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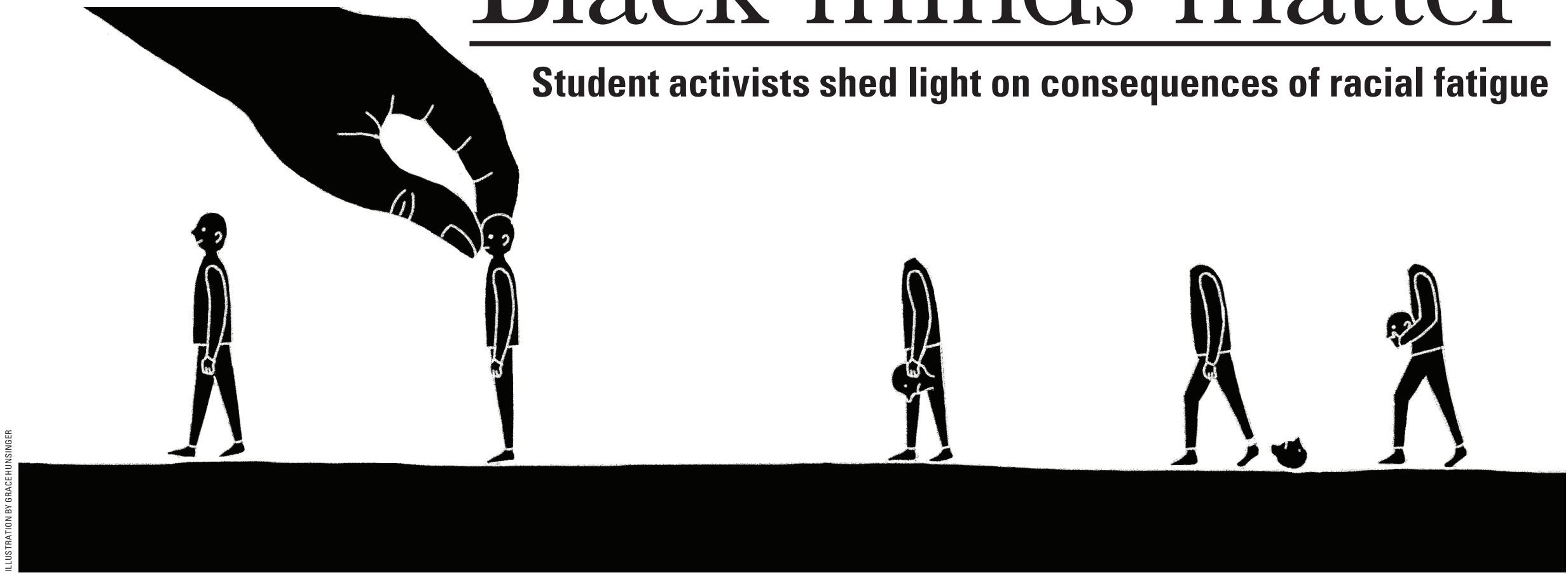
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Black minds matter

Student activists shed light on consequences of racial fatigue



MAURA MAZUROWSKI & TYLER HAMMEL
News Editor & Contributing Writer

After the fatal shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castille, two black killed by white police officers last summer, 24-year-old VCU senior Brittney Maddox decided she had enough.

“When they got publicized back-to-back, I found that I was really tired and exhausted and I had to shut all of my social media off,” Maddox said.

On July 5, 2017, Sterling, a 37-year-old father of five, was shot in the chest and back by a Louisiana police officer outside a convenience store in Baton Rouge, La. On July 6, Castille, 32, was shot and killed in his car by a police officer outside St. Paul, Minn. News of Castille’s death spread like wildfire on social media when his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, live-streamed the aftermath of the shooting on Facebook. Reynolds’ 4-year-old daughter was also in the car when the shooting occurred.

When the details of both shootings emerged, people across the country shared anger, frustration and fear on social media. Yet these deaths were just two among countless high profile fatal police shootings of black men and women — including Amadou Diallo, Manuel Loggins Jr., Ronald Madison,

Kendra James, Sean Bell, Eric Garner and Michael Brown.

From Ferguson to Baton Rouge, Maddox said it seemed like the unnecessary killings had no end.

“I just remember feeling really tired and the videos (of the shootings) were up everywhere,” Maddox said. “I reached out to some friends to ask how they were doing to see how people were feeling about this. We realized we all kind of had the same feelings.”

Maddox, along with VCU senior Taneasha White and VCU alumni Kendall Bazemore, sought out the help of some of their professors to help interpret their reactions. Maddox said this is when the trio learned about the concept of “racial battle fatigue” — a term coined by University of Utah ethnic studies professor William Smith.

In the early 2000s, Smith defined this term while studying how racial microaggressions — relatively inconspicuous, but potent, degradation of marginalized people — affected black students at predominantly white colleges and universities.

“Racial battle fatigue is essentially a way of assessing people of color and the racial microaggressions, or racism and race-related stress that they experience and the impact of those experiences on their physiology, psychology,

emotional status and behavioral responses due to dealing with racism on day to day basis,” Smith said.

Smith’s paper, titled “Challenging Racial Battle Fatigue,” discusses how students of color have difficulty concentrating and constantly feel stressed and out of place while navigating campuses and classrooms populated primarily by white students.

Bazemore said racial battle fatigue is an emotion he has felt his whole life, but had been unable to define until recently.

“This thing that we were experiencing now had a name, and once it’s given a name, we could start to approach it and figure out why we’re feeling this way,” Bazemore said.

In an interview with WCVE PBS, Yolanda Avent, Director of VCU’s Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, explained microaggressions can be subtle, but powerful, and are often hidden in the form of a “compliment.”

“One of my favorite microaggressions that I get all the time, sometimes when I’m speaking and people say to me, ‘you’re so articulate,’ and I think they’re well meaning in their mind,” Avent said. “But the message behind it is, ‘my expectations were so low for you probably anyway,’ or, ‘my expecta-

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Sports



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News



Kwarteng’s fraternity brothers spoke in their friend’s honor.

Community mourns loss of 20-year-old senior Samuel Kwarteng at campus vigil

SIONA PETEROUS & MAURA MAZUROWSKI
Spectrum & News Editors

The VCU community gathered on the campus Commons Friday evening to commemorate the loss of a peet, 20-year-old senior Samuel Kwarteng, who was shot and killed on the 1200 block of W. Moore Street at 12:28 a.m. last Thursday.

“It is with great sadness that I inform the university community of the tragic death this morning of a VCU student,” said VCU President Michael Rao in an email.

Kwarteng, from Alexandria, Va., lived on the 1700 block of Jacquelin Street. Richmond Police said the suspect, Emmanuel Jordan, 20, of the 1200 block of

West Moore Street, was arrested shortly after the shooting and is charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Kwarteng died on the front porch of the W. Moore Street home. A vigil was also held on Saturday in Kwarteng hometown of Alexandria, Va.

Micky Atakilt, a senior at VCU, emphasized his friend’s admirable qualities, but also concern regarding recent media coverage of Kwarteng’s death.

“Sam moved himself (off campus) so he could focus on school. That’s why he’s graduating at 20-years-old, but there hasn’t been enough focus on who he was as a person in the media,” Atakilt said.

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Opinion



Human Trafficking
Page 11

ILLUSTRATION BY GRACE HUNSINGER

PHOTO BY ERIN EDGERTON

ILLUSTRATION BY JIADI ZHOU



news

In this section:

State budget. Mumps. Black Minds Matter. Student vigil. Tangier Island. Youth violence.

CRIME LOG

Monday, April 10

- Alcohol Violation
1300 W. Main St.
Closed
- All Other Larceny
901 Park Ave.
Pending
- Theft From Building
Cabell Library 901 Park Ave.
Pending
- Simple Assault
Capitol Apt. 1301 W. Broad St.
Pending
- Hit and Run
Main St. Deck 801 W. Main St.
Pending
- Simple Assault - Domestic
916 Cumberland St.
Reported by Outside Agency
- Motor Vehicle Theft
122 S. Belvidere St.
Reported by Outside Agency

Tuesday, April 11

- Theft From Building
Student Commons 907 Floyd Ave.
Pending
- Theft From Motor Vehicle
1121 Floyd Ave.
Reported by Outside Agency
- Shooting At/Within Occupied Dwelling
1000 N. Harrison St.
Reported by Outside Agency
- All Other Larceny
901 N. Lombardy St.
Reported by Outside Agency
- Hit and Run
200 N. Vine St.
Reported by Outside Agency
- Theft From Building
1225 W. Cary St.
Reported by Outside Agency

Wednesday, April 12

- Alcohol Violation
Grace and Broad Residence Hall
1000 West Grace St.
Closed
- Drug Violation
812 W. Franklin St.
Closed
- Theft From Building
Cabell Library 901 Park Ave.
Pending

Thursday, April 13

- Drunkness/Escapes From Custody
810 Cathedral Pl.
Closed
- Alcohol Violation
900 Bowe St.
Closed
- Theft From Building
Student Commons 907 Floyd Ave.
Pending
- Destruction of Property - State
Fine Arts Building
1000 W. Broad St.
Pending
- Shoplifting
ABC 1217 W. Broad St.
Pending
- Hit and Run
825 W. Cary St.
Pending
- Death Investigation
1282 Moore St.
Pending

Friday, April 14

- Robbery - Individual
B700 N. Harrison St.
Closed
 - Attempted Home Invasion/Shooting into Occupied Dwelling
B1300 W. Clay St.
Reported by Outside Agency
 - Attempted Robbery - Individual/Aggravated Assault
1000 Bowe St.
Reported by Outside Agency
- Download the **VCU LiveSafe** mobile phone app to report crimes anonymously.
- To contact the **VCU PD**:
(804) 828-1196.
- For an **on-campus** emergency:
(804) 828-1234.
- For an **off-campus** emergency:
911.

State budget proposal aims to aid localities facing fiscal distress

AMY LEE
Contributing Writer

Motivated by the city of Petersburg's financial crisis, Sen. Emmett Hanger (R-Augusta County) filed a bill, SJ 278, to study the fiscal stress of local governments during the 2017 session. The bill proposed the creation of a joint subcommittee to review local and state tax systems, as well as reforms to promote economic assistance and cooperation between regions.

The bill was rejected in the House Finance Committee as members deferred consideration of tax reform for the 2018 General Assembly session. Yet the state budget adopted this February has already begun to enact two fiscal stress preventive measures originally introduced in Hanger's bill.

"Currently, there is no statutory authority for the Commission on Local Government to intervene in a fiscally stressed locality, and the state does not currently have any authority to assist a locality financially," said Sen. Rosalyn Dance (D-Petersburg) who co-sponsored the fiscal stress bill.

To escalate state intervention, the budget has set guidelines for state officials to identify and help alleviate signs of financial stress to prevent a more severe crisis. A workgroup established by the auditor of public accounts will determine an early warning system for identifying fiscal stress. The system would consider such criteria as a local

government's expenditure reports and budget information.

Local governments that demonstrate fiscal distress will be notified and may request a comprehensive review of their finances by the state. After review, the state is expected to draft an 'action

“It is important to have someone who can speak to first-hand experience dealing with issues of local government fiscal stress.”

Lashrecse Aird
Delegate (D-Petersburg)

plan' detailing purpose, duration and the anticipated resources required for the intervention. Gov. Terry McAuliffe also has the option to channel up to \$500,000 from the general fund toward relief efforts for the local government in need.

The new state budget also called for the creation of a Joint Subcommittee

on Local Government Fiscal Stress, with members drawn from the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriations and House Finance committees. The subcommittee will study local and state financial practices including regional cooperation and service consolidation, taxing authority, local responsibilities in state programs and root causes of fiscal stress.

"It is important to have someone who can speak to first-hand experience dealing with issues of local government fiscal stress," said Del. Lashrecse Aird (D-Petersburg) a member of the Appropriations Committee. "This insight will be essential in forming effective solutions that will be sustainable long-term."

While all states hold limited authority to intervene in struggling localities, the level of involvement they actually play in fiscally stressed communities varies greatly.

