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Camp Cathy, a city of 91 tents, was established in the fall on property leased by VCU in Church Hill. Photo by Megan Lee

Tent city remains on VCU land despite pushback from city officials

KATHARINE DEROSA
Contributing Writer

David Henderson, who lives in a tent city on land leased by VCU, said he has been looking for help outside the camp since September. He hasn't had much luck.

He had received information on housing assistance, Henderson said, but none of the sources followed through to help him.

"All I got was bogus letters," Henderson said. "This is the life of the camp. These people are settling down here because they feel they have nowhere else to go."

Henderson lives in one of the 91 tents at Camp Cathy, which is located next to a city-funded hypothermia shelter on Oliver Hill Way in Church Hill, which only opens when the temperature falls below 40 degrees. The camp was established by Rhonda Sneed in September, who founded Blessing Warriors RVA, a nonprofit in Richmond that serves homeless people. City officials want to remove the camp, citing safety concerns.

Sneed said she received a letter in December from Reginald Gordon, the director of the City of Richmond's office of community wealth, telling her to shut down Camp Cathy.

"I have been made aware of two incidents requiring first responders, demonstrating

that a harmful environment has been created by the tent city," Gordon wrote. "Therefore, I have no other option but to ask you to cease your program right away."

"I told him [Gordon] I would shut it down if he had some place for them to go," Sneed said. "If he took all 100 something out today, I would get 100 more."

“

We can group together here and we can talk, chat and tell stories, and when we do that, we begin to feel like we're a family."

David Henderson,
Camp Cathy resident

The field where Camp Cathy is located belongs to the city, but VCU has a 40-year lease on the land.

VCU spokesperson Mike Porter said that VCU has no plans to build on the land.

"VCU and VCU Health are collaborating with the city and Homeward to connect these members of our community to city resources for shelter and food as well as to help relocate them as soon as possible," Porter said in an email.

Porter expressed concerns about long-term housing on the land. The State Department of Environmental Quality found the soil to be contaminated with arsenic and other chemicals in 2004.

Sneed's refusal to remove the tents and people from the area resulted in a meeting between city officials, camp residents and community members that took place inside the Giles Community Center, adjacent to the camp, on Feb. 5.

Advocates involved in nonprofits that support Camp Cathy — such as Blessing Warriors RVA, Moments of Hope Outreach and Helping the Homeless — were disappointed in the outcome.

"It was a circus," said Traci Byrd-Eagles, a volunteer with Camp Cathy, "No plan was discussed at all."

Floods on Thursday afternoon severely damaged the camp. Blankets were left soaked, and five people were taken to the hospital. The doors to the adjacent shelter didn't open until that night because of the temperature rule. After first responders showed up on site, staff members came by to open the shelter.

The City of Richmond published a strategic plan to end homelessness on Sunday. It outlined several strategies to reduce homelessness, such as financial support for nonprofits and those facing eviction, an increased number of shelter beds and connections to employment resources and behavioral health sciences.

This winter, the homeless population in Richmond has increased by 10%. A 2019 report collected by Homeward, a planning and coordination service for homeless people living in Richmond, counted 429 homeless adults and 68 homeless children in the city region, and 152 were not living in a shelter. Last month, 549 were counted.

Sneed said the camp has helped people get on their feet and establish themselves in the community.

"A lot of people have gotten jobs," Sneed said. "Some have gotten housing."

Henderson, the Camp Cathy resident, said residents work together to keep things running smoothly.

"We all work together to keep things calm, and to be peaceful and meet and greet, so it doesn't feel so bad when we're standing alone sometimes with no one to talk to," Henderson said. "We can group together here and we can talk, chat and tell stories, and when we do that, we begin to feel like we're a family."

Photographer sees artistic voice as a form of defiance

“

I'm not going to continue to watch this nastiness [police brutality] without having a counter to that, just the same as I wouldn't sit here and let somebody tell me that I'm an awful person without fighting back."

Alanna Airitam, photographer

See page 7



Alanna Airitam took three months off to create her exhibit, "The Golden Age."
Photo by Marlena Artis

Stories of the week

NATIONAL: Entrepreneur Andrew Yang and Colorado Senator Michael Bennet dropped out of the 2020 presidential election on Tuesday. Nine Democratic candidates and two Republican candidates remain as of Tuesday.

INTERNATIONAL: The death toll for the viral coronavirus is now more than 1,100 people. All of the fatalities were in mainland China, except for one death in Hong Kong and one death in the Philippines.

Confederate monuments in the City of Richmond



★ VCU Monroe Park Campus

Information Compiled by Naomi Ghahri, Infographic by Jeffrey Pohanka

MONUMENTS

- 1. General A.P. Hill**
Laburnum Avenue and Hermitage Road
- 2. Robert E. Lee**
Monument and Allen avenues
- 3. J.E.B. Stuart**
Monument Avenue and N. Lombardy Street
- 4. Jefferson Davis**
Monument and Davis avenues
- 5. Stonewall Jackson**
Arthur Ashe Boulevard and Monument Avenue
- 6. Matthew Fontaine Maury**
Monument and Belmont avenues
- 7. War Horse statue**
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
- 8. Monument to Confederate War Dead**
Hollywood Cemetery
- 9. Monument to Confederate Soldiers and Sailors**
Libby Hill Park
- 10. General Williams Carter Wickham**
Monroe Park
- 11. General Fitzhugh Lee**
Monroe Park
- 12. Richmond Howitzers**
Between Grove, Park and Harrison avenues

VCU students, professors say monument honoring black Union troops would improve inclusivity

NAOMI GHAHRAI
Contributing Writer

Many VCU professors and students say the construction of a monument honoring black troops who fought for the Union would improve Richmond’s goal of becoming more inclusive, supporting Richmond City Council’s endorsement of funding for the statue.

Honor the 14 Foundation is pushing for the construction of this new monument honoring the 14 soldiers who earned Medals of Honor for serving in the U.S. Colored Troops Regiment of the Union Army. The foundation is leading the fundraising efforts for this privately funded monument to be called Forgotten 14.

The 14 black Union soldiers were part of two regiments that overtook Confederate troops in the Battle of New Market Heights in Henrico in 1864, which was part of the Siege of Petersburg during the Civil War. Other Union forces hadn’t been successful in overtaking the same Confederate troops.

African American studies professor Travis Harris said it’s important to recognize the role black people played in saving the Union during the Civil War.

“What Blacks involvement in this war points to is the fact that slavery ended because of the work and the ‘blood, sweat and tears’ of Black people,” Harris said in an email. “Blacks were abolitionists. They rebelled. Blacks organized with their African family. They fought the system of slavery in multiple ways. Their fight with the union is a part of the work they have been doing to get free.”

Junior chemistry major Christine Nguyen supports the Forgotten 14 monument, which would be located on Monument Avenue, calling it a step toward needed change.

“I think the monument honoring the African American soldiers in the Civil War would be a great addition to Monument Avenue to counter the monuments honoring the Confederacy,” Nguyen said. “Richmond needs change, and this monument is a good step towards that change.”

Donald E. King, senior partner at McGuireWoods law firm and board member of the American Civil War Museum, initiated this endeavor and founded Honor the 14 Foundation.

“I think it would be wonderful for these heroes to be celebrated,” King told the Richmond Times-Dispatch. “And I think it would do a lot of good for the city to include that part of the story on Monument Avenue.”

He decided to introduce this idea to Councilwoman Kim Gray given her success in renaming the Boulevard to Arthur Ashe Boulevard. Gray proposed the appropriation of \$5,000 toward Honor the 14 Foundation’s efforts.

“I think this is an opportunity to have a very powerful and unifying moment for our city that will continue to tell more of the untold stories,” Gray told the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Current Virginia law forbids the removal of war memorial monuments, including those representing the Confederacy or Union. In January, Richmond City Council asked the General Assembly for authority over Confederate monuments along Monument Avenue.

On Tuesday, the Senate passed Senate Bill 183, which would allow localities to choose whether to remove war memorials if it passes the House and is signed by Gov. Ralph Northam. The Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue is owned by the state and would not be affected.

“

Slavery ended in the United States because of the bravery, sacrifice, and determination of enslaved and free African Americans.”

Adam Ewing, African American studies professor

Raven Witherspoon, a junior physics major, said the Union monument would be a “powerful statement” but does not change the meaning of existing Confederate statues in Richmond.

“I think the proposed Forgotten 14 monument is a powerful statement about the value of black Union soldiers and a commemoration of their fight for freedom, but it does little to assuage the concerns of black citizens who are marginalized by the continued existence of Monument Avenue,” Witherspoon said. “Adding statues that feature black people cannot erase the implicit message of the original monuments: ‘You do not belong here.’”

Sarah Beetham, an art history professor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts who specializes in the study of Civil War monuments, said the addition of contemporary art has been important to the debate over Confederate statues.

“While awaiting a decision on the legal issue, contemporary works of art, including Kehinde Wiley’s Rumors of War at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the proposed statue to African-American troops, do important work to reconfigure Richmond’s memory landscape,” Beetham said in an email.

According to The Washington Post, there were 1,741 Confederate monuments in the U.S as of 2019. Forty-three percent of the monuments are statues, and there are more than 100 in Virginia.

African American studies professor Adam Ewing said monuments are “living reflections of our community values.”

“In this sense they are very important,” Ewing said. “They are political statements, deriving from political will, which reflects the power of a constituency to have its story heard and its interests acknowledged.”

The current plan is to construct the new memorial on Monument Avenue either at the Meadow Street or Allison Street intersection.

