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Students present famed opera 'Carmen' at special MLK Day event



A special Martin Luther King, Jr. Day presentation of the George Bizet opera, "Voices of Carmen" that will include a discussion examining escalating conflicts and violence among young people is planned for Charm City. The more recent escalation in school violence and relational aggression among teens led writer, director and choreographer CJay Philip to believe the time was right to bring "Carmen" to the stage and into communities as a vehicle for dialogue around sensitive topics. Photo: Youth performance and community conversation (left to right) Faith Bender; Grace Cassar; Jared Adams; Ui-seng Francois; Noelle Young Davis; Terrence Martin; Jade Underwood; and Catherine Davis. (See article on page 9) Courtesy Photo/PushtoStartInc

Baltimore Entrepreneur Nakeia L. Drummond: The Woman at The WELL

By Ursula V. Battle

Last year, The 2018 State of Women-Owned Business Report was released. The report was commissioned by American Express with the hope that “the report will continue to serve key players within the women’s advocacy arena with data on changing business conditions and will identify opportunities for accelerated growth, as well as acknowledge and celebrate women’s progress and identify where they still struggle.”

The 2018 State of Women-Owned Businesses report examined the periods 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2018, looking at trends in the number of firms, employment, and revenue by various groupings. The findings were promising, with the report noting, “African American owned businesses represented the highest rate of growth in the number of firms between 2017 and 2018 of any group.”

The report also included data that was not so promising. It found that for women of color, average revenue dropped from \$84,000 in 2007 to \$66,400 in 2018, while for non-minority businesses, revenue rose from \$181,000 to \$212,300. Moreover, the gap between African American women-owned businesses’ average revenue and all women-owned businesses was the greatest.

However, one local minority female entrepreneur is taking an active stance to close this gap and ultimately help to ensure that women of color are getting their fair share of the financial entrepreneurship pie. She is 36-year-old Nakeia L. Drummond, founder and chief strategist of NLD Strategic, a management, consulting firm supporting businesses and organizations that drive social impact.

Last fall, Drummond launched The



Nakeia Drummond launched The WELL (The Women Entrepreneur Leadership Lab) in 2018. The group will foster collaboration, community and confidence for black women-owned businesses.
Courtesy Photo

WELL (The Women Entrepreneur Leadership Lab), a network that will foster collaboration, community and confidence for black woman-owned businesses.

“Our intent is to collect data and best practices that are scalable for black women businesses,” said Drummond. “We are hearing that black women start business three to six more times than other groups, but our income earnings are lower. That duality was really intriguing to me. There was this narrative of how black women are living their best life, and are starting businesses, but our annual revenue is considerably lower than that of other groups.”

She added, “That makes it harder to grow and increase revenue. I wanted to explore the duality of taking the leap and starting a business, but on the other hand, not making the money. The prob-

lem has been explored, but I wanted to explore it from our perspective.”

Last October, Drummond held a pre-launch event for The WELL.

“The purpose of this event was to tell people in my network what I was doing,” said Drummond. “I had been holding Roundtables over the last two years, and I know how I felt about the disparities. However, I wanted to see if this resonated with other women, and it did. This was a way to take all the work I do, and apply it to area of impact that was relevant to me and that I was passionate about.”

The LAB recently wrapped up the three-month Founder’s Launch (pilot), and now has 10 Founding Members. According to Drummond, The WELL has started building a social media presence and following on Instagram under

their handle @sheswellnetworked.

“As a black woman professional you have to go into all spaces,” said Drummond. “We aren’t given the same information as other groups. If we can’t have access to that information, we can’t grow. We have a ton of success, but we also experience setbacks that we would not have to experience if we don’t work in an isolated way. The main intent is to build community, collaboration, and confidence to grow our businesses.”

Prior to founding NLD Strategic, Drummond worked at Accenture, as an analyst before shifting careers into education, teaching in Baltimore City Public Schools and serving in various district management roles. The entrepreneur is a Spring 2018 Warnock Foundation Social Innovation (WFSI) Fellow. The Fellowship provides Baltimoreans with the opportunity to implement their ideas/innovation to make Baltimore a vibrant city to live in, learn and grow. The Baltimore native is married and has two children.

“As black women entrepreneurs, we have to prove and prove and prove,” said Drummond. “However, we are experts, are educated and have proven time and time again we know our stuff. Through The WELL, we will share our expertise in a trusted space. We will give advice to women that they can act on and implement. People learn in cycles, and The WELL takes a cyclical approach to growth and development.”

She added, “Symbolically, and biblically, a well means a lot of things. It’s a place you can go, be you, be accepted, and where your needs are met. That embodies what The WELL is all about.”

For more information, visit <http://www.nldstrategic.com>.