For Virginia, the new budget aims to widen the commonwealth's powers to intervene, as well as more effectively spot fiscal red flags in an area.

"Prior to now, Virginia had no mechanism to track, measure or address fiscal stress in localities," Aird said. "Petersburg's situation is not unique, and it is encouraging that proactive measures are now being taken to guard against future issues. This is essential to ensuring that Virginia's economy remains strong and that all communities can share in our commonwealth's success."



Lashrecse Aird (D-Petersburg)



Emmett Hanger, Jr. (R-Augusta)



Rosalyn Dance (D-Petersburg)



PHOTO BY BECCA SCHWARTZ

Health officials are cautioning the community to take precaution against mumps and receive an MMR vaccine if they have not done so already.

MARY LEE CLARK
Staff Writer

VCU students received emails from VCU Health last week reporting two confirmed cases and one suspected case of mumps on campus. Other cases have been reported in the Richmond metro area, and health officials are cautioning students and residents to take precautions.

"VCU students need to be aware of the risk of mumps in their community, take precautions to avoid mumps infection and seek out medical care if they suspect they might have mumps," Vice Provost Charles Klink said in the email.

These cases of mumps comes within weeks of mumps cases being confirmed at several Henrico schools. According to CDC, the first signs of the mumps are usually a few days of fever, headaches, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite, followed by swelling of the salivary glands. The disease is preventable by the mumps, measles and rubella vaccine, which most children receive before age 4.

It is unclear whether the VCU students or students at other universities received the MMR vaccine. However, even with the vaccination, prevention of the virus is not guaranteed. One dose of the vaccine is about 78 percent effect and two doses roughly 88 percent effective.

This is not the first time the mumps have hit campuses across the states. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, multiple universities have reported cases in 2017 alone.

According to WTOP, two cases of mumps were also reported at George Washington University; U.S. News and World Report reported Monday that Kansas State reached 15 cases of mumps since February; Louisiana State University confirmed 20 cases as reported by WAFB on March 28; The Seattle Times reported that the University of Washington found 20 cases of mumps that were concentrated in the university's Greek system; Western Illinois University, Appalachian State University and others are all on also the list of universities that have broken out in cases of the mumps in the past few weeks.

Melissa Viray, deputy director for the Richmond City Health District, said no correlation has been found between the outbreaks and university campuses. However, mumps do spreads easily when people are in close contact with each other, such as attending the same class or living in the same dormitory.

"I think what we are seeing overall, not just in mumps but other preventable diseases, is that people are less afraid of diseases like measles, mumps and polio that they don't push getting a vaccine as much," Viray said. "They may not vaccinate their kids on the advised schedule, and it puts their children at risk."

The CDC recommend two doses of the MMR vaccine received at a young age. Even if students have received the MMR vaccinations, students should take extra precautions to avoid the mumps — wash hands regularly, do not share food or drink and stay home if sick.



What you should know about mumps:

- Mumps is a contagious disease caused by a virus.
- It typically starts with a few days of fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness, and loss of appetite, followed by swollen salivary glands.
- The mumps component of the MMR vaccine is about 88% (range: 66-95%) effective when a person gets two doses; one dose is about 78% (range: 49%-92%) effective.
- It spreads through saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose, or throat.
- Symptoms typically appear 16-18 days after infection, but this period can range from 12-25 days after infection.

Information from the CDC

Students combat minority mental health stigma

— “FATIGUE,” continued from page 1

tions were that you were going to speak a certain way.’ So all microaggressions have a message.”

Maddox and White decided to help others make sense of this term by bringing the Black Minds Matter Project to VCU, an initiative designed to prepare 21st Century African-American youth leaders in the areas of art, education, and political activism, according to the BMM website.

In partnership with the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and VCU Res Life, students and faculty held a summit from March 20-22 with workshops, mixers and roundtable discussions to “provide a space for open discussion, education, empowerment and healing” for people of color affected by racism, according to White.

Maddox had the idea to bring BMM to campus after returning to VCU last fall feeling “uneasy” about the deaths of Sterling, Castille and others while attending a “PWI” — a predominantly white institution. White said although VCU is well-known as being a diverse university, she feels the weight of racial battle fatigue every day.

“If I’m not taking an African-American studies class I’m still one of four black people in the class, sometimes the only one,” she said.

To cope with the deaths of Sterling and Castille and the general stress she feels as a black woman at a PWI, White reached out to University Counseling Services to navigate coping methods. However, White said she found the services to be underutilized by black students. She said this is in large part due to the “stigma” against mental health in the black community.

“There are varying reasons for why black people don’t feel comfortable talking about their mental illnesses,” White said. “That was one of the reasons we felt an importance to gather a bunch of people and create a space for black people to be able to get together and talk about the way they’d been feeling and maybe provide space for frankness but also for education.”

According to a 2013 study by Mental Health America, African Americans believe mild depression or anxiety would be considered “crazy” in their social circles.

The study states African Americans hold beliefs related to stigma, psychological openness and seeking help, which in turn affects their coping behaviors.

“There’s a stigma between seeking mental health in the black community,” Maddox said. “Not only is it a conversation for black students, alumni and the faculty here, it’s also for mental health professionals who are our allies, who want to help, but they just might not know where to start.”

Maddox said she visited UCS as well, but found the facility “wasn’t prepared.”

“It’s not that they didn’t care what we were going through, they just didn’t have the mindframe or skill set to address our issues,” Maddox said.

According to the UCS website, VCU offers a wide spread of counseling options, including individual therapy, couple’s therapy, group therapy, support groups and psychiatric services.

UCS Senior Staff Clinician Megan Guinn said said mental health services are often misunderstood as appropriate avenues for support across several communities due to “diverse values and beliefs” regarding where and how to find help.

“UCS makes an effort to reach out to various historically underrepresented groups on campus and provide information about mental health services and how these services can support students,” Guinn said. “Our goal is to put a face to the agency, and develop relationships with students to increase their comfort in seeking services.”

Guinn, who has a LGBTQIA focus, agreed that starting a conversation about microaggressions and racial battle fatigue is a strong step toward alleviating the stress students of color often feel.

“More knowledge and awareness is always a good thing,” Guinn said. “Even if you don’t have the words for what you are experiencing, someone might be able to recognize behaviors like decreased motivation, withdrawing from others, missing classes, unhealthy substance use, sadness, sleep problems and other symptoms that identify someone in distress.”

In contrast, several articles from conservative commentators caught wind of BMM at VCU and focused on their disagreement with racial battle fatigue instead of mental health as a whole.

““

Not only is it a conversation for black students, alumni and the faculty here, it’s also for mental health professionals who are our allies, who want to help, but they just might not know where to start.”

Brittney Maddox

One such publication, Freedom First, discussed how students of color struggle with mental illness “due to white people.” The writer, Stacy Jayhawk, questioned what “people that struggle with actual mental illnesses” would think about this.

Stacy Jayhawk did not respond for comment in time for publication. However, Freedom First’s comment section did not hesitate to contribute opinions on the matter, either.

“I recovered from a mental illness. And this is a blatant insult to people with REAL mental illnesses that require hospitalization,” wrote Facebook user Veronica Verratti.

“Well if they’d stop being so racist, maybe they wouldn’t be so fatigued. It takes a lot of energy being hateful and bitter,” wrote Facebook user Candi Brinson. “Most whites want to live and let live and don’t care what color people’s skin color is.”

Vice President of College Republicans at VCU John Rackowski echoed similar sentiments when asked about subject.

“It may be a cliché to state at this point, but that does not take away from the truth of the matter,” Rackowski said in an email. “Some people are looking to be offended, and are, for whatever reason, drawn to the idea of being a member of an oppressed group, constantly seeking to validate their beliefs that they are indeed oppressed.”

Rackowski said as a Republican, he understand persecution and that his beliefs make him a regular target for criticism. However, Rackowski

did not agree that racial battle fatigue is a problem, citing how he and those with similar views behave.

“In spite of all of this, we do not complain or wallow or get offended at minor things; instead, we laugh these things off and tell ourselves that this is ‘just the way things are’ - and if we want something to change, we actually work to bring about that change,” Rackowski said. “Having faced actual harassment, we simply laugh off minor insults or social miscues, instead of dwelling on them and internalizing them.”

Smith, the author of the study which coined the term, laughed when asked if people have expressed discontent with the concept of racial battle fatigue.

“There’s always people who will say ‘get over it,’ ‘it’s all in your head,’ ‘you’re whining, you’re crying,’ ‘put on your big boy/girl pants,’ — all these type of things,” Smith said. “But those are people who are really insensitive and/or don’t really understand the ramifications of some of the behaviors that they might participate in or others that they might know.”

It’s not just college campuses that are struggling to address diverse mental health needs. In February, Gov. Terry McAuliffe urged Virginia legislators to include in the state budget funding to conduct mental health screenings in jails and hire investigators to examine suspicious jail deaths.

According to a study by The Compensation Board, about 16 percent of Virginia’s jail inmates were “known or suspected to be mentally ill.”

In 2016, there were nearly 1.6 million Americans in state or federal prison. In 12 states — including Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois and Virginia — more than half the prison population is black, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

“We need someone in those jails who can determine if someone has an issue with mental health,” McAuliffe said at a news briefing.

In a letter to legislative leaders, McAuliffe called on the General Assembly to approve his budget request for \$4.2 million “to provide for training of jail staff in mental health screening and to provide grants to jails for mental health assessments.”

McAuliffe also asked for \$200,000 for the Virginia Department of Corrections to hire two investigators “to review deaths and other major situations in local and regional jails.”

The request for the investigators was spurred by the death of Jamycheal Mitchell in 2015. Mitchell, a 24-year-old African-American male, suffered from schizophrenia and was placed in the Hampton Roads Regional Jail in Portsmouth, Virginia, after stealing about \$5 of snacks from a 7-Eleven. Although a judge ordered that Mitchell be sent to a psychiatric hospital, he ended up staying in the jail for four months, lost 40 pounds and was found dead in his cell on Aug. 19, 2015.

When the General Assembly commenced on Feb. 25, legislatures allocated \$250,000 to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to prepare an implementation plan for the financial realignment of Virginia’s public behavioral health system.

Though both White and Maddox are graduating in May, they have plans to continue promoting BMM throughout Richmond. In addition to keeping their web presence active, Maddox touched on developing a podcast with a local radio station with a focus on Black Minds Matter.

Above all else, Smith said one of the strongest tools to combat racial battle fatigue is to simply engage productive discourse with those who both agree and disagree with the concept.

“Most rational people, even those that don’t agree with you initially, when you sit down and talk to them and you explain these things, what people of color are dealing with on a day to day basis,” Smith said. “Those who might not have agreed with you at the beginning then start to have a new appreciation for what you might be experiencing.”

Vigil honors the life of senior Sam Kwarteng

PHOTO BY JULIE TRIPP

Attendees shared about Kwarteng’s “hard-working,” “selfless” and “talented” characteristics, among others. Kwarteng was set to graduate a year early this May.

— “VIGIL,” continued from page 1

Kwarteng was a member of VCU’s Pi Kappa and was set to graduate a year early this May with his degree in Electrical Engineering. Many of his past and current fraternity brothers attended the vigil on campus.

During the candle-lit vigil, students, faculty, friends and members of the Kwarteng family gathered in a large circle to share memories of the young man who was repeatedly referenced as, among other characteristics, “hard-working,” “caring,” “selfless” and “talented.”

“He worked really hard,” said VCU Pi Kappa alum Gabriel Perez. “He never spoke ill of anyone and was one the most kind people I’ve ever known.”

A GoFundMe page with a goal of raising \$15,000 to help Kwarteng’s family cover funeral expenses launched on Friday. At press time, more than \$20,000 had been donated to the cause after only two days.

VCU Police Chief John Venuti sent an email to the community on April 14 to deliver a message about student safety.

“I want to assure you that VCU is committed to ensuring the safety of our students,” Venuti said. “In response to some of the recent events near campus, VCU Police have increased patrols and officer visibility.”

