

COVID-19: Mental health impact on Hampton students

SYDNEY MCCALL
STAFF WRITER

While one's younger years are not usually a time full of stress, the current health crisis has changed that, and teenagers and young adults around the world are struggling. The pandemic has raised stress factors such as uncertainty about the future, financial hardships, and safety concerns.

Sixty-three percent of 18-to-24-year-olds have reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, 25 percent of those admit to increased substance use, and 25 percent reported that they have seriously considered suicide, according to the CDC.

Hampton's campus has been closed to students since March 2020. Many students complain that they are struggling with online learning and an altered college experience.

Freshman Hampton students who have never lived on campus feel as if they have not had a real college experience.

"The pandemic has had a huge effect on the class of 2024's social life. We lack a class bond as most of us have never met in person," said Oluade Swan, a freshman strategic communication major. "It feels as if stepping on campus has become a far-fetched dream."

Senior Hampton students are struggling in accepting the fact that their time in college will not end traditionally. 100 days, a Hampton tradition, and a graduation ceremony are just some of the things seniors are not experiencing as usual.

"I've been waiting for the moment I would become a senior in college," said Reana Garcia, a senior biology major. "I am sad not only because the end is near but because of all the different events that would take place. I've been robbed of that experience and can never get it back."

College students of color have been more vulnerable to the negative effects of the pandemic as college attendance among Black students

dropped 8 percent during the summer of 2020, compared to 2019, according to the first "Stay Informed" report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Additionally, 80 percent of college students reported that COVID-19 had negatively affected their mental health. While it is a stressful and anxious time, many students are choosing to be positive and make the best of their current situation. Students look forward to being able to step back on Hampton's campus in the fall and feel some type of normalcy.

"This pandemic has made me realize that I should never take life for granted. My college experience has been delayed but it's taught me that good things may take time. I cannot wait to meet my classmates in the fall," says Janiya Pearson, freshman class president.

SGA Town Hall: Visions of graduation and safe return in fall 2021

NOA CADET | STAFF WRITER

Hampton University's Student Government Association (SGA) held its annual town hall meeting on February 25. The event served as a forum for students to bring their concerns directly to administration. However this year, things were a little different.

To account for the ongoing pandemic, SGA's town hall was held virtually through Zoom. Students submitted their concerns via an online submission platform and SGA asked the questions to members of the Hampton University administration, including but not limited to; President Dr. William R. Harvey, Dr. Barbara Inman, Dr. Karen Ward and other members of the Hampton University administration.

Hosted by Austin Sams, SGA's 75th president, the town hall presented an opportunity for the administration to reveal their plans for Hampton's future.

Most notably, Inman revealed that in-person instruction will be available beginning during both the upcoming summer 2021 and fall 2021 semesters, Hampton's first on-campus semesters since Spring 2020. Factoring in lingering health concerns with COVID-19, it is required of Hampton students (unless medically contraindicated or in the case of religious exemption) to be fully vaccinated before returning to campus and uploading documentation of such.

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Spotlighting distinguished Hampton alumnae

NIA WHITE | STAFF WRITER

Hampton University has flourished for 153 years, with its well-accomplished alumni highlighting the standard of excellence. With graduates in a wide variety of fields and positions, Hampton University has made its impact on the surrounding community, country and world.

The national observance of Women's History Month is celebrated every year during the month of March. This month is reserved for highlighting the achievements of women making strides in their respective fields both in the present and past.

Hampton alumna Felicia Blow graduated in 1988 and is currently serving as Chair-Elect for the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The position of Chair-Elect is one of the highest in the company and it encompasses many different roles.

"PRSA is the world's largest organization of communications, public relations, and strategic marketing practitioners," Blow said. "I lead efforts with Strategic Planning and our National Leader Rally. I also work closely with other members of the executive team in carrying out the mission and vision for the organization. 2022 will mark the 75th anniversary of PRSA and in that regard, I am serving as Co-Chair of the Task Force to lead the anniversary efforts."

During her time at Hampton, Blow majored in mass media arts, which led her to her current position.

"Hampton instilled in me a pride of authorship, a determination of spirit, and the insight to never give up when pursuing your passion," said Blow.

Another flourishing Hampton alumnus is Dr. Helen Stiff-Williams, Class of 1973, former Division Chief and Superintendent of Instruction in the Virginia Department of Education.

Her position required "experience in educational leadership," Stiff-Williams said. She gained experience at Hampton, including "leadership experiences for recognition and expectations for high achievement."

Throughout her time as division chief and superintendent, she "provided leadership in the conceptualization of the 'Virginia common core standards' that were the precursors to the current Virginia Standards of Learning," Stiff-Williams said.

For current Hampton students, Blow also shares advice regarding how to be successful. "Work hard, never shy away from something because it's difficult. I was once told, 'What is easy is seldom excellent.' So don't take the easy way out. Continue to learn... advance your knowledge... don't stop learning, take classes, improve your skills," Blow said.



Courtesy of Kelly Berry | @kellyberryart

COMMENTARY

Black mental health: A road map to improvement

MILES RICHARDSON
STAFF WRITER

Black mental health needs to be a top priority for the Biden Administration.

African Americans have historically had less access to affordable health care. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, "in 2017, 55.5 percent of blacks compared to 75.4 percent of whites used private health care insurance."

The reason for this has gone largely unnoticed. This disparity exists because there is a sizable portion of the Black community that lives in mental health deserts. This dynamic has caused a great deal of turmoil within these communities. According to Mental Health America, "Black and African American people living below poverty are twice as likely to

report serious psychological distress than those living over 2x the poverty level. Socioeconomic status, in turn, is linked to mental health: People who are impoverished, homeless, incarcerated, or have substance use problems are at higher risk for poor mental health."

The current wave of mental health decline, combined with mental health deserts within African American communities, will likely lead to a significant rise in arrest rates, substance abuse and suicide attempts.

The effects of this mental health crisis will only be further exaggerated within inner cities. If HBCU students are struggling this much with mental health, how do you think things will be for the youths and adults who live in communities where wealth and resources are more scarce?

This problem can be solved by actively working to create more diversity

in health care professionals through employing policy to encourage future graduates to enter mental health. There is a dire need for more African American mental health care professionals who are from these communities. Having access to culturally educated medical professionals will likely create a more comfortable environment for Black youths and adults to seek help with their mental health battles, combatting the apprehension the stigma around mental health problems generally creates.

This can be achieved by creating relationships between HBCUs and research centers to further professional development, combined with the lessening of medical school debt. The heroic youths who decide to combat this issue should have every opportunity to do so.

CAMPUS

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SGA town hall: Visions of graduation and safe return in fall 2021

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Included in this plan for on-campus living, the administration mentioned that they intend to implement a system towards maintaining 50 percent occupancy in classrooms. In this plan, students of a said classroom will be split into alternating days of in-person instruction and remote instruction within their dorms, creating a cycle in which; there is always one half of class in the classroom and the other half operating remotely.

In addition to classroom operation changes, Hampton is planning on implementing living changes by reducing density in residence halls. Currently, it has been established that both single and double occupancy rooms will be made available for the fall 2021 semester.

