



THE BALTIMORE TIMES

A Baltimore Times/Times
of Baltimore Publication

 *The Annapolis Times*

Vol. 40 No. 17
February 13 - 19, 2026

CW Events: Thoughtful Catering Rooted in Latin American Tradition



Cristina Weimert, founder of CW Events, stands beside a vibrant display of handcrafted bites that reflect her South American roots and passion for intentional hospitality. Through thoughtful presentation and authentic Latin American flavors, Weimert is redefining catering in Baltimore—creating gatherings where food becomes an experience and every detail is rooted in tradition, care, and community. (See article on page 6) Photo courtesy of Cristina Weimert



Attorney General Brown Secures Commitment from Trump Administration that Removes Threats to Millions in Education Funding

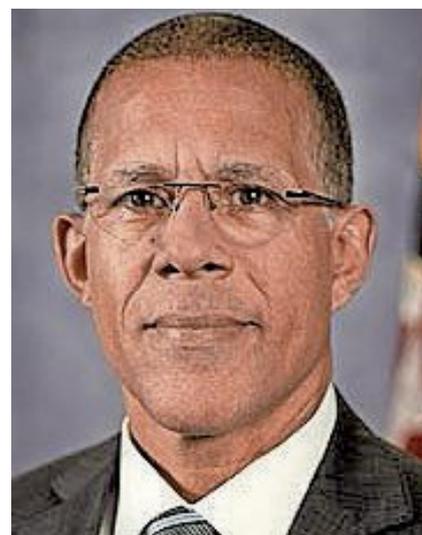
BALTIMORE, MD (February 10, 2026) – Attorney General Anthony G. Brown joined a coalition of 19 attorneys general in obtaining a commitment from the Trump administration that will prevent it from withholding federal funding from state and local education agencies that refuse to abandon lawful programs and policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which promote equal access to education in K-12 classrooms across the nation.

“The Trump Administration tried to blackmail Maryland schools – abandon your commitment to equal education or lose the resources your most vulnerable students depend on,” said Attorney General Brown. “This victory means Maryland students with disabilities, English language learners, and children from low-income families will keep getting the support they need. We will never sit idle while the federal government plays politics with our children’s futures.”

On April 3, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) informed state and local agencies that they must sign a document setting forth the Trump administration’s new interpretation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts – or else risk immediate and catastrophic loss of federal education funds.

Maryland provided the Department with written certifications, making it clear that Maryland and its local partners fully comply with Title VI and its lawfully issued implementing regulations, but it informed the Department that Maryland would not assent to its additional, unlawful demands.

On April 25, 2025, Attorney General Brown and a multistate coalition filed a lawsuit asserting that the Department’s



Attorney General Anthony G. Brown
Courtesy photo

attempt to terminate federal education funding based on its misinterpretation of Title VI violates the Spending Clause, the Appropriations Clause, the separation of powers, and the Administrative Procedure Act. A complementary lawsuit filed by other parties in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, *American Federation of Teachers, et al. v. United States Department of Education*, obtained an important victory vacating the April 3 certification request. The administration decided not to pursue an appeal from that decision.

In the states’ lawsuit, the administration confirmed that the relief obtained in the *American Federation of Teachers* lawsuit applies to schools in Maryland. It prevents the administration from withholding any funding based on these unlawful conditions.

The agreement protects more than \$700 million in financial support that the Department provides to Maryland each year for a wide variety of needs related to children and education, including more



Getty Images

than \$250 million in funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This funding further includes financial support to ensure that students from low-income families have the same access to high-quality education as their peers, bolster teacher training and development, and fund programming for non-native speakers to learn English.

Joining Attorney General Brown in signing this agreement are the attorneys general of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawai‘i, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

We love to hear from our readers!

Connect with us:
Facebook.com/
TheBaltimoreTimes

Twitter:
@Baltimore_Times

Instagram:
@thebaltimoretimes

MSU Leadership in Asset and Investment Management

Morgan State Students to Manage Millions as UNCF Expands National Asset Investment Program to University

Baltimore — Morgan State University’s growing influence as a leader in practice-based business education is expanding into one of the nation’s most competitive financial sectors. UNCF has announced its selection of the University for Project ACCLAIM (Accelerating Learning in Asset Investment Management), a national initiative designed to prepare Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) students for leadership in asset and investment management.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Backed by a \$10 million investment from Adage Capital Management and philanthropists Elizabeth and Phill Gross, Morgan students from the Earl G. Graves School of Business and Management (Graves School) have the opportunity to manage \$4 million in investment capital

while gaining real-world experience. The Graves School will leverage the immersive learning initiative to cultivate the next generation of investment leaders, support institutional priorities and create long-term program sustainability.

