



TEACHING YOUTH THE BEAUTY OF HOW TO BE

AESTHETICALLY SPEAKING

VOLUME 2. ISSUE 1

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President's Message

Changing Minds...One Day at a Time!

Hello and welcome to the winter edition of Aesthetically Speaking. Happy New Year and I wish you success and blessings. Speaking of success, for the past five years, Black Aesthetics has successfully delivered programs and services that are reaching youth at their place of need. We make a difference in the lives of the youth we serve and consider ourselves to be the pre-eminent youth development and media arts production organization in the region. In this effort, Black Aesthetics facilitates engaging programs that prepare youth for jobs in the television, film and photography industries, and produces media arts tools for educational and national consumption.

We teach youth the beauty of

how to be through self esteem building media arts training programs that focus on Black culture and self pride. It is well documented that learning through the arts results in higher academic achievement and higher test scores. Indeed, it is through the arts that youth can blossom and grow existing talents, or tap into unknown areas of potential that points them toward a path of self-acclimation.

As a junior at Howard University in Washington, D.C., I majored in Fashion Buying and Merchandising. One day, I stumbled upon a student film festival at Howard's School of Communications and experienced my first major epiphany. After I observed how the power of film could *change minds* through the engaging student films I viewed that day, I knew film-making was for me. This breathtaking experience spearheaded my decision to change my major right away. It was at that very moment that I consciously de-

cidied to facilitate, create and support images of Blacks that inform, transform and inspire. When Blacks represent only 13% of the American population, it behooves us to be cognizant of the negative images of Blacks we consume when we open a magazine or book, turn on the television set, watch a film, or look at photographs in public spaces. Facilitating images of Blacks that are fair, practical and realistic changes how others see us, and how we see ourselves. For those individuals, whether Black or



White, who have no Black friends, neighbors or co-workers, the daily bombardment of Black stereotypes can create mis-understandings, mis-conceptions, and distrust. The essence of Black film is that it can be used to enlighten and *change minds*. Back at Howard, my favorite professor was Dr. Ron Simmons. This African-American, Dashiki wearing, mocha colored, brilliant brother taught us students to “go out there and be VANGUARDS.” A few days ago, I viewed Denzel Washington’s Golden Globe nominated, “The Great Debaters.” “The Great Debaters” is a wonderfully riveting and engaging film. Visit www.seeingblack.com for Esther Everem’s film review. “The Great Debaters” taught its viewers that Blacks can be and are VANGUARDS, and therefore... *changed some minds*. For the New Year, I challenge you to go out there and be VANGUARDS by supporting Black film. More than any other media experience, film determines how Blackness and Black people are seen and how others respond to us. Your dollars will speak loud and clear about the importance of Black film, which essentially helps to sustain Black culture and Black actors, and acts as a conduit for building positive self-esteem, self-pride and sense of self. I assure you that with this commitment, we will change minds....one day at a time.

One Love,

deneZe!

*Save
the
Date!*

*Date:
Saturday
May 17, 2008*



2008 Black Vanguard Award



Daphnee Maxwell Reid

The Black Vanguard is an individual who has made a major impact in any arena upon the national or local consciousness, and whose activities serve to inspire others to believe and achieve. It is one who has been a trailblazer, initiator and forerunner in some activity, which improved the well being, self esteem and life goals of others. It is one who has shown courage in their commitment to community development, when the timid might have given up. The Black Vanguard Award pays tribute to, and honors extraordinarily outstanding African Americans and person of African descent whose exemplary character, professional achievements and personal service to both the African American and world community have made an enduring imprint and are a model for emulation by young African Americans and youth of African descent. Join us on May 17, 2008 as we present Ms. Daphne Maxwell-Reid, award winning Actress, Fashion Designer, Fashion Model and Film Producer, with the 2008 Black Vanguard Award. Daphne Maxwell Reid, who is most

widely recognized for replacing Janet Hubert-Whitten as Aunt Vivian Banks on NBC's hit comedy "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," is also a quintessential performer. She is also known for her role on the CBS comedy series "Franks Place," in which she co-starred with her husband, Tim. The couple teamed up again when she starred as Mickie Dennis on CBS' "Snoops," and also on the King World syndicated talk show, "The Tim and Daphne Show" for 76 1-hour episodes.