Dr. Michelle Penn-Marshall, Vice President for Research and Associate Provost, also mentioned the procedural updates within the Health Center, with the inclusion of COVID testing that would be able to provide results “within 24 to 48 hours,” thus allowing for swift testing on campus to ensure maximum safety.

With all the procedural changes that Hampton University is implementing for the return of the student body, the question remains to be asked: what of the spring 2021 graduates?

As announced by the Hampton administration, the University intends to hold virtual graduation not only for spring 2021 graduates but spring 2020 graduates as well, given that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented a proper Spring 2020 graduation from

occurring.

While details regarding the specifics of the virtual ceremony have yet to be revealed, the decision has been met with quite a bit of disappointment from graduating seniors.

“I feel saddened by the news of the virtual graduation. This is not at all what I imagined the end of my HU experience would be like. However, I am thankful that I’ll be with my family. I know that they will make the experience special even though it is virtual,” says Cassie Herring, a senior English major from Woodbridge, Virginia.

As more information is released regarding graduation, the student body can only hope that the virtual ceremony manages to commemorate the achievement memorably, to make up for the fact that it is not in person.



Courtesy of HU Student Activities

One thing remains clear nonetheless, Hampton University is making the strides to return to a new normal.

Ariana Crofton selected as TRESemmé Future Stylish Fund Recipient

VASHTI DORMAN
STAFF WRITER

TRESemmé, an American hair care brand, awarded Hampton University’s own Ariana Crofton a \$10,000 scholarship to attend cosmetology school last month. Ariana Crofton, a recent 2020 HU graduate, currently owns her own business, Ariana’s Canvas, where she creates myriad unique hairstyles such as; box braids, faux locs and feed-in braids.

The TRESemmé Future Stylish Fund scholarship Crofton received was tailored specifically for Black women to break the systematic barriers surrounding African American women and their hair in the beauty industry.

“There are many barriers that exist for future Black female stylists, but things are changing because those tough conversations are being had,” said TRESemmé Future Stylists Fund selection committee member Ursula Stephen in an interview with Essence. “And great opportunities like the TRESemmé Future Stylists Fund are helping to encourage some much-needed change.”

Before winning, Crofton mentioned that she experienced a season of no’s. Then one of her peers from Hampton sent her the TRESemmé Future Stylists Fund application during the summer of 2020. Crofton took a leap of faith and applied. Crofton even took out a loan for cosmetology school but soon canceled it once she got the news that she won the scholarship.

“This experience was perfectly tailored for me,” said Crofton.

Crofton started her hair journey as a child, doing her Bratz Doll’s hair, eventually learning how to do her own. While growing up, her hair journey

was not easy due to the many of the bad experiences she had in hair salons. She wanted to change the reputation braiders have in the beauty industry by offering a therapeutic space for Black women to get their hair done, not only on Hampton’s campus but also in the DMV region where she resides.

“I started on accident by doing box braids for my bigs,” Crofton said.

Once she did her “big’s” hair, word spread fast, and she soon became Hampton’s go-to hairstylist.

“It didn’t feel like I was the go-to hairstylist, but people created their own hype, and that helped,” she explained.

With her fast-growing business and popularity on campus, Crofton realized that doing hair and managing schoolwork can be difficult. Along with

balancing Ariana’s Canvas and school, she realized she had to set boundaries with friends and family.

“I didn’t have time for fun and often, could only work and go to class,” she shared.

Although she lost a lot of free time, Crofton gained many meaningful relationships from doing hair on campus. Through her business, she also learned how to pay taxes and budget. Regardless of having a few struggles, she realized she couldn’t focus on the approval of other people.

Crofton advises everyone who is looking to start their own business to not over plan. She shared that she started her business in 2014 on YouTube as a DIY art channel. Later on, she began Ariana’s Canvas due to the need for Black braiders on campus who understand how to take care of natural hair.

She also advises future business owners to start a business relating to their passions and look to their friend group for support.

“If they’re good friends, they’ll support you, but build your own community,” she advises.

Crofton is currently attending cosmetology school at Aspen Beauty School and is working on becoming more creative with her work. She plans to one day bridge the gap between companies and campus stylists, as well as grow her hair business.

“I want to go international and talk to other aspiring stylists,” Crofton shared.

Book an appointment with Ariana through the link located in her Instagram bio @arianascanvas. To learn more about her TRESemmé Future Stylists Fund opportunity, follow Ariana on Instagram @ana_99.



Courtesy of Ariana Crofton

Hampton University to hold in-person instruction for the fall 2021 semester

RAVEN HARPER
CAMPUS EDITOR

After many months of anticipation and remote learning, on Feb. 25, Hampton University announced that it will offer in-person instruction and housing for the 2021 summer and fall semesters, but with a few conditions.

Dr. Barbara Inman, Vice President of Administrative Services and Infectious Disease and Prevention Working group chair, sent out an email to the entire Hampton student body on March 8 with the news. In the letter, she stated that in accordance with Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and the Virginia Department of Health, students will be able to return to campus in the summer and fall, showing valid proof and documentation of their vaccinations.

“Students will be required to be fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine prior to returning to campus unless medically contraindicated or there is a religious exemption,” the email read.

This announcement came a couple of weeks after a previous email requesting an advance tuition payment for the 2021-2022 academic school year was sent out, which had many students questioning if Hampton’s administration was planning for students to return in the fall.

News of the university’s plans were met with a lot of feedback and responses from current students and the Hampton community.



Courtesy of Eva Davis & Christian Montgomery

For current freshmen who spent what was supposed to be their first and best year in college at home, many felt solace toward the news. Felipe Gonzalez, a music education and voice major from Long Island, New York, was one of them.

“Being Mister Freshman, I’ve had the opportunity to talk with a lot of my class, and we all have already missed out on so many milestones such as; high school graduation, prom, and freshman year,” he shared. “I can say for most of us that transitioning back to campus is something we all need right now.”

Gonzalez and his friends, like other freshmen in the class of 2024, have been creating and maintaining

their friendships solely online for a year and are excited to create experiences together in-person during the fall.

Current juniors who will be returning next fall as the senior class are rather grateful to be able to finish their final year at Hampton back on campus.

“Honestly, it’s a blessing to be able to have a senior year. I know we’ve all dealt with a lot in the past year, so I think going back and being able to get back to ‘normal’ will be a good thing for us,” said Kayla Jenkins, a junior Psychology pre-med major, Spanish minor from Atlanta.

“All of our programming and decisions are going to be guided by the CDC, the Virginia Department of Health as well as executive orders

issued from the governor,” Inman said. “There will be some limitations on the number of people who will be able to congregate at social activities, but we are going to do our best to provide students with a quality, in-person experience.”

As the administration works on rolling out more details, one thing they are aware of is that for the graduating class of 2021, graduation will be held.

In fact, they will be hosting graduation for the 2021 class as well as 2020 graduates who, unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not get to have one. However with the news of the return for the rest of the student body, some graduating seniors were upset.

“Of course, the news was a bit disheartening. I would love to interact with my classmates one more time, but I’ve chosen to accept it and move past it. I just hope that the virtual graduation will still be of quality,” said Eva Davis, a graduating senior cellular and molecular biology major from Fayetteville, North Carolina.

