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Essence Fest 2023

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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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Affirmative Action, Justice Jackson and Civil Rights Leaders Agree:

America Has Never Been Colorblind



After the Supreme Court decision declaring Affirmative Action unconstitutional, questions arise will colleges continue their commitment to having more diverse student bodies. Also, how will this decision impact African American enrollment in America's colleges and universities.

Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

As she watched her conservative majority colleagues on the high court issue the death knell to affirmative action on Thursday, June 29, Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote another masterpiece to express her dissent.

Jackson's disapproval could easily be summed up in a single and precise sentence: "Our country has never been colorblind."

"The best that can be said of the majority's perspective is that it proceeds (ostrich-like) from the hope that preventing consideration of race will end racism," Jackson wrote in blasting the six-member majority.

"But if that is its motivation, the majority proceeds in vain. If the colleges of this country are required to ignore a thing that matters, it will not just go away. It will take longer for racism to leave us."

In the majority ruling, the conservative justices declared that the admissions policies of Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, which consider race a factor, were unconstitutional.

Students for Fair Admissions had presented two cases for consideration against Harvard and UNC, representing private and public universities.

They argued that the practice violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment and put white and Asian-American applicants at a disadvantage.

Harvard and UNC maintained that affirmative action should be upheld, contending that their admissions policies align with previous court decisions.

They argued that considering race ensures a diverse student body. They denied any discrimination in their practices.

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However, the Court ruled that affirmative action violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

The justices stated that the universities' policies do not conform to the limited exceptions for equal rights without regard to race, color, or nationality.

The justices determined that the universities failed to provide sufficient justification for using race in admissions.

Further, they claimed that affirmative action programs do not comply with the Equal Protection Clause's requirement that race not be used negatively or as a stereotype.

The Court noted that affirmative action resulted in a lower acceptance rate for Asian American applicants at Harvard.

The Court further stated that basing admissions on race leads to stereotyping and assumes that individuals of a particular race think alike, which it said it found offensive and demeaning.

The justices did acknowledge that race can still be considered if it is directly tied to an applicant's character or unique abilities that



Supreme Court Justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson in her dissent summed up her disapproval of the majority decision by saying, "Our country has never been colorblind."

they can contribute to the university.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in the majority opinion, emphasized that students should be evaluated based on their experiences rather than their race.

He criticized universities that he said had wrongly prioritized skin color, stating that America's constitutional history does not support such a choice.

Jackson lambasted that opinion. "With let-them-eat-cake obli-

ousness, today, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces, 'colorblindness for all' by legal fiat," Jackson forcefully dissented.

"But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life. And having so detached itself from this country's actual past and present experiences, the Court has now been lured into interfering with the crucial work that UNC and other institutions of higher learning are doing to solve America's real-world problems," Jackson asserted.

"No one benefits from ignorance. Race matters in the lived experience of Americans, even if legal barriers are gone."

Casting aside decades of precedent, the Court's "anti-opportunity majority further undermines its own legitimacy by gutting race-conscious university admissions, which will benefit the wealthy and well-connected most," the Chairs of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.), Congressional Black Caucus Rep. Steven Horsford (D-Nevada), and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Rep. Nanette Barragán (D-Calif.) offered in a joint statement.

"We know that not all students are afforded equal opportunity in our education systems, and we know that diversity on college campuses benefits the entire student body by enriching their college experiences and better preparing them to enter our workforce," the statement continued.

"Holistic, race-conscious admissions policies allow all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity, to be able to tell the full story of who they are and participate in

a thriving, multiracial democracy. Importantly, though, this decision should not be viewed to impact race-conscious processes outside the scope of university admissions."

President Biden, former President Barack Obama, and a host of civil rights activists also condemned the Court's decision.

Civil Rights Attorney Ben Crump said the ruling "reeks of the intellectual justification of discrimination."

"As we have recently witnessed in politics, this is a coordinated effort to undo much of the progress made to turn America into a land of equal opportunity," Crump stated.

"The truth is, Black Americans do not have equal opportunity because our starting line is miles behind that of our white peers. It's obvious that social inequities and systematic discrimination create a more difficult and treacherous path for Black and Brown people to achieve stability and success, blocking their ability to accumulate generational wealth and get their families to a place of financial security. Affirmative action opened doors for bright, young people that were closed to them for generations."

