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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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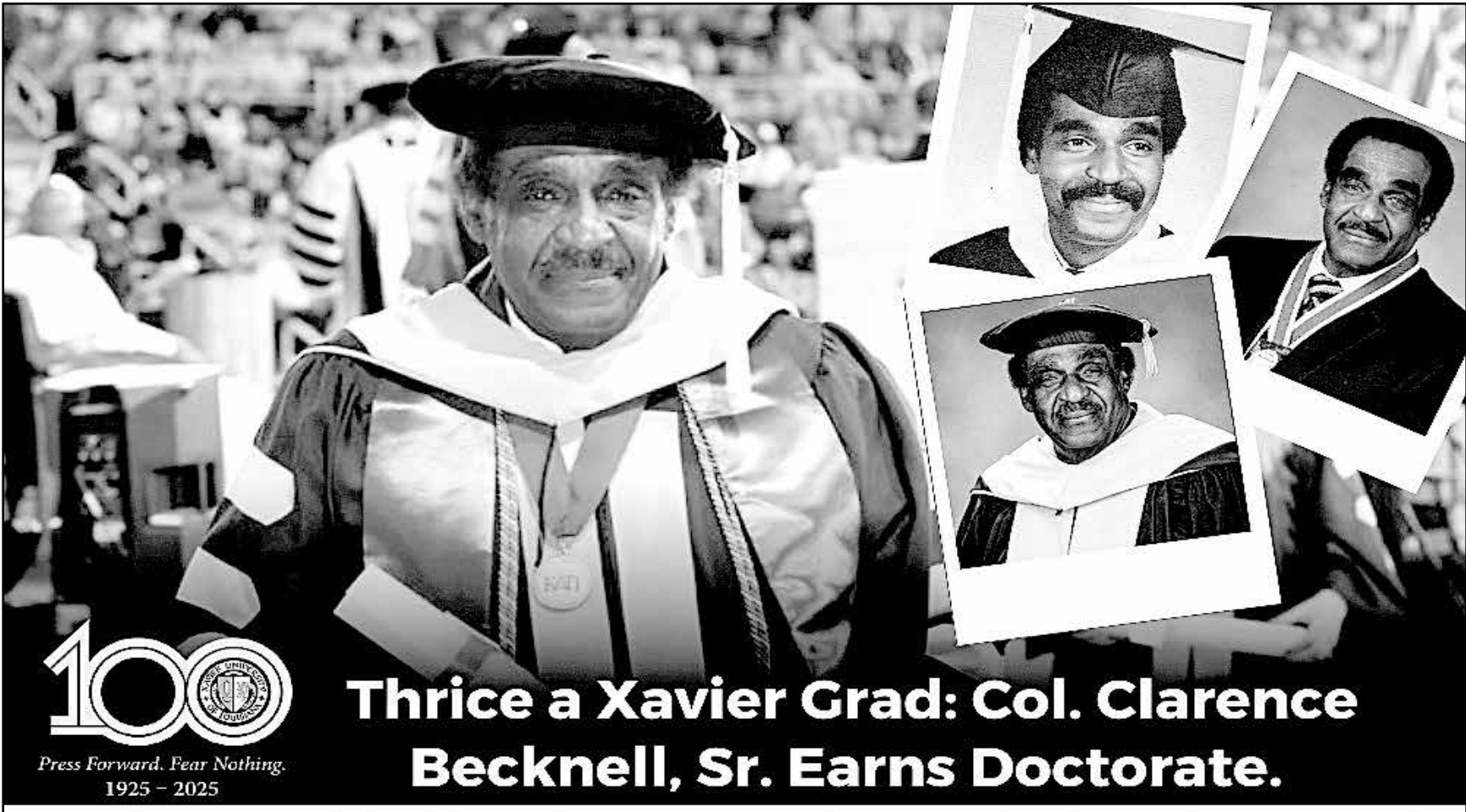
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Dr. Clarence Becknell, Sr.

Decorated Military Veteran, former Morris Jeff Elementary Principal and Zulu Historian Earns Doctorate



Dr. Clarence Becknell, Sr. has lived a life making an impact as an educator, decorated veteran and cultural historian. He continues to inspire others to pursue excellence. Recently, he earned his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Xavier University at the age of 74.