Morgan’s selection into the program builds upon the Graves School’s existing Student-Managed Investment Fund (SMIF), launched in 2024. The SMIF provides accounting and finance majors the opportunity to manage real investment capital while developing professional-level portfolio management and securities research skills.

“Participation in Project ACCLAIM represents a transformative opportunity for our students at the Graves School,” said Royce D. Burnett, Ph.D., dean of the Earl G. Graves School of Business and Management. “Through the

Student-Managed Investment Fund, our students will gain hands-on experience in asset management, portfolio analysis, and decision-making at a level rarely accessible at the undergraduate or graduate level. This initiative directly aligns with our mission to deliver rigorous, practice-based education while positioning our students for competitive careers in investment management and related financial services fields.”

Under Project ACCLAIM, Morgan students will participate in a yearlong, credit-bearing investment course that mirrors the professional demands of the asset management industry. Students will take on authentic roles in market and economic analysis, security research, portfolio construction, risk modeling, compliance, performance attribution, reporting, and trade management. In addition, participants



George Micheni, director of the Graves School’s Capital Markets Lab and advisor to the Investment Club, poses with a student in the Capital Markets Lab. Courtesy of Morgan State University. Photo courtesy of MSU

will gain access to internships, mentors, and an investment advisory board, offering direct exposure to industry expertise and experiential training beyond the classroom.

THE BALTIMORE TIMES

For 40 years The Baltimore Times has connected business with loyal engaged community

Advertise with us Today

- Website**
www.baltimoretimes-online.com
- Contact Us**
sbunch@btimes.com
- Location**
2530 N Charles St #1052,
Baltimore, MD 21218

Our Services

- ✓ Trusted Newspaper
- ✓ Engaged local Audience
- ✓ Print & Digital Reach
- ✓ Black-owned Media



THE BALTIMORE TIMES

Biased In, Biased Out: Three Women Shaping a More Trustworthy AI Future

By Karen Clay

Clay Technology and Multimedia, L.L.C.

Believe it or not, the focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) began decades ago primarily as a result of a paper published in 1950 by a man named Alan Turing. He proposed his Turing Test as a benchmark for machine intelligence in the article, “Computing Machinery, and Intelligence,” where he posed the question, “Can machines think?”

Modern AI, often described as objective, data-driven, mathematical, and precise, has been proven over time that today’s AI systems carry social, racial, and gender biases because they learn from human-generated data, therefore inherit human-made patterns such as unequal representation, historic discrimination, and stereotypes embedded in text, images, and records. When these systems are used for hiring, housing, healthcare, education, surveillance, or research, biased outputs can translate into real-world harm. A widely cited article, “Gender Shades,” found that commercial gender-classification tools had far higher error rates for darker-skinned women than for lighter-skinned men, revealing how “high accuracy” can still dramatically fail certain groups.

Against this reality, three women stand out for doing more than pointing out problems. Timnit Gebru, Rediet Abebe, and Ayanna Howard are helping reshape what progress in AI should look like by building tools, theories, and technologies that push AI toward transparency, equity, and trustworthiness.

Timnit Gebru: Turning AI Ethics into Standards and Accountability

Timnit Gebru is best known for making ethical AI concrete by emphasizing a set of practices. One of her most influential contributions

is “Datasheets for Datasets,” a proposal that datasets should be accompanied by standardized documentation explaining how the data was collected, what it contains, intended uses, limitations, and potential risks. The concept is simple but powerful and emphasizes that if

AI is trained on data, then documenting that data is a first step toward understanding and reducing harm.

Timnit also helped the public and research communities see bias as intersectional, meaning systems can fail in compounded ways at the overlap of race and gender. A 2018 research paper “Gender Shades” co-authored with Joy Buolamwini, revealed significant racial and gender biases in commercial AI facial analysis technologies, pushing organizations, researchers, and journalists to ask better questions such as “Who is the ‘average user,’ and who gets excluded when we optimize for that average?”

Timnit also founded the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR), an independent organization focused on community-rooted research and the real-world impacts of AI. In a field dominated by corporate labs, DAIR represents an alternative approach in pushing research agendas shaped by public interest, not just product priorities.