Last year marked Richmond’s deadliest in a decade, but 2017 homicide rates already surpass the number of killings this time last year. There

were 20 homicides as of April 13, 2016; on that date last week, there were 24 recorded in Richmond since the start of the year.

““

Sam moved himself (off campus) so he could focus on school. That’s why he’s graduating at 20-years-old, but there hasn’t been enough focus on who he was as a person in the media.”

Micky Atakilt

“A message about student safety” from VCU Police Chief John Venuti

To the VCU Community,

I want to assure you that VCU is committed to ensuring the safety of our students. In response to some of the recent events near campus, VCU Police have increased patrols and officer visibility. VCU Police take these incidents very seriously. VCU Police are working collaboratively with the Richmond Police Department to focus on areas on campus and in surrounding neighborhoods. Being visible on campus is a high priority for VCUPD, as it helps to deter criminal activity and puts officers in direct contact with the community.

The department investigates all tips about suspicious activity on campus and encourages people to report all threats made against others; this can be done by calling us at (804) 828-1234 or by submitting tips via the LiveSafe app.

If you see what you may think is suspicious activity please call us immediately.

If anyone feels unsafe at any time, they are encouraged to contact VCU Police. The VCU Police Department has hundreds of high-definition security cameras on both campuses and we encourage students to use RamSafe at night for transportation. The university is dedicated to communicating crime information through VCU alerts to our students so that they can make informed decisions about their safety.

John Venuti, VCU Chief of Police

VCU’s University Counseling Services offer help for those coping with death and grief.

Contact:

Monroe Park Campus (804) 828-6200

Medical Center Campus (804) 828-3964

Or visit <https://students.vcu.edu/counseling/>



PHOTO BY HIBA AHMAD

Tangier residents may be forced to move if sea levels continue rising.

WASHING AWAY

Climate change threatens Va. town, history

HIBA AHMAD
Online Editor

14 miles off the coast of Virginia in the Chesapeake Bay lies Tangier Island, a quiet island that's home to roughly 450 residents. But with rising sea levels and land erosion, the island is set to disappear into the bay by 2050, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Tangier is approximately 1.2 square miles in size and has been a victim to land erosion for decades. David Schulte, an environmental specialist from the Army Corps of Engineers, has been studying the island for more than a decade and said that Tangier is the "most dire situation" he's seen.

"(Tangier) is one of the first sites in America that is getting severely impacted by rising sea levels," Schulte said. "Enough that you actually have to consider moving the town in the near future."

According to Mayor James Eskridge, the island continued to lose dozens of feet off its shoreline every year until a sea wall, designed to stop sediment erosion, was erected in the 1970s.

In order to deter any further land loss, Eskridge said he hopes the island can secure state or federal government funding to build more seawalls along the other ends of the island.

"We're in need of help and we're hoping that we'll get that help before it's too late," Eskridge said.

However, the funding may be difficult to obtain after President Donald Trump announced a 30 percent cut in federal funding to the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA also provides funding for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation — a key player in Tangier's hopes of building more protective seawalls. CBF will suffer a 73 million

dollar cut, therefore the foundation will unlikely be able to begin new projects in the near future.

According to the U.S. Census, Tangier's population peaked in the 1930s when an upwards of 1,100 people inhabited the island. As of 2017, residents say the population is no more than 450 to 500 people.

Though Tangier's environmental turmoil has caused some residents to

water, sell their individual catches to local markets in Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C.

Milton Parks, a lifetime Tangier resident, said he used to be able to catch an upwards of 100 bushels of crabs a day; now, he brings home about 27.

"The best fishermen on the bay live here, but they're limited to what they can do," Parks said.

Tangier's residents are hopeful the Trump administration will be able to help curb what they consider "crippling regulations."

Just last month, President Trump signed four bills under the Congressional Review Act that would eliminate any regulations or rules that harm job growth in the United States.

"Any regulation that is outdated, unnecessary, bad for workers, or contrary to the national interest will be scrapped," President Trump said in a statement released by the White House.

As an alternative to the decrease in water-related jobs, islanders have taken up tugboating instead. However, it's not enough to keep young adults on the island.

Cameron Evans, a junior in high school, said another contributing factor to the island's decreasing population are the students who graduate and attend college on the mainland.

"I like to work on the water, but it's just not a steady job," Evans said. "People make money all the time doing it, but it's not guaranteed every day."

The problems that plague Tangier are not easily remedied, but Eskridge continues to urge the island's citizens to stay resilient.

"I don't want to lose hope, that's what I tell the citizens," Eskridge said. "Never lose hope, because if you lose hope then all is lost."

“

We're in need of help and we're hoping that we'll get that help before it's too late.”

James Eskridge
Tangier Mayor

leave, Eskridge said it's the government's regulations from the 1980s on crabbing, fishing and oysters that continue to be the driving force behind the island's dwindling population.

"Of course you need regulations," Eskridge said. "But you have to balance it out because you can regulate people out of business."

Fishing, crabbing and oysters has served as the backbone to Tangier's economy for generations. Watermen, those who make a living off of the

VCU partners with Richmond PD to combat youth violence

JIM THOMMA
Staff Writer

VCU Health is partnering with the Richmond Police Department and other community members to introduce RVA Alternative Pathways, an intervention program to reduce youth violence in the city.

The program was launched with a Robins Foundation Community Innovation Grant (CIG), a non-profit working to steer at-risk youth toward success.

The announcement comes as the city's homicide rate lingers at 2016 levels, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, which were the highest Richmond had seen in more than a decade.

The partnership, along with other CIG recipients, seek to reverse this trend. The Robins Foundation also provided half a million dollars earlier this year for the Richmond Public Schools Resiliency Partnership, a collaboration between ChildSavers and other youth advocacy groups to provide students in Richmond's East End with trauma-informed support services.

RVA Alternative Pathways combines two existing programs. VCU Health's Emerging Leaders program connects patients at VCU Medical Center's pediatric emergency room and adolescent clinic to mentoring and internships there. The LIFE program also offers an alternative to the juvenile justice system for Richmond Public School students who commit minor legal offenses. However, participants are instead given the opportunity to enroll in classes taught by RPD officers on subjects such as conflict resolution and substance abuse.

"There are a lot of organizations in Richmond that do great jobs, but we don't share information," said RPD Deputy Chief Steve Drew in a statement. "With RVA Alternative Pathways, we are going to open communication so that everyone can take part in the intervention of these young people and hopefully put them on a new direction in life."

As part of the RVA Alternative Pathways proposal, LIFE graduates would then be able to enroll in the Emerging Leaders program. In addition, health and police officials would be able to share resources and information to better address participants' needs. The hope is this broader network will help stem the problems associated with youth violence by giving kids in

'emerging' communities a leg up.

"The Foundation could not deny the impact each of the initiatives would have on the future of the Richmond community," said Robins Foundation Board Vice President Juliet Shield-Taylor. "With the efforts proposed by each, the

“

Changing the trajectory of young lives in the region has a rippling effect for Richmond.”

Tracie Mooneyham
The Robins Foundation

children win and the transformation begins."

Early intervention is key to transforming communities, according to Tracie Mooneyham, Special Projects Coordinator at the Robins Foundation.

"Changing the trajectory of young lives in the region has a rippling effect for Richmond," Mooneyham said, adding that countless community partners are working to do exactly that.

The first Robins Foundation CIG was awarded to Church Hill Activities and Tutoring more than three years ago, to help provide job training, marketable skills and employment opportunities for young people in the Church Hill neighborhood.

Mooneyham said ever since then, it's become increasingly apparent that partnerships and collaborative thinking are the drivers of much-needed change in the Richmond metro region.

"As we have seen with those who rise to top of this process, collaborating with other organizations can be leveraged to great effect when it comes to building a feasible and sustainable solution to some of the region's biggest issues," Mooneyham said.



RVA Alternative Pathways seeks to give at-risk youth a leg-up against violence.

PHOTO BY JULIE TRIPP

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RAMAWAY

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sports

Stat of the week:

Mo Alie-Cox's vertical jump and three-cone drill would have placed him seventh of the tight ends who participated in the NFL Combine.

Baseball still on top in Atlantic 10 play

JESSICA WETZLER
Contributing Writer

TUESDAY - U.Va.

The Rams opened up the week with a tough loss against the University of Virginia Cavaliers. With the game tied 4-4 in the bottom of the seventh inning, U.Va. would open up with a five-run inning to give a solid lead away from VCU.

Despite clutch hitting from the bottom of the Black and Gold lineup, the Rams dropped the game 9-4.

Virginia beat VCU to the scoreboard in the bottom of the second inning with a two-run homerun to left field from Cameron Simmons off of senior right hand pitcher Jonathan Ebersole to give the Hoos an early 2-0 lead.

The Rams responded in the top of the third inning, as junior infielder Daane Berezio lifted a sacrifice fly to score sophomore infielder Zac Ching and bring the score to 2-1.

In the bottom of the third, Virginia would come right back with a run to push their lead back to two, making the score 3-1, as the Cavaliers Robbie Coman singled home Adam Haseley.

However, the Rams refused to quit as they tied the game in the top of the fourth, all started by a double by senior infielder Darian Carpenter to the left center gap to score freshman infielder Paul Witt. Carpenter finished 1-for-4 on the game.

Junior outfielder Haiden Lamb capped off the scoring in the top of the fourth as his single up the middle scored Ching, tying the game at 3-3. Lamb, who finished 2-for-4, made the only multi-hit effort.

Both sides continued to go back and forth as each other as the Hoos came back with another run in the bottom of the fourth. Virginia's Ernie Clement put a single up the middle, scoring Justin Novak to give U.Va. the lead back, 4-3.

Ching would respond in the top of the sixth inning, as his RBI double to the left field corner would score junior infielder Mitchel Lacey and tie the game, 4-4. The

Rams would have runners on second and third after the double with only one out, but would fail to add any more runs in the inning.

Things broke open for Virginia in the bottom of the seventh inning, as they put up five runs with a pair of RBI doubles from Simmons and Novak, and a single from Jake McCarthy. After the scoring, the score stood 9-5.

Sophomore pitcher Garrett Pearson ended Virginia in the bottom of the eighth before the Rams went empty handed in the ninth, giving Virginia the 9-4 win.

FRIDAY - DAVIDSON

After a tough defeat against the University of Virginia, the Rams returned to the Diamond for game one of an Atlantic 10 three-game series against the Davidson Wildcats.

Things didn't get started until the top of the third inning, as Will Robertson took junior right hand pitcher Sean Thompson deep for a two run home run, giving Davidson an early 2-0 lead.

The Black and Gold responded in the bottom of the third, as Carpenter nearly tied the game with a home run, but his line drive hit off the top of the wall, scoring senior outfielder Logan Farrar to cut the lead to 2-1. Farrar led the offense with a 3-for-4 day that included a double, walk, RBI, and two runs scored.

The score would stand until the top of the fifth when Davidson struck back with another pair of runs as both Brian Fortier and Justin Lebek each hit RBI singles to extend the Wildcat lead to 4-1.

With the bases loaded in the top of the eighth and with only one out, it looked as if VCU might turn a double play to get out of the inning and out of the jam. However, Robertson beat out the back end of the play at first to allow a run to score. That would pump the Davidson lead to 5-1.

With the game 5-1 headed into the bottom of the ninth, the VCU Rams would make a solid comeback effort, putting up three runs in the final frame and leaving the tying run at third base. Haiden Lamb would start things off with a one out single through

the left side for his second hit of the day.

Senior catcher Dylan Isquirdo picked the right time for his only hit of the ballgame up the middle, putting runners at first and third for Farrar. His single would score Lamb, as all the runners would trade places putting runners first and third again and put the score at 5-2.

Witt followed up by getting hit by a pitch, loading the bases for Carpenter. He smacked a single into center, scoring two runs and bringing the Rams within one point from tying the game. Witt would scamper to third.

Freshman infielder Steven Carpenter would come in to pinch hit for Lacey, but ground out to the shortstop to end the ballgame, cutting the Rams comeback short.

SATURDAY - DAVIDSON

After Friday night's loss, the Rams responded in a big way during game two of the three game series Saturday afternoon. The black and gold team scored five runs in the bottom of the first inning and never looked back.