Xavier University of Louisiana

In May 1975, Clarence Becknell, Sr., crossed the stage to proudly accept his bachelor's degree in early childhood education from Xavier University of Louisiana. A veteran of the then-recent Vietnam War, Becknell was a member of an experimental Career

Opportunities Program (COP) for veterans at Xavier that sought to bring more Black men into teaching. He would later return to the nation's only historically Black and Catholic institution to receive his master's in 1988, and now, 47 years after he received his first degree from Xavier, Becknell has again returned, this time as "doctor," after earning his Doctorate in Educa-

tional Leadership.

"Xavier has a great legacy of educating the next leaders of this nation," said Dr. Reynold Verret, President of Xavier University of Louisiana. "Dr. Becknell is a true example of the gift that Xavier presents to the world through graduates who are instilled with the calling to serve and to create a more just and hu-

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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mane society as envisioned by our founder.”

St. Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament established Xavier's College of Arts and Sciences in 1925 in pursuit of educational equity, particularly for those who had little to no access to higher education due to the sin of racism. Quickly approaching its historic centennial, Xavier University of Louisiana has long sought a better future for all and was built on the foundation of what was originally a school for teachers. Though the university faced hardship and prejudice, it has remained committed to the mission gifted by its foundresses and values the education of its students and the youth as the cornerstone of justice and advancement for all.

In 1972, Xavier was, according to Dr. Becknell, the hub of social programs designed to advance those who were marginalized and underserved. Dr. Becknell shared that he was a member of an entering class of between 90-100 students, many of whom were also veterans.

Dr. Becknell shared his gratitude for his fellow Xavier-alum turned advisor Dr. Ramona Perkins, the



Dr. Norman C. Francis (center), who served as President for over four decades, pictured with Dr. Clarence Becknell, Sr. and other the Vietnam veterans, who earned degrees in Early Childhood Education from Xavier University in the 1970's.

Educational Leadership Program Coordinator for the Master and Doctorate Programs at Xavier University of Louisiana. While he participated in the COP for veterans, Dr. Perkins tutored many veterans in the program.

“They would call us, ‘Dem Vets,’” said Dr. Becknell, who detailed that, at a time when Vietnam veterans found themselves unjustly treated, Dr. Becknell claims that then-university President Dr. Nor-

man C. Francis was a staunch advocate for better treatment of the vets on Xavier's campus and beyond.

Retiring after 40 years of service in 2008, Dr. Becknell served in the United States Air Force from 1968-1972 and was also part of the Louisiana Air National Guard and the Louisiana Army Guard. He achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel-colonel. In 2009, the U.S. Army honored Dr. Becknell with a Freedom Team Salute Veteran Commendation during

a special ceremony at the Essence Music Festival for his years of service with the Army National Guard.

During Dr. Becknell's time as a student, Dr. Francis negotiated with Orleans Parish Public School Board to have participants in the Veteran COP intern at New Orleans schools. Born and raised in the Big Easy himself and known locally as the long-serving historian of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Dr. Becknell fondly recalled

when he and the other men in the program acted as mentors for the children.

After graduating from Xavier in 1975, Dr. Becknell observed classes taught by Dr. Perkins' mother, Ms. Audrey O. Jean. As a probationary fifth-grade teacher, he observed her classrooms for a year. Dr. Becknell proclaims that he learned a lot from Ms. Jean and hails her as a great mentor in his life.

His work with the New Orleans Public School System began when he was a student in 1972 through the COP for Veterans and continued until 2005. During that thirty-year span, he worked in various positions and was even an acclaimed Principal of Morris Jeff Elementary School.

Dr. Becknell's decision to return to get his doctorate was, as he puts it, not a lifelong dream but something he felt called to do. After receiving mail about continuing education and seeing a photograph of his old classmate Dr. Perkins at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, he decided to enroll in the entirely online Xavier Doctorate of Educa-

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on page 7.

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Kim Robinson Birthday Party

Photos by Terry Jones
Publisher, Data News Weekly

Kim Robinson recently celebrated her birthday at Whiskey and Sticks, located on Bayou Rd. She was surrounded by family, friends and many well-wishers. It was a night filled with food, fun and music. Data News Weekly was in the house during this amazing event!!!



Kim Robinson enjoying her birthday with family and friends.



Kim Robinson and Julius Kimbrough



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Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.

Data Zone, Continued from page 4.



I asked what kind of family Amina wanted. She said, 'A family like yours.' That's when I knew I had to adopt her.

Denise, adopted 17-year-old Amina

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Rep. Troy Carter, EPA Presents St. James Parish Community Air Monitoring Funds to LDEQ

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- Writing skills and detail orientation will be appreciated.