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Essence Fest 2023

The Essence Music Festival of Culture was a huge success bringing in people from all over the globe to enjoy several days of Celebrating Black Excellence. Data News Weekly there to catch some of the sights and sounds of this amazing event!

This was truly an amazing and memorable Essence Fest, which has attracted thousands to the great City of New Orleans with about 250,000 in person annually says organizers of the festival.

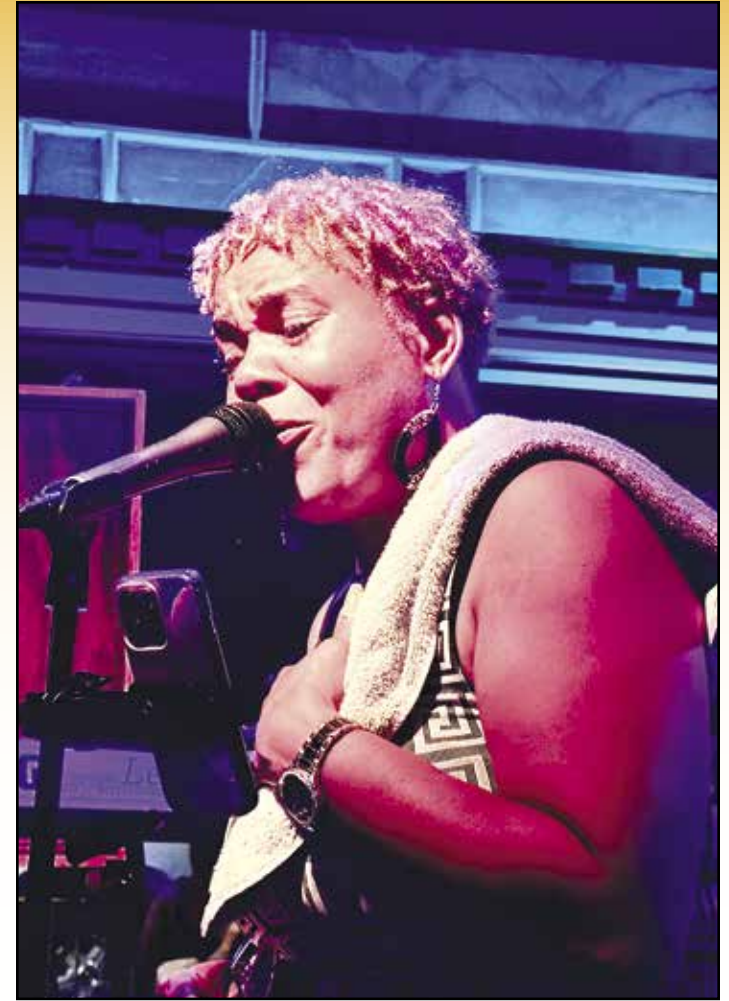
Why it matters: New Orleans hosts Essence Fest each year, with the event being a “celebration of the contributions of the Black community through business, music, and more,” Essence organizers said in a statement.



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

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Black Female Environmental Justice Activists Call Out EPA Regarding Decision to Drop Civil Rights Investigation. Share Stories of Resilience and Action in the Face of Petrochemical Violence as Part of Storytelling Salon

Share Stories of Resilience and Action in the Face of Petrochemical Violence as Part of Storytelling Salon.

New Orleans Agenda

Five Black female environmental justice activists leading the way to oppose new Fossil Fuel Projects that threaten Louisiana communities' health and livelihoods came together for a storytelling event during ESSENCE Festival.

The event included speakers Dr. Beverly Wright, Ph.D., Founder and Executive Director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice and Member of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council; Wawa Gatheru, Founder of Black Girl Environmentalist; Roishetta Sibley Ozane, Founder of The Vessel Project of Louisiana; Shamyra Lavigne, Executive Assistant at Rise St. James; Jo Banner, Co-Founder and Co-Direc-



tor of The Descendants Project; Dr. Joy Banner, Co-Founder and Co-Director of The Descendants Project.

Speakers shared reactions to the Environmental Justice Protection Agency's (EPA)'s decision earlier this week to drop the Civil Rights Investigation into Louisiana pollution without providing support or relief to the community. In January 2022, Earthjustice filed a complaint on behalf of affected residents ask-

ing the EPA to investigate whether the State of Louisiana had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act by permitting industrial development that exposed its Black residents to disproportionate environmental harm.