Rediet Abebe: Building the Mathematics of Algorithmic Justice

Where Timnit is often associated with accountability and documentation, Rediet Abebe is known for bringing



Timnit Gebru, Rediet Abebe, and Ayanna Howard; three pioneers in Artificial Intelligence

Graphic design by Karen Clay



Karen Clay, Clay Technology and Multimedia *Courtesy, Karen Clay*

rigorous theory to one of AI’s hardest questions; “How do algorithms interact with inequality? “Rediet’s work treats inequality not as a side issue, but as a technical design constraint. If algorithms rank candidates, allocate resources, or match people to opportunities, then it matters, mathematically and ethically, who benefits and who is left behind.

Her research, frequently framed as “computing for social good,” is aimed at ensuring that optimization, prediction, and automated decision systems do not simply scale existing inequities. Rediet has helped shape the conversation around what counts as “good” machine learning by centering focus on outcomes such as education access, public health, and economic mobility rather than only accuracy metrics. Her approach insists that AI researchers ask not only *Can we build it?* but also *What does it do to opportunity and fairness when deployed?*

Ayanna Howard: Human-Centered Robotics and the Dangers of “Overtrust”

Ayanna Howard brings AI into the physical world through robotics and human-centered autonomous systems, where issues of bias and trust become tangible. When a system interacts

directly with people, “mostly accurate” is not good enough. Errors can create unequal safety outcomes, exclude users with disabilities, or cause people to rely on technology beyond its capabilities.

A key theme in Ayanna’s work is “trust calibration,” designing systems so that human confidence matches what the technology can truly do. She emphasizes the danger of “overtrust” in that people assume an AI system is more capable than it is and make decisions that increase risk. Ayanna has written and spoken about overtrust as a defining challenge of the robotics age, especially as AI tools become more embedded in daily life.

Together, Timnit, Rediet, and Ayanna represent three pillars of trustworthy AI: transparency (knowing what data and assumptions power systems), justice (ensuring algorithms do not widen inequality), and human-centered design (building systems people can use safely and inclusively). As AI moves from novelty to infrastructure, its work offers a better standard for progress: not just AI that is powerful, but AI that is fair, accountable, and worthy of public trust.

Paris Brown
Publisher

Joy Bramble
Publisher Emeritus

Dena Wane
Editor

Andrea Blackstone
Associate Editor

Eunice Moseley
Entertainment Columnist

Ida C. Neal
Administrative Assistant

Sharon Bunch
Advertising

Ursula V. Battle
Reporter

Stacy Brown
Reporter

Demetrius Dillard
Reporter

Harold Booker, Jr
Reporter

Rosa “Rambling Rose” Pryor
Columnist

Karen Clay
Technology Columnist

Tyler Stallings
Junior Reporter

The Baltimore Times (USPS 5840) is a publication of The Baltimore Times/Times of Baltimore, Inc. The Baltimore Times is published every Friday. News and advertising deadline is one week prior to publication. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Subscriptions by mail \$60 per year. Standard bulk postage paid at Baltimore, MD 21233. POSTMASTER send address changes to: The Baltimore Times, 2530 N. Charles Street, Suite 201, Baltimore, MD 21218

Notice

Any unsolicited manuscripts, editorial cartoons, etc., sent to The Baltimore Times becomes the property of The Baltimore Times and its Editorial Department, which reserves the right to accept or reject any or all such unsolicited material.

Mailing Address

The Baltimore Times
2530 N. Charles Street, Suite 201
Baltimore, MD 21218
Phone: 410-366-3900
<https://baltimoretimes-online.com/>



Opinion

From Doubt to Promise: Empowering Our Youth Through Education

By Traci Brown

Growing up in Philadelphia, I believed education was my path forward. Not optional, not a hobby—necessary. But I also knew that belief could feel fragile when the world outside the classroom seemed indifferent. Today, working in Baltimore, I see the same struggle in young people: the hope and the doubt coexisting in the same heartbeat. Many children look at school and wonder, Why bother? They see peers graduating yet struggling to find meaningful work, relatives in jobs unrelated to their degrees, and teachers stretched thin—too exhausted to show the way. For these children, education can feel disconnected from life, a series of tasks with no visible payoff.

For Black youth—and especially first-generation college graduates—education is not an option; it is a necessity. But necessity alone does not guarantee success. Many first-generation students navigate schooling without mentors or examples of how to translate their hard work into opportunity. They complete degrees, yet feel ill-equipped for the professional world (FirstGen Forward, 2024). Without guidance, exposure, and intentional career support, education risks becoming a cycle of effort without outcome.