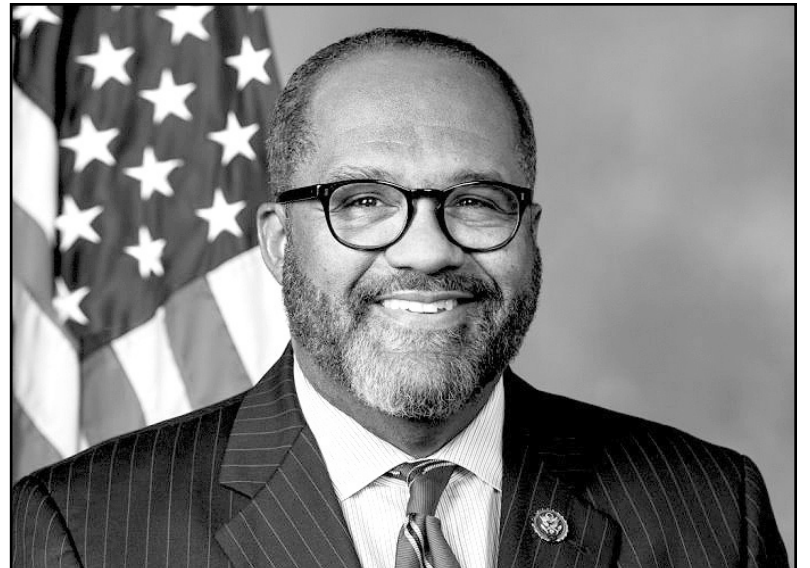
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Data News Staff Edited Report

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) presented a grant to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality at an event on Monday. EPA Regional Administrator Dr. Earthea Nance, U.S. Rep. Troy Carter (LA-2) and community leaders gave remarks about the grant, which will support an Air Monitoring Project in St. James Parish.

Funding for this grant comes from the Inflation Reduction Act, a historic piece of legislation under the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America agenda.



U.S. Congressional Representative Troy Carter (LA-2)

State & Local News

Essence Fest and its Economic Impact on New Orleans

Jasmine Browley New Orleans Agenda

It's nearly impossible to think about ESSENCE and its marquee Annual ESSENCE Festival of Culture (EFOC) without images of New Orleans flashing in your mind. The three have been intrinsically linked for more than two decades, when in 1994, the first festival was hosted there to celebrate ESSENCE Magazine's 25th Anniversary. The location made sense, as both have honored the sacred culture of Blackness for generations.

Now, as we near the 29th year of ESSENCE Fest which will take place June 29-July 3, the event has evolved but one aspect has remained the same, New Orleans is still its forever home.

EFOC has kicked off a long-standing and deeply rooted kinship with the City of New Orleans that has only grown stronger over time. Last month, ESSENCE Ventures' President & CEO Caroline Wanga delivered the keynote for Dillard University's 2023 Graduating Class and was honored with a degree for her substantial work in private and public sectors.

On May 13th, Wanga addressed the crowd of thousands and implored them to not only go after their dreams, but to revel in what they'd already accomplished.

"It's not so much about what the

power of your presence after today will do for the world," Wanga said to the onlookers. "What's more important is how powerful your absence will be."

The honor was just one example of ESSENCE's relationship with NOLA. EFOC, for example has played a pivotal economic role in the city, as evidenced by a November 2022 report conducted by Dillard University, an HBCU located in New Orleans. The report, prepared by Dorian Williams, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Business and Casey Schreiber, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Urban Studies & Public Policy at Dillard University, found that in last year alone, EFOC made a \$327M impact, generated \$120M in labor income, contributed about \$49M in city, state & local taxes and added \$189M in value added to GDP.

"It's always been in New Orleans," Wanga said in a 2022 interview with Power 105.1's The Breakfast Club.

"And I have to reinforce that because it's not the ESSENCE Festival if it's not in New Orleans," explaining that the fest was temporarily relocated to Houston for one year, and virtual for another two years during the Pandemic.

As she also points out, it is the largest festival in the country by per day attendance.

"We're talking about half a mil-



lion people for 27 years have live gathered in New Orleans—you can't find another one that does that, that's then just about us."

EFOC returns this year, on an even bigger scale as it celebrates the 50th year of hip-hop, with a full lineup of musical pioneers to lead the performance showcase over the course of the 3-day event. There will also be 1 million square feet of Hip-Hop Nostalgia at the Convention Center this year.