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Three strategies for helping distressed young people become more resilient

News & Experts— Is the United States facing an epidemic of lost and distressed youth who struggle to handle the daily challenges of life? Statistics say yes. The suicide rate for young people is on the rise, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Despite such troubling statistics, there are ways to better prepare young people so they can bounce back from the trials that life throws at them, said Dr. Kim Metcalfe, a retired professor of early childhood education and psychology, and author of “Let’s Build ExtraOrdinary Youth Together.”

“Children need much more than love, food, clothing, shelter and electronic devices,” Metcalfe said. “They need to be armed with the ability to be resilient so they can navigate through childhood and into adulthood, dealing with adversity, trauma, tragedy and other significant sources of stress. We know the traits of emotionally resilient people and we know the types of experiences and



opportunities that youth need to develop these traits.”

Resilient individuals don’t see themselves as victims, even though sometimes they are. They refuse to play the blame game, and they know how to intercede on their own best behalf.

Resilient individuals view setbacks as challenges that they are capable of addressing successfully. They feel hopeful rather than helpless.

For Metcalfe, helping distressed young people is a mission. Her daughter committed suicide in 2012, so Metcalfe speaks both as a professional and as a mother who has suffered a loss.

Metcalfe offers suggestions for parents and others on ways they can help build resilience in young people so they know they can handle the situation when life becomes difficult:


•**Give them opportunities to self-regulate.** Self-regulation is when you are able to take control of your thinking, your decisions and your behavior. If you want your children to develop the skill of self-regulation, Metcalfe says, you must provide them opportunities where they are required to stop and think about the consequences of those decisions and behaviors. That means you can’t make all their decisions for them.

•**Use missteps, mistakes and disappointments as learning opportunities.** The next time your adolescent does something you aren’t thrilled about, Metcalfe says, try asking them questions such as, “What other choice could you have made?” Use follow-up questions, such as: “If you made that choice what do you think might have happened?” “Is there another choice or option you could have considered?”

•**Model the resilience you want to see in them.** One way to build more resilience in a teenager is to make certain you are modeling the behavior you want to see. They notice how you handle challenging situations. “If you have a difficult time bouncing back from setbacks, then it makes sense that your teens will have difficulty, too,” Metcalfe says. “Modeling for our youth what we want to develop in them is very powerful. Resilient people are able to cope with challenges, weather the storms in life, and work successfully through setbacks to reach their goals and make their dreams come true.”

“People like to say that kids are resilient,” Metcalfe says. “That’s not always true. In fact, it’s often not true. But they can develop the thinking habits and skills to live through adversity and recover in ways that allow them to live the lives they were born to live and do in life what they were born to do.”


Dr. Kim Metcalfe, a retired professor of early childhood education and psychology, is the author of Let’s Build ExtraOrdinary Youth Together (www.xtraordinaryyouth.com). She is a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the California Association for the Education of Young Children, and the American Psychological Association.



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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Opportunity Zones: The New Trump Executive Order For Blacks

By Roger Caldwell, NNPA Newswire Contributor

After almost two years, President Trump has laid out a policy with an executive order to spend money and investments in the “distressed communities across the country.” Last week (12-12-18), at an executive order signing at the White House, with a majority of African Americans in attendance, President Trump said, “this order would draw investment into neglected and underserved communities in America.”

With a sea of black faces, starting with Billionaire Bob Johnson, Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina and United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Ben Carson, [President Trump] has assured the mainstream media that this is one of the solutions to fix the numerous economic problems in urban America. Under the leadership and direction of Secretary Ben Carson, 13 federal agencies have already put together a list of 8,761 potential designated action zones.

“The White House’s new executive order for agencies to prioritize OZs is a positive first step to transform more communities into walkable, equitable, and thriving places and repair the mistakes of the 20th century that led to sprawl and disinvestment,” said Christopher Cotes, Director of LOCUS, a program of Small Growth America. “Most importantly, this new council must encourage greater transparency to ensure any federal investment in OZs achieves equitable development outcomes that are good for both residents and businesses.”

On paper, “Opportunity Zones” appears to be an excellent concept and major corporations have an opportunity to invest in distressed communities and get a break on their taxes. These Opportunity Zones were created a year ago under the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, but a year later there are still no established rules to implement the program. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories are able to participate in the Opportunity Zones initiative. State governors are responsible for nominating low-income communities based on qualified census tracts, and the U.S. Department of the Treasury will certify Opportunity Zones within 30 days of receiving nominations.

