

Brandon Nicholson (00:00):

Yeah, <laugh>. Well understand. Listen, I got no issues whatsoever. We can go Afrobeat, we can go hip life. Highlight the whole thing. I'm, I'm not mad at, I'm just making sure you know. Exactly. Slide that in. Yeah, exactly right.

Brandon Nicholson (00:15):

We might need to do a few more electric slides.

Brandon Nicholson (00:18):

That's it. Just to, I didn't see any in the first one. I have not seen what kind of forever yet. So it's not a spoiler. But if they did work in electric slide into the second, that would be appropriate. It would do that. Be unappreciated.

Akilah Hughes (00:33):

Hi, I'm Akilah Hughes and you're listening to The Black Euphoria Podcast, A show about black joy, innovation, creativity, and Afrofuturism. After we all got to see Wakanda on screen and Black Panther back in 2018, there's a scene in Ryan Cooker's Black Panther film that sticks with me. It's the final scene of the movie when the representatives for Wakanda are finally giving back to a black community in Oakland, California. They've created a center for learning and excellence fully subsidized by Wakanda. And it sticks with me because the black community is often underfunded and black genius is often considered rare and stolen from the black community because of it. But today's, today's guest shows that investment in our brothers and sisters does make a huge difference. But today's guest shows that investment in our brothers and sisters does make a huge difference and can happen where we are. Brandon Nicholson. Brandon Nicholson is the founder of The Hidden Genius Project, an Oakland based nonprofit that empowers young black men in the tech and entrepreneurship space. Here's that conversation. All right, Brandon Nicholson, thank you so much for being here. I have a question. So if you could describe your version of Wakanda, what would it look like? What would it feel? What would it sound like? Is the movie pretty close?

Brandon Nicholson (01:45):

Well, it was great to be here. Thank you for <laugh> allowing me to speak with you. And unfortunately I suffer from dramatic and egregious lack of imagination. So <laugh> my vision of what would look precisely the kind from the movie. I didn't even know that. I was like, damn, this is the option. This is great. <laugh>. It looked good before it just looked like my backyard. Yeah, that was No, I think certainly when I think about just what was so impactful even thinking back to the scene where you're taking the aerial view, I guess almost the drone shot Oh yeah. Is the juxtaposition of the lush greenery, Right. With the high technological advancement, obviously. And yeah, hover, crash and everything zooming around. But I think what struck me in that shot was obviously you see prosperity and you see environmental wellness and what you would only imagine and hope then was humanistic or holistic wellness on parts of our human beings and it's inhabitants. And I think you saw different examples of coexistence,

Brandon Nicholson (03:12):

Different tribes all thriving together,

Brandon Nicholson (03:14):

And also environment. So the people, the tribes, the actual land. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> where we know, especially if you look at the continent and the Sub-Saharan continent, there's so many instances of resources being extracted and all these things to the point where it's harmed the health of the land. So I think all those things are part and parcel for sure. Probably a little bit more Frankie Beverly Maze, <laugh> as well. I'm saying, listen, I got no issues whatsoever. Go Afrobeat. We can go hip life, highlight the whole thing. Not mad. I'm just making sure I

Brandon Nicholson ([03:51](#)):

Might exactly slide that

Brandon Nicholson ([03:52](#)):

In kick. Yeah, exactly

Akilah Hughes ([03:54](#)):

Right. We might need to do a few more electric slides before. That's

Brandon Nicholson ([03:58](#)):

It. Just to, I didn't see any in the first one. I have not seen Wakanda forever yet, so it's not a spoiler. But if they did work an electric slide into the second, that would be appropriate. Wouldn't be met Unappreciated

Akilah Hughes ([04:12](#)):

<laugh>. Exactly. Well, you mentioned Wakanda forever and that's definitely sort of the inspiration for this podcast. So when you saw the trailer for WA forever, how did that feel? Because I know obviously Black Panthers impact can't be overstated, but now that we're moving into the sequel, what was it like when you finally got to see it?

Brandon Nicholson ([04:35](#)):

Honestly, I guess bittersweet, right? Because the entire trailer is very much holding obviously this joyous moment of moving forward and new possibilities and you see new characters and you see now Mexican representation and one of the villains. And at the same time of course we recognize that Chadwick is not there. That means the child is somewhere else. And of course I know a lot of our minds when there were just extreme excitement and joy and sadness and somber and solemn and purposeful and all the things, but it was still extremely exciting. And just recognizing how much that movie has meant to our communities over the years, thinking about how many times went and saw it when it first came out, kept watching it and just what it's held for us that's really significant. And definitely just, it's nice. It's hard enough to get that sort of film made once. So to get it made twice is incredible achievement.