As students await more information regarding their return, the Hampton Administration says students can expect more detailed information and specifics rolled out well before the 2021 fall semester begins.

“We believe we have a reopening plan that we allow safe and responsible in-person instruction and housing for our students,” Inman shared.

OPINION

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NEWS & VIEWS

National News

How Black history is taught in schools faces new scrutiny

OKLAHOMA CITY — There is no national curriculum or set of standards for teaching Black history in America. Only a small number of states, including Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi and New York, have laws requiring that it be taught in public schools. States set their own standards, and history survey courses often touch on slavery, Reconstruction, the rise of Jim Crow laws and the civil rights movement.

LaGarrett King, director of the Carter Center for K-12 Black History Education at the University of Missouri, said he believes there is too much emphasis in the instruction of black history on violence, which is often centered on racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan in a way that doesn't explore nuances or apathy toward black deaths.

King provided training last year for 300 educators around the country who are interested in teaching black history. He said that the growing interest makes him optimistic but that history needs to be framed differently.

"White people don't acknowledge Juneteenth, but yet we're supposed to be a country that believes in freedom. We have been taught July 4, 1776, is the real Independence Day, but it's not," King said. "The vast majority of black people were still enslaved."

Lawrence Paska, executive director of the National Council for the Social Studies, said schools should be preparing to help walk students through questions about discrimination, protests and racial violence when they return in the fall.

"The notion of 'Do we have a curriculum that is responsive to the needs and experiences of the students we have now?'" That is an important question schools need to be asking," Paska said.

—Associated Press

Everywhere and nowhere: The many layers of "cancel culture"

NEW YORK — So you've probably read a lot about "cancel culture." Or know about a new poll that shows a plurality of Americans disapproving of it. Or you may have heard about a letter in Harper's Magazine condemning censorship and intolerance.

In tweets, online letters, opinion pieces and books, conservatives, centrists and liberals continue to denounce what they call growing intolerance for opposing viewpoints and the needless ruining of lives and careers. A Politico/Morning Consult poll released last week shows 44% of Americans disapprove of it, 32% approve and the remaining 24% had no opinion or didn't know what it was.

For some, "cancel culture" is the coming of the thought police. For others, it contains important chances to be heard that didn't exist before.

Recent examples of unpopular "cancellations" include the owner of a chain of food stores in Minneapolis whose business faced eviction and calls for boycotts because of racist social media posts by his then-teenage daughter, and a data analyst fired by the progressive firm Civis Analytics after he tweeted a study finding that nonviolent protests increase support for Democratic candidates and violent protests decrease it. Civis Analytics has denied he was fired for the tweet.

Cancellation in one subculture can lead to elevation in others. Former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick has not played an NFL game since 2016 and has been condemned by President Donald Trump and many others on the right after he began kneeling during the National Anthem to protest "a country that oppresses black people and people of color." But he has appeared in Nike advertisements, been honored by the ACLU and Amnesty International and reached an agreement with the Walt Disney Co. for a series about his life.

"You can say the NFL canceled Colin Kaepernick as a quarterback and that he was resurrected as a cultural hero," says Julius Bailey, an associate professor of philosophy at Wittenberg University who writes about Kaepernick in his book "Racism, Hypocrisy and Bad Faith."

"Cancel culture" is hard to define, in part because there is nothing confined about it — no single cause, no single ideology, no single fate for those allegedly canceled.

—Associated Press

JAMAIJA RHOADES
STAFF WRITER

Sitting at my desk, blankly staring into the projector showcasing tons of so-called American heroes, trying hard to stay awake and wondering why I hate history class so much.

Until I started attending college, history was my least favorite subject. History courses typically left me uninterested and confused about why America is considered a great country.

It was not until after my first semester of African Diaspora and World History during my freshman year that I realized why history was once such a "snoozefest."

Like many Black students in the United States, I did not see myself reflected in the dense archives of the past. The few instances in which I did know a person who looked like me flash on the whiteboard, it was to depict a slave or a peaceful leader who was assassinated.

Unlike white students, individuals of African descent do not often get the chance to see themselves reflected positively or at all in their history classes. Not only does this lack of information and knowledge negatively impact Black students, but it has proven to have a detrimental effect on how students of other racial backgrounds perceive the Black community as a whole.

When America's school systems decide to only tell a portion of American history, it leaves Black students without visual representations of their ancestors' accomplishments. By failing to acknowledge our culture and our ancestors' contributions to society, standard education has limited what history Black girls and boys are exposed to.

This lack of emphasis and acknowledgment of the rich history and culture of African Americans in K-12 history classes also helps promote the misconception that all Black people are the same. Neglecting to educate

all students about the African diaspora permits the rest of the society to uphold ideas of white supremacy, and it potentially justifies dehumanizing an entire community of people.

I remember the impact that learning about the history of my people had on me. Seeing Josephine Baker not afraid to embrace her sensuality made me feel more confident in my womanhood. Reading Zora Neale Hurston's works and seeing her highlight the dialect of Black people made me take more pride in my Blackness.

Being supplied with images and information of American heroes who look like me provided me with the space and imagination to dream bigger. It helped me become unapologetic about my Blackness.

While Black students can seek outside sources to educate themselves on their history, they should not be forced to do so. Just as white students continue to get spoon-fed information about who they are and what they can become, Black students should be given this same luxury.



Unsplash user Santi Vedri

The conundrum known as "cancel culture"

RYLAND STAPLES
STAFF WRITER

"Cancel culture" has dominated the social media landscape for years. A certain population of social media users pride themselves on their ability to dig up old tweets from celebrities, and subsequently "cancel" them for past digressions.

The recent Dr. Seuss debacle where people are removing him from their reading list because of racist political cartoons and his how he treated his wife. Even products like Aunt Jemima's maple syrup and Uncle Ben's rice, doing a total rebrand due to the Black Lives Matter movement over the summer.

Let's get one thing clear first. Dr. Seuss is dead, and has been since 1991. It's not like he can lose any brand deals and opportunities because his past works have come to light. I really don't get why people are in an uproar about the origin of his works, or him as a person. We all read *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Lorax* and several other books he wrote. All of this information that we recently found out has already been out

there for years.

As a Black person, it is a little disheartening to see how an author as notable as Dr. Seuss has these kinds of illustrations be a part of his portfolio. But at the same time - not to make any excuses for him - these characters were acceptable during the time. Have you seen the Looney Tunes and Tom and Jerry from that time? They're filled with racist depictions and stereotypes of Black people and other POC's.

"Cancel culture" has even been brought to the forefront of modern celebrities like founder and CEO of Tesla, Elon Musk, who uses his Twitter as a platform to speak out against cancel culture. His supporters often say that the billionaire is too smart to be canceled, that the rules don't apply to him.

This rhetoric has become common among conservative figures like President Trump, Ben Shapiro and other well known figures. Often saying that people need to get over it because it either happened in the past, or it wasn't that bad to begin with. Even though it feels like they're just getting themselves into trouble every chance

they get.

This idea of "cancel culture" is often entangled with P.C. (political correctness) culture as well, which has caused a rift in the comedy landscape. With TV shows like Family Guy, South Park and Rick and Morty, people have begun to think that making jokes at a marginalized group's expense is what comedy is.

