



# THE CONTINUUM PROJECT, INC.

## Inside the Continuum

December 10, 2011 Fall/Winter Issue

## THE CONTINUUM PROJECT'S FULL CIRCLE MOMENT



Henry Louis Gates with CP co-founders Glenn Gordon and Nikkole Salter and CP newbie Kelly Thomas after being interviewed for the PBS special, "Finding Your Roots," December 9, 2011.

*The Legacy Program: RESIDENCY*

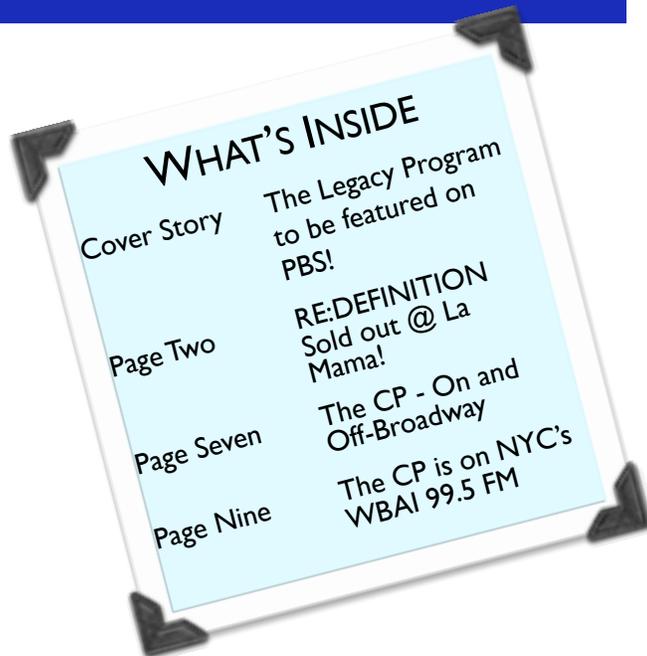


will be featured on the PBS series, "Finding Your Roots"

PBS

In 2007 co-founder Nikkole Salter was struck with a moment of what she calls 'divine inspiration' after watching the PBS special, "African American Lives," hosted by historian and Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. It was during this program that Ms. Salter watched famous African Americans explore their genealogy and receive their ancestry testing to close a gap in their understanding of themselves as people of African descent - a feat that proved impossible for generations of Blacks due to the forcible disconnection from culture and history caused by the TransAtlantic Slave Trade.

"I remember sitting on my futon in my Brooklyn (continued on page 6)



## LPC5 ENTERS THE CONTINUUM!



The Legacy Program: Residency Cycle (5) Five after the first performance of their show Spectrum of Legacy at William Alexander Middle School 51.

On December 8th and 9th in MS 51's 3rd Floor Black Box theatre, amidst a full audience and PBS camera crew, the participants of *The Legacy Program: RESIDENCY CYCLE (5) FIVE* completed their 9-week Continuum Project experience with the 45-minute culminating performance entitled **Spectrum of Legacy**. The bare-bones theatrical experience -

(continued on page 5)

## RE:DEFINITION DRAWS HUGE CROWDS

Actor/Writer **GLENN GORDON** turns away audience overflow at the famous La Mama Theatre in NYC.

On October 28th and 29th, despite some crazy pre-Halloween snow, Glenn Gordon and his cast - LaVonda Elam, Tavi Fields, Herbert Newsome, Cori Robinson and Ayanna Williams - presented the workshop production of **RE:DEFINITION** in front of sold out audiences at the historic La Mama Theatre in New York City's Lower East Side. *(continued on page 8)*



## THE CP GOES GLOBAL ANCESTRY ANALYSIS REPORT

Having completed 5 Cycles of *The Legacy Program: RESIDENCY*, the CP has helped 46 Brooklyn students (plus 3 staff, 2 board and 2 honorary volunteers) reconnect themselves to a global citizenship and cultural inheritance from 500-2,000 years ago, before the TransAtlantic Slave Trade. Of the 53 people that have been tested with AfricanAncestry.com CP membership represents:

**(4) Continents** - Africa, Asia, Europe, North America

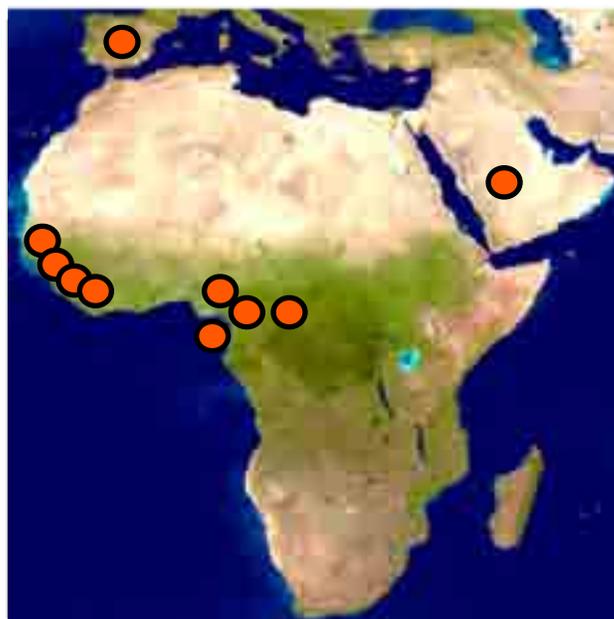
**(9) Countries** - Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cameroon, Spain, Senegal, Liberia, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea

**(20) African tribes** - Yoruba, Balanta, Mende, Tikar, Fulani, Temne, Hausa, Mafa, Fula, Kru, Bamileke, Biaka, Brame, Bubi, Djola, Ewondo, Ibo, Limba, Mandika, Wolof

**(2) Haplogroups** - NI and A

**and (53) Families** spread all across the country!

There are more CP members from the Yoruba (Nigeria) and Balanta (Guinea-Bissau) tribes than any other tribes, and there are more CP members from the countries known today as Nigeria and Sierra Leone than any other countries -



Guinea Bissau and Cameroon are close behind.

It is our goal to launch the cultural exchange component of *The Legacy Program* in 2013 so that members can have a first-hand experience of their ancestral connections. We call this experience *The Legacy Program: JOURNEY*, a program where we annually take LP students and teaching artists to the countries of their ancestry for a cultural and artistic exchange experience. This initiative will take much fundraising and planning, but be on the lookout for the CP Gone Global! First up, Cameroon!

# THE CONTINUUM Profiles

As demanding as the Continuum Project is for all involved, all CP staff, board members and collaborators maintain thriving artistic careers and entrepreneurial endeavors. Check them out!



## KELLY THOMAS

LP: RESIDENCY CYCLE (5) FIVE FACILITATOR

A recent addition to the Continuum Project family, theater artist and educator, **Kelly Thomas** hails from the Garden State. A New York City resident for 5 years, Kelly studied directing and acting at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and has recently completed her Bachelor's degree in Educational Theater at NYU's Steinhardt School, with a minor in Africana Studies. As a citizen\* artist and student of the global classroom, Kelly's works and studies in liberatory education, cultural analysis, feminist theory, holistic wellness and hip-hop have taken her around the US and across the continents to the most nontraditional of stages. Kelly is a member of the Body Ecology Performance Ensemble, which places reproductive healing, and the liberation of black girls and women at the center of experimental performance work. She has recently won the title of "Madam Wob Dwiyet USA," establishing her as a Cultural Ambassador for her mother's home island of Dominica. Kelly is a descendant of the Tikar people of Cameroon.