Akilah Hughes ([05:58](#)):

Yeah, it's definitely more than groundbreaking. It is the milestone, I think for black cinema. Well, this is the Black Euphoria podcast and we are talking to all different kinds of creatives, creators, innovators across all kinds of different industries and spaces who take what we saw in Wakanda and what we saw in the first Black Panther film and are doing the cool things that are brought up in the film in real life. So can you tell our listeners a little bit about your background and the Hidden Genius project?

Brandon Nicholson (06:37):

Well, I've never built Magic sneakers, <laugh> or technological armor. I've modified some sneakers accidentally

Akilah Hughes (06:51):

Just

Brandon Nicholson (06:52):

Cause I was poor. So I just needed, I'm saying I was just trying to, Yeah,

Akilah Hughes (06:57):

I'm just resourceful.

Brandon Nicholson (06:58):

Yeah, that's a different type of Yeah, I think I am very proud to be the executive director of The Hidden Genius Project and we train and mentor black male youth and technology creation, entrepreneurship and leadership skills to transform their lives in communities. We are headquartered in Oakland, California. Okay. Also operating in Oakland, Richmond, Los Angeles, and Detroit. And by the time we are speaking and folks will be hearing this, be anticipating launching a new communities looks like Chicago net Atlanta is worst.

Akilah Hughes (07:39):

Oh, awesome. Okay. So yeah, you're definitely taking over and I'm glad you mentioned Oakland. You're there now, I think as we're recording this and Black Panther begins and ends in Oakland and there are obviously these major themes about how access to advances in technology can really help these marginalized communities, our communities. And as an Oakland native who's obviously one of the founding members of the Hidden Genius Project how did you feel watching Black Panther for the first time?

Brandon Nicholson (08:11):

When I think back to the first scene Black Panther being in Oakland, honestly it wasn't something that I had expected. <laugh>, I probably should've expected it. Understanding that Ryan Kugler is from this area and being able to make a connection with some of the just history and legacy and heritage of activism and art and all these things like Oakland would make a great, if not obvious choice for the <laugh>, the origin story in the sense of Black Panther. And of course there are any number of cities in our country where we go through similar things. But this is certainly my home and it's a place that has always been to me, a hub and a wellspring for different sorts of innovation.

Akilah Hughes (09:15):

I mean, the proximity to Silicon Valley I think also gives you that it's the mix of not only diversity, but also of a place where people do just come to create new things and innovate in the spaces. And so growing

Brandon Nicholson (09:31):

Up there that Silicon Valley came to Oakland before Oakland came to Silicon Valley in that sense, right? Oh yeah. And folks have been innovating here, whether it's in culture, art, even social movements and academia and being down the road from

Akilah Hughes ([09:47](#)):

Music.

Brandon Nicholson ([09:49](#)):

That's right, college and all these places where different movements and even intellectual movements began. And so it could be a bit of a chicken and the egg, but certainly for black folks, this is a place where we can get it done. And even in our work, to be honest, with the Hidden Genius project, we don't spend much any time talking about Silicon Valley. We certainly <laugh> have partners and visit companies, some of which are headquartered there. But we're always very much clear that technology and you're a genius, your brilliance, your innovation is wherever you are. And I think you see that shining through, of course in Black Panther in terms of just black excellence and innovation, but innovation with a purpose in so many different ways. And also we see a real juxtaposition of understanding that how we have to struggle with the Silicon Valleys in our backyards and that being a metaphor for so many things. What's the kind adjacent institution or space, whether it's the museum right in Yes,

Akilah Hughes ([11:01](#)):

Exactly. Yes. We

Brandon Nicholson ([11:03](#)):

Kill Valley here. Absolutely. And you know, have companies for example whether they're based in the Valley or whether they're leveraging technology and social media that are curating in many ways our culture, our intellectual property, our <affirmative> brilliance, intelligence, and oftentimes either selling it back to us or giving it away and not affording us any equity. And oftentimes doing that without our permission. So lots of parallels for sure. Lots of metaphors and lots of, I think a purpose in terms of Oakland being at the Hub. But I loved it and even come coming to the conclusion of the first deal thinking about the idea of the W Kind Center and Yeah,