Comedy should be there to make everyone laugh, there are plenty of jokes that don't make anyone the butt of the joke. If you're afraid of what's going to happen if you talk about your true feelings on something or tell a joke about something perceived as inappropriate, then you should take a look at yourself to see the issue.

Ryland Staples is a graduating senior journalism major from Silver Spring, Maryland.



Unsplash user Santi Vedri

LIFESTYLE

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

How to: Mastering self-care & confidence

SHIRMARIE STARKS
STAFF WRITER

On February 25, The Female Quotient, WW (formerly known as Weight Watchers), and Tai Life Media partnered together to host the inaugural *#HBCULikeMe* three-part series, which focuses on the mental and physical health of HBCU students and young women of color.

The first episode, *Confident Like Me: Mastering Self-Care*, shed light on the importance of confidence, wellness and how to cultivate them both. Hosted by actress and Spelman College alumna, Kennedy Rue-McCullough, the event helped explore how mental wellness, movement, nutrition and sleep all help in building and maintaining one's confidence.

The event began with a keynote speech by actress, dancer, singer and entrepreneur Monique Coleman. During her speech, Coleman addressed her personal definition of confidence.

"Confidence looks different on different people," she said. "For some people, it is bold and encompassing. For others, it is a quiet knowing, or a subtle existence."

She also explained that confidence is also not automatically obtained. Instead, confidence is a constant journey

of practices that are implemented into your life, that help you achieve wellness and confidence.

"You define yourself, and decide who you are and what you are," Coleman said. "As you come face-to-face with your insecurities, and embrace all that you are, your confidence will open doors that no man can shut, no matter what."

As the event progressed, Kennedy returned to the screen along with five dynamic women to have an interactive panel. These ladies participated in an interactive panel to discuss their experiences with building and maintaining their confidence as well as their overall wellness journeys.

An important part of building confidence is being able to let go of comparing yourself to others, and seeing yourself as your best self, and your own competition. Professional softball player and TV host AJ Andrews says that we should strive to get 1% better each day. This mindset is a good way to think about improvement, because life can be very overwhelming.

As the conversation shifted from confidence to overall wellness, all of the panelists agreed that wellness has health, physical and emotional components. In order to fulfill one's highest potential, they must be able to focus and prioritize their wellness. Maura Washington, director, producer,

and Spelman alum, stated "Wellness impacts your purpose."

One way to start building your confidence is through affirmations. If you start to say everything that you want as if it is already a reality, you can overcome self-sabotaging, and start to build your self-confidence in return. Simple phrases such as "I am worthy," "I deserve to have the best life," and "I believe in me," are all good starts at building your confidence and overall wellness.

In the meantime, you can celebrate each small win. Monika Pierce, Head of Inclusion & Diversity at WW (formerly known as Weight Watchers), says we should celebrate "non-scale victories." These victories allow you to cherish the moment and celebrate what you have already accomplished. All successes are worth celebrating!

The *#HBCULikeMe* event revealed a common denominator: prioritizing self-care and self-worth.

Christian Peterson, the 63rd Miss Hampton University, expressed that she struggled with confidence until one day she decided that she was done living within the confinement of her fears.

She shared a few tips for people who may be experiencing the same situation. As a believer in Christ, Christian says that she first started by strengthening her faith and relationship with God. As her relationship pro-

gressed, Christian began to move with intention with everything she did.

"With the clothes I would wear or the things I say, it [intentional practices] led to having confidence in the bigger things like the relationships I wanted to form or activities I wanted to pursue."

Like the panelists from the *#HBCULikeMe* event, Christian also started to use words of affirmations. One of her favorite affirmations is, "I move as though success is inevitable."

Through the keynote speech from Monique Coleman, to the dynamic panel with five awesome women, to the inspiring conversation with Miss Hampton University, we can see how the importance of confidence and wellness can really impact your life. AJ Andrews reminds us to remember that "your authenticity is your superpower," and we should always remember exactly who we are! The first part of the *#HBCULikeMe* series was a major success and I encourage you to be on the lookout for the next two parts of the series!

A photo is worth a thousand words

KENNEDY BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Margaret Wolfe Hungerford once said that, "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." Photographers do their absolute best to not only capture the best shot, but also capture the best possible message of the subject. Photographers rely on their lens to tell a story and hopefully the viewers can interpret it in the best way possible.

What happens when these photographers are no longer able to continue taking photos of the things that matter to them? When the country went on a worldwide lockdown, a lot of photographers no longer had access to spaces to produce concepts for photos and even lost access to shooting subjects due to

new social distance regulations.

Three Hampton University students: Jordin Wright, Olivia Mitchell and Mikayla Roberts shared how they kept their passion alive within their own photography and what they hope people leave with after seeing their photos.

Q: Who or what has inspired you to keep pursuing photography even while this world is on a pause?

Jordin: "If I didn't have the support from my friends and family, I would just be a girl with a dream. I can grow my business and my craft because of the support system around me. The few photographers in the Charlotte, NC area also push me to be better. I'm learning so much everyday and can't wait to bring my photography to Hampton U."

Q: What do you want people to leave with after seeing some of your work?

Mikayla: "I want my audience to see life without the fluff. I do my best to keep my photos as raw as possible because I believe that too much editing can create a euphoric sense of the subject, and although that is the goal for certain photo shoots, I generally try to stay away from that."

Q: How have you kept your passion alive while in quarantine?

Olivia: "I continue to think of different photo shoots and some of them I have been able to execute while others are still in the works. I am in no rush to post them either, I'm just happy I can continue doing something I love. The

encouragement from my peers from the HerCampus team also pushes me to stay active and to continue being active even if we are unable to be on campus. But one thing I always do is take photos on my phone. Anytime I am somewhere, whether it is a restaurant or an outing with my friends, I always snap a picture."

Make sure to keep up with Jordin, Olivia, and Mikayla as they continue making their marks through their photos!



Courtesy of Jordin Wright, Mickayla Roberts, & Olivia Mitchell

LOCAL & WORLD

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

Peninsula Rescue Mission serves despite the pandemic

DAELIN BROWN
STAFF WRITER

Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the United States to shut down, the Peninsula Rescue Mission homeless shelter did not let the pandemic stop them from sheltering the homeless population of Hampton Roads.

“We have been operating as close to normal as we can. The people who are in the shelter still have to eat, so our doors have been open throughout the entire pandemic,” said Paul Speight, director of development at Peninsula Rescue Mission.

The Peninsula Rescue Mission has a team of about 20 staff members, but they rely heavily on volunteers that serve meals. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the shelter experienced a drastic decrease of hands-on volunteers.

“During the shutdown we lost more than half of our volunteers. When we did away with check out at the shelter, we were providing everything ourselves,” said Speight.

Usually, the Peninsula Rescue Mission gives people the option to check in and check out a bed when they need a space to sleep. The one big change during the pandemic was that the shelter was not letting anyone check out. Therefore, when people are checked in, they have that bed available to them for 6 months.

The pandemic also put the shelter at 50 percent capacity from June of 2020 until November of 2020. However, even with half capacity, they did not have to turn anyone from the shelter.

