



BRANDON "JINX" JENKINS

ON THE ART OF THE PIVOT

Real conversations in mass media that really make you sit down and reflect are increasingly hard to come by. Can you name five of your favourite hip-hop related pieces of literature from the past decade? With rapid-moving social media and instant messaging affecting the way we digest news and converse, less people are seeking out the underlying narratives that motivate their heroes. But New Jersey native Jinx is quite the opposite: he's made it his mission to explore the minds of this generation's brightest and best, redistributing knowledge for the world to enjoy. Despite accolades like the launch of his own documentary series 'The Culture', and an epic double-headline interview with Kendrick Lamar and Kobe Bryant this year, 2018 holds bigger projects that will be rewarding to both himself and the rest of us.

But before all that, Jinx was Brandon Jenkins from Somerset, New Jersey. His neighbourhood was "whatever they're showing people on TV now. You ride bikes. Everyone hangs out together. The classrooms look like 'Boy Meets World' but more people of colour." He was listening to Sade and Kenny G in his mom's Toyota Cressida, memorising a TLC compilation with his sister, then finally catching onto MTV and Hot 97. He had aspirations of becoming an engineer since his parents had impressed upon him the prestige of such an established profession.

Although Brandon would go on to switch majors from engineering to marketing at Morehouse College, an HBCU (Historically Black College and Universities), his penchant to create manifested early, when he built two phone apps during a summer program at Carnegie Mellon University in 2001: one that played music and one that received emails. He was 14 years old.

In college, Jinx would record everyday life around him - smoke sessions, basketball games, jokes - on a digital camera and constantly dump footage on a now broken hard drive, as well as designing party fliers and MySpace backgrounds for himself and his friends. The reality of graduating those hobbies to a full time job didn't appear within reach until 2011, when he earned an unpaid internship fresh out of college at Steve Stoute's creative marketing agency, Translation. While commuting to the New York City office, Brandon would forego lunch and MTA fare sometimes to save up for a dollar, jumbo slice of pizza and Dutchies on the way home. However, giving into the pressure of his parents' concern for job security, he'd suffer a minor setback when he moved to Erie, Pennsylvania for a sales position, a company car, and a printer, courtesy of Nestlé.

A year later, unable to give up on his dreams, Jinx was back in New York with another unpaid internship, this time at another agency, Decon. While working out of the SoHo office in Manhattan, he not only wore all of the hats - crafting campaigns for brands from ideation to delivery - but he also helped relaunch the street lifestyle/graffiti publication 'Mass Appeal' as a video producer, writer, and occasional model: "I'm modeling Sir in the same issue that I wrote a piece about the chapter of Bloods in Newark. And in the back of that issue, I shot polaroids of random people. Then I'm taking that same issue to Supreme like, 'Hey guys, sell them if you want. We just really want you to have them.'"

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From unpaid intern to a modest salary and his first business card, Jinx would cut his teeth at Decon and Mass Appeal, slowly building on the overlap between his love for all things culture and the advertising world. This was where he discovered the perspective that would shape his work philosophy. "Between Canal and Houston, and between Varick and Bowery, this is where I fuckin' want to be at," he remembers. "You could be in the same room as a rapper but not have to celebrate them. You could just see cool shit." This mental framework allowed Jinx to see past plaques hung on walls and rumours floating in the air and cut right to the core of someone. "I wanted to be the Alex Haley of rap," he recalls.

Jinx's work ethic began attracting attention beyond Decon, and in 2013 Noah Callahan-Bever of Complex would slide in his DM's to enquire about bringing him onto a nascent video news team. Becoming a mainstay video correspondent, he's worked out the kinks across the past five years, and is now an instantly recognisable face for the Complex brand. He has earned his own series, 'The Culture', which tells inspirational tales about people who work behind-the-scenes of the music industry, including photographers, A&Rs, artist managers and video directors. The series isn't targeted at kids trying to carbon copy the subjects' lives, but more for the kid - like a young Brandon - who didn't even know there's something beyond engineering. "It's not a roadmap," he explains. "But it's evidence that it exists. If you get your name up and you're respected, you can have real, trusted conversations with people while servicing them. I'm just curious about people, process, and creativity."

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