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Independence Reflection

By Leon Fraser

When we say the word “*Independence*” or that we are “*Independent*,” it immediately conjures an image of self-sustaining, self-reliance, or a noted mode of sustainability capable of doing the things that are necessary to sustain one’s self.

Independence allows individuals, or a country to manage the affairs of their households or country to benefit the family, or residents of the country in such a manner that reflects the true value of independence.

Political separation from colonial domination (as is the case of Jamaica) is a good first step and the island-country has trod the road of independence for 60 years. So there must be some level of learning that must be evident.

There are many peaks of the successes of the island of Jamaica when compared to others within the same, or similar circumstances—out of colonialism and on the road to self-sustenance. However at the other end of the spectrum there are many dark periods that are typify the learning curve and which we must observe. As we enter the 60th year of our celebrated Independence, there are many lessons we as a people have experienced and must learn from those experiences.

This is a time when we, as Jamaicans, are poised with the independent research to disseminate to emerging millennials for them to utilize. “What was hidden from the wise and prudent is now revealed to the babes and sucklings.” We as a

generation must remember the words and works of those that came before us and do the same; pay it forward, or we become irrelevant. This is slowly happening.

Sixty years are a great feat in any venture or organization of a society that has impacted global affairs to the extent that Jamaica has and continue to do. Like the Mitochondria of a cell, we are pulsing. When the thinkers do their thinking and the researchers do their research, they sometimes have those head-scratching beard pulling moments, because the standard contingencies do not apply to Jamaica in terms of output of talent and geographical size.

As we trod along the road of “progress,” we as citizens must begin to be more observant and demanding of elected officials that profess their love of their citizens and the “rock,” yet every move says otherwise.

No longer must folks vote with their belly, which is unfortunate, but demand more services, more education, more accountability, and more transparency if we all are to put shoulders to the wheel for the benefit of our later generations.

Strides in the educability of the population have enabled us to not be misguided by the obfuscation of sources of information from which we draw strength. By this I mean we were able to have sources of knowledge separate from the colonial sources that kept us in the mental stranglehold, and to see the difference as we move on the global stage.

With independence one should be able to chart his or own path, which is the desired thing for “big people.” But when there is no independent source of capital or particular commodity with which to trade, then that independent action will seem only ceremonial.

The models that we have observed for the previous 60 years must be analyzed, dissected and reconstructed to suit the locale especially of the Caribbean, and make observations how best our region, as the Caricom region, is advantageous to us as an independent island, especially if we choose to not be on any country’s coat tail.

It is hard, if the import is greater than the export. We must also, at this stage of our growth, seek to establish a particular method of protecting the creative talents of the citizens so their flank is protected when plagiarism is evident and redress seems insurmountable.

I celebrate with my kinsmen in the African Diaspora of the celebration of our Afro-Caribbean cultural heritage on the island of Jamaica in its 60th year. As we remember the successes and failures, trials and tribulations of those that precede us, we give thanks to the universe and the creator of all life for this opportunity to be still on this side to observe this time of celebration. To the families and friends that have lost loved ones during this time of a pandemic, I say stay strong.



Above: Commemoration of 60th Independence Anniversary, flags of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, and gatherings celebrating the occasion.
Photo Courtesy: John Rhone

NABJ And NAHJ Hold Joint Conference, Las Vegas

By Mark Milward

The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) held their joint conference this year at Ceasars Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, August 3-7.

The event attracted over 4,500 attendees from across the nation. The conference and career fair are the premier conference in the United States for journalists and media professionals of color. The conference attracts influencers in journalism, media, technology, business, health, arts, and entertainment.

Innovators and industry leaders have attended the NABJ/NAHJ conventions each year addressing the many thousands of attendees. Special guests and speakers have included then Sen. (President) Barack Obama, President George W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, Former Vice President (President) Joseph R. Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, US Housing and Urban Development



Mark Milward at NABJ and NAHJ Conference

Secretary Julian Castro, former RNC Chair Michael Steele, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Tyler Perry, Al Sharpton, and many others.

The NABJ will celebrate its 50th Anniversary in 2025, and the NAHJ, which is also based in Washington, DC, was established in 1984. The NAHJ is dedicated to the advancement of Hispanic and

Latino journalists in the United States and Puerto Rico. The HAHJ has approximately 2,300 members and NABJ has well over 4,100 members.