## NIKKOLE SALTER

CP CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

An actress and playwright, Nikkole Salter hails from Los Angeles, CA by way of Howard University in Washington, DC and NYU's Graduate Acting Program in the Big Apple. A current resident of New Jersey, Nikkole has also managed to plant roots into the Garden State's artistic community serving as conservatory faculty, community liaison for in-school residencies and on committees for arts education curriculum development, and arts scholarship adjudication with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). Her new play CARNIVAL is scheduled to be published in an anthology of works by emerging Black women playwrights in 2012 and will receive its world premiere in Luna Stage's 2012-13 season. She was recently commissioned by Piper Theatre Productions to develop a physical theatre piece tentatively titled GAME OVER based on her work with the Continuum Project. Her spring 2012 will also be busy creating the role of 'Lucy' in the world premiere of Kristen Greenidge's new play THE LUCK OF THE IRISH at the Huntington theatre in Boston. Nikkole is a descendant of the Wolof people of Senegal.

# THE CONTINUUM Perspectives

Our programming has impact beyond the culminating events. Check out what these people say about how the Continuum Project has influenced their lives.



## LEGACY PROGRAM: ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

LPC3er Sydney Clarke was asked, **“In this last year, what impact has the Legacy Program: Residency had on your life?”**

*“Probably the deepest thought I gathered and turned into a motto was taking pride in my heritage. I made this my motto, to respect Africa and show my respect and pride for it because it is a sliver of what makes the anatomy of Sydney Clarke. Even though, I give in and giggle at jokes my friends make about things they've heard about Africa through stereotypes, I continue to try and control myself to show people I care about my roots and that I take it seriously because I was lucky enough to find it. I am dedicated to the Continuum Project and will always appreciate Mr. Glenn and Ms. Nikkole for traveling with me on the rugged and smooth path to my roots.”*

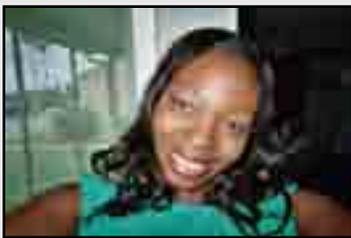


Four generations of the Tyson family

## LEGACY PROGRAM: PARENT PERSPECTIVE

LPC5 Parent Deci Tyson-Johnson was asked, **“What impact has the Legacy Program: Residency had on your family?”**

*“Knowing yourself, knowing where you come from gives you support and inspiration to be everything that you want to be. I wanted my daughter to know that she belongs not just to the Johnson family, that she has a place in the world. I think Naomi - all of us, actually - know that place more now. We can stand on that and be proud.”*



## LEGACY PROGRAM: AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Audience member, Eula Taylor was asked, **“What impact did RE:DEFINITION have on you?”**

*“For me, RE:DEFINITION is theatre at its finest! It’s entertaining, thought provoking, passionate, and compelling. [RE:DEFINITION] is an absolute gem, a must-see. Glenn Gordon forces you to question, or “redefine,” your understanding of what it means to be Black in America. It explores the role oppression continues to play in the Black psyche. He accomplishes this through beautifully crafted lyrics, reminiscent of Common and Talib Kweli, and comedy that is simply gut-wrenching. RE:DEFINITION can best be described as the truth.”*



(continued from page 1) woven together simply from genealogical research, self-exploration and improvisation - featured scenes in which students embodied their great grandparent in a past world and championed empowered individuals who defined their own sense of identity, not based on racial stereotype, but on the true legacy of their ancestors. After the first performance the audience stayed to witness the beautiful **Ancestral Revelation Ceremony** where participants, their families, and the entire community discovered a part of their ancestry for the first time. Cycle (5) Five is the first cycle where a participant tested Native American, an ancestry that only about 17%\* of African Americans share. Many of the *LP* participants opted to receive the results of their ancestry test with their parents, grand parents, great grandparents, siblings and cousins thus signifying the closing of a hole of self-knowledge for an entire family.