Akilah Hughes ([11:52](#)):

Exactly. At the final scene where they're like, and

Brandon Nicholson ([11:55](#)):

It's like, well, that we might be able to do what I'm saying. Yeah. So here,

Akilah Hughes ([11:59](#)):

And also, I mean that's a great segue, you know, and your organization of predate the film by six years, if I'm correct. So when we see this final scene where Surey and Child are pointing to this building, that's the hope for the future of Wakanda actually giving back to black communities around the world. You've done that. So let's just like imagine it's a year after they're standing there and pointing what do you think they could have achieved in that time? Cuz you've done it year after year, you all are growing and expanding and affecting the community. So I mean, what do you think would've been possible in that year? <laugh>?

Brandon Nicholson ([12:39](#)):

Oh, well shoot with the resources they got money. You know what I'm saying? So

Akilah Hughes ([12:43](#)):

They got my condom

Brandon Nicholson ([12:44](#)):

Money. No, they got money. Money. So I think they could have navigated all sorts of supply chain issues. I wouldn't have any concerns. Those permit and inspections would've come right on time. But <affirmative>, Yeah, I think one thing that was interesting, there's a lot of momentum I think in these last four years even. And to be honest, it it'd be interesting even to think about just that question just from the standpoint of real life. So we got from the time Black Panther release to the Pandemic, we got basically two years. And even for us, to be honest, 2019, we served a record number of young people like by a mile. We served 2300 young people in 2019, we did programming in Johannesburg, South Africa and London, England, and engaged with young people all over the country and literally the world taking our youth leaders around. And that was just us.

([13:43](#)):

There were so many organizations and partners we had finding different ways to innovate talking through how we could collaborate, exploring what else could be possible for us. And in that respect, I think a lot of that was we had a battery in our back. Sure. To branded battery in our back for sure. Just in terms of understanding, we could collaborate, we could be creative we could apologize a little bit less, we could dream a little bit bigger. And it's interesting for us now, as you mentioned, it's more than four years removed from the day debut. It's our 10th anniversary which is a blessing into itself. But then we also find ourselves, I'm sitting right now in a building we required just over a year ago, it's our national headquarters and we're hoping to conduct the grand opening for it in December. But it's a four story plus building. And on the second floor we're going to have a teen technology center in downtown Oakland. It won't be called the Wakanda Center.

Akilah Hughes ([14:49](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah, that's fair. We

Brandon Nicholson ([14:50](#)):

Didn't need that Disney legal smoke, but we call it the Ubuntu century. I think still very much in the spirit of Wakanda and Black Panther. And I am because we therefore we are because I am. And that's something that was an opportunity afforded to us as a result. Certainly the hard work of our team and so many of our young people, we now have multiple young people who work with us full-time as salaried employees in addition to the dozens we employ, but even some of our funders and benefactor and the champion driving us to acquire this property being black business person and philanthropists and all the, So it's a lot of tremendous parallels and just reminders of what we are capable of when we're able to build together.

Akilah Hughes ([15:41](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. You mentioned travel, like you mentioned actually getting to go to South Africa, getting to go to England. And something that struck me in Black Panther was just the fact that it was not only clear that Wakanda had so many different tribes, so there was an experience within just living in

that sort of multicultural society. But also they are going to Korea, they are in Oakland. And so can you talk a little bit about what it was like for the people you got to take with you to different parts of the world as you were building your organization and how that maybe opened up their minds or influenced the work that you're doing?

Brandon Nicholson ([16:22](#)):

That's actually a tremendous point. One of the coolest things about taking those trips because we'd actually gotten to go to London in 2018 as well. So we went to London in 2018 and 2019. Nice. And then also Johannesburg. And we had different partnerships in each place. London, working with Chelsea Football club of all people and English primarily team and different companies Google and Autodesk and Microsoft and others. And then for our trip to Johannesburg, there was a school system in South Africa Leap schools, leap sites and mass schools. And this whole idea of just diaspora mentioning each of those partnerships is all about getting us closer in and expanding our notion of diaspora and understanding for us first and what it means to have those connections. So then being able to take our young people alumni from our intensive immersion program, it's a 15 month cohort based program for black boys and young men in high school age.