"{New Orleans} and ESSENCE were born together," Wanga said. "The cultural currency the city has is what makes the festival dope—it will always be held there." To Come Jasmine Browley New Orleans Agenda

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Cornel West Announces Run For President

Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

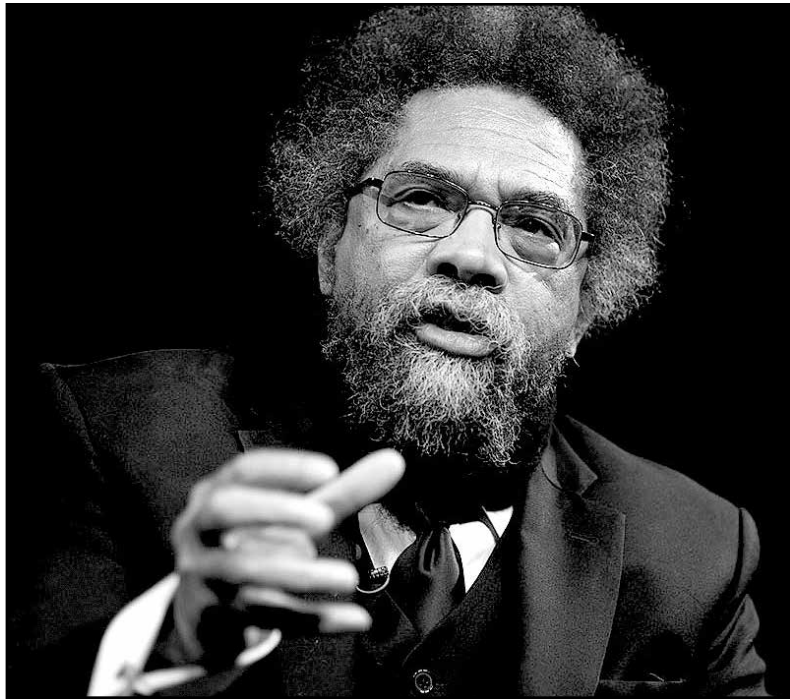
Renowned Scholar and Activist Dr. Cornel West declared his candidacy for the upcoming presidential race under the banner of the People's Party, as announced on Monday.

In a compelling video shared on Twitter, West expressed his intention to run for the pursuit of truth and justice, emphasizing that the presidency serves as a means to achieve these noble ideals.

With a strong academic background, including positions at prestigious institutions such as Harvard University and Princeton University, West is recognized for his intellectual activism.

In his Twitter video, West articulated his decision to run as a third-party candidate, citing the reluctance of the established political parties to address critical issues concerning Wall Street, Ukraine, the Pentagon, and Big Tech.

He referred to former President Donald Trump, a leading contender



Dr. Cornel West, renown scholar has announced his run for President in 2024.

for the Republican nomination, as a "neo-fascist" and labeled President Biden as a "milquetoast neoliberal."

West's educational journey has taken him through esteemed universities such as Yale, Princeton,

and Harvard, and he presently holds a professorship in philosophy at Union Theological Seminary.

Throughout his career, he has been known for his progressive activism and his outspoken critique of

former President Barack Obama.

Fair wages, affordable housing, abortion rights, universal healthcare, the urgent need to address climate change, and preserving American democracy were some of the significant issues West highlighted in his campaign video.

The platform through which West intends to pursue his presidential aspirations is the People's Party, which Nick Brana founded after previously working on Bernie Sanders's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016.

While the party attempted to recruit Sanders after his 2016 campaign, the senator declined involvement and subsequently sought the Democratic nomination once again in 2020.

"Will we succeed? Only time will tell. But some of us are ready to fight until the end," declared West in his announcement video, leaning towards the camera, his words resonating with determination.

"We will fight passionately, with style, and with a smile."

Essence/ Continued
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tional Leadership Program.

"The colonel deserves all the accolades for accomplishing so much personally and professionally," said Dr. Perkins about her classmate, student, and peer. "He is going to make a difference in the support of veterans in higher education, just watch."

The rigorous course called for three years of discipline and hard work, all of which built up to his dissertation reflecting who he is and what he has always felt inspired to do: prepare and instruct universities and other learning centers on properly engaging veteran students. Titled, "A Sacrifice for Their Country and a Commitment to the Community: A Phenomenological Study of Veterans and Their Transition from Soldier to Students," his dissertation was dedicated to Dr. Fran-



Dr. Becknell is a retired decorated veteran serving in the United States Air Force from 1968-1972 and was part of the Louisiana Air National Guard and the Louisiana Army Guard, retiring after 40 years of service in 2008.

cis, Dr. Perkins, Ms. Jean, as well as current military members, veterans, and deceased soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

"Thank you for your service to our country and for putting a downpayment on freedom for us," Dr. Becknell wrote for the dedication.