Senior left hand pitcher Brooks Vial spun a quality six innings of shutout baseball, scattering nine hits, one walk, and striking out four for his fifth win of the season.

Farrar wasted no time at all getting the Rams on the board in the bottom of the first inning. After a leadoff single by Berezio, Farrar launched a two-run home run, putting the Rams up to an early lead, 2-0.

As the Rams kept up with the hits, both Steven Carpenter and Witt finished with two hits apiece. Darian Carpenter put on a hitting clinic, extended the lead to 3-0. Carpenter finished the game going 3-for-4 with a double, home run, walk, three RBI and three runs scored. He now leads VCU in doubles with 11 on the season.

Freshman infielder Brett Willett added a sacrifice fly, along with an RBI single from Ching to make things 5-0 after one inning of play.

The big innings were far from over as the Rams piled on another chunk of runs in the bottom of the fifth inning. Featured by RBI doubles from Darian Carpenter and

Ching, the Rams built up a 9-0 lead after five innings of play.

VCU would add two in the bottom of the sixth inning, as Steven Carpenter forced an error from the pitcher on a ground ball just to the side of the pitcher's mound. The throwing error would allow Farrar to score from first. Witt would follow with a groundout to score Carpenter to push the Ram lead to 11-0.

Farrar was back in the mix with another RBI in the bottom of the seventh, as his sacrifice fly gave the Rams a 12-0 lead. Farrar wouldn't be outdone, as his 2-for-4 afternoon with a home run, three RBI, and two runs scored would pace the top of the lineup.

A solo home run from Darian Carpenter in the bottom of the eighth inning would cap off the scoring, giving the Rams a 13-0 lead.

Senior right hand pitcher Jonathan Ebersole and Pearson teamed up to take care of the seventh, eighth, and ninth innings in securing the VCU win. Behind 17 hits, the Rams defeated the Davidson Wildcats by a final score of 14-0. Every batter in VCU's starting nine would record a hit in the ballgame.

SUNDAY - DAVIDSON

The final Atlantic 10 weekend series game was underway on Sunday afternoon as the Rams took on Davidson for the third time. After a tough beginning, the Black and Gold team took home another series win to beat the Wildcats 11-4. The win allowed the Rams to keep first place in the Atlantic 10.

Davidson made the first move in the top of the third inning, as a leadoff triple from Justin Lebek would lead to an RBI groundout, giving Davidson the 1-0 lead.

The Wildcats would add two more unearned runs in the top of the third as Brian Fortier singled into center field with the bases loaded, scoring two and putting the score at 3-0.

The Rams got on the scoreboard in the bottom of the third, as Darian Carpenter drew a bases loaded walk with two outs to force a run home, cutting the score 3-1.

The black and gold would come within

one run in the bottom of the fourth, as Isquirdo lined a single into left field, scoring Ching from second to put the score at 3-2.

Davidson's Will Robertson would bring the score back to a two run lead for Davidson, 4-2, with a solo home run in the top of the fifth inning.

VCU refused to go down without a fight, as they put up three runs in the bottom of the fifth to take a 5-4 lead. Thanks to a bases loaded walk from Ching, that led to a sacrifice fly from Lamb and RBI single from Isquirdo to get the job done. Isquirdo notched his first three-hit game of the season, going 3-for-5 with a double, two RBI, and a run scored.

Steven Carpenter added to the lead in the bottom of the sixth inning, as would Willett. Carpenter would hit an RBI single to score Farrar who doubled, while Willett pinch hit for Lacey and hit a sacrifice fly to push the Rams lead to 7-4.

Ching added the exclamation point on the five-run sixth inning, as he would blast a three-run home run over the left field wall to give VCU a 10-4 lead. Ching took full advantage of the offense, going 3-for-4 with a home run, double, five RBI, two runs scored, and a walk. This was second game this season a Ram would record five RBI or more in a single game. Ching also extended his hitting streak to seven games.

Ching would add the final run of the day for the Rams in the bottom of the eighth, as he singled into center field giving the Rams the 11-4 lead.

Donko shut down the Wildcats over the final 3.1 innings, grabbing the Rams 10th Atlantic 10 win of the season. Donko collected his eighth save of the season as the shutout relief pitcher.

The Rams return to action this Tuesday against the VMI Keydets. First pitch is set for 6:30 p.m. at The Diamond.

Alie-Cox impresses scouts at NFL workout

Seven NFL teams expressed interest after Alie-Cox completed the 90-minute workout.

NICK VERSAW
Staff Writer

VCU fan-favorite Mo Alie-Cox had all but two NFL teams show up to his official workout Tuesday in Mechanicsville, where the now former basketball star showcased the physical gifts that made him a force on the hardwood for the Black and Gold.

Interest in the 6-foot-6, 275 pound big man has been widespread across the league after the NFL determined the former Ram would enter the league as a free agent rather than through the draft.

"We expected this many (...) I had had a lot of teams call me early," Alie-Cox said. "I think they were surprised at some of my measurements and the way I was moving — probably the biggest thing was how well I caught the ball. I got good feedback from that, and I haven't really heard too much, because I've been busy doing meetings right after."

Alie-Cox's impressive performance included a 4.75 second 40-yard dash, 35.5 inch vertical jump and a 7.25 second three-cone drill. The latter two figures would have placed him seventh out of the tight ends who participated in the NFL Combine earlier this spring.

While those numbers won't turn heads at first glance, they are especially promising considering the Alexandria product had only a week's worth of preparation following the Black and Gold's arduous 2016-17 basketball season, and it was just the third time Alie-Cox had ever ran the 40-yard dash.

In addition, Alie-Cox — who hasn't played the sport since ninth grade — participated in several football-related drills, including catching passes from former Henrico High quarterback Malcolm Bell.

"He's a beast — he's big, he's long and he has range," Bell said. "His hands are humongous. In one drill, we had to throw the ball pretty hard to him, and he was just absorbing it."

Following the 90-minute workout, Alie-Cox met privately with representatives from the Tennessee Titans, Miami Dolphins and Baltimore Ravens.

In the days following the workout, he has been slated to meet with a number of other organizations, including the Kansas City Chiefs, Indianapolis Colts, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the New York Jets, and will continue to meet with teams leading up to this month's NFL Draft in Philadelphia.

Alie-Cox's agent, Joe Flanagan of BTI Sports, said several scouts left the workout impressed with the raw talent of the former VCU star, but assured his client was more than just potential.

"This is not a novelty," Flanagan said. "Mo is a very special athlete. I had more than one scout turn around to me today and say 'You've got something special'. He possesses a lot of traits that you just can't teach...With time, he's going to be a special football player."

Alie-Cox wouldn't be the first college basketball star turned NFL tight end. The list of successful crossovers include household names the likes of Tony Gonzalez, Antonio Gates and Jimmy Graham. Cowboys tight end Jason Witten, after watching the Rams back in 2015, even urged Alie-Cox to consider making the switch once his basketball career was over.

Alie-Cox now enters the waiting game while teams mull their options heading into the draft. However, he said he's willing to wait it out to find the right fit.

"I just want to put myself in a situation where I have a great opportunity to learn," he said. "There's going to be a huge learning curve."

"We haven't really thought about contracts or anything like that," Alie-Cox added. "We wanted to get the workout out the way before focusing on anything else."

Flanagan said he expects Alie-Cox to sign before the NFL Draft, which takes place April 27-29 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

RAM IN ACTION: Mitchel Lacey

ADAM CHEEK
Contributing Writer

Junior infielder Mitchel Lacey is having a breakthrough season at the plate and in the field for the VCU Rams.

After a slow rookie year in the 2014-15 season, Lacey picked up the pace in 2015-16, racking up 12 hits and four runs in just 48 at-bats. This season, Lacey has seen more time at the plate and increased his production accordingly. So far this season, Lacey has 15 runs and 22 hits.

Prior to the 2017 season, Lacey used the offseason to focus on hitting mechanics and improving his performance at the plate.

"I underwent a complete swing change to develop more power, and I gained 20 pounds to help with my ability to square balls up and have more power," Lacey said.

This new hitting style and stance has made a noteworthy impact on improving his performance and his statistics prove it.

This season, Lacey's batting average is .253 and he is posting a .322 slugging percentage.

Lacey said he continued with the same plate approach, but added he "became more aggressive" and began "trying to get his at-bat over with in the first couple of pitches."

He also said he began swinging more early on in the count when he was ahead of the pitcher, and this prevented him from facing two-strike situations often.

Lacey said the reason the Black and Gold have played solid so far is because each player steps up when the team needs them most.

"I think that our team is really good at fighting back to stay in the game," Lacey said. "We compete for the whole nine innings and, although it's a bit of a cliché, we put a lot of emphasis on being focused from pitch one."

Lacey also discussed how, while sometimes it takes the team a few innings to really get going, being locked in helps the team a lot.

"There's never a doubt in my mind or a lack of confidence that we'll come back," Lacey said.

Lacey said the Rams are in a good place mentally as the season hits the midway point.

"Now that the season's in full swing, we're really finding who we are, and we need to focus on not changing but so much," Lacey said.

The team's winning record speaks for itself, and the Rams continue to consistently notch wins over tough rivals, and currently sit at 8 wins in the A-10 conference.

"The team has been exceptional at discovering what we're really good and successful at, and continuing with what we've been doing and trusting that we keep good at-bats, and that we have the right formula to do so," Lacey said.

In the offseason, as well as working on his swing, Lacey played local ball in the Piedmont League and worked out on campus to fine-tune the various aspects of his performance.

While playing in the minors or eventually going pro is "always the dream," Lacey went on to say that he aspires to enter medical school and further his education, but will always have future baseball at the number-two item in his list of priorities.

When asked what the experience was like playing at The Diamond, rather than a college park, he remarked on how large the stadium was, and said that although the dimensions of the field were a bit daunting and overwhelming at first, he adjusted quickly.

"You realize it's the same field," Lacey said. "There's still 90 feet between the bases and it's the same size field."

Mitchel Lacey's excitement for the weekend series was evident, and he seemed eager to gain some retribution for the Davidson University Wildcats' wins over the Rams last year.



This season, the junior infielder's batting average is .253 and he is posting a .322 slugging percentage.

PRESS BOX

Most Valuable Perception

ZACH JOACHIM
Sports Editor

The race for the 2016-17 NBA MVP award is the most widely debated sporting honor in recent memory.

But before we get into the cases for each of the leading candidates, let us ask — what is an MVP, anyway?

“TRIPLE DOUB —,” in due time, my friend.

“Most Valuable Player” is a completely arbitrary standard by which we choose who is honored as the top performer in each of the major American sports. Whether it’s the NBA, NFL, MLB or NHL, this is the title the sports world has chosen to bestow upon its athletes worthy of the highest honor — the question is, what does it mean?

There is no single answer, and that’s simultaneously the problem with and beauty of the award. The standard is subjective, contingent upon one’s perception of what “most valuable” entails. So we can argue all day about what constitutes a player’s value, but it is a cyclical debate with no right or wrong to it, only true opinion.

“It all depends on how you want to define what an MVP is,” said LeBron James, a four-time winner of the NBA’s highest honor who is once again embroiled in the debate this year. “I’ve been fortunate to win the trophy four times, but I’ve been the MVP of my team for a long time — just because of the way I lead and the way I approach us being professionals off the floor.”

Let’s start with James for the sake of argumentation, because he is who I would vote for.

“BUT TRIPLE DOUB —,” shush, we’ll get to that.

There is a faction of voters and fans who believe, simply, that the best player in the league is almost always inherently the most valuable. I count myself among these audacious heretics.

Think of it in these terms — if we split the league apart and re-drafted with a single Championship season in mind, 95 percent of us would take LeBron James first overall. The other five percent would probably take Kawhi Leonard of the San Antonio Spurs, the best two-way and most efficient player in the league, and another off-beat MVP candidate.

If that doesn’t constitute most valuable, I’m not sure what does.

“WESTBROOK’S TRIPLE DOUB —,” yes, yes, I know, we’re getting there.