She is at home in comedy and drama and her television credits include roles in "Simon & Simon," "Hardcastle and McCormick," "WKRP in Cincinnati," "Cagney and Lacey," "Hill Street Blues," "Murder, She Wrote," "The Fall Guy," "The A-Team," "The Cosby Show" and "Sister, Sister." She has also co-starred in movies of the week for NBC, CBS, and PBS, as well as the feature films "Protocol" and "Once Upon a Time...When We Were Colored." Maxwell Reid was born and raised on Manhattan's west side and was encouraged by several of her teachers to enroll in the renowned Bronx High School of Science, where she graduated as Senior Class President and Merit Scholarship recipient. While pursuing a major in Interior Design and Architecture at Northwestern University, an English teacher submitted a photograph to a magazine editor and friend who was preparing an article on college women. The result was Maxwell Reid's first photograph in *Seventeen* magazine. Quickly signed by the Eileen Ford Agency, she appeared in many magazines, and was also the first Black woman to grace the cover of *Glamour* magazine. Ms. Maxwell Reid is also the Co-Founder of New Millennium Studios in Petersburg, Virginia.

Youth Vanguard Program



This year's Youth Vanguard Program (YVP) has been off to a phenomenal start with its current project: Perspectives on Anacostia – A Visual Narrative. In preparation for the completion of the documentary film on HIV/AIDS in the Anacostia community and its affects on youth - and the photographic montage of the Anacostia community, youth participants have been receiving training in film and television production from DCTV Instructors and basic photography skills training from BAI staff. Upon completion of the program, they will receive Studio Technician certification. They have all been given the opportunity to receive hands-on training on interview techniques and video camera operation. Additionally, they have been working with digital cameras to document the Anacostia community. In order to provide a greater context for the film's subject matter, the young men and women of YVP have participated in guided discussions and trainings, screened films and independently conducted research on the subject of HIV/AIDS. Bearing in mind the current estimate that one in every forty five young people between the ages of 13 and 24 contract HIV/AIDS in

the District - the highest rate in the country - youth participants have consistently shown a dedication to augmenting their knowledge of this growing Washington, DC epidemic. Most impressive, however, is the fact that the young people have now created the first draft of the treatment and script for their documentary film; combining the information they gathered from their BAI learning sessions, and their creativity and adherence to authenticity. As a complement to the technical aspects of the Program, the youth have continuously gained training in job skills, proper etiquette and office wardrobe selection, and grooming skills. Recently, they put these lessons into practice during a field trip to the FrontPage restaurant in the District's Dupont Circle. Dressed for success and exuding personal style, while exuding the temperament of royalty, YVP participants enjoyed a delectable lunch, while adhering to the basic courtesies and manners for a special event. The success of the YVP, thus far is extremely encouraging, and leaves no doubt that what will follow from this point forward, will be nothing short of amazing! For further information about YVP, please contact Denise Erskine-Meusa at denise@blackaesthetics.org. **V. Njoku**



In the Darkroom

The Youth Vanguard Program’s current project is entitled Perspectives on Anacostia: A Visual Narrative. Youth participants recently took to the streets within the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C. to document this quintessential District neighborhood through the eye of the camera lens. Guided by Media Arts Coordinator, Melissa Jones and Volunteer, Vivianne A. Njoku, the photography excursion began at none other than, “The Big Chair” – the undisputed neighborhood landmark of the Anacostia community. Armed with top-notch Canon Power Shot digital cameras provided by the United Black Fund and the Neighborhood Investment Fund and dynamic picture taking skills garnered from lessons on the fundamentals of photography, the youth (ages 11 – 18) captured Anacostia from as many different angles and perspectives as possible. Whether they were capturing colorful scenes in front of wall murals, or capturing lively store front scenarios, or taking time to detail the intricacies of church altars and its paraphernalia, the young men and women of the YVP let no opportunity pass to find artistic expression within the ins and outs of this historic Washington neighborhood. Passersby were repeatedly compelled to comment on the dedication with which the children took to their task. As a matter of fact, a handful of parents expressed their desire to have their children enroll in future BAI programs! Program participants have taken so many pictures



that they will have a difficult time deciding on the final selections for display at the closing ceremony on May 3rd. Undoubtedly, the showcase will further validate the need for these and similar programs aimed at engaging our young people, and allowing them one more means of vital creativity. **V. Njoku**

Chairperson’s Corner



Make this Year Your Best One Ever!