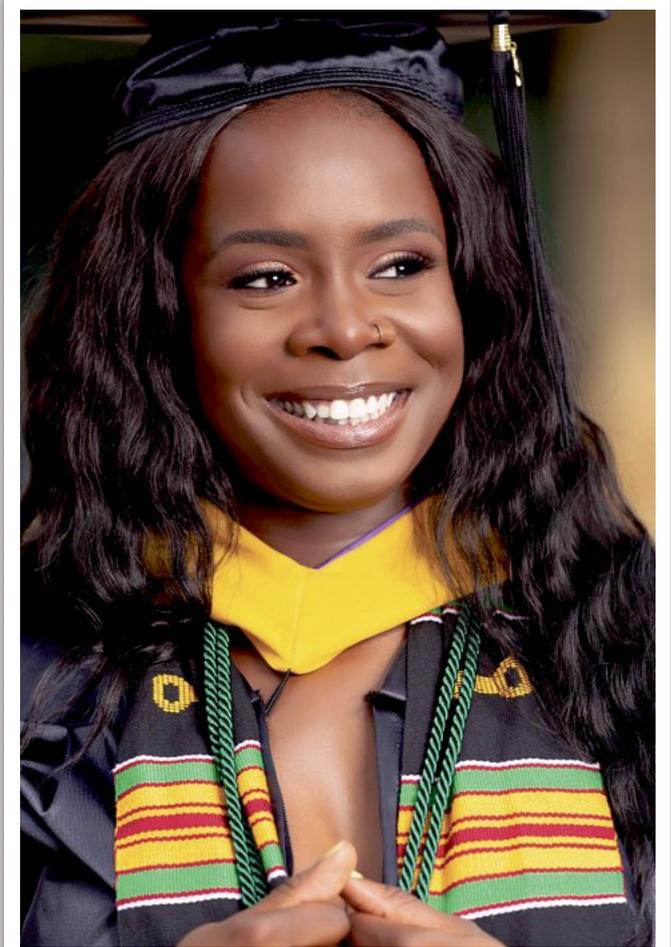
The educators guiding these students face immense challenges themselves. Chronic underfunding, large class sizes, and limited institutional support have led to high rates of teacher burnout (Ingersoll, 2018). When teachers leave or are stretched too thin, students lose role models, consistent guidance, and the belief that someone is invested in their future. This reality disproportionately affects Black and

first-generation students, reinforcing the perception that education may not matter.

In Baltimore City, the consequences are visible in workforce outcomes. Youth unemployment for residents ages 16–24 remains around 17.2%, with even more underemployed in roles that do not match their education (Baltimore’s Promise, 2025). The issue is not lack of talent—it is lack of access, guidance, and support.

Career readiness programs can bridge this gap. Through TB Resumes & Career Services, I work directly with youth to provide resume building, professional coaching, mentorship, and job readiness support. These programs help students see that education can matter, giving them exposure and guidance often missing in under-resourced classrooms. Even small interventions—teaching a student to craft a resume or prepare for a first interview—can change the trajectory of their life.

Investing in youth means showing them that education can lead somewhere. It means supporting teachers so they can remain present and



Traci Brown

inspired. It means pairing hard-earned degrees with guidance, mentorship, and real-world opportunities. Baltimore—and Philadelphia—have the talent, drive, and potential already in their youth. With intentional support, we can ensure that children who once questioned the value of school not only see the purpose of education but are empowered to turn it into meaningful success.

CW Events: Thoughtful Catering Rooted in Latin American Tradition

Submitted to the Baltimore Times

For Cristina Weimert, great food and memorable gatherings have always gone hand in hand. As the founder of CW Events, she has built a catering and events business grounded in attention to detail, hospitality, and the belief that food can transform a moment into an experience.

Cristina's passion comes from watching people arrive at an event and instantly feel excitement and care. She is inspired by beautifully designed spaces, thoughtful presentation, and the joy guests experience when everything feels intentional and well done. Her love for feeding people is deeply personal, shaped by her South American roots, where women express love through cooking and hospitality as a daily ritual.

Her journey into entrepreneurship began close to home. Cristina planned and organized her own wedding for 75 guests, managing every detail from start to finish. That experience confirmed her passion for events and catering and showed her that creating meaningful moments through food was more than an interest; it was a calling. She officially registered CW Events on June 1st, marking the start of a business focused on flavor, precision, and personalized service.

Inspired by Family and Tradition

Family history plays a central role in how Cristina approaches food and business. In South American households, meals are not simply about eating. They are about presence, care, and bringing people together throughout the day. Those values guide everything CW Events creates, from menu development to guest experience.

Cristina believes that simplicity done well is powerful. CW Events uses



Photos courtesy of Cristina Weimert

high-quality ingredients and avoids unnecessary additives, flavorings, or colorings. Meals are seasoned only with salt and pepper, allowing natural flavors to stand on their own. This approach reflects her belief that food should be honest, intentional, and rooted in tradition.