([17:26](#)):

So all those cities we named earlier, that's where immersion programs operate. And taking alumni who had been teaching. And so this was effectively one of their rewards for being excellent teachers out rated as outstanding facilitators and youth educators in their own rights now getting to take them overseas so they could do the same on a bigger stage and sing their eyes, light up, being able to help a young person acquire their first passport. We have one young man who we took him in 2018 and 2019 and we got him his first passport and now he's traveling to Toronto and the Caribbean, all these places every other month for work and all these things off that same passport. And once you afford somebody that level of access that's access, it's hard to take back now. You can always do something, you can always mess up, get your passport revoked.

([18:19](#)):

But that idea of there being something greater and recognizing that man we are of Africa all over and that we have so many, many differences, but a ton of commonalities and just seeing, especially if you think about the states for myself, even with certainly a number of our young people, we can't always draw a very clear line and connection to our ancestry, to all of our heritage, even to the continent of Africa for that one <affirmative>. So to feel a sense of homecoming for example. Or even a sense of common recognition of people away from home in London. But seeing that commonality, one of the coolest moments I would say was there in 2018 when we went to London we did an activation in, I think it was in Kings cross area, wherever it was. And there's all these young people coming from across the city and overwhelmingly young people of color.

([19:23](#)):

And then we're getting ready to start and doing the intro and the welcome and then end walks. This group basically saing in half an hour late <laugh> at this bus of black boys, all teenager, probably 16 years old. And they all looked like our boys. So they were wearing distress jeans and their hair and brushing and everything. The Jordan elevens and the Jordan threes <affirmative> and the whole thing. And they sat me back and I'm looking at 'em and I blurted it out. I didn't even think about it when I said, I was like, Br, y'all need to move up to the front. We know y'all right? And I, I'm y'all are. But the only difference was they sounded British. Right, Exactly. Yeah. Our guys, it was like, nah, you're gonna come to front today, we're gonna have a good time. This is what we do. It's time. This is our time. We don't

have to perform or put masks on or anything. Let's just have a blast. And just being able to do that and see that happen so many places on earth and know that there are young men who have to put that mask on the same way they put it on here at 6,000 miles away, whatever it is. That was a trip as

Akilah Hughes ([20:36](#)):

Well. I mean absolutely. It's honestly taking me back. The first time I went overseas, I was 19 years old and it was just sort of with a boyfriend. We went to Paris and I got my passport and I remember going there and there were obviously African immigrants who lived in Paris who would speak to me and languages I didn't know <laugh>. And there was something so not just flattering, I think it was just eye opening about the fact that I'm like, Oh, only in America am I seen as only one thing. And that thing is very defined and it's not defined by us. And to go elsewhere in the world and see yourself reflected in people who have totally different cultures than you and grow up with access to the same sort of entertainment or whatever, but grew up with their customs and everything else.

([21:33](#)):

It was just, I think there's not enough being said <laugh> about what that means, what that feels like when you see yourself recognized in the diaspora somewhere else on the other side of the planet, <laugh> where you've never been. And they're like, Oh, I thought you were so and so's kid <laugh>. Like there's just something really, really beautiful about that. Yeah. So thank you for sharing that. I mean, I guess one important question, because you do work with young black boys and young black men and that this country doesn't have the cleanest history of treating everybody equally <laugh> in your organization, how does Hidden Genius project teach black male youth to navigate adversity, whether it be from a government, sort of like this is just the way things are, way versus college expectations and job expectations. How have they learned from you and what have you tried to impart?

Brandon Nicholson ([22:32](#)):

That's a great question. Is an important question. And to some extent also a thorny one. I think the reason why I say thorny is because you're starting off with young people who don't represent a monolith. Our cohorts run the gamut. You got people who are two parent homes and multiple parents with multiple degrees and just day to day materially doing well enough. And then you've got folks who are in foster care, first generation to go trying to make it day to day and all the things. And then you've got everything in between. And they're all brothers, but they can have a lot of disparate experiences. And some of 'em love anime and some of them love sports <laugh>, some of em love all the above. And some of them love rocking, some of them love rap and some of them love all the above <affirmative>.