“Slavery ended in the United States because of the bravery, sacrifice, and determination of enslaved and free African Americans,” Ewing said. “Celebrating African American troops — many of whom escaped slavery before enlisting to destroy the institution — pays tribute to this legacy.”

‘Shades of Blackness: Fruits of Our Roots’

OMSA directs Black History Month

KATIE HOLLOWELL
Contributing Writer

Neon green bingo cards covered tables last Wednesday as hundreds of students joined the Activities Planning Board to guess songs by 2 Chainz, Drake and Chief Keef for Hip Hop Bingo.

This was one of the first events to kick off Black History Month this year from the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs. This year’s theme, “Shades of Blackness: Fruits of Our Roots,” is meant to spark conversations around what it means to be black around the world.

The idea for the theme came about by trying to identify blackness and understand that its roots are deep and global.

“We’re a bunch of trees with no roots, our focus is how do we find those roots?” Ingram said. “How do we identify outside of the patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy?”

The Activities Planning Board hosts a bingo night every month, and the group decided to make it relevant to Black History Month by giving it a hip-hop theme.

“They worked together to figure out something we thought the students would like, and it would be something anybody could come to,” said senior and Weekend Programming Coordinator Amari Samaya. “If you listen to music, you could come and play the game.”

Fashion merchandising major and avid bingo night attendee Maia Mitchell said bingo night is a stepping stone for students to become more involved.

“I feel like it’s important because it brings people together,” the sophomore said. “It’s a way to get people out of their shells and involved in the community with their peers.”

With more than 20 programs planned for this month, OMSA has been putting together the events since November with a committee of students, faculty, alumni and community members. The group partnered with multiple student organizations and offices such as APB, Sisters & Stethoscopes, Recreational Sports, Sigma Gamma Rho sorority and the da Vinci Center.

VCU alum and Programming Coordinator for OMSA Tiana Ingram said the programs planned this month can appeal to students of many interests.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Happening later this week:

Black History Month Jeopardy
Thursday from 7:30 - 9 p.m.
*Alumni Board Room,
University Student Commons*

Black History Museum of Central Virginia Tour
Friday from 11:30 - 2 p.m.
122 W. Leigh St.

“Queen & Slim” Screening
Friday from 6 - 11 p.m.
*Commons Theater,
University Student Commons*

“A lot of these events are really fun and informal,” Ingram said. “We try to have broad events where everyone can come and then more focused events.”

APB member and mass communications major Angelique James discussed the importance of the Black History Month events.

“I love it. It’s great. I definitely think everyone comes out for it, it’s not just black people,” the sophomore said. “It is a great cause.”

Ingram estimated \$4,000 was allocated for Black History Month out of OMSA’s overall academic year budget. OMSA focuses on six heritage months, and each month receives the same amount of funding.

Tuesday night, the black sexual health program took place in partnership with Sisters & Stethoscopes, a student organization for black women who want to be health care professionals in the future.

President of Sisters & Stethoscopes and junior nursing major Jessica Lister said one of the reasons for the panel was that it’s important to talk about sexual health in terms of racial identities.

“Taking pride in being black and making sure our members know what risks are increased, like STIs, because they’re black,” Lister said. “Unfortunately a lot of people didn’t receive the best sexual education when they were in school, so just trying to give them an additional opportunity to be educated on that.”

Lister said some racial groups are at a higher risk for certain infections such as bacterial vaginosis, a type of bacterial infection in the vagina. Black women specifically are more likely to contract bacterial vaginosis



Activites Planning Board Director of Outreach Ashli Phillips outlines the game rules at Hip Hop Bingo.
Photo by Marlena Artis

than women of other races, according to the Vaginal Human Microbiome Project conducted at VCU.

“We’re putting that information out there,” Lister said, “so our members and anyone else is aware and can protect themselves accordingly.”

A full schedule of OMSA’s Black History Month programming can be found at omsa.vcu.edu.

VCU’s You First program hopes to provide community, guidance for first-generation students to improve graduation rates

ANYA SCZERZENIE
Contributing Writer

Starting university can be hard for anyone, but it can be especially difficult if you’re the first in your family to go to college.

First-generation college students have lower retention and graduation rates, both at VCU and nationwide. This is a gap that VCU’s first-generation student program, You First, hopes to close.

“It’s student-led and student-driven, and it has grown dramatically,” said Daphne Rankin, head of the Division for Strategic Enrollment Management, which sponsors You First.

You First started in 2017. Rankin said it stemmed from Altria Scholars, a program for first-generation engineering and business students that began in 2016. Many of the programs in You First are derived from the Altria Scholars program.

“It sprang from a statement from a student. One of those students made the comment that they wish they had known others who were first-generation during their first year,” Rankin said. “So we realized that with a third of our class being first-gen students, we had to do more to help them build a community.”

First-generation college students are defined by You First’s webpage as those whose legal guardians have not earned a bachelor’s degree, although statistics from the U.S. Department of Education define

them as people whose parents have never enrolled in college.

Thirty-two percent of the 2019-2020 freshman class at VCU was made up of first-generation students, according to VCU News. University data from 2016 shows the retention rate for first-generation students is 78%, compared to 86% for non first-generation students.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show that first generation students often lag behind their peers whose parents went to college. They are more likely to drop out of college and not finish their degrees.

You First hosts a five-week Summer Scholars program. Rising first-year students take two regular three-credit classes, live on campus and participate in academic workshops. They also participate in activities like white water rafting and visits to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

“Because the students are more connected to the university, even if they do leave the university, they tend to stay longer,” Rankin said.

Freshman art foundation student Joshua Staples said You First helped him feel less stressed about attending university in the city.

“I was nervous about city life, paying for college and stuff like that,” Staples said. “In the program, we were taking classes every day, and we were encouraged to go exploring around the campus. The program had many small talks about paying

for college and focusing on your mental health.”

Staples said the Summer Scholars program helped him learn about college while having a lot of fun.

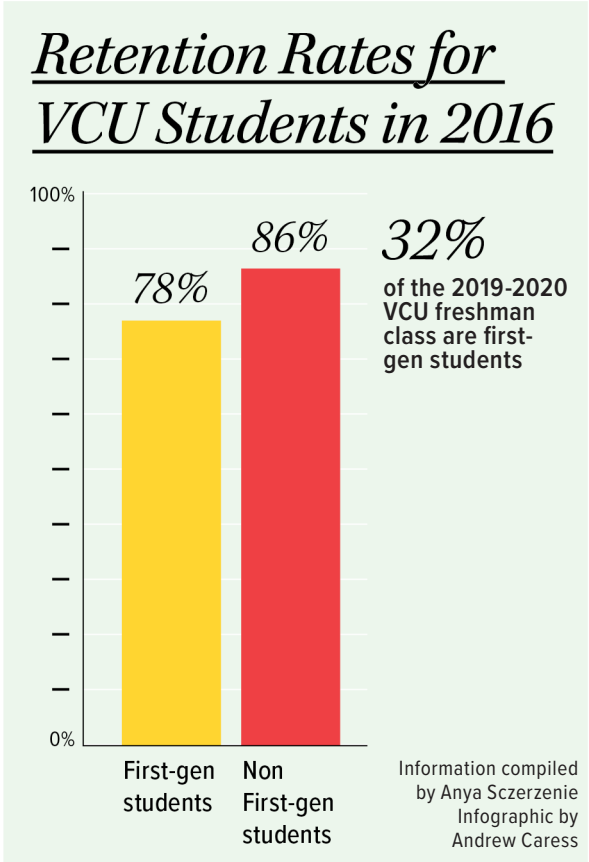
“It was a great time, volunteering and getting an understanding of how university life works,” Staples said. “We also did small field trips in Richmond like the art museum, Hollywood Cemetery and the river.”

You First hosts “First Tuesday” sessions on the first Tuesday of every month, which are based around topics such as mental health and relationships. They also have a mentoring program for first-generation students, started by Elizabeth Bambacus, who is the student engagement and summer studies administrator for You First.

Their race and gender demographics are very similar to the demographics of the school as a whole, according to Rankin. However, a higher percentage of first-gen students are eligible for Pell Grants.

In November, Cabell Library hosted an art exhibit featuring the peer mentors

from the You First program. The exhibit included photographs of the mentors with speech bubbles above their heads containing the “words of wisdom” they’d give to new students. It was put up in honor of the National First-Generation College Celebration on Nov. 8.



What you missed this week in the General Assembly

ANDREW RINGLE
Managing Editor

HANNAH EASON
News Editor

CROSSOVER DAY 2020

Legislators in the Virginia General Assembly reached the midway point of their 2020 session on Tuesday, casting their final votes during what is known as crossover day. Going forward, the House of Delegates and the state Senate can no longer vote on their own bills. Before a proposal can become law, it must be approved in the House and the Senate with a signature from the governor.

IN-STATE TUITION FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS ADVANCES

The House approved a bill that would exempt undocumented students from having to pay out-of-state tuition at public colleges and universities. In order to be eligible for the exemption, students must have attended high school in Virginia for at least two years.

HOUSE MOVES \$15 MINIMUM WAGE PROPOSAL TO SENATE

HB 395 passed in the House on Tuesday, which would gradually increase the minimum wage in the commonwealth to \$15 per hour. The first raise, from \$7.25 to \$9, would happen July 1. The minimum wage would continue to increase an additional \$2 each year until 2023. The measure, sponsored by Jeion Ward, D-Hampton, passed in a 55-45 vote and will continue to the Senate. A similar bill out of the Senate was adapted to raise wages in only Northern Virginia.

