



## **Hip Hop Enthusiast Provides Hope to the Community: Ar'Marlon Barbour uses music and hip-hop culture to provoke change**

The tagline on the Hip Hope University website is "Using music as a tool for ultimate change." The messages are soaked in raw truth and personal experience. And the man who created this school of progressive empowerment? Ar'Marlon Barbour provides some insight into his brainchild, Hip Hope University.

Chasing a dream fueled by his own trials and triumphs, Barbour spreads a message of encouragement, survival and success against all odds in the various workshops, open forums and seminars he offers through his creative initiative, Hip Hope University. The original thinking behind the university was to reach out to local youth who face difficult decisions on a daily basis and educate them on how making thoughtful, positive choices can elevate them beyond society's innumerable pitfalls.

His past is never too far from his core, as he references his experiences growing up in Baltimore as a ward of the court and an orphan who faced violence, gang activity, parental abandonment, drug selling and family addictions before re-inventing himself. Barbour uses these memories to connect with his audiences. Barbour's personal connection and interest in hip-hop culture take his work to another level. "My craft is using my intuition to tap into the at-risk population, tying in my own personal past experiences and relating those things to my audiences," says Barbour. His craft is a chameleon, feeling the essence of each group of young people he encounters and personalizing the vibe and messages to the needs of those he teaches.



**"We're in a very emotional time right now, a time that is similar to the 1960s. People turned to music then—the music culture...brought people back to the more meaningful things in life," says Barbour.**

Hip Hope University is Barbour's way of challenging the current educational norms of society. In Barbour's opinion, the school system is "still set up in the industrial age, whereas we are in a conceptual age." Through the research he did on youth and their ability to connect with society, Barbour deduced that as the social environment is ever-changing, youth are having a difficult time adapting and thriving in a technological era. "We're in a very emotional time right now, a time that is similar to the 1960s. People turned to music then—the music culture...brought people back to the more meaningful things in life," says Barbour.

Barbour offers two workshops to Art-Reach audiences: the first focuses on at-risk youth using a general Q&A session regarding hip-hop culture, open discussion and rap music as foundational tools. In this workshop, Barbour performs original rap lyrics, talking to the audience about his approach to hardships and subject matters close at heart to young people. He also uses multimedia presentations and handouts to connect with his audience, ending the session with a collaborative rap he creates with those in attendance. The second workshop is similar to the first, with added components of deeper, more targeted discussions and visual art creations to help young people realize how their personal stories have shaped them. Both workshops include a creative writing component, performance practice and music. Barbour describes the overall learning environment as "a synergistic fusion."



**Barbour prepares for a workshop. He offers two workshops to Art-Reach audiences.**

When asked to describe Hip Hope University in just three words, Barbour offers, "Passionate, Empowering and Eduvatory." Barbour, who describes himself as an educated, motivated visionary, coined the last term, which is defined as "the future [and] being able to grasp...knowledge; it allows [the creation] of a legacy for future generation." Barbour, who also serves as a program coordinator in a local high school, views his Art-Reach relationship as one that challenges the norms of arts education, fueling his desire to think and serve out-of-the-box. Says Barbour, "It's been rewarding to see [Art-Reach] artists come and give the students a different perspective of how they can use their personal experiences [to create their art]."

Art-Reach members can schedule a performance of Hip Hope University by calling (215) 568-2115, ext. 4. To view the full description of the [Hip Hope University](#) Workshops visit the [In-Facility artist roster](#).

-Talia Adell Stinson