Neither James nor Leonard will bring home the award this year, much to the chagrin of purists such as myself.

There is a pair of players who have just made too much noise with their obscene usage levels, gaudy statistical achievements and compelling narratives to be ignored by the public eye, and that’s ok.

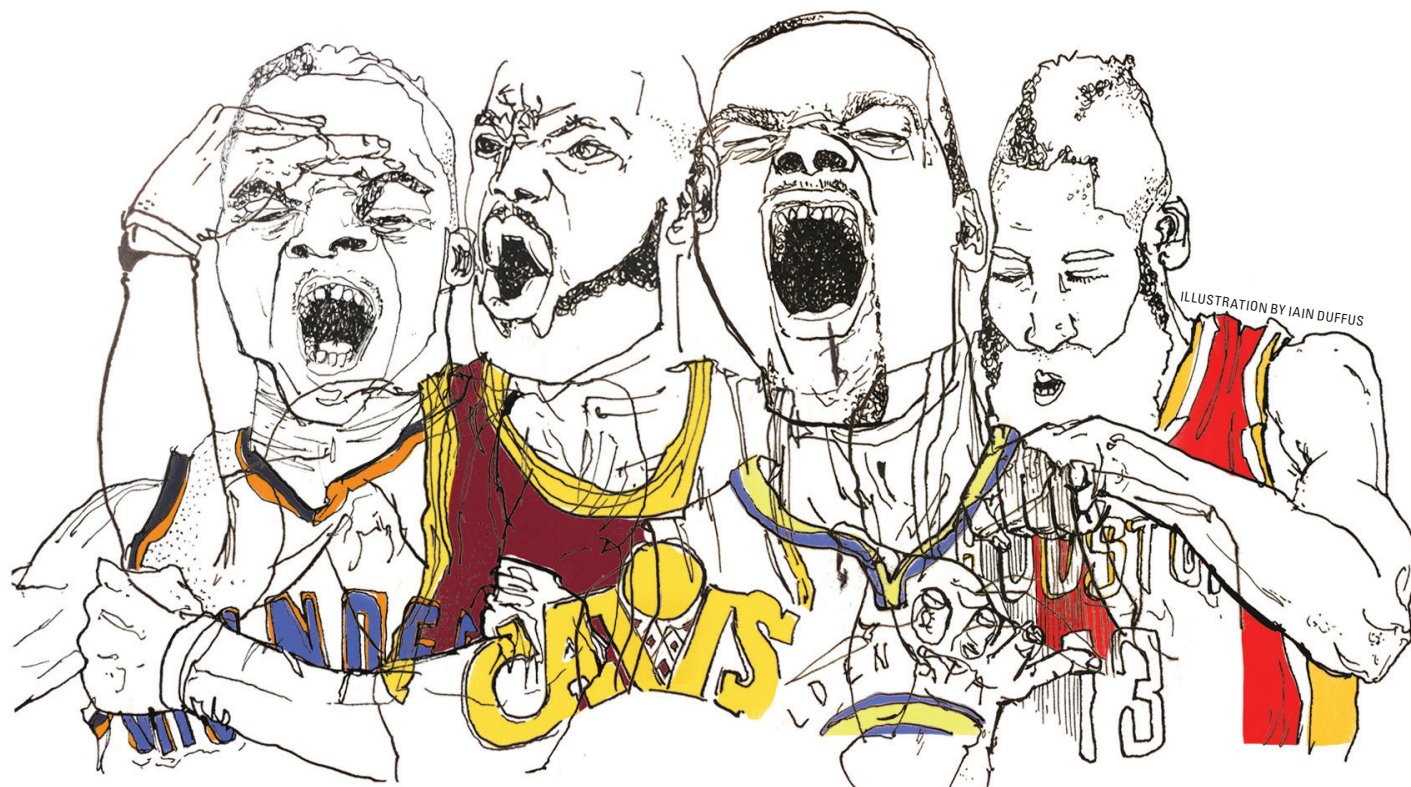
Either Russell Westbrook or James Harden will be the NBA MVP this year.

There are very good reasons why Westbrook and Harden are the consensus frontrunners, and we’ll start with those before poking — or rather, highlighting — the sizeable holes in their platforms.

Harden has averaged 29.1 points, 11.3 assists and 8.2 rebounds per game this season while shooting an efficient 44 percent from the floor. “The Beard” also led the league in points created per game off assists at a clip of 29.1 and got to the free-throw line more than anybody else. The lefty guard’s offensive artistry is captivating for even the casual basketball fan, and he led his Houston Rockets to the league’s third-best record at 55-27.

Westbrook became the second player in NBA history to average a triple double (31.6 points, 10.7 rebounds and 10.4 assists per game), and broke Oscar Robertson’s NBA record of 41 triple doubles in a single season. For this reason he is widely perceived as the favorite to bring home MVP honors. “Brodie” also led the league in scoring and carried a laughable Oklahoma City Thunder roster to the tenth best record in the league at 47-35.

“I could not be happier for him,” Robertson said. “I admire Westbrook’s all-around command of the game. He is a marvellous



athlete who plays with intensity and flair and is exciting to watch.”

The compelling narrative of Westbrook’s 2017 adds to the aura of his record breaking season.

Former MVP Kevin Durant left his longtime running mate in OKC to join the vaunted Golden State Warriors this past offseason, a move met with widespread scrutiny which prompted many to mock Durant to the tune of “if ya can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.”

This has led to public sympathy for Westbrook, who was left to single-handedly keep the Thunder from plummeting to the basement of the NBA.

Hence, Westbrook also shattered the NBA’s all-time record for usage in a season, meaning he has had more possessions, took more shots and had the ball in his hands more than anybody in the history of the league.

This is where the pitfalls in his case for MVP become glaring.

“As an athlete in a team sport, your goal first and foremost is to win games,” Robertson said. “More than anything else, records are great fodder for the fans, the talking heads, the bloggers and all the other experts who love to engage in debates about who is best, and why.”

Robertson finished third in MVP voting the year he averaged a triple double. When it all comes down to it, the mark is nothing more than a number, and should not constitute Westbrook’s value as a player.

Don’t get me wrong, Westbrook and Harden have been the most exciting players in the league this year, and their offensive achievements have been remarkable. If that’s what dictates “most valuable” to you, I completely understand. It is tough to ignore the historically sensational seasons the former OKC teammates are having.

With 1.8 more rebounds per game, however, Harden would also average a triple double. 1.8 rebounds, from a guard — that’s what makes the difference in who the most valuable player in the league is?

Westbrook, who’s shooting efficiency falls well below that of our other three candidates, led the league in uncontested rebounds this season, and has personally admitted to “stat-hunting” in pursuit of the triple double mark.

Neither Harden nor Westbrook play a lick of defense either, and

frankly, neither of their teams have much of a shot at even reaching their conference finals — much less the NBA Finals — with Leonard’s Spurs and Durant’s Warriors standing in their way.

Meanwhile, James is looking to reach his seventh consecutive NBA finals and led the league in gross production per 100 possessions. He is still indisputably the best player in the world, he just isn’t allotted the unprecedented usage levels which Harden and Westbrook enjoy.

Leonard is still widely perceived as the best perimeter defender in the NBA, and shattered offensive efficiency records in a modern NBA obsessed with jacking up as many shots as can possibly be taken in 48 minutes of basketball.

“He’s never going to be a towel waver,” said Spur’s coach Gregg Popovich of Leonard. “He speaks to me about things that he sees if he’s not happy with what’s going on on the court. I’d rather have him do that than beat his chest and wiggle his shoulders and stare at the camera and all that other crap.”

I’m not a “towel-waver” MVP kinda person, and Gregg Popovich obviously isn’t either.

Russell Westbrook and James Harden, however spectacular their seasons have been, are “towel-wavers.” They enjoy the limelight associated with being dynamos on the offensive side of the ball in the regular season.

This is why one of them will probably win the NBA MVP — because they are far and away the most exciting players in the league.

“Exciting” does not translate to “valuable” for me, but it’s OK if it does for you. That’s the beauty of this award — there is no universal standard to adhere to, we’re all allowed to have our own opinions.

“BUT 42 TRIPLE DOUBL —,” give it a rest, he’s probably going to win it regardless of how some people feel about the statistic.

I’m not saying Westbrook and Harden don’t deserve to win the award. I’m only saying that, in a season with a historically deep race for MVP, one’s perception of “most valuable” means everything when it comes to splitting hairs between four guys who are all deserving of the highest individual honor American sports has to offer.

Tennis closes season with a ‘W’ against W&M

RODNEY ROBINSON
Contributing Writer

The Rams won a tough matchup 4-3 against the College of William & Mary at the Millie West Tennis Facility last Wednesday.

After losing three straight matches, the Rams bounced back to finish the season strong on the road against the Tribe. The Rams got off to a quick start in the match, stringing together two doubles’ victories in a row.

Seniors Daryl Monfils and Marten Jonsson got the first doubles’ victory for the Rams, 6-2. Monfils and Jonsson improved their records to an astonishing 14-5 overall on the season.

Sophomores Vitor Lima and Arvid Noren secured a doubles’ point for the Rams as they were victorious, 6-1.

The Tribe took the first singles’ match against the Rams, but VCU reeled off three consecutive wins to put the match away.

Throughout the season, the Rams have received major contributions from their underclassmen, and against the Tribe the Rams received another vital push from the younger team members.

Freshmen Javier Amantegui and Rivero Crespo and sophomore Arvid Noren were the driving force for the Rams on Wednesday.

Amantegui got the match streak underway by defeating Damon Niquet in straight sets, 6-3 6-1, improving to 17-12 on the season in singles’ play.

Noren followed with his team high 18th victory as he defeated Addison Appleby in straight sets 6-4, 6-1. Crespo secured the victory for the Rams as he picked up his 8th victory on the season in straight sets 6-3, 6-2.

The Rams finish the season 11-11, with a 10-3 record at home. After the victory on Wednesday, the Rams are poised to make a deep tournament run.

With conference tournament play approaching, the Rams look to carry the momentum of this close victory against William & Mary and apply it in the tournament.

Seniors Daryl Monfils and Martin Jonsson look to bring veteran leadership in the A-10 Tournament as they have the team’s best double’s record, 14-5, this season.

In singles’ competition, the Rams look for contributions from underclassmen Noren and Amantegui. Amantegui and Noren led the Rams in the number of singles’ victories on the season.

Noren finished with the highest winning percentage for the Rams this season.

The Rams look to make a deep Men’s A-10 Tournament run in Orlando starting next Thursday.



Men’s tennis won 4-3 against the College of William & Mary last Wednesday in their final match of the regular season.

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Come to a meeting or contact one of the editors!

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SPECTRUM FRIDAY 4:00 P.M.

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OPINION

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spectrum

On this day...
in 1991, Nirvana performed "Smells Like Teen Spirit" live for the first time at the Ok Hotel in Seattle.

The Black Panther Party 50 years later

KEYRIS MANZANARES & SIONA PTEROUS
Contributing Writer & Spectrum Editor

Students and community members had fists raised at a packed panel event exploring the lessons and legacies of the Black Panther Party at The Depot last week.

The event was hosted by the VCU African-American Studies Department and held in celebration of the Black Panther Party's 50th anniversary. Three former Panthers — Sekou Odinga, Jihad Abdulmumit and Pamela Hannah — were invited to speak.

"(A) common misunderstanding is that the Black Panther Party was nothing more than a violent, terrorist group, full of criminals and sociopolitical outcasts," said Abdulmumit, a former BPP member and current Richmond resident who now works in a local health clinic and is active with VCU's Muslim Student Association.

Abdulmumit co-founded a Black Panther Party chapter in his New Jersey hometown, where he is no longer able to reside there due to a robbery conviction.

For Abdulmumit, the robbery he was convicted for, much like the creation of the Black Panther for Self Defense, was crucial to the development and flourishing of the Black Panther Movement, the black power movement and for furthering civil rights.

"Here we are 40 years later, and people may look at me as a criminal bank robber. But I never kept that money; I put it directly back into the work, for our community," Abdulmumit told Richmond Magazine.