CASINO GAMBLING REGULATION, NATIVE TRIBES PROVISIONS PASS HOUSE

In a 61-33 vote, the House passed HB 4, which would allow the Virginia Lottery Board to regulate casino gaming in the state. If the bill passes the Senate and governor’s approval, each city would hold a referendum on whether to allow casino gambling in the city. The bill includes provisions for Native American tribes by establishing the Virginia Indigenous People’s Trust Fund and requiring annual reports on the status of Virginia tribes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MAY GAIN AUTHORITY OVER MONUMENT REMOVAL

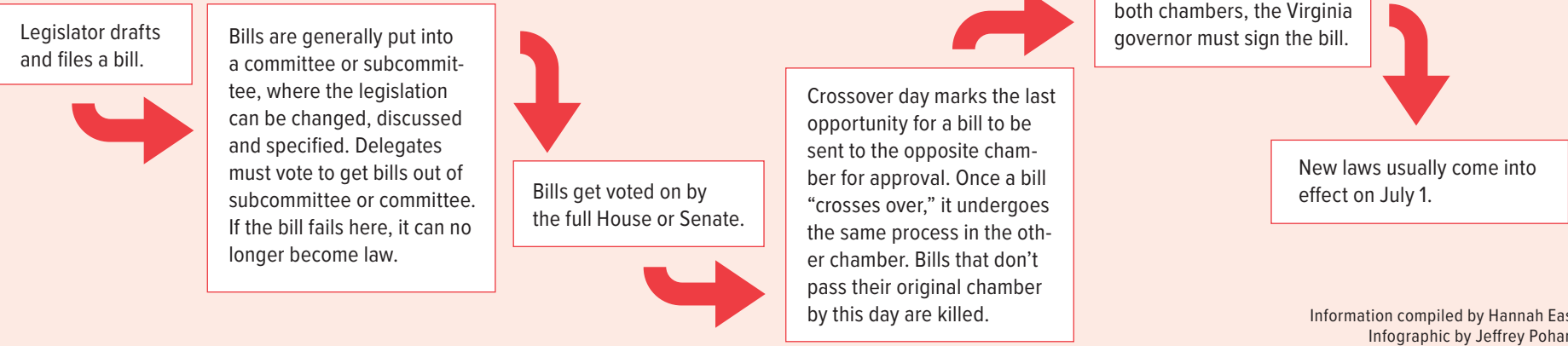
Virginia localities may soon be able to remove statues and war memorials,

including those honoring the Confederacy, as both the House and the Senate voted to approve bills that would allow such an action. The Senate’s version of the proposal, SB 183, passed by a vote of 21-19, while HB 1537 passed 53-46. Current law prohibits interfering or disturbing monuments and war memorials.

SENATE PROPOSAL WOULD CLOSE GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE

The state Senate voted to approve SB 543, a bill that would require state police to perform a criminal background check on anyone purchasing or transferring a firearm at a gun show. SB 67, a bill that would require reporting lost or stolen firearms, failed to advance out of the body.

How a bill becomes a law in Virginia



New Common Book analyzes voter suppression ahead of election

SANJANA RAVULAPALLI
Contributing Writer

LINDSEY WEST
Contributing Writer

VCU has chosen “One Person, No Vote,” a book that analyzes the voter suppression against African Americans, for next year’s Common Book. Students will read the book in their focused inquiry classes.

After the 2016 election, author Carol Anderson said she noticed many were under the impression that African Americans didn’t go out and vote, or that the Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton didn’t

reach out enough. But Anderson says the 2013 Supreme Court decision to repeal the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which barred mainly Southern states from changing voter laws without federal approval, affected voter turnout.

“That’s what drove me to write this book,” Anderson said in an interview. “What happens to American elections? What happens to American democracy? When the protections of the Voting Rights Act are no longer operable, it’s not pretty.”

The Common Book program, which involves students, faculty and staff in the book’s selection process, aims to raise awareness about social issues among students, al-

lowing readers to formulate their own educated opinions on prevalent topics. This year, the 2020 presidential election inspired the selection process.

Focused inquiry professor and director of the Common Book program Felecia Williams said because the Common Book reaches a large population, it can promote students’ involvement and awareness in society.

“Because the Common Book is a university-wide initiative, we try to have many people as part of the decision-making process as possible to make sure that the book resonates with all facets of the campus community,” Williams said.

Williams said that although voter suppression is decreasing, “any vote suppressed is one too many and would be an injustice in any election.” She said the book was meant to educate students on voter disenfranchisement, and to encourage them to “exercise that power.”

Freshman Carley Harrison is a member of the student selection committee that helps decide next year’s book. The psychology major said Anderson’s book introduced her to the idea of voter suppression in the U.S.

“I was not as aware of voter suppression before I read the novel,” Harrison said. “One Person, No Vote’ provides an abundance of information on voter suppression and allows me to vastly increase my knowledge on the topic.”

Anderson said college students are on the voter suppression “hit list.”

“There is a narrative out there that students are too liberal, and they [conservative officials] want to get them to not vote,” Anderson said. “That’s a shame, because the students who are American citizens have the right to vote, and students also have a right to vote where you go to college.”

Registering to vote is frustrating for some students, such as sophomore English major Lina Romero, who said she was turned away once at the polls after filling out the registration form with the wrong zip code.

“It’s not difficult but it is a long process,” Romero said. “And that is what voter suppression is designed to do. It is designed to demoralize you so much that you just don’t vote.”

Anderson said she hoped that students learned to “vote like your life depends on it.”

“I hope that they understand that democracy is worth it,” Anderson said. “That they register to vote, that they engage with the issues, that they understand who the candidates are, they understand what the policies are, what the implications and ramifications of those policies are and that they go vote.”

Anderson is scheduled to give a lecture about “One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy” at the Siegel Center on Oct. 21.



Author Carol Anderson. Photo courtesy of Stephen Nowland



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Stat of the week

VCU Baseball was picked to win the Atlantic 10 in the A-10 preseason poll released Feb. 11.

Behind the voice of the Siegel Center

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Every time Hunter Elliott walks into the Siegel Center for a men's basketball game, he follows the same routine. For the past 34 years, the public address announcer has walked in at the same time, fist-bumped the same security guard and sat down in the same seat with each team's roster.

Sold-out crowds are common at the Siegel Center, but two years into announcing games in Richmond, Elliott narrated his first sold-out game against Virginia Tech at the Richmond Coliseum.

“

I genuinely get excited for every single game. I have always loved sports, and I've got arguably one of the best two or three seats in the entire arena.”

Hunter Elliott, public address announcer

“I looked up just a couple minutes before tipoff, and there wasn't an empty seat in the place,” Elliott said. “I just remember my leg, just a little nervous bounce to your foot on the floor.”

That nervous twitch in Elliott's leg hasn't gone away — it comes

back before each game.

“I genuinely get excited for every single game,” Elliott said. “I have always loved sports, and I've got arguably one of the best two or three seats in the entire arena.”

Elliott began working at VCU in 1986, serving as the public address announcer for volleyball, women's basketball and men's basketball at the Richmond Coliseum. A few years later, he said he transitioned into announcing only men's basketball games because his day job required frequent travel.

The VMI graduate was on the microphone during the 1990 and 1996 NCAA tournament regional games, hosted at the Richmond Coliseum.

When the Siegel Center opened in 1999, going to work became a family event for Elliott. He brought at least one of his children to games with him for the first 10 years of the building being open.

“I have three kids, and all three of them have been a ball boy or ball girl from the time they were 7 or 8 until they were 12,” Elliott said, adding that his youngest child is now a college freshman.

Elliott said he has prepared for each game the same way for as long as he can remember. He researches the visiting team's roster a day before the game to look for challenging names.

“Names and faces go together real



Hunter Elliott, center, has been the men's basketball public address announcer since 1986.
Photo by Megan Lee

well,” Elliot said. “Over the years, you still remember them.”

During his career, Elliott has noticed more international players in college basketball since he began in the late 1980s.

“As the years have gone on and the game has become more international, being able to pronounce some of the international names [can be hard]” Elliott said. “There's more consonants, and the sounds in their names are sounds you don't typically say in the English language.”

Before each game, Elliott finds someone from the visiting team to make sure he's pronouncing names correctly. To make sure his pronunciation is consistent throughout the game, he

writes down the names phonetically.

Elliott's favorite part of the job is the element of unpredictability inherent to a basketball game.

“It plays out right in front of you, and you have no idea what's going to happen,” Elliott said. “It's a new chapter in the book every time, which is really cool and will never get old.”

After more than three decades behind the microphone, Elliott said he doesn't see an end anytime soon.

“I tell people all the time, as long as VCU's crazy enough to give me a microphone,” Elliott said, “I'll keep showing up.”

PRESS BOX

SHORTER PLAYOFF SERIES WILL REDUCE INJURIES

NILE MCNAIR
Contributing Writer

In last season's NBA Finals, the Golden State Warriors lost two of their starting five to injuries sustained in the playoffs.

The Warriors were the favorites to win the title, but losing superstars Kevin Durant and Klay Thompson to injury in the playoffs dashed their chances; opening the door for the Toronto Raptors to win it.

“When Klay goes down and out of the

game, it's like ‘You got to be kidding me,’” Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. “This has got to stop. It's devastating. I don't know if it's related to five straight seasons of playing a hundred-plus games.”

In order to win the title, a team must win four of the seven games in the two-month series. However, the prolonged series results in heightened predictability compared to other sports' postseasons.