“When you work with the homeless population, they tend to be an isolated group anyway. Their concerns were the same as ours were and being outside was safer in their minds

anyway,” said Speight. “Even in winter months, we only filled to full capacity a few times.”

When the Peninsula Rescue Mission opened back up fully, at first only 30 percent of their volunteers came back, but gradually, the number of volunteers increased.

Even with less volunteers and full capacity, the shelter had generous donations. Many people recognize the homeless population to be the most vulnerable population in the Hampton Roads community, especially during a pandemic, so the shelter found themselves with an abundance of strong financial support and new donors.

“We have been very blessed in the area that our donations have remained strong over the pandemic,” said Speight. “Homeless shelters and food banks were two subcategories of nonprofits that tended to perform pretty well.” Many organizations like churches and

schools that didn’t want to participate in hands-on volunteering participated in the shelters’ “adopt a meal” campaign.

“We had a campaign called ‘adopt a meal’ and donation groups would purchase meals from a local restaurant. This helped both local businesses with sales and saved our staff workers a night of work,” said Speight.

Over 100 different groups helped donate to the shelter in the midst of the pandemic and the Peninsula Rescue Mission was able to receive over one thousand dollars worth of meals.

Vaccine rollout continues for Americans, but questions still linger

WILLIAM PAUL ELLIS
STAFF WRITER

After previously promising that all Americans would have access to the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of summer, President Biden announced new directives to the public concerning the national vaccine rollout during a March 12 prime-time address to the nation, the first of his presidency.

Biden’s directions were given in conjunction with a timeline for all states to follow. By May 1, all adults should be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. This differs from the current eligibility guidelines that vary by state but can best be described as a priority system where only the most vulnerable Americans are allowed to receive the vaccine.

By July 4, President Biden intends for the country to be “closer to normal,” with the vast majority of Americans having received the vaccine.

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global health pandemic one year ago, over 500,000 Americans have died from the virus’ complications.

However, recent data has shown that the United States is potentially nearing the end of the pandemic.

As of March 12, approximately 2.3 million doses of the vaccine are being administered each day, and about 35 million people have been fully vaccinated, according to the New York Times.

Many young adults have been ineligible for the vaccine depending on their state of residence. However, the pandemic has continued to have a great impact on the daily lives and decisions of both young people and college students.

Hampton University first began holding fully virtual classes in March of 2020 and has continued to do so for the 2020-21 school year.

While most students agree on wanting to return to Hampton’s campus in the future, their opinion on the COVID-19 vaccine varies.

Nicole Brown, a senior marketing major from Lynchburg, VA spends her days at home interning for a prominent technology company but was able to get the vaccine in February.

According to Brown, her experience receiving the vaccine was

positive.

“For my first shot I didn’t feel any serious effects,” Brown said, “But for my second shot, I felt soreness in my arm.”

Other Hampton University students have not been so optimistic.

Trevor Hutson, a senior entrepreneurship major from Brooklyn, New York, works part-time at a funeral home in the Hampton area and is frequently in contact with the public. However, he has still chosen not to receive the vaccine.

“I’ve been offered [the vaccine] but I wanted to see what the effects would be on others before taking it,” Hutson said.

Similarly, Eddy Baldwin, a senior sociology major from Upper Marlboro, Maryland, is hesitant to receive the vaccine due to possible unknown side effects.

“The vaccines are being distributed on Emergency terms, so I’m cautious that there hasn’t been a thorough review or testing of the vaccines’ effects long-term,” Baldwin said.

While Hampton’s graduating seniors can continue to weigh their vaccine options, continuing students have less time to decide. On March 11,



Uncredited | Associated Press

Virginia marks anniversary of COVID-19 virus trace

JOURDYN GRANDISON
STAFF WRITER

This week marks the anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 reported in Virginia.

Since then, according to Virginia’s Department of Health, about 553,000 Virginians, including over 153,000 in Northern Virginia, have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and over 43,000 Virginians have been admitted, treated, and released due to virus symptoms. In addition, the epidemic has claimed the lives of over 7,000 Virginians, including over 1,700 in Northern Virginia.

At the start of the pandemic, Center for Disease Control (CDC) officials advised

washing your hands and avoiding touching your face. Mask mandates hadn’t yet been enacted and nationwide shutdowns were on the cusp of our consciousness.

“This was unrelenting,” Governor Northam said in an interview with NBC 12. “We were asked to fight a biological war without any supplies and without any guidance.”

Virginia experienced its first coronavirus case in March 2020, and due to the unknown ramifications of the virus, COVID-19 began to spread.

“I never expected quarantining to be a part of our reality,” said Hailey Keys, a Norfolk State University pre-nursing major. “When my family and I first got in contact with the virus, it

was like the world was stuck on pause. It feels like a never ending cycle of loss and I’m ready for it to end.”

According to Governor Northam, one of the many frustrating problems at the beginning of COVID-19 tracing had to do with testing. There were few tests available that had to be sent off to be analyzed by the CDC.

“The initial lack of resources in the state and nation created a chaotic situation. We used what was available through science and data,” Northam said to NBC 12.

Now, Virginia is focusing its efforts on vaccine rollout.

According to the health department’s vaccine dashboard, Virginia residents have received 1.4 million

vaccine doses out of a total 1.73 million received by the state. A total of 351,000 Virginians have received both doses, which are needed for the vaccine to be completely effective.

“It’s been incredible to witness the resiliency, passion and dedication of the health care workforce driving care delivery across Virginia,” said Steve Arner, Carilion Clinic Chief Operating Officer and the Chairman of VHHA’s Board of Directors in a press release.

“While we wouldn’t wish to be in this situation, we appreciate that Virginia has a structurally-sound health care delivery system. We are fortunate to work alongside thousands of talented clinicians and health care workers whose dedication to patients is unparalleled.”



Courtesy of the Governor’s office

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

Billboard-charting Hampton music producer is making a name for himself

JAMEL ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

Christian Ho started charting a path to success before he got to Hampton University.

Ho, aka “DatKidChris,” first made the beat to Middle Child at age 17 during his junior year in high school. He produced the song by PnB Rock and XXXTentacion.

After Middle Child’s release, it ranked No. 91 on Billboard’s Top 100 and No. 37 on Billboard’s R&B/Hip Hop Hot 100 for the week of May 18, 2019. The song peaked in the top 10 in all of Apple Music. The music video has 62 million streams on YouTube.

Ho, now 21 and a third-year computer science major from Woolwich Township, New Jersey, was honored to work with PnB Rock.

“PnB Rock is a monumental figure in the music industry in the Philadelphia/New Jersey area,” Ho said. “I was a big fan of his work before working with him and am honored to have been a part of his project, TrapStar Turnt PopStar, which was released in May of 2019.”

That was less than a year after XXXTentacion was shot dead at age 20, according to The New York Times.

Ho believes XXXTentacion would have been one of the greatest artists of this generation.

The beats go on

Ho has worked really hard to get to this point and estimated that he has made around “3,000 beats since starting [his] musical journey in 2016.”

He also has unreleased tracks with recording artist Playboi Carti, titled Let’s Get It and Rollie. Ho hopes those songs will make Carti’s rumored deluxe version of his critically acclaimed 2020 album, Whole Lotta Red, which debuted at No. 1 on Billboard’s Top 100 in December 2020.