With this New Year, I’m thrilled about life’s expectations, its new beginnings and challenges that make our lives so entertaining! In my newest role as the Board Chairperson for Black Aesthetics – I am ready to help lead our wonderful organization to higher heights. Along with our wonderful volunteers and fellow board

members, I will seek out sustainable contributions and assist with bringing positive change to our youth and children in the District of Columbia.

As I look back on the year that was, one thing is clear – there was never a dull moment. This year, BAI has an exciting line up of interactive programs and special events, and we look forward to your joining us on this exhilarating, yet thought provoking journey. BAI would not be able to do what it does without the generous support from our corporate sponsors, community partners and volunteers. We are especially grateful for our strong partnerships with the United Black Fund, the Covenant Full Potential Development Center, the Safeway Foundation, the Neighborhood Investment Fund, the National Minority AIDS Council, DCTV, and the government of the District of Columbia. These organizations have in some way helped to sustain or fund our signature program – the “Youth Vanguard Program.”

Ask yourself every day – “what would it take for me to live my best life?” With that said, let me introduce you to Kiri Davis – an African-American woman who is a filmmaker, youth activist and student at Howard University. She released her first documentary film, “A Girl Like Me” in 2005 when she was just 16 years old. Garnering her international fame, Davis’ film was a reenactment of African-American Psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark’s 1940’s Doll Test, in which African American children between the ages of 3 and 7 years old were presented with White and Black dolls, and then asked which doll they preferred in order to

study the psychological effects of segregation on Black Children. Dr. Clark’s research was actually used as evidence for desegregation in the landmark 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which successfully argued that segregation damaged the personality development of Black children. Sad, as it may seem, the majority of the children that participated in Davis’ test, mirrored Dr. Clark’s research and, overwhelmingly preferred White dolls over Black dolls – citing that they were prettier and nicer to play with. Suffice it say, we must exercise a sustained effort and interest in developing and promoting positive images of Blacks that affirm Blackness and cultural pride among our youth, so that they too, can live their best lives.

Why am I sharing this with you? Well, at BAI, we are creating tomorrow’s filmmakers, today! BAI is uniquely positioned as an innovative nonprofit organization that is strongly committed to educating and developing positive and thought provoking images of Blacks using diverse media. BAI’s mission and purpose is to introduce constructive imagery for our youth to debate, create, design and enjoy.

Ask yourself, “who influences me?” and “how can I influence someone else tomorrow?” You won’t know the answer to your question unless you try – each one teaches one! At BAI - we make a difference – one day at a time - one child at a time - teaching youth the beauty of how to be. Please consider joining us as a sponsor, community partner and/or volunteer today!

Kay Sibetta!

Aesthetically Speaking is Published by Black Aesthetics Institute, Inc.

Editor: Denise Erskine-Meusa

Youth Vanguard Program Calendar (Remaining Dates)

February 2nd

10AM – 4PM

DCTV

Script & Storyboard Unveiling and the Screening of “Sankofa”

February 9th

10AM – 4PM

In the field interviews

March 1st

10AM – 4PM

In the field interviews

March 15th

10AM – 4PM

Final production shooting

April 5th

10AM – 4PM

DCTV Post-production

April 19th

10AM – 4PM

Covenant Full Potential Development Center

Job training session and round table discussion: “STD’s and Family Planing”

May 3rd

10 – 4PM

Covenant Full Potential Development Center (Fellowship Hall)

Closing Ceremony/Documentary Film & Photographic Montage Unveiling

May 17th

11AM – 3PM

Black Vanguard Award Luncheon
Public Welfare Foundation Bldg.

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