Among the some-odd 120 audience members who saw the performance of **Spectrum of Legacy** were some very important **CP** supporters who went out of their way to witness the historic events. MS 51 Principal **Lenore DiLeo Berner**, MS 51 VPs **Nance Speth** and **Gregory Stanislaus**, **CP** Board members **LaVonda Elam** and **Dominique Morisseau**, African Ancestry's co-founder **Gina Paige** and MS 51 drama teacher **John McEneny** were all in attendance. **Four (4)**



**LPC3ers, three (3) LPC4ers and Nyle Farmer of LPC1 returned** to volunteer for front of house duties, to give encouragement and to participate in the **Revelation Ceremony** by welcoming the new inductees in(to) the Continuum. Cycle (6) Six is scheduled to begin at Math and Science Exploratory in March 2012.



## OUR FIRST ANCESTRY LOTTERY WINNER GETS HER SON'S RESULTS!

**S**ince Yildiz Yilmaz received her results in the mail she said she has, "been feeling goosebumps." The winner of our first national **Ancestry Lottery** where donors who contribute to the **CP** enter a drawing for a chance to win an African Ancestry MatriClan Test, Ms. Yilmaz had no idea how the test would change her world.

A Kurdish woman from Turkey, Ms. Yilmaz immigrated to America to attend the historically African American Howard University in Washington, DC. "Being Kurdish, I had a deep connection to the experience of Blacks in America, because it's very much like the experience for Kurds in Turkey," Ms. Yilmaz said.

After graduation Ms. Yilmaz started her family with an African American man and, "wanted my son to know all of his ancestry and culture and to be proud of it. I searched high and low for names from Turkey and Africa that would remind him of his roots and of his greatness." Despite soe objections she selected a Turkish name 'Derman' but, was at a loss for an African name. "[Some people were] concerned that having an ethnic name would make life unnecessarily difficult for my son. But I disagreed." After much searching she found 'Eze', a Nigerian name from the Igbo tribe meaning

(continued on page 8)

(continued from page 1) apartment fixated on the television thinking, ‘Oh my God! They can restore what has been lost for hundreds of years with DNA!’ Then I thought, ‘Wait a minute: how come stars are the only ones that get to have this experience? Why can’t everyone do this?’ That’s when I got to work,” says Ms. Salter recalling the moment the Legacy Program was conceived.

Four years later, the Legacy Program thrives. Moving into its 6th Cycle at the William Alexander Middle School 51, it has recently added a host site at the Math and Science Exploratory School also in Brooklyn, NY and launched the LP: Reflection by commissioning our first teaching artist’s work with the play RE:DEFINITION. Mr. Gates is still at it with PBS as well, creating programs that change lives by exploring genealogy and ancestry as a means of having progressive conversations about the social, political and economic construct of race and class. His upcoming PBS program, “*Finding Your Roots*,” is the fourth in his *continuum* of work and scheduled to air 10 episodes beginning in the late March of 2012. So, when Rachel Dretzin, senior producer of “*Finding Your Roots*” at Ark Media, contacted MS 51 to invite the Legacy Program: Residency to be featured in an episode of the new show, you can imagine the staggering serendipity of it all.

“I was completely floored. I felt goosebumps all over. It’s not everyday that someone contacts you, unsolicited, because they heard great things about your work and because they want to use their platform to tell the world about it,” Salter said. “I must’ve read the email ten times to make sure I had read it right,” Salter recalls.

On December 8th and 9th, in a full circle *continuum* moment the crew from Ark Media taped the culminating performance of LPC5 and then the next day, with the cooperation of MS 51’s leadership, Mr. Gates interviewed the current cycle along with 8 other representatives from Cycles 2, 3 and 4 for over an hour.