([23:24](#)):

But then they have some sometimes amazing commonalities, some beautiful ties that bind them. And sometimes they have some very ugly ones, common experiences, <affirmative>. And so we have to be careful why I say authorities cuz we can't look at them as they're all having just one single experience for sure. And needing to navigate the same type of adversity. And it can even be very hard to guess on the surface what type of adversity they're navigating. So we have to talk about, make sure we don't make assumptions around that. But then where we can land in two areas, you've got yourself, you're a genius. Even as you make these mistakes, even as you drive us up the wall, even knowing that at this stage in your life, you're probably the dumbest you'll be in your entire lifetime, including when you were a toddler and early elementary, just the dumbest any boy will be usually is from about 13 to 17 and a half. We're just like, what? Why? And I'm not talking about four point ohs and grades and there've been parents who like my boys not dumb. That's a dumb thing to say. Cause at this age they may be



intelligent, they may retain information, but they don't make great decisions. That comes from a lack of experience. And it's each of us. I'm saying I was there. That's how I know. Which is why not that many dads argue with us. Cause they're like you. Exactly.

Akilah Hughes ([24:45](#)):

Amen. Yeah. They're like, now that I can see it,

Brandon Nicholson ([24:47](#)):

You're right. So that's why we meet a village, right? <affirmative>? No, this is a time when they need to know your genius. You know, can do what you want. You can make mistakes. We're not going to ship you off or cast you off. But also your genius, you're brilliant. What you've yet to do is incredible. We can't even fathom, nor can you, right? You're a genius. So now those are your brothers. You all can be a genius together. So as you encounter these things these adversities, whatever they might be, lean on yourself, lean on each other, recognize all the power you have, all the capability you have, use your skills, use your tools. And one of those most important tools is gonna be your network, right? Your relationships. Yeah, absolutely. And that's where we start. Because for some that adversity's gonna be homework and some it's gonna be housing and some it's gonna be safety and all the things. So rather than having run through the checklist, I think we start there now. We definitely talk, especially in our leadership sessions about very real things going on and how they view their environment and the issues in the environment. But I think more than anything, we just want them to be confident and successful.

Akilah Hughes ([26:04](#)):

Yeah. Well that's incredible and thank you for empowering the youth that way. I think <laugh>, as much as we can talk about how great Black Panther is and how impactful the film is and continues to be in reality, it takes people like you and organizations like yours to build us up. And so I just wanna say thank you on the record, <laugh>. I'm sure you don't hear it enough. So I mean, one more thing, just to go back to Black Panther. One major theme in the film is this sort of fear of change. And that fear is letting Wakanda be known to the world, letting their power be known to the world, sharing their resources with everyone. And that fear of change and its impact, the its potential impact on Macon. Now we know that you've mentioned in previous interviews that you want black youth to envision themselves as change agents. So how do you define change agents and how do you empower them, the youth to become change agents? Why is this a good thing?

Brandon Nicholson ([27:06](#)):

Sure. Well yeah, it's probably worth starting off by saying kill monger was at least partially right? <laugh>. I know some people good shirts. It's a good shirt. It's a good shirt.

Speaker 4 ([27:16](#)):

Yeah, exactly. I'm like, listen for could do. They could have done more

Brandon Nicholson ([27:20](#)):

But dialogue. We needed more dialogue so we could kill monger. Didn't have to pass on, nor did to child first to figure this out, right? I think number one lesson. But yes, I mean when we think about just moving forward, what's possible for us really about, So I think there's so much to be said for a world in which we can be a change agent by determining our future and the future of our communities not



needing to outsource our solutions. Now there's nothing wrong with collaboration, there's nothing wrong with learning. If we find ourselves continually waiting on someone though, or needing permission, that's not where we want to be. So when we think about our geniuses, our young people being change agents, I think it's really about them just feeling as though they're right there in the driver's seat. At least writing in the passenger seat to someone, giving directions and navigating with respect to what's ahead for us. And understanding that all these things in our world don't just have to be happening to us all the time. There's decisions we can keep making, strategies we can keep organizing, pulling together, elaborating consolidating power, et cetera and find ways to move about the world and not just sit on her heels and hope nobody sees what we got going on underneath these trees.

Speaker 4 ([28:51](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Brandon Nicholson ([28:53](#)):

I think it's just really about feeling a sense of having a say. I think when you're talking about adolescents, also you're transitioning from different phases. Stages in your life of not having a say. You're like, man, I don't need to have a bedtime too much longer, a little child. I don't need to tell me what to eat too much longer, et cetera. And so one thing we talk about cuz we really do, I think support our young people along multiple pathways you knows there's not gonna be just a single pathway that's gonna be the one, right? And I think there are folks who are just primed to go to college, folks who are primed to be entrepreneurs, folks who are primed work in a set career. Folks who are primed to try 27 different things before anything sticks but no matter what, you know, want them to feel as though they've got opportunities and access and resources.