Ho also has a recently released project with an upcoming Philadelphia artist named Lil Bape, Neighborhood Popstar, which is available on all streaming services.

Hampton influences

Ho’s mother is a proud Hampton alumna who is one of many who influenced his decision to attend Hampton University.

His interest in technology motivated his interest in the computer science department. He has aspirations to make his own software application that will tie both music and technology together for creators like himself. Ho wishes there were more outlets for aspiring producers/creatives like himself at the university, including more label opportunities and listening events for artists to get their names out there.

His Hampton University inspiration is DJ Envy, a prominent Hampton alumnus and host of the nationally syndicated radio station 105.1 The Breakfast Club. His other inspirations include Pi’erre Bourne, Metro Boomin and Pharrell Williams.

What separates him

Many people have asked him to collaborate and wonder why he does not work with many artists, and it is because he is very critical of his art and

has to believe in an artist’s vision to work with them. He states that many people just release art, hoping that it works instead of focusing on putting the best product out there and being unique, which he believes separates him from many other creatives.

You can follow Christian Ho’s musical journey by following his social media platforms, @DatKidChrisOnDaTrack, and he encourages other fellow Hampton creatives to contact him to collaborate or for tips on how to start making music.



Courtesy of Emmanuel Young

Netflix’s *Biggie: I Got A Story To Tell* covers untold tale of the hip-hop legend

NOAH HOGAN
STAFF WRITER

The thought of death weighed heavy on the mind of Christopher Wallace up until the day he died at age 24.

Wallace fell victim to gun violence on March 9, 1997, yet has left an unimaginable impact on the genre of hip-hop and music itself.

Hailing from the epicenter of New York, the Notorious B.I.G.’s legacy will forever be echoed in rap conversations across the world.

“Biggie is one of those names that is held in such high regard, but unfortunately I was born after he had already passed, so I am not so familiar with his work other than his major hits,” said Calyx Stover, a Hampton University journalism major from Boiling Springs, South Carolina.

Netflix’s *Biggie: I Got A Story To Tell*, which debuted on the streaming service March 1, serves as one of the many pieces of posthumous content released by the Wallace estate in recent years. The documentary spans various forms of media, including his sophomore album, *Life After Death*, a 2009 biopic, *Notorious*, and various books and documentaries.

Biggie: I Got A Story To Tell finds its uniqueness as it is constructed using previously unseen footage provided by Biggie’s lifelong friend, Damion Butler. With executive production from the MC’s mother, Voletta Wallace, and lifelong friend, Sean “Puffy” Combs, the authenticity is felt throughout the film by incorporating interviews from friends and family who knew and understood Christopher Wallace best.

I Got A Story To Tell takes the opportunity to fully flesh out and explain Wallace’s relationship with his mother. Tracing the Wallaces’ roots back to Trelanny, Jamaica, Ms. Wallace details her difficult decision of chasing the American Dream or staying in Jamaica.

“I always daydreamed of being a filthy rich lady, a lady of means with three children,” Voletta Wallace said in the documentary. “I did not see that in the country for me. That was not my life.”

Raising her son in Brooklyn as a first-generation American, Wallace found it instrumental to send Christopher to Jamaica every summer, where he would come back and share new music and dialect from his Uncle Joe.

In an attempt to build on his natural talent of art, a local saxophonist, Donald Harrison, exposed Wallace to various forms of jazz artist such as Max Roach, who would later inspire some of

Wallace’s rhyme schemes.

“He was already writing,” childhood friend Hubert Sam said in the documentary. “He had different rhyme books, and we’d all link up and start doing routines.”

Although he attended a Catholic school from an early age, Wallace soon fell victim to the chaotic environment around him and began selling drugs on Fulton Street, an area notoriously known for hustlers and addicts.

Over the course of the 97-minute runtime, *I Got A Story To Tell* depicts the ebbs and flows of Wallace’s double life. On one hand, he is depicted as a man who did what he felt he must do to provide for his family and those in his support system. On the other hand, he was a man who dedicated himself to a life of crime out of fear of his financial woes.

“I think this documentary was much-needed for the perception of

Biggie,” Stover said. “Other hip-hop legends that have passed like Tupac have a good amount of interviews and other footage so that people could get a feel for who they were. On the contrary, besides the songs, Biggie is a complete mystery.”

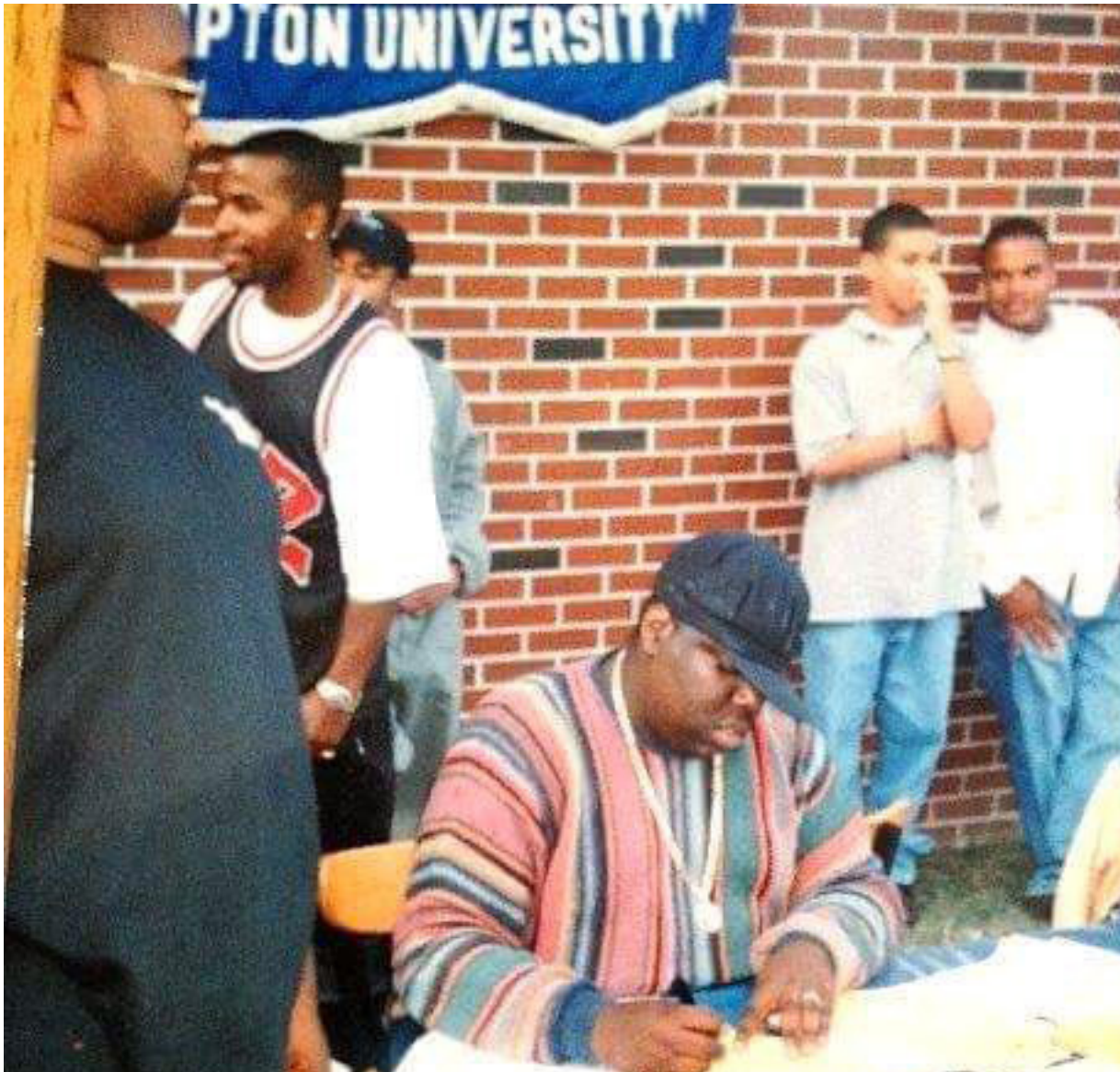
In an attempt to connect the Christopher Wallace story to a younger audience, director Emmett Malloy made it his mission telling the side of Biggie that fans don’t know. Instead of focusing on the infamous East Coast vs. West Coast conflict, he makes better use of the narrative by honing in on the circumstances and relationships that made Christopher Wallace.