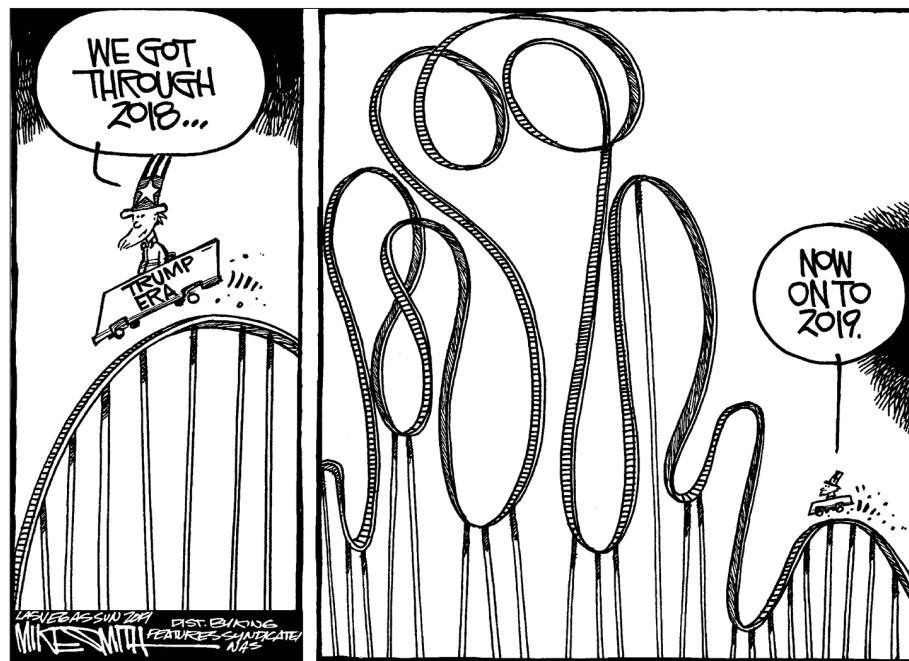
Presently, the major question is how will the African American community benefit from Opportunity Zones? To begin, very few African Americans are aware of or have information about Opportunity Zones, and many consumer advocates warn that the investments may not reach distressed areas. Many of these projects will be a public-private-partnership, and many companies refuse to invest money in a poor community, where they don’t see them getting a return on their investment.

However at the executive order signing, different prominent blacks spoke in favor of the project. Pastor Donte’ Hickman of the Southern Baptist Church and in partnership with other faith-based stakeholders’ institutions, has created the East Baltimore Revitalization Plan, addressing development needs of 100 acres, approved and adapted by the City Planning Development of Baltimore.

“Our area has been federally-designated as an Opportunity Zone, and this bipartisan legislation can leverage public and private funding toward community revitalization,” says Pastor Hickman. After Pastor Hickman gave his remarks, Billionaire Bob Johnson of BET spoke.

Johnson is also a big supporter of Opportunity Zones. “What this proves is the efficacy, Mr. President, of a program that allows capital to flow to places where people are seeking out opportunity. And I am convinced that this program, where the tax incentives out of the Treasury Department to business people, will cause people to invest money where before they saw risk, now they see opportunity,” says Bob Johnson of BET.

It’s too early to make an informed opinion on this Opportunity Zone project. There are different numbers from different leaders as to the amount of money the government is willing to invest. Some say \$1.3 billion and others say \$2.2 billion— both numbers are substantial. Before everyone gets excited about the Opportunity Zones project, please remember that no Opportunity Zones have been identified and the Treasury Department has yet to establish rules for the program.



Community Affairs

Maryland school systems awarded \$1.5 million in grants

Baltimore— The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has awarded \$1.5 million in state-funded grants to local school systems through the Learning in Extended Academic Program (LEAP) and the Public School Opportunities Enhancement Professional Learning Program (PSOEPLP).

“Supporting out-of-school time programs and teacher recruitment and training is a direct approach to ensuring no Maryland student falls behind,” said Dr. Karen Salmon, State Superintendent of Schools. “Improving these opportunities have been shown to have a positive impact on students, and puts us one-step closer to leveling the playing field.”

LEAP programs occur before school, after school, during the summer, and on Saturdays. The program received \$1 million in grants aimed at improving out-of-school time opportunities. The purpose of LEAP is to provide grants to eligible schools in order to extend academic programming that has a positive

impact or enriches the academic performance of students who are at risk of falling behind.

The grant provides opportunities for academic enrichment, instructional services for students who attend low-performing schools, and academic achievement in core academic subjects; and targets public schools in which at least 80 percent of students qualify for the free and reduced price meals program.

Grants were awarded on a competitive basis in Baltimore City, Frederick County and Montgomery County.

Additionally, MSDE has awarded \$500,000 to Teach for America (TFA) through the Public School Opportunities Enhancement Professional Learning Program (PSOEPLP). The purpose of the PSOEPLP is to provide grants to non-profit organizations that support existing educational programming during the school day, including the recruitment, training, and ongoing professional learning of new teachers.

The grant enables TFA to select 125 new teachers for Maryland through rigorous recruitment efforts to provide specialized and intensive support to meet the needs of nearly 200 first and second-year teachers.

Equity v. Equality: Giving students the tools they need to succeed

By Naomi Shelton
Director of K-12 Advocacy at UNCF
(United Negro College Fund)

Equity has been a huge buzzword in the field of education this year. Education advocates and politicians alike have called for an increase in educational equity, but what does the term really mean? Equity is not Equality. Equity creates equality by prioritizing resources to students who need them the most.