The predictability issue has caused fans to come into the season essentially

knowing who will win the championship.

In order to correct the matter, the NBA should consider shortening the first two rounds of the playoffs.

Implementing this format will create a sense of urgency the NBA hasn't seen in the playoffs since the rule change in 2003.

Previously, the NBA had a five-game-series first round, followed by the remaining three seven-games series. Both the first and second rounds of the playoffs should be a five-game series, and then the conference finals and NBA finals should be a seven-game series.

Ultimately, most believe the 2003 change by the NBA was intended to generate more revenue from television and ticket sales.

Prime examples of short series include the MLB's five-game series for its divisional playoffs and the NFL's and college basketball's single-elimination postseason tournaments.

Aside from minimizing predictability and injuries, single-game elimination tournaments provide Cinderella stories like VCU going to the Final Four in 2011, or the lowest seed in the playoffs winning the Super Bowl like the Packers did in 2010.

Back when the first round of playoffs was only a five-game series, low seed teams, such as the Houston Rockets in

1995, were more able to win an NBA title.

This doesn't necessarily mean the NBA should implement a single-elimination postseason tournament, but the overall format should certainly change.

Even if the NBA lessens the number of games in the first two rounds of the playoffs, it will still bring in its desired revenue because the viewership of the first two rounds will increase.

Recently, the NBA and commissioner Adam Silver have been considering a playoff reseeding of all 16 teams.

One potential format for playoffs would set the best 16 teams in the league against each other, a plan that Silver said has received national attention.

“That is something that has got serious attention from the league, and the obstacle is travel and not tradition,” Silver said.

Obviously the commissioner is willing to change the playoff format in order to correct the conference imbalance, which is an issue in the NBA.

If travel is the concern, then the NBA should shorten the first two rounds of the playoffs. It will increase the NBA playoff viewership revenue because it's still a series that the best team should win. The increased likelihood of an upset would correct conference imbalance.



Illustration by Ky Williams

Baseball expects new players to fill crucial roles

BEN MALAKOFF
Contributing Writer

After winning the Atlantic 10 regular season, Rams baseball fell into heartbreak after losing both of their postseason games.

Some teams might want to forget and move on from a tragic moment, but for coach Shawn Stiffler and his team, the losses are motivation.

“If you’re a competitor, regardless if you win a championship the year before or came up short, those [results] should be motivation for you to get back there,” Stiffler said.

The team lost seven seniors last year, including right-handed pitcher Benjamin Dum, who is now in the Minnesota Twins organization. This season, VCU has brought in 14 newcomers, including 11 freshmen.

“Over half the team has never played a game for VCU baseball,” Stiffler said. “And that’s why this team is going to have to find its own way to win. Regardless of how last year’s team was, it has nothing to do with this year’s.”

One of the new players Stiffler is most looking forward to watching is freshman infielder Tyler Locklear. From Abingdon, Maryland, Locklear was a 2018 Under Armor All-American. At 6-foot-3 and 210 pounds, Locklear hit .500 with six home runs during his senior year of high school.

Locklear will miss the first couple of weeks at the beginning of the season due to a broken bone in his hand. When he returns, he should be a good addition to the middle of the lineup, Stiffler said.

The Rams will have a lot of roles to fill as the team brings back one of three starting pitchers. Redshirt-junior right-handed pitcher Justin Sorokowski appeared in 20 games last year, all starts for VCU. He posted a 3.42 ERA in 73.2 innings of work with 73 strikeouts.

“He’s so consistent,” Stiffler said. “His improvements, many times, are incremental.”

Sorokowski always seems to trend upward steadily because of how consistent he is, Stiffler said.

Freshman right-handed pitcher Mason Delane is another newcomer who Stiffler believes will make an impact early on in the season. Delane was the No. 7 ranked right-handed pitcher out of Virginia by Prep Baseball Report. He broke Colonial Beach High School’s record when he recorded 110 strikeouts in 63 innings pitched.

“He’s got an electric arm,” Stiffler said. “I’m excited for the impact that he’s going to make.”

Junior infielder Liam Hibbits returns for his junior season fresh off being named a collegiate baseball preseason All-American. Hibbits led the team with 75 hits and batted .366 last season, en route to being named A-10 First Team.

This season Hibbits is working on improving his all-around game to help out the team more than just on offense.

“I’ve been really trying to focus on being more of an all-around player,” Hibbits said. “I really wanted to take the fall and in the spring and work on defense, and I feel like it’s paid off.”

Some other notable returners for the Rams are senior infielder Paul Witt, who was named A-10 first team and hit .336, senior infielder Brent Norwood, who was named A-10 second team and led the team with six home runs, and sophomore right-handed pitcher Evan Chenier, who was named to the A-10 all-rookie team.

While the new practice facility has only been open for a few weeks, it has made training much easier on the team. For the short time it has been made available, the team has been using it to its full capability.

“So far, it’s been incredible,” Hibbits said. “Just getting more reps, we got the new technology in there, just a convenience to just being right around the corner from our locker room. It’s been a game-changer.”

The Rams start off the season with an away series against Charlotte starting Friday. The first homestand comes quickly after that, beginning on Feb. 21 against Sacred Heart.

However, Stiffler and his squad aren’t



Sophomore catcher Logan Amiss logged 23 RBI last season. CT file photo

just circling one date on their calendar. For the Rams, every game has more meaning than the last.

“Every game you win makes the next game that much more important,” Stiffler

said. “And every series you win makes the next series that much more important.”

Witt ready for final season with Rams

ADAM CHEEK
Staff Writer

Senior infielder Paul Witt returns for a final year on the Rams’ baseball roster Friday, having put together three seasons in the field and at the plate.

Witt, who primarily plays second base, is part of a large returning class that includes stalwart senior infielders Brett Norwood and Steven Carpenter. He’s bounced all around the infield, playing shortstop and second base his freshman year, third base his sophomore season and moving back to second for his junior and senior years.

“I’m definitely just getting back in the swing of things with my team,” Witt said. “I think we have something special. ... I’m definitely excited to do what we can do and try and win a championship again.”

The veteran racked up career numbers during the 2019 season, recording 75 hits and four home runs with a batting average of .336. Witt also put up career highs with 50 RBI and nine stolen bases, playing in all 58 of VCU’s contests.

Born in Long Island and having moved to West Virginia growing up, Witt started playing at a young age. His older sister played softball and his father coached, so he would go to their practices when he was just 2 years old.

“[Baseball] was definitely something I always loved from the start,” Witt said. “I basically just started off from ... 4 years old ‘til now.”

Memorable moments at VCU abound for Witt, including walk-off hits against George Mason and George Washington in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Despite those highlights, Witt says his

favorite experience has been being part of the Rams organization.

“Last year was just an awesome year,” he said. “Despite the end of the season, last year’s team was just awesome. Everyone meshed together. We all just had a great time.”

Witt hopes to continue his presence on the diamond after college but has

backup plans for when his time with baseball comes to an end.

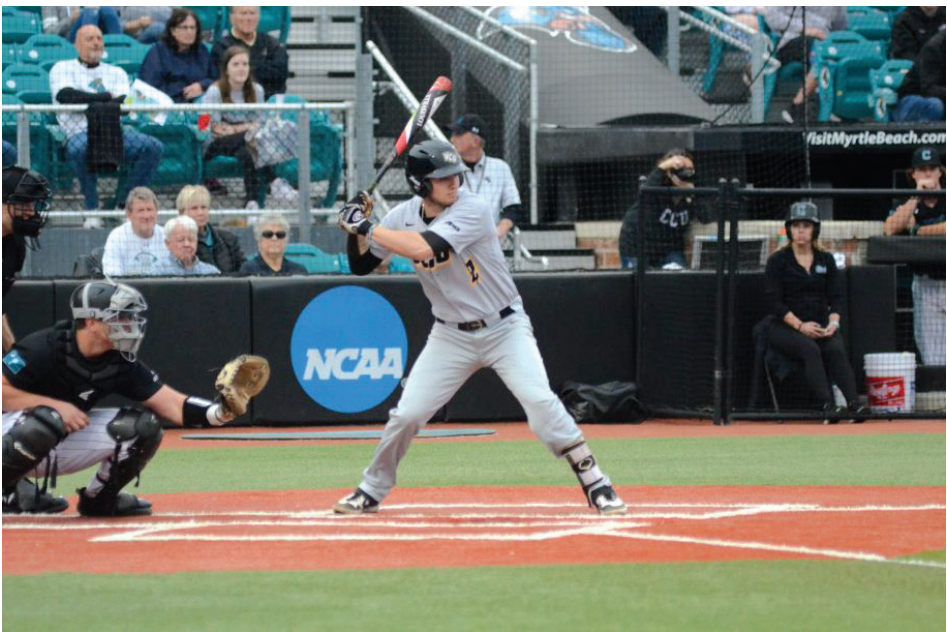
“I’m definitely going to try and play baseball as long as I can,” he said. “If I’m fortunate to be able to get drafted and play professional baseball, I will play that as long as I can. But when baseball’s done, I’d probably try and pursue my career in real estate and getting my real estate license or becoming an FBI agent.”

The infielder, who was named to the Atlantic 10 All-Conference team at second base, says those awards mean a lot, especially in the long run.

“They’ll mean something next year, they’ll mean something the year after,” he said. “It’s definitely something that I get to look back on and be proud of myself and enjoy what I did, but it’s also a motivation tool.”

Reflecting on his career with his final season approaching, Witt says playing for the Rams taught him the importance of hard work and being in tune with the game itself.