The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. The party began as a community service organization that focused on protecting and promoting the civil rights of oppressed citizens in the midst of the civil rights era.

Dressed in black and carrying open weapons, the Black Panthers of Defense quickly became a divisive entity in California. Soon, the movement spread to New York, where Sekou Odinga was a founding member of the east coast chapter.

"Young people are the future," Odinga said. "What I would like people to take away from this, here tonight, is to go out and organize groups and to stand up for what they believe in."

Student Asia McCall said that as a black muslim-American she worries about standing up and fighting

for what she believes in.

"To me it's so important to be here today and hear their stories," McCall said. "The color of my skin has an embedded history of social demonstrations that changed the world around me. But my contribution to this social movement — that is so desperately needed in light of the new presidency and Black Lives Matter to me is still grey."

Odinga's legacy and contribution to the Black Panther Movement attracted much of the public to the event. Odinga told the crowd that the fight for social change is always on-going and he remembers the moment where he knew he had to go into underground work as part of the Black Liberation Movement.

On Jan. 17, 1969, Odinga's influence as a Black Panther member grew when a rival black nationalist group killed two Panthers from California — Alprentis "Bunchy" Carter and John Huggins. A Panther from Odinga's New York chapter was in police custody and had been beaten brutally; the police were actively searching for Odinga in connection to a police shooting.

"That was probably the most terrifying and emotional experience I have had as a Black Panther," Odinga said.

Odinga was arrested on six counts of attempted murder and was convicted in 1984. He was sentenced to a consecutive 25-years-to-life in state prison as well as 40 years in federal court.

Odinga was released from prison on Nov. 25, 2014. He now runs the Jericho Movement which focuses on the rights of political prisoners in the United States — some of which have been in jail since the height of movements in the 1960s and 70s.

Hannah said the total amount of time the remaining incarcerated members of the party are serving totals around 800 years.

"Many of these people, they aren't going to live out their sentence," Hannah said. "They will die before they can do that."

Hannah also commented on the similarities between her native city of Harlem and Richmond, Va.

"I was driving around the city today and it looks like gentrification," Hanna said to the crowd. "The conditions that brought myself to the BPP in 1969 still exist today."

During her portion of the panel, Hannah repeatedly

emphasized the importance of young people looking critically into and at their communities.

"(Activism) doesn't have to be real complicated, this isn't a fancy community," Hannah said. "Know your resources, focus on your resources and in the meantime instead of saving the world start with saving your community — save each other."

Meanwhile, a group identified as "ASH Antifa Seven Hills - Antifascists Seven Hills" on Facebook shared a widely-circulated post stating the VCU Police Department were outside stopping attendees who wished to enter the over-crowded event.

"As this was happening, a young person from outside tried to walk past a cop, calmly, and he was nearly thrown to the ground, whipped around," reads ASH Antifa Facebook post. "I've seen (the VCU PD) be more aggressive and physically violent more often than RPD, and that's no f***ing compliment. They are the enforcement arm of VCU's colonization of richmond."

VCU PD public information officer Corey Byers said the public was not allowed in the venue at that time due to safety concerns because the crowd was over-capacity and event organizers asked for assistance.

"Despite several communications from event organizers to those outside that no one else could be admitted, one person ran past an officer and entered the building," Byers wrote in an email. "(The person) was briefly detained and escorted out of The Depot. The man was not arrested and no charges are pending. He was not a VCU student."

Byers said the VCU PD reviewed the incident the next morning, and Police Chief John Venuti believes officers at the event should have communicated more clearly with guests outside to explain why no one was being admitted into the building even after other participants left the event.

Richmond Struggle, a local activist group, gathered in the VCU compass on Wednesday to protest the police interaction on Tuesday evening and raise awareness of police overreach in day-to-day interactions, according to a Facebook post about the demonstration.

"Were here to protest VCU PD in general," said Foster McClain, a member of Richmond Struggle. "With its policies of racial profiling and generally serving as the shock troops for VCU's gentrification plan for Richmond."

Richmond Struggle said they intend on initiating

more events addressing police militarization and gentrification in Richmond in upcoming weeks.

There has been a drastic decrease in complaints against officers, use of force by officers and a decrease in bias-based complaints since 2010 when Venuti became Chief of VCU Police.

In the 2009-10 school year there were 74 such complaints, as of November 2015 there were two. The VCU PD also engaged in bias training that year to further mitigate such incidents and help make officers more aware of their interactions with the community.

“

(Activism) doesn't have to be real complicated, this isn't a fancy community," Hanna said. "Know your resources, focus on your resources and in the meantime instead of saving the world start with saving your community— save each other."

Pamela Hannah
Former Panther



Jihad Abdulmumit, a former Black Panther Party Member and Richmond activist, lead lecture attendees in a chant used during his time with the BPP.

Pamela Hannah compared the gentrification she witnessed in Richmond to her native city of Harlem, New York.



'Forbidden' explores being undocumented and queer in rural America

GEORGIA GEEN
Staff Writer

The VCU Division for Inclusive Excellence hosted a screening of "Forbidden: Undocumented and Queer in Rural America," a documentary about of Moises Serrano, a queer undocumented immigrant and advocate at all intersections of his identity.

The film's producer, writer and director Tiffany Rhynard and the film's editor Heather Mathews were present at the screening and participated in a panel discussion afterwards. Serrano was originally going to attend, but was unable because of schedule conflicts.

Serrano was less than two years old when his family crossed from Mexico into the U.S., settling in Ladkin Co., N.C. Shots of the state's shops and natural landscape are sandwiched between sections of the documentary.

"It felt really necessary to be film-

ing in that rural area because it's so different than an urban environment where you have access to a lot of resources," Rhynard said. "That felt really clear, that it's just harder to get things done."

Rhynard said that when they start filming, the crew wasn't sure how the story would pan out.

"We definitely wanted the beginning of the film to be Moises telling his own story, describing who he was and where he came from," Mathews said.

Numerous marches and rallies take place throughout the documentary. Some feature chants such as, "we're here, we're queer" and "undocumented and without fear." In one scene, Serrano speaks to a group of organizers and switches between Spanish and English every few sentences so each phrase would be expressed in both languages.

Serrano said in the documentary that he feels privileged both for his light skin and ability to speak Eng-

lish fluently.

The words of President Donald Trump on the campaign trail, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," start of the documentary, but the desire many undocumented students have to obtain higher education is the central focus in "Forbidden."

"The college piece (of "Forbidden") actually came in later. We didn't know it was going to happen, but we knew it was an important story," Rhynard said.

Immigration lawyer Ann Marie Dooley discussed the implications of the Obama - era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which allows renewable deferred action from deportation for many undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors. Dooley described the policy as a "Band-Aid."

DACA allowed Serrano to apply to college, which wasn't previously possible for undocumented immigrants in North Carolina. He now

attends Sarah Lawrence College.

Members of Serrano's family also reflect on their own challenges, including crossing the border.

"We knew that the story of his parents journeying across the desert, to bring their family here for a better life was a story that needed to be told," Rhynard said.

According to Rhynard, there were originally 250 hours of footage and the first cut of the film was more than four hours long.

"I worked in black hole for six months getting the first cut together," Mathews said.

Originally, Mathews said the documentary focused equally on Serrano's experiences as a queer man, but eventually decided to focus more on his story as an undocumented immigrant because it's a pressing issue that doesn't have as much attention.

Rhynard said she became very close to both Serrano and his family through the filming process.

"I feel very blessed that I got to

know this young man and his family. I feel like my life is richer because of it," Rhynard said. "The film has

been a labor of love, a lot of time and energy put into it, but that also felt really necessary."



Director Tiffany Rhynard (right) and editor Heather Mathews (center) took questions from the audience at the event.

“Queer Threads” weaves together art and community



VCUarts hosted “Queer Threads” to use craft and design as a way to invite open dialogue about queer identities.

LIA TABACKMAN
Contributing Writer

“When my grandma let me change the fabrics of her quilt, I had this epiphany that I could be safe there - and that it was something I could be included in. So instead of being angry about the system, I started to think - how can I turn this into something positive?”

—Ramekon O’Arwisters

Ramekon O’Arwisters is one of five artists whose work was highlighted in Virginia Commonwealth University’s event series; “Queer Threads: Making and Talking Fiber and Fashion.” O’Arwisters spent his childhood questioning how to exist as a gay black man living in the South and shared how his relationship with textiles spawned from his childhood hobby of sewing and quilting with his mother and grandmother.

“What I really wanted was to be accepted, heard and appreciated for my creative vision,” O’Arwisters said. “So I stopped asking people to accept me and started to liberate myself.”

To O’Arwisters, crocheting was an escape from the constraints of being told “who to be” and “what to do,” and allowed him to begin accepting himself on his own terms. His experiences were shared alongside those of fellow artists and curators John Caich, Cindy Baker and Jeanne Vaccaro, during the symposium’s collaborative forum on April 12. Moderated by event coordinators and craft and material study professors Aaron McIntosh and Erika Diamond, the forum was part of a series of events designed to promote discussion about the intersections between queerness, body image, textiles and the community.

The week’s events were funded by the VCUarts Inclusion Infusion Initiative and hosted by the Department of Craft and Material studies - but the Queer Threads initiative began years before arriving at VCU. The idea was originally introduced at New York’s Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art an art show curated by panelist John Caich — an independent curator who says he is fascinated by the ideas of curation as a form of communication and of queerness as both a verb and an adjective.

He talked extensively about how queerness was threaded through his various art curations and addressed the concept of “the queering of materials” — like using thread to create a drawing, creating a painting with felt or macramé with rip cords.

“Queering is something that can be done to art,” Caich said. “There can be a queering of practices or a queering of materials — so it’s important to consider the gestures and practices that the artist used to compose the piece.”

Caich explained that he envisioned the Queer Threads curation as a show that would bring new context to the word “queerness” and show it as an adjective that means “to see a material or an object in a way that goes against its intended use.” For artist Cindy Baker, this means creating pieces that circumvent conventional ideas of how art should be created and understood.

“I wanted to make things that queered art and that people wouldn’t recognize as art because it was important for me to get people to think about the ideas that I was talking about before they put a label on it and dismissed it as art,” Baker said. “I want to take raw materials and turn them into things that make you ask, ‘what the hell is this?’”

Through displaying queer content directly through the fiber craft tradition, Caich hoped to “curate culture into a haptic experience” while intertwining established and emerging artists together.

“I’m grateful that in collecting these moments and these artists at this time, we can keep a dialogue going and ask more questions than I ever could as one person.” Caich said. “There is a sense of community formed among the artists, to encourage each others practice, ask questions, and boost each others confidence.”

The week’s events also included a crochet-jam where participants gathered at Diversity Richmond to create yarn from used clothing and collaboratively crochet a massive textile. O’Arwisters explained that through physically connecting people through yarn, the crochet jams foster a culture of social creativity, individuality, and liberation.

“We are not focusing on the product,” O’Arwisters said. “We are focusing on telling stories and working together.” He went on to explain that crochet jams are a way to open up the art world and step away from the culture of exclusivity that is often prevalent within art museums and galleries. “It is liberating to not be told what to do,” O’Arwisters said. “In a crochet jam, everyone is included. They’re not being told what to do and they are not being judged. So I decided that that would be my art - to give to others what I myself needed.”

What I really wanted was to be accepted, heard and appreciated for my creative vision. So I stopped asking people to accept me and started to liberate myself.”

Ramekon O’Arwisters

A look behind NON World Wide Collective

SIONA PTEROUS
Spectrum Editor

For Chino Amobi, one of the three founders of the music collective NON Worldwide Records, the creation of music isn’t about technical approach so much as it is about intuition.

“I can’t read music but I play it by ear, by feeling — it’s not a technical process” Amobi said. “I really do love working with programs and I draw out my music in the same way I draw visual art so there are a lot of parallels between music and graphic design.”