For example, think of a typical track meet. There are five runners— each in their own lane. Each runner must run one lap around the track. The first runner to complete the lap, wins the race. Now let's use this analogy to inform our understanding of equity.

Equality would mean that every runner would start the race at the exact same spot in their lane. However, the track is oval-shaped. If each runner began at the same spot, each runner's distance to the finish line would be different. The runner in the innermost lane would run a shorter distance than the runner in the

outermost lane. Sure, they would both start in the same spot (EQUAL), but the runners in the innermost lanes would have an advantage— in distance— than their counterparts in the outermost lanes.

This is precisely why track meets do not operate this way. Since the track is oval-shaped, each runner begins the race in their own lane, at different, equal distance, spots along the track; ensuring that each runner, runs the exact same distance needed to complete the race.

schools in affluent neighborhoods with a surplus of resources. These students have the advantage of local tax-based funding formulas, parent lead fundraising efforts and/or private funding, and state-of-the-art technology.

What we need is education reform that promotes fairness. Fairness equals equity. As Debby Irving in her book *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race* states, "Equality means giving all students the exact same

than ten percent from year to year despite school performance. ESSA also attempts to ensure that low-income students are not disproportionately taught by ineffective, inexperienced, and/or out-of-field teachers.

ESSA requires that state and district report cards include the percentage of inexperienced teachers, principals, and other school leaders as well as teachers with emergency credentials, and teachers teaching subjects out of their range of expertise. ESSA also seeks to relieve some teacher angst surrounding evaluation systems by ending the requirement for state teacher evaluation systems to focus significantly on student test scores.

ESSA gives power back to the states to control education policy. Now, members of the community must hold their school leaders and elected officials accountable to implement system-wide and school-specific measures that ensure equity in our schools.

Furthermore, UNCF's 2017 community resource, *Lift Every Voice and Lead Toolkit: A Community Leader's Advocacy Resource for K-12 Education*, offers step-by-step analysis of African American Education and highlights organizations that have effectively engaged in education efforts at a local level to support efforts in improving the quality of education for all students.

Naomi Shelton has experience in education related community engagement both at the national and local levels and public administration. She is currently the the director of K-12 Advocacy at United Negro College Fund, the nation's largest and most effective minority education organization. Follow Naomi on Twitter at @NaomiSheltonDC

“ESSA gives power back to the states to control education policy. Now, members of the community must hold their school leaders and elected officials accountable to implement system-wide and school-specific measures that ensure equity in our schools.”

Now, think of our current public education system in this same context. Students— regardless of race, geography, household makeup— start on the same marker on the track. Some students, like the runner in the outermost lane, have to run harder and faster to get to the finish line. The barrier here is distance. In the real world, barriers include low-income, resource deprived neighborhoods, disabilities that require additional expertise, culturally negligent curriculum, outdated technology, inexperienced teachers or access to critical supportive services.

Meanwhile, the runner in the innermost lane has it a lot easier. They don't have to run as fast or as hard to get to the finish line because of their initial position in the race. The barriers here are fewer in number. In terms of education, these innermost runners attend

thing to meet the same expectations.

Equity means holding people of differing needs to a single expectation and giving them what they need to achieve it." In other words, the playing fields need to be leveled. It's critical that our public educational system undertakes reform— changes so that each student is given what they need to succeed.

Our education system should support students by allocating the most resources to students who are most in need, just as track athletes arrange themselves for fairer competition. The national education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) targets dollars to the highest poverty schools and districts.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools could lose funding if they failed to meet statewide standards. But under ESSA, states cannot reduce funding by more

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Dramatic opioid crisis film hits Baltimore

By Stacy M. Brown

The World Health Organization estimates approximately two million people in the United States alone are addicted to prescription opioids.

A new feature series, "Jacqueline and Jilly," currently airing on the Urban Movie channel, will be screened at AMC Owings Mills 17 Theatre on Friday, January 11, 2019, is the story about one family.

The series, which has already received critical acclaim was written, produced and directed by Emmy-nominated actress Victoria Rowell.

"In my opinion, the functionality of the entertainment industry should not solely be to entertain but should also be used as an awareness mechanism for calls to action in any crisis," said Rowell, renowned for her roles in Eddie Murphy's "The Distinguish Gentlemen," "Diagnosis Murder," "Dumb and Dumber," and other movie and television hits.

"My hope is that Jaqueline and Jilly will inspire spirited conversation between families and communities while also encouraging legislative limitations on pharmaceutical distribution.

"I'm hoping this inspires transparent conversation that people will be empowered to want to help in communities who don't have the help and medical support they should have.

"I'm hoping people will write their legislators about managing doses. These [opioids] are powerful pharmaceutical drugs that are meant for end of life, they were never meant to get into the mainstream of public medical care," she said.