Latin American cuisine is at the heart of CW Events. Through her menus, Cristina introduces guests to new flavors, textures, and aromas while honoring the dishes and techniques passed down through generations. Her goal is to create food that feels familiar to some and exciting to others, all while bringing people together around the table.

Using Food to Bring People Together

CW Events stands out in Baltimore's catering scene by using food to unite people from diverse backgrounds. Cristina sees Latin American cuisine as a bridge, especially in a city as diverse as Baltimore. Her menus are designed to feel welcoming, balanced, and satisfying, offering guests an experience that goes beyond the plate.

Her approach is also influenced by

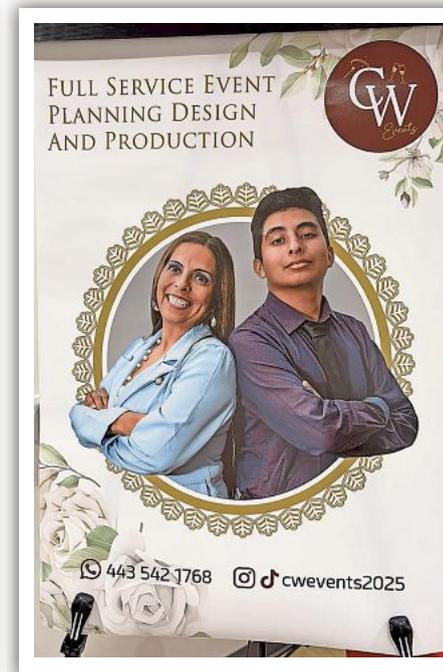


her mother, who has lived with diabetes for more than 30 years. Watching her mother cook with discipline and intention taught Cristina the importance of balance and thoughtful preparation. CW Events limits sugar in desserts, uses natural ingredient alternatives when possible, and serves hot beverages without added sugar, offering natural honey instead.

Looking Toward the Future

Cristina's immediate focus is on growth with purpose. Her next step is to fully equip a commercial kitchen and ensure all operational requirements are met. Once established, she plans to open a welcoming restaurant where people of all nationalities feel at home.

She hopes the aroma and flavor of CW Events' food will transport guests back to their roots, reminding them of family kitchens, shared meals, and the grandmothers who cooked with love. That sense of familiarity and warmth is central to her vision.



An Invitation to the Table

Cristina hopes first-time guests delight in discovering new flavors and aromas. For those already familiar with Latin American cuisine, she wants the food to feel like a return home. Above all, she wants every guest to experience food prepared with care, intention, and respect for tradition.

"At the table, we all share something in common," she says. "Delicious food made with love, without unnecessary additives. Just salt and pepper."

Through CW Events, Cristina Weimert is creating more than catered meals. She is creating moments of joy, remembrance, and celebration, one gathering at a time.

For catering and event inquiries, contact Cristina Weimert at manager@cweventsandcatering.com.

Dentist, Researcher Finds Dental Supplies, Manufacturing Company Focusing on Oral Health

By **Andrea Blackstone**

Black History Month offers a time to reflect on the accomplishments of past Black History figures and honor today's history makers.

Dr. Abi, a dentist, researcher, and founder of Dentrogen, a dental supplies and manufacturing company, focused on advancing oral health through science, education, and intentional innovation.

"I grew up in New Jersey, and my familial background is rooted in Nigeria. That upbringing instilled discipline, resilience, and a strong respect for education, shaping my long-term mindset and my desire to build something meaningful that prioritizes impact over shortcuts," said Dr. Abi.

She became interested in dentistry because it is a unique intersection of science, art, and precision.

"With a background in sculpting and working with my hands, dentistry allowed me to apply biological science in a very tangible way. My interest in research and inventing dental supplies grew when I realized how much more emphasis is needed on preventive dentistry."

Dr. Abi considers herself a Black history maker in her own way.

"Representation is extremely important to me as a Black woman in dentistry. Visibility helps expand what future generations believe is possible and opens doors for others to enter the field with confidence," she said.

African Americans and Dental Care

Although there is a shortage of Black dentists, access to dental care remains problematic for Black Americans.

Group Dentistry Now reported that "African American adults (aged 20-64) experience untreated tooth decay nearly twice as often as white Americans, which leads to black seniors suffering total tooth loss at almost double the rate of white

individuals over age 65. This imbalance of care is also evident regarding even more serious oral health matters. Most notably, the fact that African American men historically have a lower 5-year survival rate of oral pharyngeal cancers, with one study citing an 82% higher rate of mortality for the group (<https://www.groupdentistrynow.com/dso-group-blog/racial-disparity-in-dental-care-the-numbers-tell-the-story>).