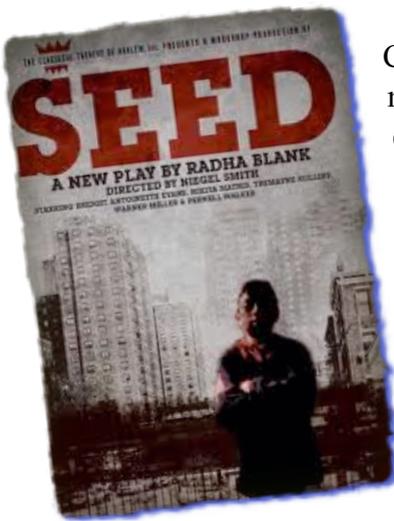


“I was so proud of them,” said Glenn Gordon, co-founder and Deputy Director of the Continuum Project. “They had language to discuss their experience with race and they had ownership of their feelings. They were articulate and fearless about the subject. It proved to us what we knew all along: the Residency had a lasting and positive impact on their sense of personal and ethnic identity.”

Mr. Gates also interviewed CP co-founders Salter and Gordon, and CP newbie, Kelly Thomas. “When [Mr. Gates] asked, ‘How’d you get the idea for this program?’ and I said, ‘From you,’ his face was priceless,” Salter recounts. “He seemed amazed and proud that something he created inspired something like [the Legacy Program]. It was definitely a full circle moment. A *continuum* moment.”

The “*Finding Your Roots*” episode that will feature the LP: Residency is scheduled for April or May of 2012 on PBS. Stay tuned!

## THE CONTINUUM PROJECT ON & OFF B'WAY

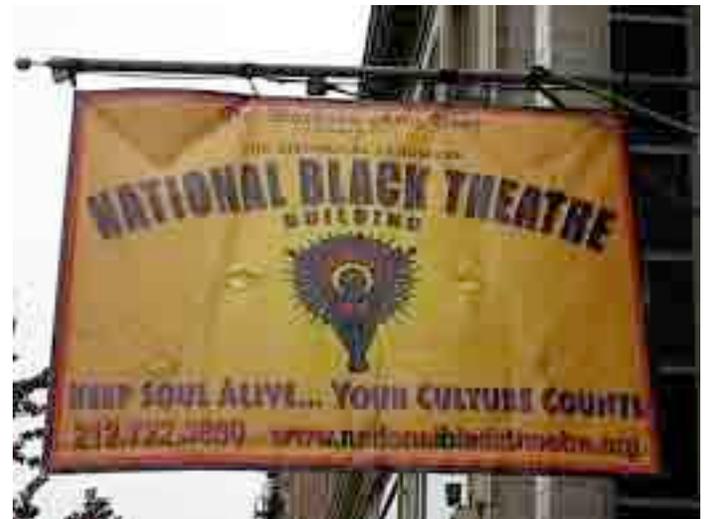


**P**art of the Continuum Project's mission is to further expose audiences in the communities we serve to the cathartic power the arts. The Continuum Project was extremely fortunate this season to have had the opportunity to introduce its consistent donors,

Legacy Program: Residency students, parents and teaching artists to some of the season's best theatre in New York City.

Due to a generous discount by producers, the Legacy Program: Residency Cycle (5) Five (including teaching artists, one parent and one long-time CP volunteer) was able to see the New York premiere off-Broadway production of Radha Blank's play **SEED**, directed by Niegel Smith. The play centers on the plight of a social worker in Harlem struggling with the restrictions of her official capacity and her own sense of moral duty as she tries, in a last hurrah, to help a teenaged boy successfully navigate family and social obstacles to fulfill his greatest potential.

Students, parents and teaching artists travelled from Brooklyn to the National Black Theatre in Harlem



to catch the production. All expressed complete awe by the experience and students were particularly enamored with the performance of a 14 year-old boy in the show. The entire cast and playwright, Radha Blank, honored the group by posing for a group photo and by talking to them about their experiences as actors in the show.

Students asked questions about everything from the stage presence and



*SEED cast, playwright Radha Blank, CP Exec. Dir, Nikkole Salter, LPC5 Teaching Artist Kelly Thomas and CP volunteer Genia Morgan*

professionalism of the cast to the issues of peer pressure that the play's young protagonist endured in the story.