"People walk into hospitals for routine surgeries and they walk out addicts,"



Emmy-nominated actress Victoria Rowell in a scene from "Jacqueline and Jilly," a new feature series currently airing on the Urban Movie channel. The series, which has already received critical acclaim was written, produced and directed Rowell.
Courtesy Photo/Urban Movie Channel

Rowell continued. "Once a patient can't get the pill they're addicted to, they often turn to the streets for heroin and that often leads to HIV."

In "Jacqueline and Jilly," political areers and societal privilege create distance between Jacqueline and her husband, Magnus Mitchell, a District of Columbia lobbyist. Their over achieving daughter, Jilly, who is in her 20s and an aspiring photographer enrolled at Hampton University, has long felt the strain and neglect, and turns instead to her bohemian boyfriend, Paul, for comfort and attention.

Unnoticed, Jilly develops a growing addiction to prescribed opiate painkillers due to a fall from her thoroughbred horse.

News of a car accident causes her busy parents and doting grandmother, Zillah Stewart, to rush to her side. Added by denial, Jacqueline and Magnus regard their daughter's addiction as an embarrassing nuisance, disrupting the status quo.

As this family unravels the truth, Jacqueline recommends the posh safety of their Chesapeake Bay home as a part of Jilly's ongoing recovery. However, Jilly has another idea. Secrets that have haunted the Mitchell's are unlocked at a rustic lodge setting healing these three women like never before.

The series stars Rowell, Richard Brooks (Being Mary Jane), Daphne Maxwell Reid (The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air), Nikko Austen Smith (Queen

Sugar), and Shannon Wallace.

"I'm proud of [media mogul] Bob Johnson for giving me a platform to provide quality content. Opioid addiction is colorblind, it's class blind," Rowell said. "I want this to be an awareness mechanism; to use its powerful weight in bringing awareness. I'm hoping that Jacqueline and Jilly inspires conversations between families, communities and friends."

Rowell says she is also proud of being at the wheel of the film and series, as producer and director.

"With three black female writers... it once again validated my journey of having worked with big networks and not seeing my reflection in so many cases... this has given me an opportunity not only to create content I believe is important and might save lives, but hire people who don't get opportunities, people who are remarkably and incredibly qualified who just need the opportunity," Rowell said.

Rowell says that the takeaway from Jacqueline and Jilly is that it offers hope.

"We see TV shows, movies and documentaries that are incredibly tough to watch and I think a lot of the content lacks hope. So, Jacqueline and Jilly offers hope. It offers hope of recovery and I've written it with a dash of humor because life is hard enough," Rowell said.

The actress says it's important that everyone knows that there is a hotline, 800-662-HELP. Rowell also suggests using the #jacquelineandJilly on social media where she can be found @victoriarowell.

For more information about the series, Jacqueline and Jilly, visit: www.JacquelineandJilly.com.



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It's the end of an era for the Ravens

By Tyler Hamilton

As the final seconds ticked off the clock in the Baltimore Ravens playoff loss to the Los Angeles Chargers, quarterback Joe Flacco stood on the home sideline for the last time at M&T Bank Stadium. After spending all of his 11 NFL seasons in Baltimore, a change is on the horizon.

Flacco's last game action came in week 9 in the Ravens 23 - 16 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers. A back injury kept Flacco from returning the following week and 2018 first-round pick Lamar Jackson took over, leading Baltimore to an AFC North division title.

Ravens head coach John Harbaugh never wavered in his support for Jackson. He stuck with the rookie when they were down 23 - 3 to the Chargers.

Jackson rewarded Harbaugh by almost pulling off the comeback with two touchdown passes in the fourth quarter making the score 23 - 17.

After the game, Harbaugh signaled the end of an era when asked about Flacco.

"Joe Flacco is going to play really well in this league. Joe can still play; I think we saw that in the first half of the season," Harbaugh said. "Joe's going to have a market. There's going to be a lot of teams that are going to want Joe."

Flacco's Super Bowl MVP performance



Baltimore Ravens starting quarterback Joe Flacco's last game action came in week 9 in the Ravens 23 - 16 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers. Not only did Flacco give Baltimore a Super Bowl title, he was also part of various community outreach activities and became a beloved athlete in the city.

Courtesy Photo/NFL.com

in 2012 wasn't lost on Harbaugh. However, it's a business and Flacco's \$26.5 million cap number is one the team can't stomach, especially with him not being the starter.

Harbaugh complimented his former starter calling him one of the best to ever wear a Ravens uniform.

"I'll be in Joe's corner wherever he's at. He's special. Joe Flacco is a great talent. He's an even better person. He's the best QB in the history of the Ravens without question," Harbaugh added.

The fans chanted Flacco's name hoping he would come in to lead the Ravens from behind in the Chargers game.

Flacco was flattered, but showed tremendous class saying Harbaugh did the right thing.

"No, you can't even go there man," Flacco said about benching Jackson when the team was down. "I thought Lamar did a great job kg hanging in there and giving us a chance at the end."