I Got A Story To Tell does its best to fill in the gaps of Christopher Wallace’s story of growth through trials and tribulation. Scene after scene, viewers get an idea of the type of character that Biggie was through the use of home video clips of day-to-day

activities. The same individuals from the artist’s childhood would reappear again in new roles as Wallace’s companions at his performances and live appearances.

Twenty-four years after his death, *I Got A Story To Tell* leaves fans with the burning question: Why was a man so talented slain so young? In an attempt to rationalize and humanize Wallace, fans are left with the cold reality of what could have been.

“Christopher Wallace certainly had a great ear,” said Faith Evans, Wallace’s wife, in the documentary. “He was super intelligent with his way of words, and he probably would have set them all up with gold and platinum albums, if they showed that that was what they wanted to do.”



Flickr user @JamesIdell

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

Hampton students react to historic Nintendo reboot

ISAIAH TAYLOR
STAFF WRITER

Since the beginning of Nintendo’s reign as one of the leading video game franchises, titles such as *Super Mario*, *Pokémon* and *The Legend of Zelda* have been the cornerstones for Nintendo, playing a vital role in the prestige amassed over the years. Fans worldwide are all celebrating significant anniversaries this year.

One of the biggest anniversaries on Nintendo’s list to celebrate in 2021 is *The Legend of Zelda*. The original NES title was released in 1986, and since then, the series has only gotten more prominent as the years progressed.

“Each Zelda title is a huge release to the fanbase and has always brought such unique concepts and gameplay with every game released,” said Janee’ Hoover, a third-year Hampton University business major from Detroit.

The latest *Legend of Zelda* game to be given a reboot is the Nintendo

Wii installment of *Skyward Sword*. Dropping on July 16, it has been more than 11 years since the initial release in 2011. The game also supports button-only controls, owing to the Switch Lite’s absence of removable hand controllers.

“I was completely blown away, seeing *Skyward Sword* on the switch. All of those same emotions from playing this game in my childhood came flooding back in full force,” said Vincent Thomas, a fourth-year HU graphic design major from New York. “Nintendo is going crazy this year, and I’m 100% here for it.”

In addition to *The Legend of Zelda*, Nintendo is also focused on getting the most from each and every new retro game reboot going forward. Next to *Zelda*, *Pokémon* is the most extensive series celebrating a milestone in 2021. Primarily, the plans for this will be orchestrated by the Pokémon Company and Game Freak.

During the *Pokémon* anniversary live stream, the Pokémon Company announced the release of reboots for

Pokémon Diamond and Pearl coming in November 2021 and titled *Brilliant Diamond and Shining Pearl*. The company also announced that it is releasing a new *Pokémon* game unlike any other, called *Pokémon Arceus*. *Pokémon Arceus* will be an open-world, non-linear game that will combat the previous mold of all the other games released in the past.

“I love my switch, but now I feel like I’m truly getting my money’s worth with these new Pokémon games,” said Jonathan Lowe, a third-year HU marketing major from Atlanta. “I literally cannot wait until these games drop this year. So much nostalgia.”

Last but not least, the Super Mario franchise is a worldly renowned platformer adventure game released in arcades in 1983 before being ported to the SNES and NES. Not only is it one of the most iconic and influential arcade titles of its time, but it’s still vastly popular today with hundreds of games that have captivated fans for decades. It introduced so many beloved characters

that have grown alongside Nintendo.

With the anniversary being celebrated year-round, Nintendo launched *Super Mario Bros. 35*, a free online battle game available to Nintendo Switch Online subscribers, along with an exclusive Game & Watch *Super Mario Bros.* handheld console. When the games were announced on the 35th anniversary of Nintendo Direct, the company said all of these would be removed from sale on March 31 indefinitely. This makes them potential prized collector items.

“I’ve been a Mario fan ever since I could remember,” said Brooke Marsh-ton, first-year HU liberal arts major from Bowie, Maryland. “All of these Nintendo releases are just adding to the everlasting love I have for Nintendo. I can’t wait to play!”



Flickr User Luis Paulo Borges

Meghan and Harry interview with Oprah lays bare royal rift

JONATHAN LANDRUM JR.
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — In a wide-ranging interview aired Sunday, Harry and Meghan described painful discussions about the color of their son’s skin, losing royal protection and the intense pressures that led the Duchess of Sussex to contemplate suicide.

The interview with Oprah Winfrey was the couple’s first since they stepped down from royal duties and the two-hour special included numerous revelations.

Meghan, who is biracial, described that when she was first pregnant with son Archie, there were “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he’s born.” The statement led Winfrey to ask “What,” incredulously and sit in silence for a moment.

In a rare positive moment in the interview, Harry and Meghan revealed their second would be a girl. The interview opened with Winfrey gushing over Meghan’s pregnancy and lamenting that COVID-19 protocols kept them from hugging.

The interview aired Sunday night in the United States, a full day before it will air in Britain. The revelations aren’t over: Winfrey teased additional bits of the interview would be shown Monday morning on CBS.

In response to a question from Winfrey, Harry said he wouldn’t have left royal life if he hadn’t married Meghan, but that it was their relationship that revealed the strictures of royal life.

“I wouldn’t have been able to, because I myself was trapped,” Harry said. “I didn’t see a way out.

“I was trapped, but I didn’t know I was trapped,” Harry said, before adding, “My father and my brother, they are trapped.”

Harry acknowledged that he does not have a close relationship presently with his brother William, who is heir to the throne after their father, Prince Charles.

The prince disputed rumors

that he intentionally blindsided his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, with his decision to split. He suspects the rumors came from the institution.

“The queen has always been wonderful to me,” Meghan said.

Winfrey at various points in the interview ran through headlines about Meghan and at one point asked about the mental health impact. Meghan responded that she experienced suicidal thoughts and had sought help through the palace’s human resources department, but was told there was nothing they could do.