“Everything means something and matters,” he said. “Whenever I’m in practice or on a game, I have to do that one thing 100% correctly in practice, understanding the game, and that’s one thing coach Stiff really taught me well is to really be diligent on details.”



Senior infielder Paul Witt recorded a .336 batting average last season. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics

On this day

In 1999, President Bill Clinton was acquitted by the Senate in his impeachment trial.



Candela Gallery's newest exhibit, "The Golden Age" features archival prints "The Queen" and "Saint Monroe" by Alanna Airitam. Photos courtesy of Alanna Airitam

IMAN MEKONEN
Spectrum Editor

‘THE GOLDEN AGE’: PHOTOS PRESENT AN EMPOWERING NARRATIVE FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

THE EVERYDAY stress that came along with a fast-paced job and the pressures of being the only black person in her corporate advertising department were toxic for Alanna Airitam. It got so bad that she attributes it to her diagnosis of Hashimoto's disease, an autoimmune condition that affects the thyroid.

"I was getting sick at this job, and I thought 'I could legitimately die in a cubicle,'" Airitam said. "And that's not the way that I plan on going out. I know that I have a lot to offer."

She eventually quit her job of 20 years and decided to take three months off to chase her artistic desires of becoming a photographer.

"We complain about certain things in our life," Airitam said. "I started listening to myself complain about the same things over and over again, but not actually doing anything different."

In those three months, Airitam created "The Golden Age," a photography collection made in response to the treatment of African Americans by police.

The photos, which are on display at Candela Gallery, show black men and women in elegant portraits with royal dressing, and fruits and vibrant flowers.

Candela co-director Ashby Nickerson said she was introduced to Airitam's art

about a year ago while selecting work for a local auction.

"We were immediately drawn to the beautiful portraiture within 'The Golden Age' and Alanna's approach to race and agency overlaid with such a unique process," Nickerson said in an email.

Airitam says that anyone, regardless of their tools or resources, can become a photographer — she got the entire wardrobe for "The Golden Age" out of a Rubbermaid bin.

"You can do this on the cheap," Airitam said. "You don't need hardly anything. You just need your imagination and ... whatever camera you happen to have. That's it."

The project initially started as a way to keep her occupied during her three-month journey. She invited friends over to her house to model for the projects.

"A lot of the people are friends or friends of friends," she said. "Sometimes I can just look at somebody and I just feel a story, like there's something there."

No matter how hard Airitam tried to push a narrative to her models, they always brought a story to the set that showed up in

the art. The models knew who they were at the moment and didn't require any coaching.

Just like trying to grab the wheel of a car from the passenger seat, taking control of the narrative wasn't going to work out, Airitam said.

“

I was getting sick at this job, and I thought 'I could legitimately die in a cubicle. And that's not the way that I plan on going out. I know that I have a lot to offer.'

Alanna Airitam, photographer

One of the pieces in the exhibit, "Saint Nicholas," is a portrait of a son of a friend of Airitam's. She said the boy stood in front of

the camera and brought his own story simply by looking at the camera.

"I've been very lucky because they just embodied the work," Airitam said. "They just sort of knew who they were in this, and so there really wasn't a whole lot of coaching or anything like that."

When she was at her previous job, many of the stressors she experienced

made it hard to express her emotions, especially when instances of police brutality were in the news.

"Ferguson was crazy at that point. And so there was just nowhere to put all that, you know, when you go into those corporate environments," Airitam said. "You have to leave all of those emotions at the door."

For Airitam, her artistic voice was a form of defiance against police brutality and the negative portrayal of African Americans in the news. She wanted to counter that narrative and make sure there was a more accurate, empowering portrayal of African Americans.

"I thought, 'I'm going to counter that with something beautiful,'" Airitam said. "And I'm not going to continue to watch this nastiness without having a counter to that, just the same as I wouldn't sit here and let somebody tell me that I'm an awful person without fighting back."

The Golden Age is on display at Candela Gallery, 214 W. Broad St., until Feb. 22. For more information, visit candelagallery.com.

Environmental film festival brings global environmentalism to RVA

VAILA DEYOUNG
Contributing Writer

The Richmond Environmental Film Festival returned this week to celebrate and raise awareness of environmentalism. The festival was founded by the James River Film Society in 2008, and was later backed by the Sierra Club and revived in 2011 as the RVA Environmental Film Festival. The festival, which is free, is supported by local nonprofits and businesses. The audience ranged from environmental enthusiasts, children, parents and students of all ages — all eager to learn something new about nature. I was one of them, and the experience taught me a lot about local and global environmentalism. Here are my reviews of the three films I managed to see over the weekend.

'SINGAPORE: BIOPHILIC CITY' (2012)

Opening night was held at the Richmond Public Library, and entailed a screening of the documentary “Singapore: Biophilic City,” as well as a panel discussion with local environmental activists and public figures. Michael Carter, a small farm resource center coordinator from Virginia State University and member of the panel, spoke on our lack of connection with nature and said people should strive to become familiar and comfortable with the outdoors.

“No matter where you come from — Europe, Latin America, South America, Africa, Africans in America — we are so disconnected from nature,” Carter said. “Singapore: Biophilic City,” documented some of the ways that Singapore is implementing the concept of biophilia, the desire to be around other forms of life such as plants and animals, into the daily lives of its people.

The philosophy behind interweaving natural elements with urban landscapes comes from the idea that nature is innately healing and beneficial to our health, giving natural remedies to everyday stressors — which leads to happier and healthier citizens. The short film, which is available on YouTube, described how an urban area can quickly become a more natural and efficient place to live and work. It was enlightening to see the simple ways that Singapore uses its natural resources to benefit its citizens. “We need and want to be close to nature, so we argue that nature is not something optional. It’s absolutely essential,” said Tim Beatley, a member of the Biophilic Cities organization, which produced the film.

'THE LORAX' (1972)

I had only previously seen the 2012 3D animated film of the same name, but this original, classic tale was short, sweet and straight to the point. The story is a lighthearted tale with a serious undertone about what can and will happen if we have too much control over our natural environment. In the beginning of the story, the native plants and animals thrive freely. One day when the Once-ler stumbles onto the land, he realizes he can use the luscious trees to create his all-in-one product called Thneeds. The Lorax quickly tries to stop the Once-ler from using up all of the trees, but the Once-ler never listens. Over time the trees run out

from overexploitation, and the Lorax has nothing left to protect. In its 25-minute runtime, “The Lorax,” manages to comment on environmentalism, capitalism and the dangers of exploiting limited natural resources, all perfectly packaged into a children’s cartoon.

'THE BUTTERFLY TREE' (2018)

The last film of the weekend was “The Butterfly Tree,” and it documents the story of the remarkable migration patterns of monarch butterflies. The butterflies make a cross-generational migration from Canada and the eastern coast of the United States, all the way down to central Mexico for the winter. The film loosely follows a set of interviews of people who have dedicated their life and work to following the migration patterns of monarch butterflies. At first, I was taken aback by the film’s nonlinear structure, but as it progressed all of the information began to fit together like a puzzle piece. As much as the film emphasized the documentation of this natural phenomenon, it also explained the metaphorical and symbolic meaning behind the life cycle of the butterfly. Butterflies undergo magnificent transformations and growth within their lifespan, and it all comes from basic instinct. They don’t understand why they migrate thousands of miles, but they do it because they know they must. The film posed a question: If butterflies can do all of this instinctually, what’s stopping us from achieving our goals?

The festival continues until Friday, showing one film per day at various locations throughout Richmond. For more information, visit rvaeff.org.




Illustration by Lindsay Hart


ADVERTISEMENT

BEALE STREET IS TALKING:

A DISCUSSION ON BALDWIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO BLACK AMERICA.



OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL STUDENT AFFAIRS
THURSDAY, FEB. 25 | 7:30 PM



Office of Multicultural Student Affairs

“If Beale Street Could Talk” is a film directed and written by Barry Jenkins, and based on James Baldwin’s novel of the same name. It is an examination of black family life and a love story that is tough to embrace. James Baldwin is a literary icon who has had monumental influence but is not spoken about often enough. Join the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) on Monday, February 17th as Monquell Middleton, OMSA’s Program Manager discusses James Baldwin’s impact on the world as an intellectual and an advocate for civil rights.

‘BIRDS OF PREY’ is a morally confused, explosive time at the movies

JOSH CLINTON
Contributing Writer

The greatest accomplishment of Cathy Yan’s “Birds of Prey” is that the whole movie feels like the central character, Harley Quinn. It’s energetic, cute and colorful with a dark, violent edge, and it introduces an all-female superhero team, The Birds of Prey.

Following a recent break-up with The Joker, Quinn goes on a bender that involves trashing the nightclub of local crime boss Black Mask and blowing up the nearby Ace Chemicals plant in a colorful firework extravaganza.

It’s a pretty great tone-setter for the movie accompanied by an energetic soundtrack and narration from Quinn herself.

“Birds of Prey” draws heavy inspiration from “Deadpool” in its over-the-top violence, irreverent humor and omnipotent narration that leads the audience through a story told out of order.

Margot Robbie captures the psychotic emotional range of the character beautifully, similar to Robert Downey Jr. as Iron Man. If she doesn’t win an Oscar for how she plays up the tragic loss of her break-fast sandwich, then there is no justice on this Earth.

Her charisma is only matched by that of Ewan McGregor as the film’s villain, Black Mask, who is easily the pettiest villain put to film. His relentless, self-absorbed nature makes it all the more satisfying when everything blows up in his face — figuratively and literally.