It is a tactic that has worked well for the artist since he graduated from VCU in 2010 with a degree in Painting and Printmaking. In the years between graduating and the creation of NON, Amobi went on to produce work under the stage name, Diamond Black Hearted Boy. During this period, he produced four albums - “Untitled,” “Vogue,” “Hommes,” “Japan Digital Volume 1.0,” and “Zero” - worked on a variety of collaborations and toured nationally and internationally.

Amobi also spent time developing community connections and believes in salvation of people through the act of helping others.

“I continued working on paintings, doing album covers for friends and I would work with individuals with disabilities and at the Boy’s and Girl’s Club,” Amobi said. “It gave me a lot of experiences in human services and interacting with people of different backgrounds which influenced what I am doing now.”

NON is not an acronym for any one specific thing. Amobi described it as a play on the semiotics of the word “non” which capture various conditions and platforms of not sticking to the norm. “It can capture a person being ‘non-’ of the current state of things, ‘non-identifiable,’ and even a ‘non-brand’ since we decided to avoid fixation of branding which would lead to commodification.”

NON formed in February 2015 when Amobi returned to the United States after touring and realized that there weren’t any “ideal” record labels he would sign with if he ever had the option. The only solution? Create one himself. Amobi reached out to South African artist, ANGEL-HO and Congolese artist, Nkisi, and the three formed a music-collective which would focus on the sounds of African diaspora and Black identity.

“There isn’t much (African or black influence) represented in the specific lane of electronic music I was operating in,” Amobi said “The arts in general and the digital realms lacks representation of African music pushing it forward. I appreciate the afrobeat sounds, but I’m all about hybridity and fusion of other sounds too.”

Afrobeat blends West African traditional music with Caribbean dancehall and reggae and is often sung in a variation of the many West African languages, English and French. Amobi points out that the conception of “African” or “black” music is limited to this genre, as well as rap. While he is influenced from these two genres, he hopes NON will help change this status-quo.

Amobi’s upbringing as a first-generation Nigerian-American also influenced the creation and design of NON. He explained that his feelings of displacement due to his existence as a bridge between cultures, languages and traditions, made him aware of the fragility of people’s existence, especially in the African diaspora at large.

“My family would speak the native language of Igbo and I wouldn’t completely understand it,” Amobi said. “I felt a simultaneous alienation and warmth of their language because I love Nigerian culture. Also growing up in America, I couldn’t fully

identify with black-American history either. There was always this sort of fracture I felt.”

Amobi said that it used to be a source of insecurity, but as he developed as an artist and got older he learned to embrace this fracture and the undefined spaces of people’s identities and experiences via paintings, visual arts and music.

In 2016, Amobi released a solo-album, “Airport Music for Black Folk” which he describes as an auditory guide through similar transitional spaces and the embracement of tension caused by liminal spaces of existence like that of his upbringing, among other influences. For Amobi, an airport - where visitors come and go while there is always presence of migrant people-of-color working for low wage with little option to leave - is metaphorical representation of this “fracture.”

Since its creation in 2015, NON collective has toured extensively throughout the world and the members the next leg of their tour in May which will include Lisbon Moscow and Vienna.

“With the resources available today, it’s possible to create anything,” Amobi said. “I have dreams for NON’s future: NON-tv, publications, design firms, galleries, clothing, food, farming, internet - a whole community. We can do that, but it’s beyond having a charismatic leader. It’s about leaders raising leaders and working towards a goal in a practical way that involve love.”

The very existence of NON, which now has large international followings, is a testament to Amobi’s belief in resource availability since he and the founders rely on technology to communicate and to spread their music and visual displays. Furthermore, NON hosts a Sound Cloud and Bandcamp which allows listeners and member, called, “NON citizens” to post their work and connect with the growing number of other NON citizens.

Amobi said that none of the founders expected NON, “to spread like wildfire.”

Though Amobi will be touring Europe soon, he is excited to be in Richmond for the foreseeable future as he pursues a masters in VCUarts Graphic Design program in Fall 2017.

“I’m excited because we’re doing things around the world, and now we can build in Richmond.” Amobi said, “I wanna do more things locally with design, collaborate with people and work on a publication, do more NON events and Richmond has so many resources and people down to do these things.”

Founder Chino Amobi.



Sam’s Take

“The Fate of the Furious” keeps driving its course of enjoyable absurdity

SAMUEL GOODRICH
Staff Writer

For nearly 20 years, the “Fast and Furious” franchise has landed one of the biggest cash-cows in Hollywood- pumping out new sequels every other year since 2004. Each sequel has managed to not only up the ante, but does so with a level of quality most would not expect from a ludicrous series about driving cars.

Now, we’re at number eight with the cleverly titled “The Fate of the Furious,” which aims to shake-up the franchise, and find its footing after the untimely death of the former star of the film, Paul Walker. While the film mostly comes out on top, it’s hard to not feel like we’re just spinning our wheels at this point.

Picking up a few months after “Furious 7,” “Fate” finds Dom and Letty on their honeymoon enjoying some R&R. On the trip, Dom is blackmailed by a cyber terrorist named Cipher who wants him to turn on his much-celebrated family. After an initial betrayal, the crew now need to find out how to stop Dom, as he tries to figure out how to beat a villain with the odds stacked in her favor.

At this point in the franchise, it’s difficult to criticize “The Fate of the Furious.” Ever since the fifth installment, the series has hit a stride of self-awareness and an understanding of what its audience wants: fast cars being put in more ridiculous situations and a plot so melodramatic it’s consistently comical in its attempts to raise the stakes. In that sense, “Fate” is another great entry in the series.

As with previous films, “Fate” does not innovate its plot or characters, instead focusing on how to destroy fast, beautiful cars in creative ways. One of the film’s most interesting examples involves cars being hacked so they become a horde of “zombie” cars, resembling scenes from “World War Z.”

This style of ridiculous action is present in every sequence, presenting new and implausible ways to put sports cars in interesting scenarios. This refund focus on the crew’s cars resembles the franchise’s origins, which seems to be what the film is going for, as Cipher constantly asks Dom to return to his former, criminal life.

While “Fate” turns the camera on these absurd car stunts, there’s less time spent with the characters or on hand-to-hand action scenes. The previous film, “Furious 7,”

was able to mix both fairly well, showcasing badass cars and the impressive hand-to-hand skills in the same sequences.

Because of this irreverence towards its cast, they feel even more one-dimensional than before. Everyone seems to just fill their roles, reacting with snarky comments to everything while occasionally spouting lines about the importance of “family.”

Even Dom’s turn as a villain isn’t given enough weight to be meaningful. The audience knows within the first fifteen minutes not only how he was captured and by whom, but why he would even allow this to happen.

Yet, there are still some standout performances from Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson and Jason Statham, both of whom have larger roles than in previous films. With Dom away from the team, The Rock’s character has to become the new leader, commanding the screen with his patented charisma.

The filmmakers also decided to take the scene from “Furious 7” where he flexes his arm to heal his bones and make it his defining character trait. The Rock is quite literally an immovable force, able to break high-security handcuffs and throw missiles with a single hand.

Statham, on the other hand, becomes a good guy in this film and has one of the best action sequences in the film, which expertly displays his own charm and one-on-one fight skills.

“Fate” also continues the trend of superhero-esque plotlines, but this time around it’s a little too melodramatic and implausible. While there were certain stunts and leaps of logic I could forgive, there were certain plot holes and complete disregards for how our universe works that were too out there.

Despite that, “Fate of the Furious” is still an enjoyable, if familiar summer blockbuster. It manages to place fast cars in even more ridiculous situations, but it’s all starting to feel a little stale at this point. I can’t say I didn’t spend most of the film with a grin on my face and a laugh in my throat, but I’m not sure that’ll maintain through another entry of “Vin Diesel’s Family Circus.”

Rating:

At this point you’re either a fan or you’re not, and the eighth film in this franchise is not going to change your mind.



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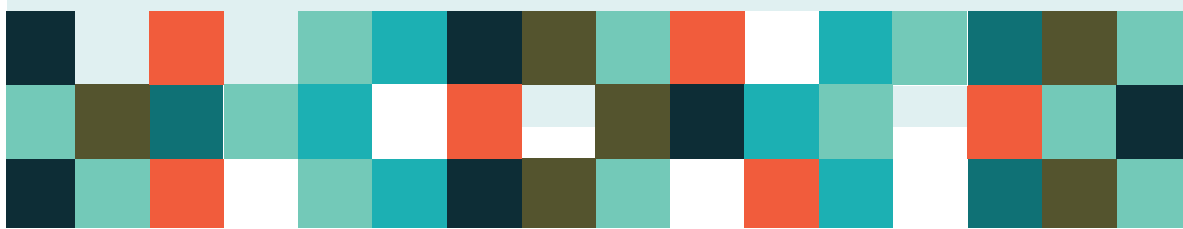
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opinion

Quote of the week:

“Firefighters in the department are rallying behind one of their own, Courtland Lambert, to support him while his 3-year-old son battles Neuroblastoma, a form of cancer.”

Missing girls of America

How race decides whose disappearance matters

AYA DRIUCHE
Contributing Columnist

Human trafficking is an ongoing issue in the United States but doesn't receive nearly the amount of media attention it needs. According to The National Human Trafficking Hotline, 7,500 cases of human trafficking were reported in 2016, almost 2,000 more than the previous year (5,526). However, the number of cases that go undetected surpass those that are reported.

Last summer, six teenage girls from the Bronx went missing but no amber alerts were sent out. The same issue occurred in the nation's capital but this time, 14 girls went missing in 24 hours. As the issue continued to gain more attention online, more information began to surface, some claiming that in the first three months of 2017, D.C. officials logged 501 cases of missing juveniles according to NBC Washington.

Social media took the issue in its own hands and with the power of retweets and reposts, the hashtag #FindOurGirls went viral. Activists, celebrities, and social media users all came together to raise awareness for the issue, blaming the authority for the lack of media coverage around the missing girls.

The hashtag created an outrage all across social media platforms demanding something to be done and find the young girls. Senior justice writer for the New York Daily News and civil rights activist Shaun King noted, “the stories of young black girls and women who are missing don't get the Elizabeth Smart or Natalee Holloway treatment.”

Raising awareness on social media has been an effective way to bring neglected issues to light and the hashtag did just that. Soon people were asking questions, which then led to the Metropolitan Police Department to speak up about the matter. Police Commander Chanel Dickerson went on Facebook live to clear up the confusion and frustration that was expressed via social media.

In the live stream, Commander Dickerson said that there is no correlation between the missing teens and human/sex trafficking. She also urged that adults should not let children live in their homes without the parent of the child's approval, implying that the cause of the missing teens is due to rebellious

behavior. Additionally, she asked adults to contact the police if they see teens wandering outside during school hours.

Police spokeswoman Karimah Bilal also spoke out about the issue, claiming that the teens missing in 2017 all left willingly, shutting down any accusations of human trafficking being the motive. The department also argued that the number of missing persons has not increased, they've just been posting on social media more, which may have led people to believe that the numbers are rising.

Police also told NBC that the claims of 14 girls missing in 24 hours is untrue and that there has never been an instance of missing persons at the rate that caused an outcry on social media.

Nonetheless, whether a minor is missing by choice or force should not dictate the attention it receives. While the original claim was not true, the issue of underreported cases of missing persons of color still remains.

All missing persons deserve to receive an equal amount of publicity. The backgrounds of where these girls come from should not be a factor of whether their disappearance will be listed as runaways or abductions.

“

The stories of young black girls and women who are missing don't get the Elizabeth Smart or Natalee Holloway treatment.

Shaun King
New York Daily News



Letter to the Editor

Richmond Fire Department

Not all heroes wear capes -- just look at the Richmond Fire Department.

When people call 911, it's usually because an unfortunate situation has escalated out of their control. During this time, most people experience an overwhelming amount of fear or uncertainty.

For the public servants of the Richmond Fire Department, responding to these dangerous and difficult situations is part of the job description.

However, when the unexpected happens to one of their own, who do these men and women turn to when they need support? Members of the Richmond Fire Department created a long-lasting friendship that allows them to depend on one another.

“We really are a brother and sisterhood. We're people that really look after each other and that's what makes coming to work fun,” said Stewart Thiel, a firefighter in the department.