Meghan said she grew concerned about her son not having a royal title because it meant he wouldn’t be provided security.

“He needs to be safe,” a teary-eyed Meghan recalled. “We’re not saying don’t make him a prince or princess, whatever it’s going to be. But if you’re saying the title is going to affect their protection, we haven’t created this monster machine around us in terms of click bait and tabloid fodder. You’ve allowed that to happen, which means our son needs to be safe.”

Meghan said it was hard for her to understand why there were concerns within the royal family about her son’s skin color. She said it was hard for her to “compartmentalize” those conversations.

Harry said the royal family cut him off financially at the start of 2020 after announcing plans to step back from his roles. But he was able to afford security for his family because of the money his mother, Princess Diana, left behind.

Sunday’s interview special opened with Meghan describing how naive she was about the ground rules of royal life before she married her husband, Harry, nearly three years ago. “I didn’t fully understand what the job was,” she said. She also noted that she did not know how to curtsy before meeting Queen Elizabeth II for the first time, and didn’t realize it would be necessary.

Meghan said she and Harry were aligned during their courtship because of their “cause-driven” work. But she

did not fully comprehend the pressure of being linked the prestigious royal family.

“It’s easy to have an image of it that is so far from reality,” she said. “And that’s what was really tricky over those past few years, is when the perception and the reality are two very different things. And you’re being judged on the perception, but you’re living the reality of it. There’s a complete misalignment and there’s no way to explain that to people.”

It is unclear what public reaction, if any, the queen and other royal family members will have to Sunday’s interview. The U.K.’s Sunday Times newspaper, citing an anonymous source, reported that the queen would not watch it.

HU students react

“I can’t believe the Institution, an organization there for her protection, offered no help to her at all,” said Laniya Sims, a second-year marketing major from Baltimore. “I am so glad they found peace outside of that organization.”

“The interview exposed that racial barriers still need to be broken globally and exposes the truth about the Royal Family that many people had prior misconceptions about,” said Aniyah Oberlton, senior strategic communication major at Hampton University.

—Anyae Johns



Joe Pugliese | Associated Press

SPORTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

Script picks: NBA power rankings

COLANGELO PARKER
STAFF WRITER

The NBA season is now half over with the arrival and departure of the All-Star break. Let’s take a look at the top teams and where they stand as the second half of the season is set to begin.

1. Brooklyn Nets (24-13)

On January 14, the Nets traded for Houston Rockets guard James Harden. Many were skeptical of the fit between three ball-dominant and transcendent talents of the league. They have all but silenced the critics and naysayers. The Nets, with the No. 1-rated offense in the league, have been succeeding without star forward Kevin Durant, who has been sidelined with a leg injury. Despite this, Kyrie Irving and Harden have kept the Nets rolling as of late, all the way into second place in the Eastern Conference. It appears to be championship or bust for Brooklyn this season with the addition of recently signed forward Blake Griffin.

2. Philadelphia 76ers (24-12)

After a disappointing run in the NBA playoffs last season, the 76ers left many questions about their future: What direction is this team going in? With the firing of coach Brett Brown, who will coach the team? Can Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons work together? This season, all of those questions and more have been put to rest. Philadelphia, behind new coach Doc Rivers, is in first place in the Eastern Conference. Simmons and league MVP favorite Embiid have excelled under new guidance, and with help from new additions such as Danny Green, Seth Curry, rookie Tyrese Maxey and Dwight Howard, the 76ers are looking primed to make some noise in the Eastern Conference this postseason.

3. Utah Jazz (27-9)

The Utah Jazz have been excellent to start the 2020-2021 season. Jolting themselves to the best record in the NBA at the halfway mark, the perennial playoff team is looking to cement themselves as true title contenders this year. The Jazz, with the third-best offense in the NBA, had three players in the 2021 All-Star Game. Utah also has been lifted by forward Bojan Bogdanovic, who opted out of last season’s NBA playoff bubble, and also the Sixth Man of the Year frontrunner, guard Jordan Clarkson. In a tough Western Conference, it is still too early to tell if the Jazz can sustain their fast start, but their early season success is difficult to deny.

4. Phoenix Suns (24-11)

After an impressive run in the NBA bubble at the end of last season, many wondered what would be next for Phoenix. Although the Suns had a young star in Devin Booker, it was clear that veteran leadership was missing within their young and inexperienced core. The additions of veterans Chris Paul, Jae Crowder, Dario Saric and E’Twaun Moore have solved that issue. Phoenix has surprised many and now sits second in the Western Conference at the halfway point of this season.

5. Milwaukee Bucks (22-14)

The Bucks are proving to be a formidable foe this season with the second-rated offense in the NBA, as well as the reigning MVP and Defensive Player of the Year, Giannis Antetokounmpo. With additions to improve spacing and defense, such as Jrue Holiday, Bobby Portis and D.J. Augustin, Milwaukee is looking to translate its regular season successes into the postseason and improve on their disappointing end to the 2020 playoffs.

6. Miami Heat (18-18)

One of two teams with the shortest rest between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 seasons, the injury bug reared its head to the Heat. It was tough for Miami to catch its groove with key players like Jimmy Butler, Goran Dragic and Bam Adebayo in and out of the lineup. Now,

however, with the team gaining back its health, Miami has returned to the gritty 3-and-D team that made an unexpected championship run last season.

7. Los Angeles Lakers (24-13)

No championship hangover for the Lakers. Despite having one of the shortest rest periods between this season and last, Los Angeles has still been playing its best basketball to start this season. Sitting at third place in the Western Conference, LeBron James, a dark horse for MVP, has willed the Lakers to stay afloat while forward Anthony Davis is sidelined with a leg injury. This injury could prove troublesome for the Lakers’ ability to dominate the paint without Davis moving forward into the regular season and playoffs.

8. Los Angeles Clippers (24-14)

The Los Angeles Clippers are another team that appears to be all-in for this season. The Clippers added forwards Serge Ibaka, Nicholas Batum and guard Luke Kennard to an already stout roster. Although the team has shown some inconsistencies at points during the season, the additions to the roster have proven to be a success. Los Angeles ranks in the top six in both offense and defense this season. Combine that with a career year from Paul George and the ever-so-consistent Kawhi Leonard, the Clippers are looking primed to continue their championship hunt, despite falling short last season in the second

round.

9. Denver Nuggets (21-15)

Despite losing forward Jerami Grant to free agency this past offseason, the Nuggets have not missed a beat, returning with the majority of the same roster that took them to the Western Conference Finals just last season. Powered behind 20.9-points-per-game scorer Jamal Murray and MVP dark horse Nikola Jokic, the Nuggets are looking to repeat some of the same successes from last season.

10. Portland Trail Blazers (21-14)

Damian Lillard is once again showing the NBA why he is one of the best players the league has to offer. The Trail Blazers are missing key contributors such as C.J. McCollum and Jusuf Nurkic for an extended period of time now due to injury. Despite this, Lillard is averaging 29.9 points and 7.9 assists per game this season and has propelled himself into the MVP discussion. The Trail Blazers sit as the fifth seed in the Western Conference.



John Minchillo | Associated Press

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