Dr. Abi Noticed Significant Gaps in Preventive Dental Care Products

"Many products prioritize short term cosmetic results rather than long term oral health, biological compatibility, and patient education," she stated. "Dentrogen products are designed to be used by people of all ages, including children, with parental guidance. We focus on gentle, enamel safe formulations that support daily, long term oral health."

Instill Good Dental Habits in Children

February is recognized as National Children's Dental Health Month (NCDHM).

"By age 9, half of children (50%) have had cavities in their primary (baby) or permanent teeth," the CDC reported.

Dr. Abi explained that consistency is most important when instilling good dental habits in their children. Additionally, children should not drink soda because it is highly acidic and often high in sugar, both of which weaken enamel and increase the risk of cavities.

"Teaching proper brushing techniques early, limiting sugar exposure, and making oral care a routine part of daily life helps children build habits that last into adulthood."

"Electric toothbrushes can help both children and adults clean their teeth more effectively when used correctly," Dr. Abi noted.

Cavity Development and Prevention.

According to Dr. Abi, one of the biggest contributors to cavity development is frequent sugar exposure combined with poor plaque removal.

"Cavities form when harmful bacteria are repeatedly fed by sugars left on the teeth."

Flossing is extremely important because it removes plaque and bacteria from areas a toothbrush cannot reach. Many cavities and gum issues begin between the teeth, making flossing essential. A key factor in preventing cavities is consistency with daily oral hygiene, balanced nutrition, and routine dental visits.

Teeth Whitening

Dentrogen's Elemental Toothpaste is a whitening toothpaste formulated with ingredients such as hydrogen peroxide, baking soda, activated charcoal, and nano-hydroxyapatite, designed to support brightness while prioritizing enamel health.

"In general, whitening should always focus on gentle formulations that protect the tooth structure rather than aggressive abrasion," Dr. Abi explained.

See Your Dentist on Time

Dr. Abi stated that children and adults should see a dentist at least twice a year. "Staying up to date with dental appointments is critical because many oral health issues are easier to treat when identified early," she advised.

Prevention of poor dental health can



Dr. Abi, dentist, researcher, and founder of Dentrogen, a dental supplies and manufacturing company. Photo by Seneca Williams

begin at any age. "Even if someone did not take the best care of their teeth earlier in life, it is never too late to improve oral health with proper habits, education, and professional care," Dr. Abi added.

Visit www.dentrogen.com to learn more about Dr. Abi and Dentrogen. Follow her <https://www.instagram.com/dentrogen>.

Building New Pathways After a Second Chance

Justice-impacted Adults Graduate From Media Arts Training

Baltimore, MD—The Flowers Whiting Initiative (*Derrick Whiting, CEO*), in partnership with Root Branch Media Group (*Dr. Vonnya Pettigrew, CEO*), proudly announces the graduation of participants from its Media Arts Training Program. This initiative was designed to prepare justice-impacted adults for careers in media, digital content, and creative entrepreneurship across Baltimore City and Maryland.

The graduation and media showcase ceremony took place on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 6:00 PM at the Root Branch Media Group Building, 2220 Boston Street, Baltimore, MD. Graduates of the program, (*Rodney Murray, Shanika Townsend and Brittany Morant*), completed hands-on training in media production and digital storytelling over the course of eight-weeks, gaining skills

that translated directly into employment, freelancing, and entrepreneurship. The training was facilitated by Root Branch Media Arts Instructor, Germar Derron.

The program emphasized dignity, creative expression, and economic opportunity for individuals often excluded from various opportunities. The event also highlighted three film projects created by the graduates during the training. The productions reflected personal growth, technical skill, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to Baltimore's creative economy.

Whiting said, "The vision of The Flowers Whiting Initiative is to create a society where returning citizens are fully supported and empowered to thrive, leading lives of purpose, stability, and contribution in safe and equitable communities."

"Access to creative education can be life-changing," said Dr. Pettigrew. "This program gives young adults who have been justice-impacted the tools to rewrite their narratives, personally and professionally."

Derron enjoyed training the students and said "it was my favorite experience in a classroom."

For justice-impacted adults seeking meaningful second chances, The Flowers Whiting Initiative's Media Arts Training Program is proving that creative careers can be powerful tools for re-entry and transformation.