The NABJ’s current president is Dorothy Tucker, investigative reporter for WBBM-TV CBS Chicago, and the executive director is Drew Berry.

The gathering in Las Vegas was the conference’s largest ever and its first in-person national gathering since August 2019, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 145 workshops were held covering various subjects in the categories previously mentioned. The NABJ announced its 2022 board of directors that included Walter Smith Randolph, an investigative editor at Connecticut Public Broadcasting (CPTV & WNPR) in Hartford, who was re-elected as Treasurer.

The NABJ organization features an annual Salute to Excellence Awards honors coverage of African American people and subjects. Awards given include Journalist of the Year, Emerging Journalist, and Lifetime Achievement; past honorees have included Lester Holt, Ed Bradley, Carole Simpson, Byron Pitts, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Bernard Shaw, Gwen Ifill and Michelle Norris.

Every major news network, ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News,

among others was represented, including print media news papers such as the Washington Post, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, The West Indian American and others.

This year’s featured conference speaker was White House Press Secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre. Jean-Pierre is also the assistant to the president. President Joe R. Biden made her the first openly gay LGBTQ+ person to hold the position. Jean-Pierre is a Caribbean person of Haitian descent. Before being named White House Press Secretary Jean-Pierre served as principal deputy press secretary and the senior advisor to President-elect Joe Biden and Chief-of-staff to Vice President elect Kamala Harris, who we all know, is of Jamaican descent. Prior to these roles Jean-Pierre served as chief public affairs officer for MoveOn.org and was an NBC and MSNBC political analyst.

Next year’s conference will be held in Birmingham, Alabama.

First Anniversary Of Smithsonian’s Anthology, Hip-Hop, Rap At National Museum Of African American History, Culture

By Gretchen Johnson

In the nation’s Capital on Saturday, August 13, 2022 a uniquely special day occurred as the first anniversary of Smithsonian’s Anthology of Hip-Hop and Rap was celebrated at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). The museum hosted a Hip-Hop Block Party headlined by several amazing artists, Grammy-nominated performers, DJs and much more!

Hundreds of attendees were captivated by this rich musical experience that chronicled the evolution of Hip-Hop, its culture and impact worldwide! Truly Hip-Hop transcends cultural barriers,

and is the cornerstone of American culture infused into our daily lives locally and globally. This anniversary celebration was ground breaking as it occurred for the first time on the historic grounds of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which is exclusively the nation’s largest cultural spot dedicated to showcasing African America’s history, rich culture and worldwide impact!

Live performances on the main stage were hosted by radio personality Vic Jagger of Majic 102.3 FM. Jagger introduced one of the Grammy-nominated singers, Maimouna Youssef also known as “Mumu Fresh” and who delivered

powerful musical selections.

On the main stage, Mumu Fresh perfectly captured the momentous occasion before she passionately belted out her song entitled “Reparations.” Mumu asserted, “If you want your story told right, you got to tell it yourself! This next song is in honor of all of our ancestors whose stories are being told inside of this beautiful building. This song commemorates!”

Mumu then took attendees on a journey of inspiration and commemoration through song as she sang “Reparations.” The lyrics enthralled hundreds of attendees and moved some to tears as Mumu belted out:

*“What you gon’ do when you get your reparations?
I’m gon’ have some fun
Pass down to my young
Everything that was stolen and plus some
Imma buy up all the old plantations
Imma elevate my whole generation
Imma start a couple foundations
Build better schools across the nation
Imma grow my own food and make my own rules”*

Mumu’s passion for elevating the next generation is exactly the mindset that all of us must embrace! Music is powerful in its ability to bring together everyone from the Diaspora! Certainly, we all can pause to reflect on the long journey and struggle for liberation!



Grammy-nominated singer, Maimouna Youssef also known as “Mumu Fresh” performs on the main stage at the Hip-Hop Block Party at the National Museum of African American History and Culture

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Bloomfield Resident Vera M. Taylor Turned 100 Years

By Mark D. Milward

Mrs. Vera M. Taylor celebrated her 100th birthday on Saturday, May 21, 2022 with family, friends, and residents of her neighborhood that came out to cheer and congratulated her. Born in St. Catherine, Jamaica in Point Hill in 1922, Taylor has been a resident of Connecticut since 1960 when she relocated from her native Jamaica to join her husband Mr.

