

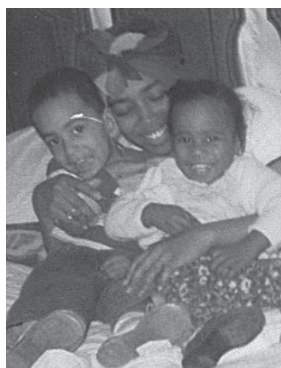
Using Technology to Make Music and Share a Message

A Conversation with Antonio Ennis

Antonio Ennis is an organizer with City Life/Vida Urbana (www.clvu.org) and a rap artist. Performing under the name "Twice Thou," his music video "The Bank Attack" is available at www.youtube.com and his album, which just won the New England Urban Music Award "Best Conscious CD," is available at www.cdbaby.com. A short documentary about his work with 4Peace is available at vimeo.com/3394399. He was interviewed by The Change Agent in May 2013.

How did you become a rap artist?

My mother. She's an artist. I loved art when I was younger, but now I "paint" with my words. Words are colorful. You can create pictures with them. I used to read everything. I grew up bilingual, so I had a lot of words. At a young age, I was listening to R&B, George Clinton, etc. We made drum sets out of Tupperware bowls. We made our own guitars.



Antonio (left) with his mother and sister.

We built a band. We played records over and over again, and started doing our own routines. We performed on our porch, and people gave us coins and dollar bills. That's the porch on the house I live in now – the house I've lived in my whole life – the house that is in foreclosure and that I am currently fighting for.

What do you do to fight for your home?

Some volunteers from a housing organization in Boston, City Life/Vida Urbana, were canvassing in my neighborhood. I found out about their weekly

meetings, and I decided to go. Now I'm an activist in the anti-foreclosure movement, and it has opened my eyes.

Did you ever imagine that you would be an activist?

Absolutely not. I used to ride by people doing pickets or protests, and I thought they were crazy. It looked comical to me. What were they doing

wasting time? But now I see that protesting is a way we try to weaken a system that's working against us. At City Life, we protest the banks that are foreclosing on homeowners and tenants – people who are victims of the economic crisis. It's not our fault that the banks created this crisis, but we are paying the price.

Does City Life use technology and social media in its organizing?

Yes. We send out emails and text alerts. We have a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, and a Twitter account. But the way I heard about City Life was the old fashioned way – a face-to-face conversation



Antonio (right) with his siblings in front of the house they grew up in – the same house he is currently fighting for.

with a neighbor who had met some City Life organizers who were out knocking on doors.

What made you decide to create the *Bank Attack* album?

I was at my first eviction blockade, and I was watching a family get kicked out of their home. It brought tears to my eyes. I asked myself, "What can I do?" I decided I could use my music to let people know what the banks are doing. When I got home from that eviction blockade, I turned on my studio, and I started laying down tracks (beats, rhymes, melodies, and hooks). There was so much I wanted to communicate; I ended up making a whole album.

How has recording changed over the years?

You used to need a lot of equipment and a whole studio to be able to record a song. Now it's all digital. You just need a computer and software, like Pro-Tools.

There are a lot fewer major labels because everyone puts out their own music. That's good and bad news. I like that more people can access their talent, but the field is so overpopulated now, and everyone is trying to sound alike.

What is your favorite song on the album?

"Catch a Banker" is my favorite song. In it, I call out the names of the bankers who got us into this mess. I felt that it was necessary to name the bankers. These people are criminals.

What's next for the anti-foreclosure movement?

We will keep building. We will keep bringing in new leadership. We will keep up the pressure against the banks. We'll keep being creative about how to go after our targets. Every day I ask God to give me the strength to be in this struggle. We are building a movement.

Tell me what this movement looks like.

Well, it's a diverse movement. It's a big melting pot full of genuine people. I was at a political event recently, and someone said to me, "I never saw an activist wear a watch like that. Don't you know activists aren't supposed to wear so much jewelry?" And I said, "Really? Show me the manual." She thought I looked like a thug, but I told her, "Nah, this is the look of the modern day organizer."



Take it Further

Antonio describes how he changed over time. What are some of those changes? Describe some of your own personal transformations.

What are the technological as well as "old fashioned" methods City Life uses to do organizing? What do you think works best to bring people together around an issue?

Make your own music studio. Look at <www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Cheap-Recording-Studio> and search other sites for information on how to get started.