With GM Ozzie Newsome retiring, the first order of business for his replacement Eric DeCosta will be finding a new home for Flacco. There will be teams that show interest, but it won't be easy to unload Flacco's husky contract.

The City of Baltimore got more than just a Super Bowl title from Flacco. He was a part of various community outreach activities and became a beloved athlete in the city. He connected with Baltimore but his time there has come to an end.

"I love the people of Baltimore. To be honest, I can't imagine a better 11 years. This place became my home and my children's home," Flacco said. "It's definitely a group of fans and a community that I loved being around and just how many different life changes I went through and how much we won here. I'm not from too far up the road and the people here are a lot like the people I grew up with."

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A Sit Down with Nori Nori

Catch the entire 15-minute discussion with Magic 95.9's Nori Nori and Imani Wj Wright on this week's episode of the SwanoDown SitDown, available at www.baltimoretimes-online.com.

"Community— when I got here, what I realized very early and very quickly was, I needed to form a connection with the community. I needed to meet people, I need to talk to people. And this isn't necessarily movers and shakers in the city, this is just walking down the streets, downtown Baltimore, different neighborhoods that I ride through [and] when I see someone, I'm like: Hey, how you doing?, I yell out the window." —Nori Nori

Negro Leagues Centennial Team Gets own Bobbleheads

By Stacy M. Brown

Before Jackie Robinson broke the color lines in Major League Baseball, African Americans honed their immense talents in the Negro Leagues.

Satchel Paige was the star for the Kansas City Monarchs while Willie Wells and Cool Papa Bell were the pride of St. Louis, and Cannonball Dick Redding turned heads in New York with the Lincoln Giants.

Keeping the legacy of the Negro Leagues and its players alive is vital, according to Phil Sklar, the co-founder and CEO of the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum.

“Every future generation must know that there was a time when people with equal, or in many cases superior, skills couldn’t be on the same field solely because of the color of their skin,” Sklar said.

To that end, a Kickstarter campaign to create a series of officially licensed, limited edition bobbleheads to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Negro National League has raised over \$67,000, easily topping its original \$10,000 goal.

The project was launched in December in connection with the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, by the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum and Dreams of Field, which organized to promote the Negro National League Centennial in 2020.

The goal is to honor and celebrate the league and its players while also educating the public about the Negro Leagues and its players.

“I want these bobbleheads to spark discussions and educate people about the Negro Leagues and struggles and triumphs of the players,” Sklar said. “The Negro Leaguers had so many stories to tell and most of the players are gone, but the bobbleheads will play a part in keeping their legacy alive for a very long time. There are still so many injustices and cases of discrimination related to race and other factors, but teaching the story of the Negro Leagues and its players could really make a difference.

Now that the campaign has reached the \$60,000 mark, backers are in line to receive an exclusive commemorative



Photos Courtesy of National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum

ticket that provides a \$2 admission discount to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum during the Centennial Exhibit, and the first Milwaukee Bears bobblehead will be produced.

Since the campaign topped the \$60,000 mark, the production process began for several more of the bobbleheads. Each bobblehead in the series is individually numbered to 2,020 and come in a collector’s box with a “back story” of the player.

The bobblehead series is officially licensed by the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum and is being produced by the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum in conjunction with Dreams Fulfilled and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. Approvals have been received from all the identified estates of players featured in the series.

The players comprising the Negro Leagues Centennial Team were announced at a special event at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum last month.

Bob Kendrick, president of the NLBM, announced the team in conjunction with Jay Caldwell, founder of Dreams Fulfilled, as the Kickstarter launched.

Each player is being depicted on a baseball-shaped base with a replica of Kansas City’s Paseo YMCA, the site where the Negro National League was organized on February 13, 1920.

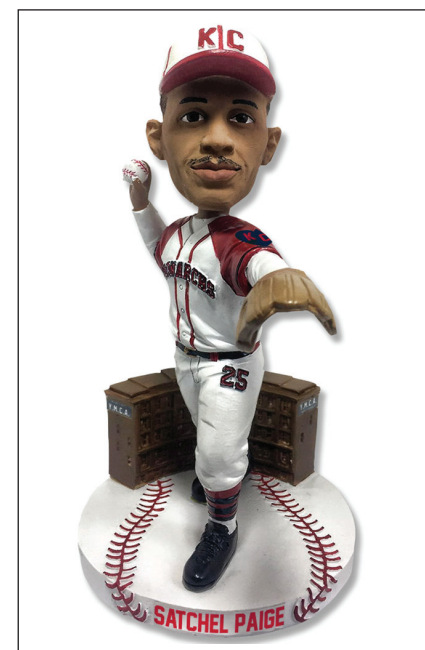
Satchel Paige was the first player selected, and his bobblehead has been completed.