Amos Taylor who worked in the Connecticut Valley as an immigrant farm worker. The mother of three, Mrs. Taylor began working in Hartford in 1969 at First National Bank for nearly 40 years before retiring. Prior to relocating from Jamaica, she was a schoolteacher, and taught elementary school in Clarendon, where she settled with her husband before he began his journeys to America in the early 1950s.



Above: Bloomfield residents, family and friends celebrated Vera Taylor’s 100th birthday

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CURET’s Summer Enrichment

Hands-On Activities: Performing & Visual Arts, Cultures, Ethnicity, Diversity

By Carol Johnson

The Center for Urban Research, Education and Training (CURET) provided Summer Enrichment Activities during July 2022 at Alfred E. Burr Middle School located in Hartford. The theme was a celebration of Cultures, Ethnicity, and Diversity, including Native Americans, infused with classes in Art, Dance, Improv/Drama, and Empowerment.

Art Class: Instructor Melissa Wright engaged students in diverse art forms and art appreciation. Students followed her step-by-step directions and created impressive works of art. Students learned an interesting art form when they partnered up in groups and painted each other’s faces, and wow! The painters became the painted.

Students received crowns with gems on their foreheads. Students learned that their faces could be a canvas as well. This was a teachable session. Another group of students painted beautiful flowers

and vines, and other students painted glitters on T-shirts and other objects to add a bit of razzle-dazzle effect. Art class was fun for the students!

Improv/Drama Class: Instructor Brittany Carrier’s class included skills for active listening, clear communication, how to work through problems in theater, improv exercises and games, and having fun being silly in drama.

Empowerment Class, Instructor Barbara Ewing taught lessons on personal goal setting and the role of our brains with such efforts. Another lesson focused on how to grow our mindset regardless of culture, ethnicity, and diversity. Students were encouraged to set goals for themselves and use the power of their brains as they grow and learn, and maximize their potentials in spite of their culture, ethnicity, and diversity.

To hone the lessons, a hands-on application arose in which students were asked to reflect on a challenge they experienced in learn-

ing a new skill and wanted to abandon the goal because they encountered challenges, for example in learning a new skill in *Art Class* or a new dance routine in *Dance Class*.

The reality is that timidity towards learning a new art or dance routine is natural, but there are ways to overcome doubt or fear. These tactics include repetition and practice, and using the power of their brains that naturally create new pathways with the repetition and practice.

Dissecting the reservations students expressed, they were taught strategies on how to frame a plan to help overcome fears and doubts and achieve goals they set for themselves. Indeed, *Empowerment* was an added dimension to students’ self-discovery this summer!

Dance Class: Instructor Grace Wright went above and beyond her instructions to ensure that students had a positive learning experience on cultures, ethnicity, and diversity within the context of

dance genres, particularly of the Caribbean. At the final recital of the Summer Enrichment Program, dance students received many cheers and applause from participants of other programs. “For many of my students, it was their first time performing in front of an audience. I was so proud of them for being brave and for completing the Summer Enrichment program,” said Wright.

As the first item on the Closing Summer program, this dance recital set the tone for the performances that followed, said Hartford Community School Director and Coordinator of the Summer Enrichment Programs at Burr School, Aneida Delgado.

Native American Culture: Instructor was Darlene Kascak. She is of the Schaghticauke Native American tribe (one of five tribes in Connecticut). Terms such as Native Americans, American Indians, and Indigenous Americans are terms used interchangeably in this write-up. However it should also be noted that while Native Americans denote a

wide range of populations, Indigenous Americans come down to the choice of the person(s) to whom you are speaking. Indigenous Americans belong to people of a particular place by birth, living or existing naturally in a specific region or environment. At the outset Darlene clarified important distinctions; this was an important lesson learned.

Certainly, students and staff had eye-opening informative lessons, including the many tribes and the differences; various visual and tactile artifacts to strengthen students’ understanding about diversity among the cultures of Native Americans, their worldviews; for example, students stretched their imaginations “to see through the eyes of Native Americans.”

They have great respect for their usage of land and natural resources, the environment and animals are viewed as gifts to be used thoughtfully, not wastefully, but to be shared and conserved for future generations, and to be mindful not to pollute the land, air, and water, to care for animals and plants.

This view is especially poignant given contemporary awakening on climate change and harsh weather conditions affecting regions of the USA as well as other countries, global warming, green house gases, pollution, and dwindling resources.

