



## Create Now Success Story: Darontay McClendon

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Darontay had his first felony when he was 8 years old. He was in and out of prisons since he was 11. When we met him, he was at Camp Kilpatrick, arrested for hitting someone over the head with a crowbar. Darontay participated in the Create Now Talent Show and won second prize in the Rap Music Contest.

Darontay came to the ShowBiz Expo in June 2000, where he passed out brochures and shared his experiences in **Create Now** with the attendees. We introduced him to some filmmakers who visited our booth. Producer David Goodman and director Adam Ripp invited Darontay to intern on their film "Gang Tapes," which they were shooting in his neighborhood, Watts.

He volunteered as an intern in their production office. The staff was so impressed with Darontay's intelligence and attitude, they paid him as a technical consultant for a variety of departments: locations, wardrobe, production design, etc. Darontay decided to audition for one of the co-starring roles. He beat out 200 professional actors for the part of "Cyril." In addition, the producers paid him a generous sum to use two of his rap songs for the soundtrack of the film.

"Gang Tapes" made its debut in Los Angeles on February 12th 2001 at the Pan African Film Festival. The feature film was screened at the Magic Johnson Theaters next to the Baldwin Hills, Crenshaw Plaza. "Gang Tapes" also won the "Best Ensemble Cast" award at the 2001 New York Underground Film Festival. The movie was then screened at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood through the American Cinematheque.

Darontay was nominated for "Best Supporting Actor in a DVD Movie" in 2002. The DVD Movie Awards were given at a prestigious ceremony at the Wilton Theater on January 14th, 2003. While he didn't win the award, he competed in this category against such notorious actors as Steve Buscemi, Gary Busey and Jeremy Piven. However, director Adam Ripp won the "Best Director of a DVD Movie." This is a great testament to Darontay's work in the film.

Darontay improvised most of his dialogue in the film and showed great talent as a writer. We gave him a computer and software so that he could write screenplays. He's working on his first script, which is a powerful story about prison life.

Meanwhile, Darontay has to support his little girl Mariah. He was the top salesman at a marketing company and he opened his own place called "Needlez and Threadz." What's really thrilling is that Darontay is now doing the mentoring these days! He said, "My shop is right there in my old neighborhood. I pretty much know everybody - all the kids and the older people - and I try to be a mentor to everyone. Sometimes people just need somebody to tell them that they can reach their dreams."

**Create Now** is really proud of Darontay and we know that he's at the beginning of an amazing career.

Media Contact:  
Jill Gurr, Executive Director  
jill@createnow.org  
c: 323.467.9039