For More Information:

- **The Flowers Whiting Initiative** - <https://www.theflowerswhitinginitiative.org/about>
- **Root Branch Media Group** - <https://rootbranchmediagroup.com/home>



L to R:

- **Derrick Whiting, CEO, The Flowers Whiting Initiative;**
 - **Rodney Murray, Student;**
 - **Shanika Townsend, Student;**
 - **Brittany Morant, Student;**
 - **Germar Derron, Instructor, Root Branch Media Group;**
 - **Dr. Vonnya Pettigrew, CEO, Root Branch Media Group**
- Courtesy photo*

THE BALTIMORE TIMES

**POSITIVE STORIES
POSITIVE PEOPLE**

Services Offered:

- ✓ Positive Community Stories
- ✓ Empower Local Voices
- ✓ Invest in Journalism
- ✓ Strengthen Baltimore's Future



For four decades, The Baltimore Times has shared stories that uplift, inform, and empower our community. The 40 Forward Campaign ensures we continue telling the stories that matter most for generations to come.

Your support helps amplify local voices, celebrate culture, and strengthen independent community journalism.

Donate Today



Givebutter.com/40Forward

Orioles' Adopt-A-School Initiative

Baltimore Orioles Celebrate Academic Growth at Harlem Park Elementary Middle School

BALTIMORE — Classrooms at Harlem Park Elementary Middle School were filled with cheers and smiles earlier this week as students were surprised with an Orioles merchandise shopping spree, courtesy of the Baltimore Orioles. The celebration honored the school's significant academic progress over the past year and marked another milestone in a growing partnership between the Orioles and the West Baltimore school community.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education annual school report cards, Harlem Park improved from a two-star to a three-star rating between 2024 and 2025. The school also recorded a 10-percentage-point increase in its total earned percent, along with gains across every evaluated category: academic

achievement, academic progress, progress toward English language proficiency, and school quality and student success.

Students celebrated their accomplishments alongside Orioles leadership, including Catie Griggs, President of Business Operations, and Kerry Watson, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs. As students browsed hats, shirts, and other Orioles gear, the moment served as both a reward and a reminder that their hard work in the classroom is being seen and supported.

The visit is part of the Orioles' Adopt-A-School initiative, launched in 2024, which provides sustained, year-round support to Harlem Park Elementary Middle School. Through this effort, the organization serves more than 430 students by building

intentional partnerships among City Schools, the Orioles, and a network of community organizations and supporters. The approach goes beyond one-day events, focusing instead on long-term relationship-building, student motivation, and school-wide engagement.

For Harlem Park students and staff, the celebration underscored what's possible when community institutions invest deeply and consistently in public education. For the Orioles, it reaffirmed a commitment to Baltimore that extends far beyond the ballpark — one rooted in youth development, academic success, and community pride.



Photo courtesy of the Orioles

To learn more about the Orioles' Adopt-A-School partnership with Harlem Park Elementary Middle School, visit Orioles.com/HarlemParkSchool.

20 BALTIMORE TOURNAMENT 26

CIAA MEN'S & WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT FEB 24-28 • BALTIMORE

\$50 TICKETS FOR CENTRAL MD RESIDENTS

EVENING SEMI-FINALS 2/27

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES 2/28

SCAN HERE TO GET TICKETS

BUY TICKETS NOW BALTIMORE.ORG/CIAA

Logos: University of Maryland, Bowie State University, VISIT BALTIMORE, CareFirst, verizon, bge AN EXELON COMPANY, WT WHITING-TURNER, WELLS FARGO, aetna, Fulton Bank

The Thin Red Line Between Love and Danger

By Michelle Petties

February is often heralded as the month of love. Hearts, roses, and chocolates flood store shelves, and social norms encourage us to celebrate love in all its forms. Yet beneath the pink and red hues lies a thin, often overlooked line between love and danger. That line — shaped by habit, marketing, and tradition — reveals how easily expressions of love can cross into harm, both to ourselves and to others.

For Black communities, the stakes are especially high. The intersection of systemic inequities, cultural expectations, and historical trauma creates unique vulnerabilities, making it essential to examine what we accept as “love” — from the foods we eat to the relationships we build.

Sweet Deceptions: Sugar-Laden Love

Consider the candy hearts, chocolate truffles, and frosted cupcakes that dominate February. These sugary symbols of affection are meant to bring joy, but they carry hidden costs. Many are packed with additives such as Red Dye 40, a synthetic coloring linked in some studies to hyperactivity, allergic reactions, and other health concerns. The excessive sugar itself contributes to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease — conditions that disproportionately affect Black Americans.