*(continued on page 9)*



RE:DEFINITION cast, director Chadwick Boseman, CP Exec. Dir. Nikkole Salter and London performer of SINGLE REFLEX after opening night.

(continued from page 2) But RE:DEFINITION didn't just jump onto the scene. The journey of development that led to the workshop production, has been full. Starting in June of 2010, in a presentation produced by Piper Theatre Productions for the community that inspired the work, Mr. Gordon, with two support cast members on beat box and djembe drum, performed the first draft at the Old Stone House under the direction of Chadwick Boseman. The piece was further developed to include 3 additional cast members (1 beat boxer and two singers) and invited to be a part of the *Standardized Reading Series* facilitated by 'the standard,' a New York based artist collective dedicated to the development of

(continued from page 5)

'king healer.' "When I found it and put the two names together it was perfect," she recalled.

Upon hearing about the Legacy Program Ms. Yilmaz was compelled to enter the Ancestry Lottery by making a contribution. "I thought it was great to be able to use DNA to restore what was lost. I thought it was amazing, something that I would love to do for myself, something I would want to do for my son and his father. And when I won I thought, 'now I can do it!'"

But what she discovered upon opening the results of her son's test (she tested Derman's paternal grandmother) paralyzed her in awe - he shares ancestry with the Igbo of Nigeria. "How could I have known that," Ms. Yilmaz asked. "In my heart, how could I have known that that name I searched the continent of Africa for was a part of my son's ancestry? I could not have planned it. I was led to it for a reason. In my heart I knew it was for him. [The test] confirmed for me that his name was perfect."

new work for artists of color. Mr. Boseman and Mr. Gordon then went back to the drawing board to refine the piece in its final incarnation about the journey of one man to re-define his sense of identity after receiving his African ancestry test results. This piece was performed in excerpt at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art's "The Power of the Word" festival and at the 2nd Annual Pan African Cultural Festival in September in Washington, DC before the Hip Hop Theater Festival produced the showing at LaMama.



As the only *Legacy Program: REFLECTION* commission to date, RE:DEFINITION has received the support of the Cameroonian community as well, having prominent members venturing from D.C. to see the show. RE:DEFINITION is scheduled to world premiere in 2012 and looks to tour to historically Black colleges and universities.

Ms. Yilmaz plans to purchase a PatriClan test from African Ancestry to find out about Derman's paternal African lineage as well. "I want to equip him with the truth about where he comes from," Ms. Yilmaz said. "With that, he will never be doubtful or confused. He will never forget."

The winner of the 2nd annual Ancestry Lottery is Jamilah Saunderson, LPC1 parent, who after seeing the lasting value of the Legacy Program: Residency in her son Siddiq, made a very generous contribution to Cycle (5) Five. Stay tuned for the results of their ancestry test experience.





*(continued from page 7)*

The Continuum Project was also awarded free tickets to see the final dress

rehearsal of the Broadway production of **STICK FLY** directed by Kenny Leon - a play that has taken the regional theatre market by storm for the past 6 years. It was playwright Lydia Diamond's generosity of 20 free tickets that 4 LP students from Cycles 1, 3 and 4, their parents, and long time CP supporters LaNora

Williams-Clark, Jaymes Jorsling, Myxolydia Tyler, Nedra McClyde, Stacey Sargent, AJ Muhammad and



*LPC1er Siddiq Saunderson, LPC3er Alinah Vision and LPC4ers Chardonnay Gittens and SaCha Coleman pose with CP execs.*

their guests were able to see the show.

The play's content dealing with a young woman's search to define herself hit home for LP students who spent their 9-week CP journey considering their own genealogies, ancestries and ethnic identities. LPC4er and NYC resident

Chardonnay Gittens had never seen a Broadway play before **STICK FLY** and was thoroughly impressed with the largeness of it all.

## THE CP IS FEATURED ON NYC'S WBAI RADIO



On September 19th the Continuum Project was invited to be featured on NYC radio station WBAI's longstanding daily program 'Talk Back with Hugh Hamilton'.