Illustration by Ky Williams

The fallout of Quinn’s bender ends up roping in other heroines from the DC Universe in a loosely connected plot to rescue orphaned child Cassandra Cain, played by Ella Jay Basco, from Black Mask. This forms the backdoor for the origin of the super-team Birds of Prey.

Jurnee Smollett-Bell presents a fresh, sassy take on the classic, butt-kicking, super-sonic-screaming Black Canary that plays off Quinn’s insanity quite well.

The Huntress, played by Mary Elizabeth Winstead, is the most underutilized character in the movie. Her assassination of mafia enforcers helps to push officer Renee Montoya, played by Rosie Perez, into the plot. Unfortunately, she doesn’t get to interact with much of the central cast until the extremely energetic finale where the heroines unite and form the titular Birds of Prey team.

Overall, the cast has great chemistry when the film allows them to share screen time. Everyone’s banter during the finale and follow-up burrito run makes me wish the film had more of the

same energy throughout its two-hour runtime.

Even if the movie doesn’t deliver on its premise until the finale, it delights throughout with vibrant cinematography, charismatic performances and a surprisingly high number of visceral action scenes.

This brings me to one final issue with the film as a whole — the violence.

This movie is relentlessly violent, and it unquestionably earned its R rating because of that. Although I’m not sure it should have. Harley has a broad appeal, from adults to preteen girls, and the character has gone through many adaptations. There’s still a likelihood that parents will take their children to this movie because Harley’s in it, but this version isn’t a suitable role model for kids.

There isn’t much of an arc for our central character other than realizing that being free of an abusive relationship is a good thing. In itself, that’s a good message, but not good enough to justify empathizing with a murderer.

This leaves the film with a confused sense of morality. However, that might have been the point, given the nature of the main character.

Overall, “Birds of Prey” largely fails to earn its title because it doesn’t really focus on the team as a whole. Still, it presents an extremely energetic and colorful start to 2020’s cavalcade of female-led comic book films like “Wonder Woman 1984” and Marvel’s “Black Widow.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

See something

THURS. 2/13

‘The Story of Plastic’ Screening

VCU’s biology department and the Richmond Environmental Film Fest will host a screening of “The Story of Plastic,” which discusses the dangers and effects of global plastic pollution. A panel discussion will follow the documentary. To request a free ticket, visit the event’s eventbrite. For more information, contact Ching-Yu Huang at cyhuang@vcu.edu.

6 - 8:30 p.m., Grace Street Theater (934 W. Grace St.) Free.

SUN. 2/16

‘Titanic’ Screening at the Byrd Theatre

The Byrd Theatre will host a screening of the James Cameron film “Titanic” (1997). For tickets, visit byrdtheatre.org.

2 p.m., The Byrd Theatre & Foundation (2908 W. Cary St.) \$6

Do something

THURS. 2/13

VCU Women’s Basketball vs. St. Bonaventure

Women’s basketball will host the St. Bonaventure Bonnies at the Siegel Center. For more information and tickets for the game, visit the VCU Athletics website.

6 p.m., Siegel Center (1200 W. Broad St.) Free for students.

THURS. 2/13

SWE Galentine’s Day and Professional Panel

The members of VCU’s Society of Women Engineers will host a Galentine’s Day and professional panel. For more information, contact Anisha Beladia at swevcu@gmail.com or call 571-208-6049.

6 p.m., College of Engineering West Hall, Room 104 (601 W. Main St.) Free.

SUN. 2/16

The Fan Dance Company First General Body Meeting

The Fan Dance Company — which performs contemporary, jazz and hip-hop — will host its first general body meeting. Interested members must have at least four years of dance experience in order to join. For more information, contact Skye Corrigan at corriganse@vcu.edu.

8 p.m., The Commons, Virginia Room A (907 Floyd Ave.) Free.

Learn something

THURS. 2/13

‘The Power To Heal’ Screening

VCU Libraries will host a free screening of “The Power to Heal: Medicare and the Civil Rights Revolution,” which looks at the history of unequal and inadequate health care in relation to civil rights.

There will be a discussion after the film led by Sheryl Garland, chief of health impact at VCU Health. To register, visit the VCU Libraries website. For more information, contact Thelma Mack at mackta@vcu.edu or 804-828-0017.

5 - 7 p.m., Larrick Student Center, Court End Ballroom, (900 Turpin St.) Free.

TUES. 2/18

Recovery Ally Training

Rams in Recovery will host a training session for faculty, staff and students to support loved ones in recovery. Registration for the training is mandatory. For more information, contact Thomas Bannard at bannardtn@vcu.edu.

11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Larrick Student Center, Jackson Ward Room (900 Turpin St.) Free.

Have suggestions for the events calendar? Email spectrum@commonwealthtimes.org

BHM PROFILE

Student artists push for black representation

KATHERINE NOBLE
Contributing Writer

When Angelique Scott saw a lack of diversity and awareness in her VCUarts classes and realized other black students were having experiences similar to her own, she set out to create a supportive organization that would be a safe space to uplift and empower black student artists.

Scott found that with her own artwork, other students in the school of the arts were often tentative about addressing the issues she posed in her artwork.

“My work was heavily tied to race relations, and most of my critique classes were silent for a period of time,” Scott said. “So I had to be intentional about seeking out other artists of color throughout the school of the arts.”

In 2015, Scott — who graduated in 2018 from the craft and material studies and art education departments — founded the Black Art Student Empowerment organization, or B.A.S.E., with four other VCU students.

Their mission is to advance awareness of black artistic ability and cultural heritage, support black artists and connect diverse groups in the community.

“Just having a support system of black artists to look out for you and uplift you — that’s why B.A.S.E. is important,” Winston said.

Scott noted that the group has been influential in pushing for increased diversity and support for students of color. It also puts on arts-focused social and service events.

“The main reason why I joined B.A.S.E. in the first place was because I felt alone in all my classes,” said B.A.S.E. vice president and communication arts major Angelina Winston.



From left: Neyo Prince, Shayne Herrera, Angelina Winston, Kiara Porter and Nick Vaughn, board members of B.A.S.E. Photo by Tzeggal Isaac

Among the events put on by B.A.S.E. is its annual art showcase, which features student artwork, including traditional painted and drawn pieces as well as sculptures, dance and musical performances. The group also holds informative talks, hosts get-togethers and works to mentor students at Huguenot High School.

One of B.A.S.E.’s goals is to challenge a misconception that the club is only for black artists. The student group is open to all students but specifically focuses on the representation of and issues faced by black student artists.

Very few of the 45 staff members listed on the art foundation department’s website, including faculty and advisors, are black.

“One of my goals is to start advocacy for students of color that experience, like, a lot of racial bias by their professors because I know that it can be a huge problem,” Winston said.

Winston credits Chioke I’Anson, an assistant professor in the African American studies department, for being in their corner in those kinds of situations.

Quote of the week
“A single seed can turn into a forest.
A single heart can transform a nation.”
— BRYAN THAO WORRA

The coronavirus is *not* a justification for racism

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

We’ve all heard about the severe and life-threatening coronavirus running rampant in China, and now around the world. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the illness is a “new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.” While the virus originated in China, it has spread to the remainder of southeast Asia, and even to the United States. The coronavirus is an extremely dangerous disease. However, your fear is not a valid reason to utilize the virus as a discriminatory vessel against Asian people.

“
The coronavirus is not a gateway for you to be openly racist and hateful against Asian people.”

Tagwa Shammet,
opinions editor

Although the news is flooded with talk of the coronavirus, many are still allowing social media and rumors to influence their thoughts on the outbreak. I recently stumbled across a video on Twitter of two Asian people sitting on a train. Across them sat a group of people covering their faces. The Asian people were not coughing, sneezing nor exhibiting any symptoms of any illness, let alone the coronavirus. I was completely appalled. If people actually knew what the virus consisted of and how it was transmitted, they would have no validation to cover their faces around an Asian person.

This is the exact same disgusting and discriminatory behavior we saw when Ebola was spreading. White folks started avoiding interacting with black people, despite the CDC saying the disease spread from person



Illustration by Brian Cummings

to person, regardless of race.

The video of the people on a train highlighted how misinformation can cause an abundance of disarray and racism. It disgusts me how people can be so hateful and venomous when an outbreak is happening. Then, I realized that distasteful behavior is inherently present in every one of those people. They just needed a reason to let it out. I’m lost as to why I even need to say this, but obviously some of you missed the lesson on kindness and respect in first grade, so let me reiterate: The coronavirus is not a gateway for you to be openly racist and hateful against Asian people.

The reality of the virus — like almost every virus, disease and illness — is that it is not bound to any one race. Much is still unknown about the virus, but the CDC and other international health organizations are working to uncover as much about it as they can. As of right now, the CDC is aware that the virus can be spread

similarly to influenza: via person-to-person contact when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

I’m not a doctor, but I’d like to enlighten you all on the true symptoms of the coronavirus, as cited by the CDC. The virus has been reported to have little-to-no symptoms in some cases, while other patients aren’t so lucky.

“
The reality of the virus — like almost every virus, disease and illness — is that it is not bound to any one race.”

Tagwa Shammet,
opinions editor

Some symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

It is also important to note that the CDC believes that the virus can appear between two and 14 days after exposure.

Meanwhile, the CDC has provided the American public with recommendations on what to do in order to stay healthy. Unsurprisingly, disrespecting and harassing Asian people is not one of them.