Paige will be joined by 10 additional pitchers, three catchers, five outside infielders (1B, 3B), three inside infielders (2B, SS), seven outfielders, one utility player, a manager and an owner as voted on by an on-line poll and supplemented by five additional players.

“We are thrilled to commemorate a historic number of former Negro League players with bobbleheads, which are the ultimate honor,” Sklar said.

“Many of these players have never had bobbleheads, and these bobbleheads will help ensure that their legacy and vital contribution to baseball and society is always remembered. We have been overwhelmed by the excitement for the series and can’t wait to produce and distribute them.”

Jay Caldwell, founder of Dreams Fulfilled, said The Negro Leagues Centennial series will “bring long overdue



recognition to players who were not only among the best to ever play the game, but also early civil rights pioneers who helped pave the way for integration in baseball and the country.”

To learn more about the campaign, visit <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/bobbleheadhall/negro-leagues-centennial-team-bobblehead-series>.

Students present famed opera 'Carmen' at special MLK Day event

By Stacy M. Brown

A special Martin Luther King Jr. Day presentation of the George Bizet opera, "Voices of Carmen" that will include a discussion examining escalating conflicts and violence among young people is planned for Charm City.

The urban musical adaptation of the iconic opera, which is set in a high school to contemporary rhythm and beats, as well as what the director calls a creative vehicle for important conversations, is scheduled for Monday, January 21, 2019 at Motor House in Baltimore 2:30 p.m. Admission is free.

"Basically, one of the things about doing a new musical production is that it's designed to be a vehicle for community conversations," said writer, director and choreographer CJay Philip, who first produced an adaptation of "Carmen" in 2007 in Zurich, Switzerland with her brother and co-choreographer Kelvin Hardy.

Philip says the feedback she received during earlier auditions from her students made her realize the benefits of establishing a production to recognize the slain civil rights leader's holiday.

"I was shocked how fantastic and quick [the students] were with the material," she said.

"The young people wanted to do this for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day specifically because of what we are talking about ... escalating conflicts with teens and how do we de-escalate them and what are the tools to deal with fear and frustration," Philip said. "Specifically, we talked about this under the umbrella of nonviolence, so that's why we're doing the Martin Luther King Jr. Day event."

A French Opéra comique, "Carmen" is also based on the novella of the same title by Prosper Mérimée that was first published in 1845. According to historians, the opera premiered in Paris in 1875 and the opening run was denounced by the majority of critics.

Set in southern Spain, it tells the story of the downfall of Don José, a naïve soldier who is seduced by Carmen. José abandons his childhood sweetheart and deserts from his military duties, yet loses Carmen's love to Escamillo, a matador.



Members of the Carmen Youth Council, (left to right) Edima Essien, Jade Underwood and Christein Wills. Courtesy Photos/PushtoStartInc.



Dina Maeva recording songs for "Voices of Carmen" for the original cast album

Jose ultimately kills Carmen in a fit of jealousy.

Historians say Bizet died of a heart attack at 36 in 1875, never knowing how popular Carmen would become.

The more recent escalation in school violence and relational aggression among teens led Philip to believe the time was right to bring "Carmen" to the stage and into communities as a vehicle for dialogue around sensitive topics.

"I was tired of town hall meetings and community conversations after an incident," Philip said. "Teenagers are being beat up, bullied and even killed over a break up. We have to find a way to get out in front of this problem."

"Voices of Carmen" is my attempt to create an avenue for youth voices to be heard and for communities to listen. Young people face a lot of pressures, stress, fear and are shamed every day. How can we help them deal with it and know they are not alone?"

Phillip has updated the work and rewritten much of the script. "Voices of Carmen," has a youth council of students who advise Philip on school climate, music styles, themes and relevance of the work.

Contemporary arrangements of the music by Bizet along with eight originals songs written and arrangement by CJay in collaboration with her husband and music producer Winston Philip range from R&B to Pop and Hip-Hop.

Citywide auditions are scheduled from March 2 to March 4 for youth ages 14-21 and the show premieres July 31, 2019 at the Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA). The show will also be presented on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage on August 3, 2019.

"Voices of Carmen" music is available free on Sound Cloud for students to learn and prepare for the citywide auditions in March. Once selected for a role, students will record an original cast album before the start of "Camp Carmen" on July 8, 2019 at the BSA.

For tickets for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day performance, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/voices-of-carmen-mlk-day-performance-tickets-53158461389>

Film Review: The Upside

By Dwight Brown
NNPA News Wire Film Critic

On paper, a story about a low-income black health-care aid who is befriended by a rich white male quadriplegic sounds suspect. Patronizing films like *Driving Miss Daisy* come to mind, and potential filmgoers upon hearing the plotline may feel anxious, angry and nauseous all at the same time.

On-screen, *The Upside*, an American remake of the 2011 Cesar-winning French blockbuster called *Les Intouchables*, which launched the career Omar Sy (*Jurassic World*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*), is iffy but still quite touching. Three-dimensional compelling performances by Bryan Cranston (that is to be expected) and Kevin Hart (a welcome surprise) are its saving grace.