The program, dedicated to the "free and fair exchange of information," focused on the social and political ramifications of the science behind ancestry and CP co-founders Nikkole Salter and Glenn Gordon were interviewed along with African Ancestry's co-founder, Gina Paige. Also on the panel was LPC4 parent Erik Street who offered his comments on the

impact ancestry and ethnic identity exploration had on his children and household.

With callers being turned away from the conversation from the unmanageable response to the subject matter, Hugh Hamilton invited the CP and Gina Paige to return to the program at a later date for a more in-depth conversation.

You can hear the full hour-long interview on our website at [www.TheContinuumProject.org](http://www.TheContinuumProject.org).



*LPC4 Parent Erik Street sits with 'Talk Back' host Hugh Hamilton at WBAI studios in NYC.*

# THE CONTINUUM Perspectives

Our programming has impact beyond the culminating events. Check out what these people say about how the Continuum Project has influenced their lives.



## LEGACY PROGRAM: PARENT PERSPECTIVE

LPC5 Parent Michael Connolly was asked, **“What impact has the Legacy Program: Residency had on your family?”**

*“An Open Letter To The Continuum Project*

*It is now two months since my daughter took part in the Continuum Project’s Legacy Program Cycle 5. In many ways it seems as though the whole thing was a dream, but I do have a few thoughts about the experience I would like to share with you.*

*What is History? Most of us grow up thinking of history as a finished story. Even when we study events closely and realize that the story could have been different if one action had been altered, we still think of history as something outside of ourselves...separate and complete. Rarely do we understand that history is never a finished story. Events unfold today because of actions taken by others long before we were here.*

*In a similar way we rarely personalize history. Even when we have the benefit of knowing our elders, we usually take their presence for granted. When listening to their stories, it is unusual to put them within the broader scope of historical events.*

*Maeve decided to personify my Paternal Grandmother during the Legacy Production. This simple exercise taught her a very powerful lesson, one that I do not think she fully understands yet. She learned for the first time that history is living right now, and that her personal story is part of a much larger whole. Her monologue had a few factual errors, but what she got so right was how my Grandmother must have felt while she was on the ship coming to America...her trepidation and determination, as well as the enormity of the change that was about to take place in her life. For a few seconds Maeve became my Grandmother, and for a moment I understood my Grandmother better than I ever had before. Maeve wrote her piece without any input from me...and she imagined her Great Grandmother on her own. It was an incredible experience and I will never forget it.*

*There was another moment that first night I will always cherish. Maeve and I discussed her knowledge of African Geography shortly after you posted the initial film of them on your website. No student had been able to name very many countries and she was a little embarrassed. I often quiz her and her brother on geography, and they always groan when I do. But this experience made her want to learn as many countries in Africa as she could and she set her mind on memorizing them all. I split the continent into regions and she learned them in a way that allowed her to know where on the continent each country is located.*

*When the results of her DNA test were announced and she heard that she had ancestry in Sierre Leone and Guinea Bissau, I saw the flash of recognition in her eyes. She KNEW exactly where those countries are located and drew a direct personal connection to them. It was a precious moment, and I was able to share it with her from across the room.*

*These are just a few observations, and they do not even address the overall experience Maeve had in Cycle 5. I have not talked about the sense of accomplishment she felt in being part of a production team, the sense of camaraderie she experienced, her elation from working hard and seeing results. She said to us as we were leaving school that first night “My mouth hurts from smiling so much.”*

*It feels like a dream now, but I know it will resonate for a long time to come. We all appreciate the chance to have been part of your program, and are very grateful to everyone at The Continuum Project for making it all possible.*

*Peace & Love, Michael Connolly”*



Our Programming for the Summer & Fall seasons is complete

Church Street Station  
PO Box 1892  
New York, NY 10008-1892  
[www.THECONTINUUMPROJECT.org](http://www.THECONTINUUMPROJECT.org)