During this chaotic and frightful time, we need to be helping one another — not turning on each other. I’m sorry to all those prejudiced and hateful people, but it’s not really the time for your revolting behavior. It never is. If Europeans once managed to survive the bubonic plague, we can certainly survive the coronavirus.

If negativity is all the news media has to offer, I don’t want it anymore

BRYCE RANDALL
Contributing Writer

It seems like everything we see in the news media is either political or surrounded by negativity.

As a disclaimer to the reader, I would like to clarify that I am not attempting to perpetuate ignorance. I believe that the general public should be aware of what is going on and that journalists have an obligation to report on aspects of politics along with all the violent and negative events that occur in our country. That being said, there is obviously a general imbalance in the types of stories that are being published.

Front-page news stories are consistently tethered to President Donald Trump. I went to read The New York Times, and one of the first things I saw on its homepage was an article covering the president’s impeachment sandwiched between one on a doctor who studied the coronavirus and another about Pete Buttigieg at the Iowa caucus. Although these articles are covering

relevant material, they present the same narrow selection of topics that the news media has chosen to consistently focus on — politics and tragedy.

The problem is not just with major news sources; the local news is the same way. The Richmond Times-Dispatch is flooded with the same negative energy. I used to be a regular reader of the newspaper, but reading the same articles about local government and crime gets stale and, quite frankly, exhausting. Only a small fraction of the publication’s articles focus on positive news in the Richmond area that doesn’t have to do with sports.

Some may argue that tragedy and politics are what sell, that these are the stories that catch the most attention. Admittedly, media outlets need viewership and readership to stay alive. That being said, if the stories produced are only meant to gain attention, then journalists are failing at their jobs. The whole point of the news is to get a balanced view of society. How can that happen when only three or four categories of stories that are predominantly negative show up on

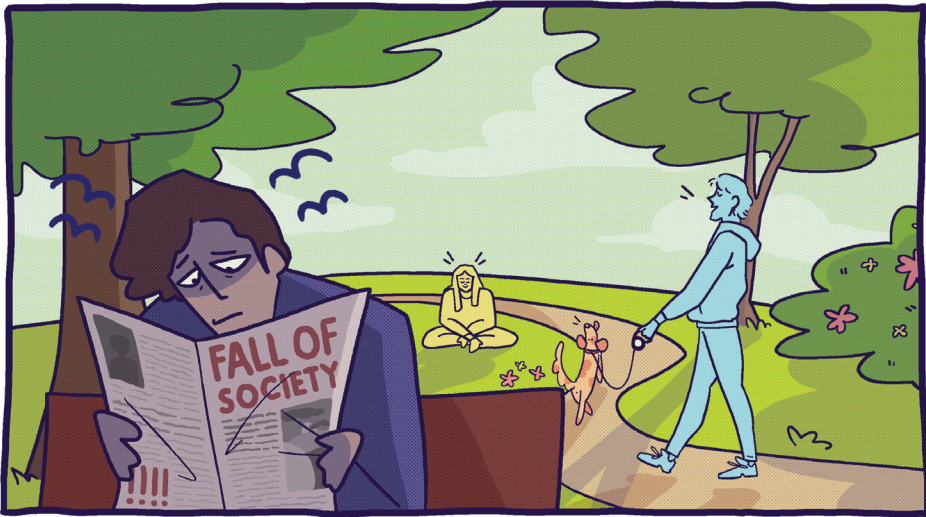


Illustration by Claire Deely

homepages of websites?

As a writer for The Commonwealth Times, I am as guilty of writing negative stories as the next person. However, I have realized that I need to change my writing style and methods because, in all honesty, I have exhausted myself with my own negative emotions.

Negativity is real, and the news can’t all

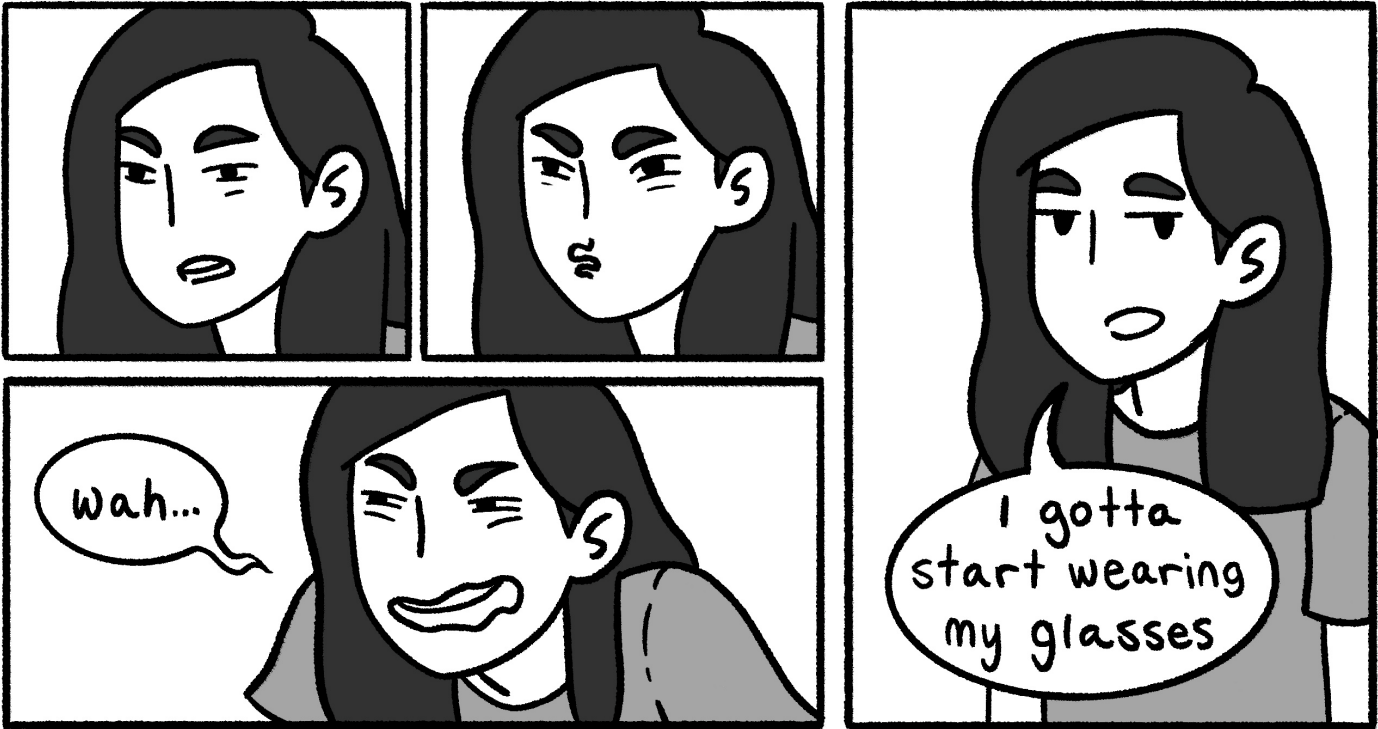
be sunshine and lollipops, but the amount of heavy and serious news stories completely outweighs the positive news. So, to everyone reading this article — writer or not — I challenge you to spread some positivity in your community.