Kevin Hart fans may think that this role of an underling is beneath their favorite comedy actor. Instead they should view it as an opportunity to see him show more than his class-clown approach to performing. Thrown into the deep-sea

depths of a dramedy, Hart proves he can swim just fine.

Dell (Hart), a young man with a criminal past is behind on his child support payments; pity his wife (Aja Naomi King, *The Birth of a Nation*) and son (Jahi Di'Allo Winston, *The New Edition Story*). He needs a job and money in a bad way. Dell haphazardly gets a position as a caregiver for a wheelchair-bound, millionaire, author Phillip (Cranston), a grief-stricken widower. Queue the violins! How rich is he? Only boxer Floyd Mayweather has more high-end cars in his garage.

Dell's budding relationship with Mr. Moneybags, is heavily scrutinized by a snooty secretary, Yvonne (Nicole Kidman). Yet, the two men learn a lot from each other—apparently opera music is not so bad, and Aretha's Franklin's voice can light up a room and a friendship forms.

Screenwriter Jon Hartmere takes the real-life experience of Tunisian-born French businessman Philippe Pozzo di Borgo, who became a diabetic quadriplegic in 1993 after a paragliding accident



Bryan Cranston and Kevin Hart co-star in *The Upside*
Courtesy Photo/NNPA News Wire

and Americanizes it. The social and racial dynamics in the U.S. are different than those in France (more progressive), so the entire premise feels passé—boarding on offensive—even with a modern New York setting. That said the nuts and bolts of the screenplay are short on sentimentality and long on the viable bromance.

Director Neil Burger (*Divergent*) knows when to pepper scenes with comic moments and when to season lightly with pathos. Nothing on-screen is awful, but not much stands out: musical score, Rob Simonsen; cinematography, Stuart Dryburgh; editing Naomi Geraghty; and production design Mark Friedberg.

Performances by Cranston and particularly Hart save this film from the trash heap. The former eats drama for breakfast. Crusty, scruffy roles in *Trumbo* and TV's *Breaking Bad* chart the Oscar-nominated actor's rise into the upper echelon of serious actors. His interpretation of the lost-in-angst Phillip is just another well-conceived portrayal.

Hart, a standup comic who churns out comic movie roles as if he is in a factory that has to meet a deadline, is a different story. Working his way through the *Ride Along* franchise, *Think Like a Man* and

The Wedding Ringer didn't prepare him for weighty roles. Yet somehow, he manages to dig deep enough to delve into both sides of Dell: the hustler, the caring friend. Scam artist traits are in Hart's wheelhouse. The more sensitive moments with Phillip require nuances in emotion that he manages to summon quite nicely. It makes you wonder where his career could go if he took more artistic chances. Is *Othello* in his future? Not likely. But judging from what's on view, he's only scraped the surface of his full potential.

If prospective moviegoers can't get past the film's premise, so be it. If they can, they'll watch a shallow film become a touch deeper because Cranston and Hart create an authentic chemistry.

The syrupy sweet *Les Intouchables* won France's highest film honor, a César Award, and so did Omar Sy. It's unlikely that "The Upside" will achieve such accolades but the performances but Cranston and, especially Hart certainly rate praise.

Visit NNPA News Wire Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com and BlackPressUSA.com.

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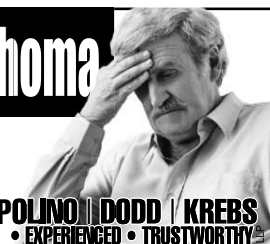
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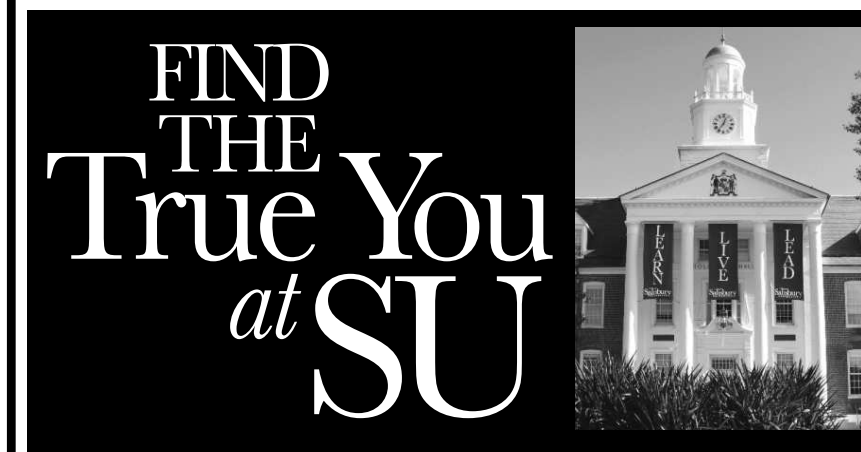
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