Among other lessons Darlene imparted were: history of Indigenous Americans in Connecticut—the reservations where they live, their use of natural resources, and respect for animals; specific attire and jewelry designs that are appropriate for rituals, ceremonies and celebrations; creative tools and other artifacts. She displayed artifacts on tables for students’ hands-on experience, discussions and questions.

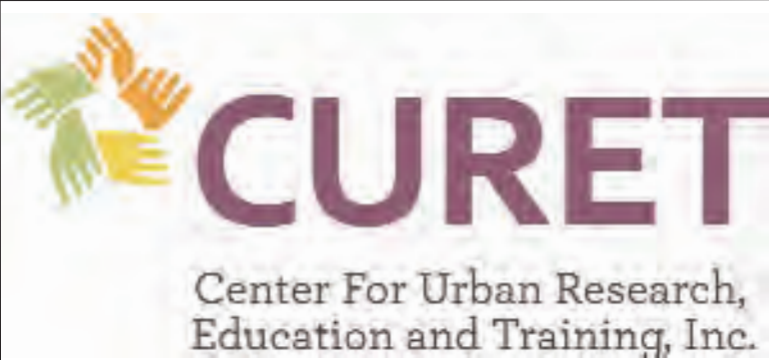
The lesson on Indigenous arts, crafts, use of natural resources and functional tools, baskets, clothing, pottery, musical instruments and jewelry was particularly insightful. Observing and handling the samples of Native Americans’ pottery, the hands-on experience provided a deeper level of understanding about the culture of Indigenous Americans and their way of life. Illustrations on the reasons for specific materials helped students in the creation of their own clay pots and jewelry to take home.

The session on Indigenous traditional dance routines was captivating. Students learned the use of bells or jingles and cones in some dances as a way to help the performers’ feet keep the rhythm with drums playing. And the beat of the drum mimics heartbeats.

Students learned the importance of music and dance in pre-colonial Native societies as ways to offer prayers of gratitude to the creator. Summer School students gained insights on aspects of Native Americans’ dances that continue to influence our music today.

By and large, CURET Summer Program certainly filled significant learning gaps many students may have missed during the regular school year.

Summer Enrichment activities open a need level of learning, adding to the building of the full person—working together for the common goal of all, and students applying empowerment and perseverance when learning new skills.



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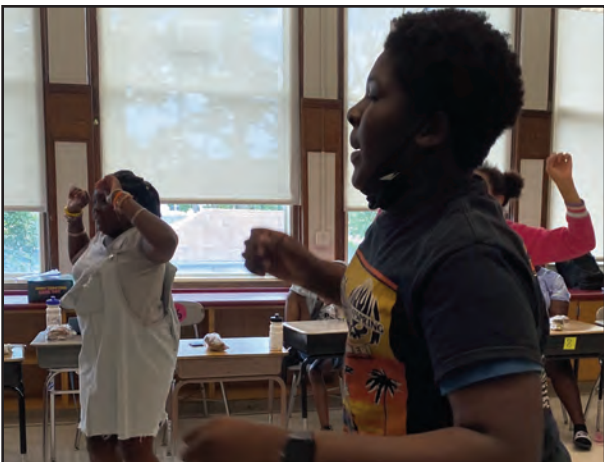
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CURET’s Summer Enrichment



Teachers: Grace Wright and Barbara Ewing; Students: Naomi Berrrios, Sh’Dai Forrester, Shalae Bryant, and Marquise King learn a Native American dance routine from Darlene Kascak. Background music by other students on musical instruments: Julian Woods (Rattle Gourd), Khalid Nooree and Steve Grey (Deer Drum), Lyvia Rivera (Turtle Rattle).



Native American dance dress made from deer skin



Instructor Darlene Kascak (right, wearing red skirt), who is Schaghticauke Native American, teaching a dance routine.



Above: Students Lizmarie Negron-Lopez, Shalae Bryant, Harmida Nooree, Masoma Nooree looking at processed hide pelts Native Americans made from the animals they captured for food.