([29:57](#)):

And so I think that's key. It's just making sure that they've got a shot, just got a shot to try something on. And so for folks who are seeking their independence, it's like look, you gotta be excellent at the thing you wanna do. Cause that's what buys you the type of that freedom, right? Exactly. To be independent. And sometimes, for example, even if you're on a different pathway, if you could be excellent for example, and get your college paid for, that's a really cool thing while you're trying to figure it all out. And then yeah, you could realize, and not every school is the same, they don't offer you all the same things. So let's be creative here, let's speak. Mm-hmm <affirmative> strategic and to find different opportunities to make something happen.

Akilah Hughes ([30:44](#)):

Absolutely. And just figuring out in college, not just what you wanna do with your life, but knowing where to try things. Knowing how to meet people who have similar interests, you know, talk about collaboration. And I think a lot of listeners will remember if they did attend college that most of it was about getting through it, but also <laugh> who did you meet your mind about something or taught you a skill that you know couldn't learn in a class, but you happen to learn because you were just there and the act of showing up was so important. So I think you're making a lot of really great points that are hitting home. We mentioned that the Hidden Genius project turns 10 years old this year. Happy birthday <laugh>. What is something that you wish you learned or wish you knew 10 years ago?

Brandon Nicholson ([31:34](#)):

Well, we're a volunteer driven organization for the first two and a half years. So maybe if there's something I needed to make sure I knew 10 years ago was that maybe we could just go ahead and take the leap and jump into this thing full time. Cause it's gonna work out. But I think

Akilah Hughes ([31:52](#)):

That's a good point. Yeah,

Brandon Nicholson ([31:53](#)):

<laugh>, I think it all worked out the timing it was supposed to, and I don't take a day of it for granted. I really love doing this. I did not wanna be doing this job, but I think it is a tremendous job for me. It just doesn't seem that fun to run a nonprofit. It seemed pretty stressful. Everybody seemed like they're up against it and I'm like, yeah, I could probably go without that in my life. You know what I'm saying? Just gimme some money and lemme Exactly. Yeah. But at the end of the day, I wanted to have make an impact and work part of a team that can make an impact and collaborate and be part of a collective impact as well. So I think it was probably the way to go. Yeah,

Akilah Hughes ([32:37](#)):

<laugh>, it seems like it worked out in hindsight,

Brandon Nicholson ([32:39](#)):

<laugh>. It may have, but that hasn't been said. I think just knowing that the sky's the limit. For one thing I will say, believe it or not, is that I'll always give our founders credit, our founding group, our supporters credit, I think generally sweet. Cause people will say, Well, did you imagine it be like this? And I'm like, yeah, Mostly because we believe in our geniuses, we believe in our young people, we believe in our communities, we know what happens when we can work together, collaborate. And when we do that, it almost feels like we're unstoppable. So 10 years ago, I just probably would just need someone say no, seriously. It's like that. Yeah, keep going. But no, I'm extremely grateful.

Akilah Hughes ([33:28](#)):

Yeah, well we are grateful to you. So whether intentionally or unintentionally your organization is bringing our community one step closer to manifesting Wakanda, I think that it just goes without saying. I think <laugh>, in reality, the reason this podcast exists is because we were all so moved by what we saw on screen and what a functioning society could look like with black leadership, with black initiatives, with without any doubt of blackness. So how can others who wanna make Wakanda real support your organization's work? Where could we start?

Brandon Nicholson ([34:06](#)):

Wow. Well thank you for that setup. I think more than anything, we're one organization, of course we're the hidden genius project. I think it was very surreal moment for me this past weekend was in Detroit over the weekend and for our end of summer celebration for our Detroit cohort. That was our third of the summer celebration in about a two and a half week period <laugh>. And it was our first one in person and over three years, which was Banana. So leave from just doing one a year in Oakland to all of a sudden fly down to LA and do that one and fly out to Detroit and do that.