Read an extended version of this story at commonwealthtimes.org

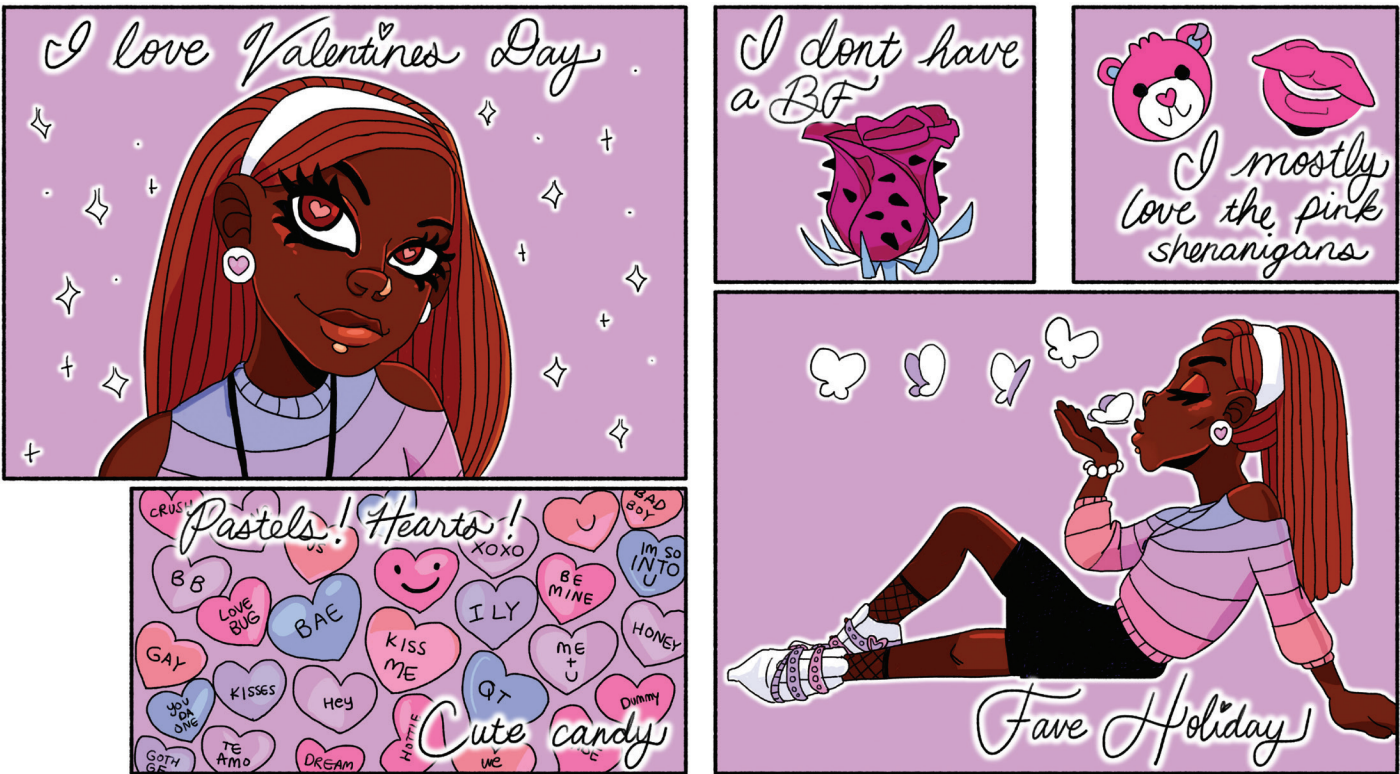


Comics

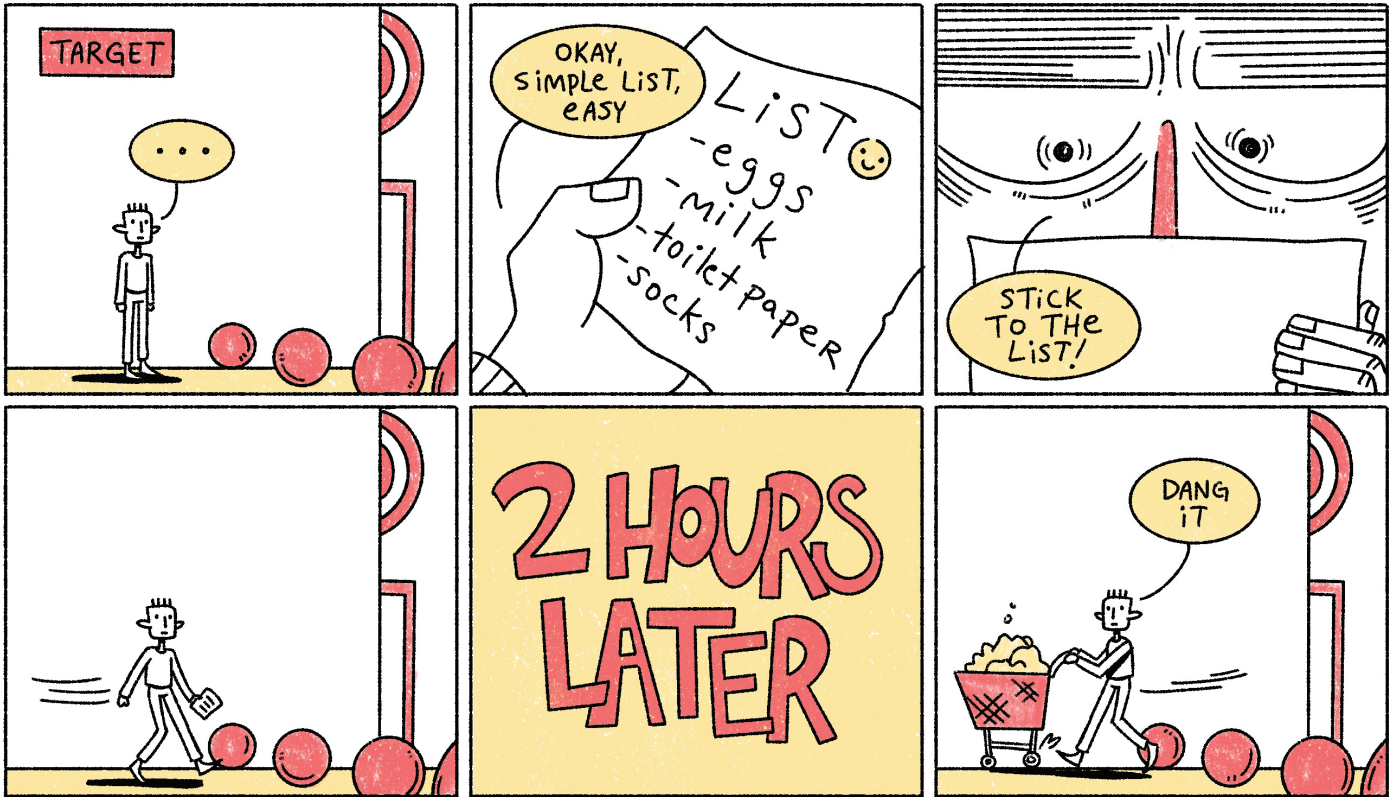
Blurred Vision by Mai Lan Ireland



Valentine's Day by Jeffrey Belfield



Target by Karly Andersen



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CT

Puzzles

Los Angeles Times

Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Nichols Lewis

- ACROSS
- 1 Stand array

6 Exams for aspiring MBAs

11 Border

15 Word with dance or union

19 Work as a team

20 Draw a bead on

21 Old alphabet character

22 Inter __: among others

23 Chicken lover's comment?

27 Most exceptional, in recent lingo

28 Relish

29 Afternoon service

30 Not cluttered

31 Race

32 Tannery tub

33 Cycle starter

34 What many writers work on

37 Attains

41 Gondoliers' tools

43 Denial from one with a very recent white mustache?

46 Ant or Arkin

50 Like much junk mail

51 Title words before Legend or Woman

52 Consume

53 "You ___ Beautiful": Joe Cocker hit

54 Roast job

55 Some notebooks

56 Reporter's query

58 Decides one will

59 Ewe, for one

60 Biblical prophet

62 Local monastery VIP?

64 Air __, 2011 Southwest acquisition

65 Chicago's ___ Tower

66 "Now, where ___ we?"

67 Bad do result?

71 Italian actress Vima

72 Submissions to an ed.

75 Big name in plastic explosives

76 First name in folk

77 Hwy. crime

78 Hogwarts potions master

80 Word before county, river or Bill

81 Cincinnati-to-Detroit dir.

82 Japanese assent

83 "Turn! Turn! Turn!" songwriter

84 Hand measure

85 Young shepherd resigned to losing his flock?

89 Resignee before Richard

91 More jumpy

92 Camp equipment

93 Soccer star Hamm

96 N. American land

97 82-Down's predecessor

98 Lawless role

100 Short __: little or no consideration

102 Environs

104 Drives out

108 Evita's exhortation to use sunscreen?

111 Aunt Bee's charge

112 Boathouse items

113 Ancient: Pref.

114 Rock-'n'-roller whom Forrest Gump supposedly met

115 Look as though

116 Small amount

117 Strict

118 Saxes, e.g.

DOWN

1 New Mexico native

2 Aware of

3 Petty peeves

4 "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" co-director

5 Paris divider

6 Comic

7 Jazz legend

8 Jackson

8 Friend of Paris

9 Personal point of view

10 "Casey at the Bat" autobiographer

11 Gas in some lasers

12 Cheer (up)

13 108-card game

14 Roger Ebert gave one entitled "Remaking My Voice" in 2011

15 "Funny not funny"

16 Sought-after guests

17 Hybrid big cat

18 "Swing Shift" actress Christine

24 Got warmer while searching for

25 "... __, and a lasting peace": Lincoln

26 Head of Québec

32 Electrical unit

34 Jacob Riis concerns

35 Skosh

36 Like typical King novels

38 Reebok rival

39 Pros with schedules

40 That guy

41 Liszt's instrument

42 "Being and Nothingness" philosopher

44 Unpredictable events

45 Tournaments

47 Bandleader Arnaz

48 Regarding

49 Peaty land

53 Kept in the know

55 Pioneering video game

56 Hacky Sack maker

57 Present

58 Change for a five

61 Tailless feline

62 Color named for a duck

63 D-Day conflict

64 Jackson Hole backdrop

65 Kate, pre-taming

67 Dangerous biters

68 Insightful

69 Community pool site

70 2009 Panasonic purchase

71 Mario's brother

72 Myopic Mr.

73 Competed in a British bee

74 Feudal workers

77 Roast site

79 English coal mining city

81 Filmmaker Ephron

82 DDE's predecessor

83 Unruffled

85 Small bars

86 "Barry" star Bill

87 Merging places

88 Common nut shape

90 Musical dragon loved by Little Jackie Paper

93 Windows precursor

94 "That's my dream"

95 Memorable links nickname

97 Put icing on

99 Bay Area NFLer

101 Bullet point, e.g.

102 Curly do

103 Dodge City, to Ford County

104 Storied fox title

105 Honey site

106 Writer Bagnold

107 Cause for a kid's grounding

109 Babble

110 Belgian or brown

For answers to this week's puzzles, check commonwealthtimes.org/puzzles every Friday at noon.

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Contact Dominique Lee @ leeds3@vcu.edu

No More Tears by Yaakov Bendavid

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13	14		15	16	17	18
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108							109						110							
111						112				113						114				
115						116				117							118			

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Sudoku

By The Mephram Group

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

Complete the grid so each row, column, and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk

6								4
	3		1			9		
			2		4	5		
4							8	2
5		1	9		6	7		3
	8							5
		8	4		7			
		5			1			
1								8

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Dr. Aloni Hill

Anthony Antoine

Johanna Sakponou

A discussion on navigating the industry as Black creatives and professionals.

Feb. 12, 2020

6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Room 2107

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