



Tyraíne Ragsdale enjoys the challenges of chemistry and rap music

## Rapper takes unique message to the people

By Tonya Pendleton  
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Tyraíne Ragsdale is a research chemist at R.W. Johnson Pharmaceutical Research Institute. His appealing, boyish face and outgoing personality belie the serious and scholarly stereotype of a scientist.

Grand Hank is a rapper. He, too, defies stereotypes. Though raised in West Philadelphia's Mill Creek projects, he is a college graduate pursuing a successful career.

His rap shows have received standing ovations from typically jaded college, high school and junior high school kids. He's even been featured on several television shows.

Tyraíne Ragsdale and Grand Hank are the same person. Ragsdale dons the persona of Grand Hank when he presents the Educational Rap Lecture, an energetic rap show and lecture designed to interest young people in science.

How does he reach them? Simple. He talks to kids in a language they can understand.

"(I) stand up before them and allow them to challenge it," he says of his show. "I ask the question, how many of you are for brotherhood or for the upliftment of our people? Everybody raises their hand. (I then ask) How can I be for the upliftment

of my people if at the same time I have someone on stage trying to teach me yet I'm trying to put him down? That seems like a contradiction to me.

"Now let's see if I'm clear. How many people are interested in the upliftment, and then you get them on your side. Just make them think and stand up in front of them...?"

"One mechanism children use is they reject everything... anything new they don't want to hear it... I don't allow them to do that... The audience doesn't have control. As long as I have a sound system that can out-amplify them they have to listen."

Ragsdale, 26, has targeted some of the toughest schools in the city. And he's dealt with some of the toughest kids. If you're skeptical about the response he receives from an already video-saturated young audience, well, you'll have to see his show.

Ragsdale's alter ego has handled potentially disruptive elements with ease. After all, he too, has had similar experiences.

Ragsdale is one of eight children raised in the projects. Though his family survived, they were not untouched by urban problems: one member was involved with drugs. The family rallied behind him, and in han-

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ding that situation Ragsdale saw one solution to the problems affecting young people.

"I look around me. It really doesn't take much to visualize what needs to be done. Everybody has some type of solution that they feel can work. However when it comes to practice, they give a lot of lip service. I feel that somebody has to sacrifice. Somebody has to say, look, I'll be the one, and that's what I've done."

Science challenged Ragsdale at an early age. He disliked English and enjoyed the difficulty of the scientific field. Ragsdale is a 1988 graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, where he received a B.S. in science.

As a chemist, he can determine ways to cure fatal diseases,

something he always wanted to do.

"There's a sense of pride," Ragsdale says of his success in the science field, "because the system has already been put in place internally in terms of having self-esteem and knowing that I am capable and confident and I can produce."

"That part of it is great. Working in an all-white environment at times you say it would be nice to have some brothers around..."

Ragsdale is one of the few Black scientists in the country, he says. As he continued to advance in the field, he saw Blacks less and less, and decided that should change. The educational rap lecture was his way of giving back.

"The message that I want to

reinforce is that there has to be compassion, there has to be forgiveness, there has to be a strong belief in Christ, belief that there

is a God. When you know there's a God, then all things are possible."

**Watch Grand Hank per-**

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form on the Philadelphia Saturday Tribune show, Saturday, May 23, at 11:30 A.M. on KYW Channel 3.