Above: Native American musical instruments made from animals and other resources where they live



Darlene Kascak presents on Native American culture



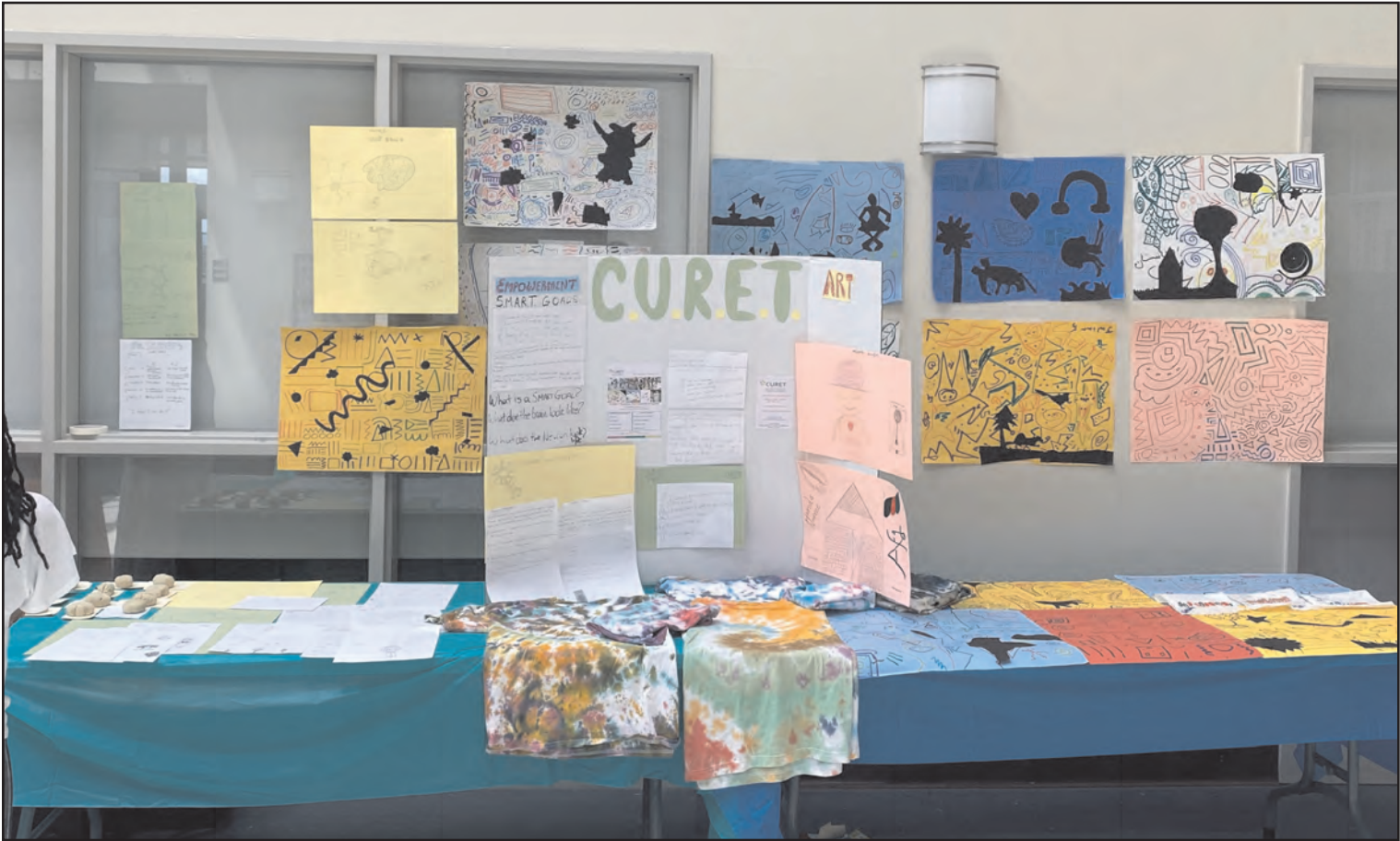
Art teacher Melissa Wright (wearing red shirt) introduces students to various styles of art.



Sisters Harmida and Masoma creating artwork with clay, making pottery. Below, Darlene admires the sisters’ creativity in their finished clay pottery



Twin sisters Layla and Lyvia demonstrating their art work whereby the painter becomes the painted--they learn that faces can be a canvas.



Following step-by-step directions of art teacher Melissa Wright, students decorate T-shirt, abstract art, and on objects rendering a razzle-dazzle effect; and they create crowns with gems on their foreheads; students learn that faces could be a canvas as well--another style of artwork.