This reality isn’t accidental. Many predominantly Black neighborhoods remain food deserts, where fresh, nutritious options are scarce while processed snacks are abundant. Even cultural food traditions — often rooted in survival and creativity — are frequently commercialized and used to justify unhealthy eating patterns. But love expressed through food doesn’t have to



Michelle Petties
Courtesy photo

mean feeding disease. A home-cooked meal made with care, fresh fruit, or shared time in movement or nature can be just as meaningful — and far more nourishing.

Romanticized Risks: When Love Ignores Safety

While sugar-laden treats pose physical risks, romantic relationships can introduce dangers of another kind. Reckless sexual behavior — often framed as passion or spontaneity — continues to carry serious consequences. Despite decades of public health efforts, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections remain prevalent, particularly in Black communities.

Here in Baltimore, the urgency is real. The Baltimore City Health Department strongly promotes regular, routine HIV testing as a critical tool in addressing persistently high local infection rates. Through free, confidential, and rapid testing offered at clinics and community

events, residents are encouraged to know their status, pursue early diagnosis, and connect quickly to care. Preventative options such as PrEP and PEP — endorsed by the CDC and supported locally — are powerful examples of how love can look like responsibility, prevention, and protection.

Yet cultural narratives still get in the way. Asking about sexual health, setting boundaries, or insisting on protection is too often framed as distrust rather than care. That misconception costs lives.

The harm doesn’t stop at physical health. Emotional and psychological dangers emerge when relationships lack clarity, boundaries, or mutual respect. Codependency, emotional manipulation, and intimate partner violence can masquerade as love. Black women, in particular, experience disproportionately high rates of intimate partner violence — another reminder that love without safety is not love at all.

When Love Becomes a Product

Commercial pressure quietly reinforces these risks. Valentine’s Day marketing often equates love with indulgence — overspending, overeating, overconsuming — while ignoring long-term consequences. For households already navigating racial wealth disparities, the expectation to “prove” love through purchases can create unnecessary financial strain and misplaced priorities.

When love becomes performance rather than practice, its substance erodes.

Reclaiming a Healthier Definition of Love

Navigating the thin red line between love and danger requires intention. Reclaiming love means redefining it.

Reframe traditions by choosing connection over convention. Prioritize health — physical, emotional, and sexual. Normalize testing, honest conversations, and preventative care as acts of love, not suspicion. And resist the idea that love must be bought, consumed, or displayed to be real.

Conclusion

The thin red line between love and danger reminds us that not everything wrapped in red is harmless. From sugar-coated indulgences to romanticized risk-taking, cultural norms often blur the boundary between affection and harm.

For Black communities — and for Baltimore — awareness is protective. By choosing a more conscious, intentional approach to love, we can honor its true purpose while safeguarding our health, relationships, and futures. Let February be more than a celebration of love. Let it be a commitment to the kind of love that uplifts, protects, and endures.



Field Trips To **FREEDOM**

Culture  WITH
Queen



Great Blacks In Wax Mansion
1649 East North Avenue, Baltimore, MD



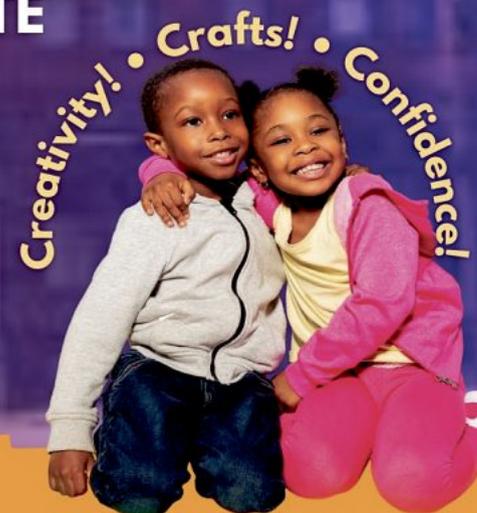
FREE CHILDREN'S PLAYDATE

Parent/Guardian must stay

Last Sunday Monthly | 2-3 PM

Feb 22 • March 29 • Apr 26

May 31 • June 28



Presented by the



Division through the ARPA Arts Grant.



THIS MUCH FUN
IS AS GOOD AS
GOLD

From January 5 through
February 22, 2026, enter Keno
tickets into My Lottery Rewards
for a chance to **win a trip for two**
to the 2028 Olympics in Los
Angeles or a Team USA
merchandise pack.

To learn more, visit
mdlottery.com/TeamUSA



The use of Olympic Marks, Terminology and Imagery is authorized by the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee pursuant to Title 36 U.S. Code Section 220506
Learn how to play within your limits at mdlottery.com/playresponsibly. For help, call 1-800-GAMBLER. Must be 18 years or older to play.