An example of the strong bond these brave men and women share can be seen through the efforts they went through to help a fellow coworker.

Firefighters in the department are rallying behind one of their own, Courtland Lambert, to support him while his 3-year-old son battles Neuroblastoma, a form of cancer.

“We raised something like \$36,000 in the span of three days”, said Keith Turner, a firefighter in Richmond.

Though their fundraising efforts have been extraordinary, one of which can be found on the Eventbrite website by typing in “Caleb Truck Raffle,” they aren't stopping there. Other firefighters in the department are volunteering to take over Lambert's shifts during this strenuous time so that

he can be at home with his family without taking time off. This type of commitment to each other shows how reliable the support network is within the department.

This support system isn't only available to firefighters. Not only do they go above and beyond for each other, but for the Richmond community as a whole.

There are 433 firefighters tasked with protecting Richmond residents from harm's way. With each station getting anywhere from zero to 15 calls a day, preparing for all scenarios can be a tricky task.

Many situations that the Richmond Fire Department deals with can be the difference between life and death for individuals. Turner recalls a situation when he had to resuscitate a local dance instructor who was presumed dead.

“When we responded there he was dead but when I left he was able to have a conversation with me,” Turner said.

Being able to go into the unknown and successfully de-escalate the problem on the scene is a major reason why many firefighters enjoy their line of work.

“When people dial 911, it's supposed to be the worst day of their life,” said Ryan Kopacsi, a firefighter in the department. “When you can go and negate that, it's the rewarding part.”

Thiel shares a similar sentiment regarding a memorable call that involved him having to stabilize a 48-year-old woman who had went into cardiac arrest.

“We were able to revive her and I remember looking down at her ID and seeing that it was her birthday”, Thiel said.

Moments like this inspire those in the department to continue the challenging work

they do but there are also hardships in this profession.

“It's said that firefighters spend one-third of their time away from their families and friends,” Turner said. “It's not a prison but it's not the kind of job where you can just go home if something comes up.”

Firefighters work eight shifts a month, each lasting 24 hours, so there are times that being in the fire house can feel confining.

In addition to spending so much time away from their loved ones, the men and women in the department can never predict what they may be faced with for each call they receive.

“You can prepare only so much because what you see may be completely different than what you prepare yourself for,” Turner said.

“There's a lot that we see,” Kopacsi said. “You want to help everyone but it's not always in the cards to help everyone.”

With some calls, there is also a chance that someone on the team could be critically injured or worse.

“You wouldn't be human if you weren't thinking of your family, friends, and if you're going to go home,” Thiel said. Even with the risks associated with the job, Thiel and others in the department find ways to stay positive. “We like to say our motto is ‘Everyone goes home.’”

Regardless of the struggles that the members of the Richmond Fire Department have to face, it all comes down to being a pillar of support to the community.

“When the tones goes off, everybody is a team,” said Lieutenant Armstrong, the public information officer in the department.

“We're just here to make sure the job gets done.”

Besides rescuing people from perilous situations, members of the department enjoy interacting with the people they serve. Each fire station holds open houses for the public to meet the people on the team at their local fire house. Fire houses are also open daily to anyone that would like a tour.

“If anybody wants to come by and see the fire truck, all you have to do is ring the doorbell,” Kopacsi said.

Firefighters in the department also reach out to the public by using teachable moments to help local residents.

“There have been numerous times when we've had to teach a VCU student how to change a flat tire,” Thiel said.

From installing smoke detectors to helping people learn about fire safety, nothing is too small a task for the Richmond Fire Department to lend a helping hand.

“It's an honor to be able to serve your community,” Turner said.

Though their line of work can be challenging, being able to create a positive beacon of hope in the community is the motivation for all members in the department.

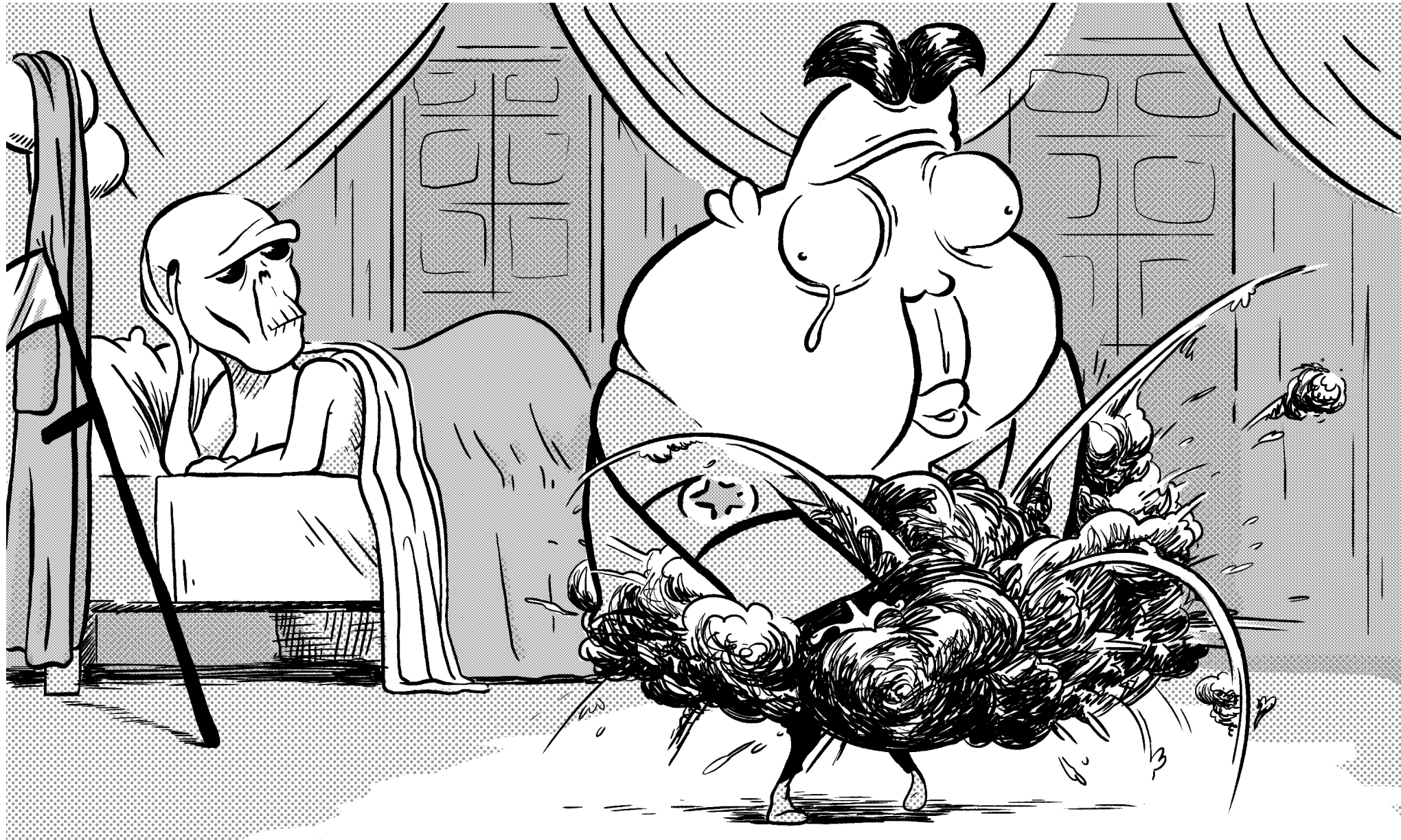
“The easiest part of the job is coming to work,” Turner said. “If you can make an impact on one person, giving them another shot at life, what better reward than that?”

— Aime Zena Sankoh



comics

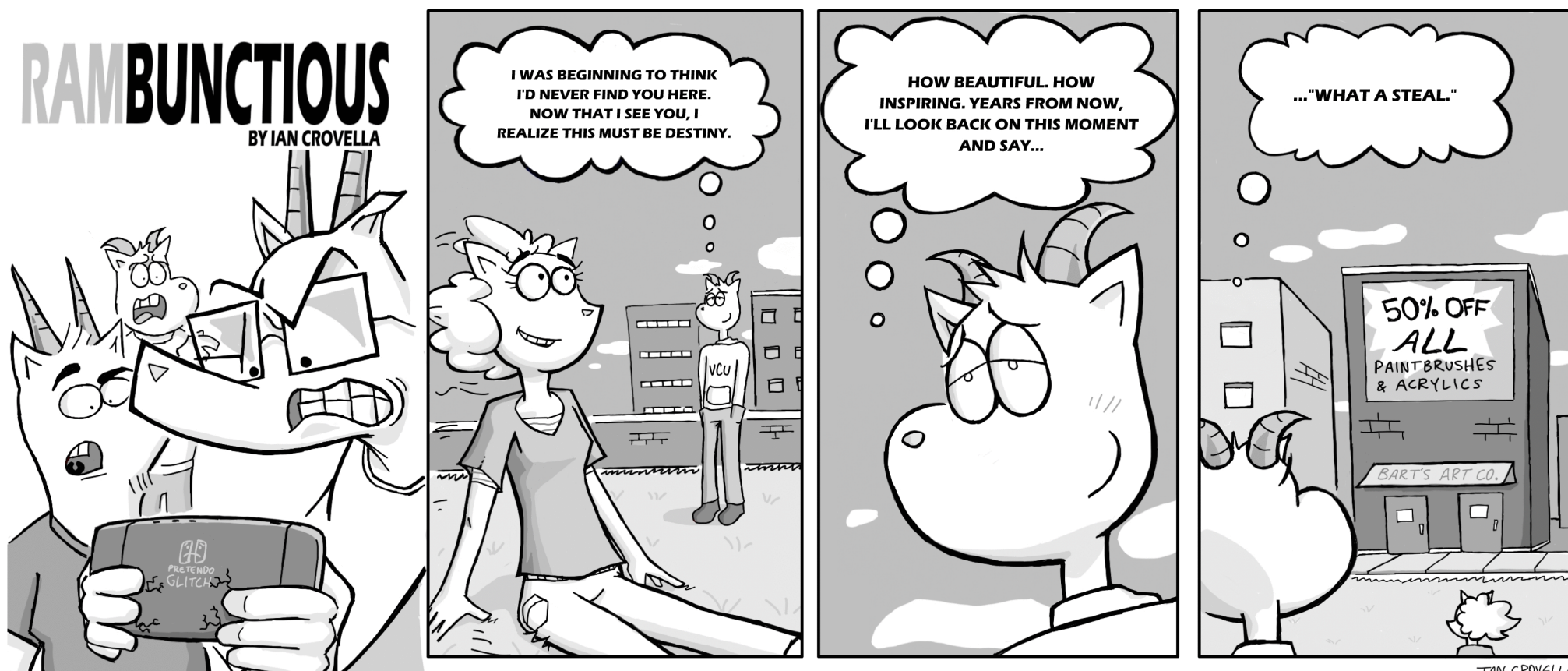
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ABOUT THE CT

The Commonwealth Times is the award-winning independent student newspaper at VCU, since 1969. The CT staff maintains all editorial and operations discretion. There is absolutely no prior review by the public, university or VCU Student Media Center administration or staff. The Executive Editor writes and manages the Operations Budget. The CT's Operations Budget is a reflection of independent advertising revenue accumulated throughout the previous academic year(s). Operations expenses include salaries, phone and internet, postage, professional memberships, award submissions and banquets, FOIA requests, programming costs and travel. Each spring, the CT staff elects the next year's Executive and Managing Editors, who then hire the remaining staff.

ADD YOUR VOICE

The opinion pages of The CT are a forum open to the public. Contributions are welcome by email to Eleanor Fiak, by mail or in-person at 817 W. Broad St., Richmond, Va. 23220. Opinions expressed are those of individual columnists and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Commonwealth Times. Unsigned editorials represent the collective opinion of The CT staff.

The Commonwealth Times strives for accuracy in gathering news. If you think we have made an error, please email the appropriate section editor. Corrections will appear on the opinion pages and/or online. One CT per person. Additional copies can be purchased at the Student Media Center for \$1 each.

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