Akilah Hughes ([34:46](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Brandon Nicholson (34:48):

But it was amazing. And I think we saw that the coolest thing was just that there was so much similarity, like these young people, the way they talked to each other, the way they leaned on each other, the way they talked about everything, maybe the intonation was a little different or the context, I'd say even more of the language was closer together. Just, you know, have some SoundCloud and YouTube and all that is take care of a lot of that. But yeah, it's just amazing what it taught me though. The reason why I bring that up is that tells me that when we do do, which is basically just believe in our young people, try and make every effort we can to afford them opportunities to develop what they're doing and build on that and lean on each other. When we do all those things then boom, great stuff happens. Last year, the year before the year that we had a hundred percent high school graduation rate before that we had one, I graduated and he graduated the year after that. Hell,

Brandon Nicholson (35:53):

Okay, he did it in his

Brandon Nicholson (35:55):

Own time. But a lot of different approaches. We tried a lot of different lessons, we failed at a lot of things. We missed meetings and we had lunches come late and we called somebody the wrong name and we didn't get this supply ordered in time and that equipment. But the stuff keeps happening, I think because we believe so people looking to support that, what kind of where they are, whether it's the hidden genius project or elsewhere. I think first we have to see our young peoples reming with limitless potential that they are only providing us with answers for the future, not problems that we have to solve. That's right. That they're certainly in need of support and structure and consistency and boundaries and yet need and in need of space and love and safety in the whole thing. And if we can do that, it doesn't have to be us who does that, What I'm saying, we're not here on Manifest Destiny. And that's where Kil Monger may have been wrong. We don't need to take over and make it the Waka Empire. But yeah, it would be great to share knowledge and team up. And so folks can certainly follow us on our socials and keep track, but also just I think help advocate and communicate for meaningful connection. You know, hear that we're coming to your city, tap in, don't go to the city council meeting and speak out against us. What I'm

Brandon Nicholson (37:33):

Saying, please. Yeah, lets allow them access to everything

Brandon Nicholson (37:38):

Come. Didn't say we won't take it lightly or nor will we take it for granted. But also just we're so fortunate to be here, we're so fortunate for all the folks who have supported us and donated and supplied or provided in kind support and grants and all the things. And we want do a lot more of this. So we need to have partners and partners that travel and partners that are hyper local. So we wanna squat. So find a way to squat up, believe in your young people first, that if you believe in us as well, let's work together.

Akilah Hughes (38:12):

Beautiful. Well thank you so, so much Brandon for being here. The organization is the Hidden genius project. Check them out. We'll put the links in the show notes. Is there anything else that I may have left off or anything about Wakanda that you'd just like to <laugh> throw out there as we say goodbye?

Brandon Nicholson ([38:30](#)):

Well, I think what I will say is we are here because we believe a rising tide lifts all boats. Actually just saw a podcast come across my desk with John A. Powell and Scholar who's elevated and advanced, this idea of targeted universalism, making a very focused and specific set of interventions or service delivery for a specific purpose for the greater benefit. Of course, we know that Angel Glove Blackwell is popularized this idea of the cut curb effect and the idea that the cut curb on the sidewalk was created for folks with accessibility challenges. <affirmative> folks need to utilize wheelchairs, et cetera, but it benefits any of us having sore ankle. It benefits any of us moving into a new apartment using a dolly. It benefits any of us riding a bike or roller skates or scooter. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, so on and so forth. I say all that to say, shout it to Sherry, You know what I'm saying?

([39:37](#)):

Cause hear this work, hear what we're doing and say you don't want us doing it with your sisters. But what I can say is this. The thing I think I'm most proud of over the last decade is how many young leaders we've cultivated and those young people have facilitated programming and opportunities for young people of all huge backgrounds, gender identities, et cetera, across the world. So when we talk about the UK or South APcare, anywhere else those have been heterogeneous groups, right? Of different background. And that's because we put our energy into these young men and then believe in their leadership potential to do the rest. So understanding what they do, believing in what they do, does not mean that you don't believe in anybody else, any background. It all fits together. We need each other. So I wanna make sure, especially as we go onto this WA forever with our Mexican cousins, Oh my God, let's make sure we're all on the same page. You know what I'm saying? We're all in this global family together trying to do our part. So

Akilah Hughes ([40:39](#)):

Absolutely. Well could not have said it better myself. Brandon Nicholson, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us and go find the Hidden Genius Project. Support it. If a young man who might be eligible to be part of it, put him up for it. <laugh>, do your part right.