Dr. Becknell's successful defense of his dissertation, military and educational leadership experience, and unwavering commitment to being a voice for others have all culminated in Dr. Becknell receiving the title of "doctor."

"It was worth it. It was very challenging, but it was well worth it," said Dr. Becknell.

When asked about his decision to earn his doctorate at 74, Dr. Becknell stated it was never too late to achieve your aspirations.

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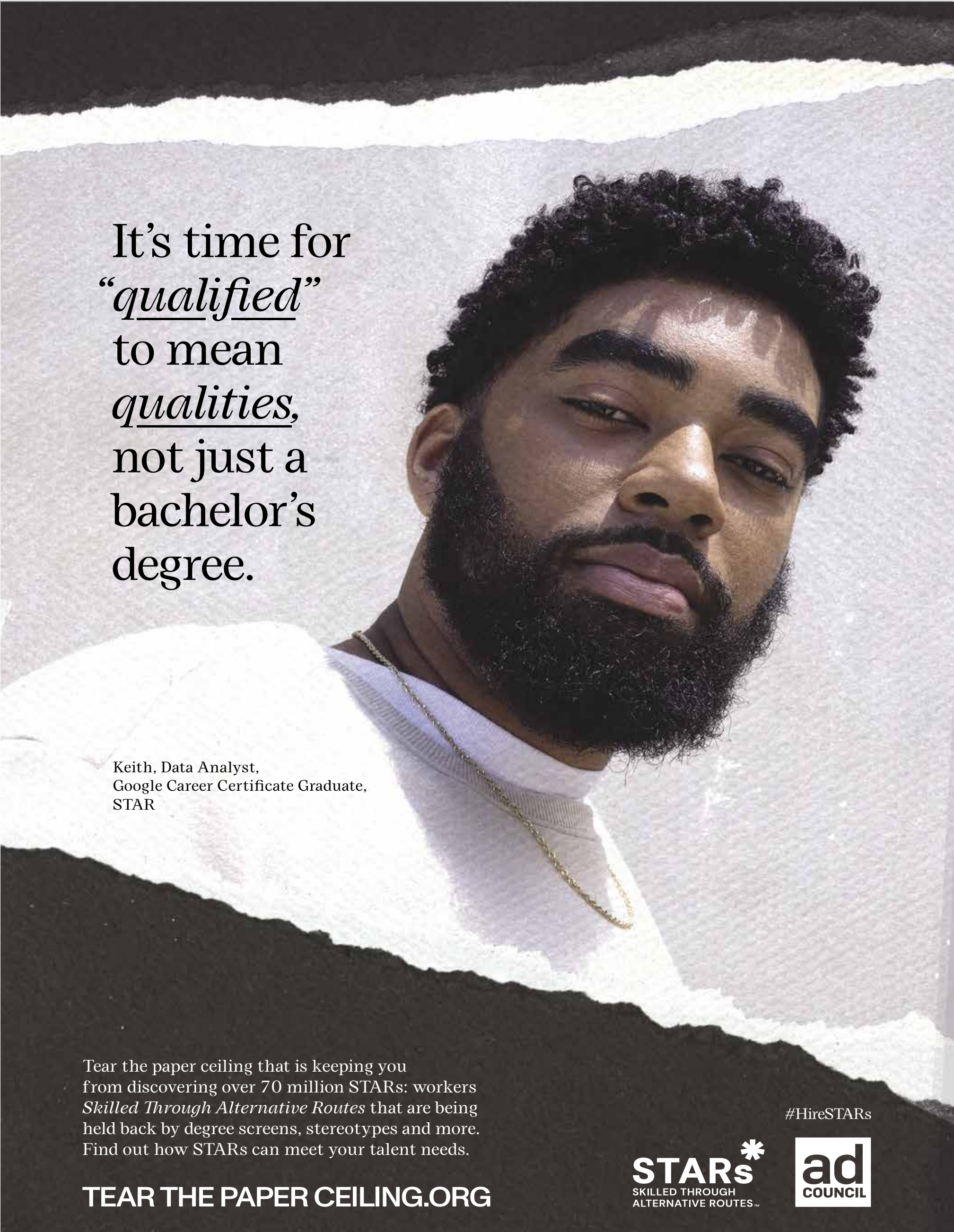
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