"We'd been out here fighting so hard for so long, it felt good to have someone shouldering the burden with us, and it felt good to not be gaslit," said Dr. Joy Banner.

"After all of that fighting, they just abandoned us... but this pain is not something that's foreign to us. We're used to them making the most vulnerable do all the work."

Dr. Banner touched on Vice President Kamala Harris and EPA Administrator Michael Regan's appearance at ESSENCE Festival, despite not being present at the community event discussing EPA issues. "Why is Michael Regan not

here listening to us?" asked Dr. Banner. "[He] owes us this much. I don't care if it's uncomfortable. Chemotherapy is uncomfortable."

"We will keep fighting," Dr. Banner continued. "[This decision] forces us to be creative. We are sharpening our claws and learning. Our ancestors were very resourceful."

"They [industry] have kept people in Louisiana in the dark," said Dr. Beverly Wright, Ph.D. "Louisiana is always first in line for the worst stuff, never the renewable solutions. It is my hope that the ship is about to change direction."

Roishetta Sibley Ozane discussed what's needed for Black Environmental Justice Advocates to feel supported in the oftentimes traumatic work of protecting their communities.

"Until we are supported, have the resources, and unrestricted funding that we don't have to report on all the time because we are in the community every day. Until we have general operating budgets,

Newsmaker, Continued on page 7.

State & Local News

New Orleans Museum of Art Appoints Amanda M. Maples As Françoise Billion Richardson Curator of African Art

Data News Staff Edited Report

The New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) today announces the appointment of Amanda M. Maples as Françoise Billion Richardson Curator of African Art. Maples joins the museum this week and will oversee the museum's significant Collection of Historic African Art, which is considered one of the most important in the United States. In her new role, Maples will create new installations and interpretive strategies for NOMA's permanent collection and expand the geographic and chronological scope of the African Art Collection with a contemporary vision.

"Amanda has distinguished herself in the field through her commitment to both the interpretation of historical objects and her

expert collaboration with contemporary artists and curators working in Africa today," said Susan M. Taylor, The Montine McDaniel Freeman Director of NOMA. "Her exhibitions evidence a crucial reconsideration of how North American museums collect and present African Art."

Maples comes to NOMA from the North Carolina Museum of Art, where she was Curator of Global African Arts and served as visiting faculty in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She has curated a range of exhibitions and written essays, books, and articles on historical and contemporary African Arts, decoloniality, museum policies, collecting practices, and restitution.

"Amanda thinks expansively about the presentation of historical and contemporary artworks, and



Amanda M. Maples

I look forward to her building on NOMA's longstanding legacy of collecting and exhibiting African Art

to our visitors from New Orleans and beyond," said Lisa Rotondo-McCord, NOMA's Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs. "We are delighted to welcome Amanda to New Orleans and to NOMA."

"I am thrilled to join NOMA as the new Françoise Billion Richardson Curator of African Art," said Maples. "As I continue to immerse myself in New Orleans, I am considering how to fill historical gaps in the museum's extensive collection to tell the fullest story of African Art possible and how NOMA can highlight the work of contemporary artists in Africa."

Maples is currently leading the team of curators organizing New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa, scheduled to open at NOMA in 2025. The exhibition examines West African Masquerade as a fundamentally contemporary

practice and marks a significant collaboration between North American and African institutions, including NOMA and the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar, Senegal. In 2018, Maples opened the exhibition Good as Gold: Fashioning Senegalese Women at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, the first in-depth exploration of the History of Senegal's Gold, from past to present, emphasizing how Senegalese women use and have used gold jewelry in self-presentation.

"It is crucial to create new models for museums to consider African Art through a multiplicity of voices," added Maples. "I look forward to building on sustained relationships with institutions in Africa, North America, and Europe while developing new partnerships with artists to present their work in New Orleans."

We Must Provide What Educators and Students Need to Thrive

SB25 Wasn't the Right Path. Let's Come Together to Address the Challenges our Schools Face



Dana Peterson CEO
New Schools for New Orleans

Last month, I traveled to Baton Rouge alongside school leaders, parents, educators, and advocates from across our city to testify against Senate Bill 25 (SB25), a piece of legislation that would have limited the freedom and flexibility of New Orleans' educators to create schools that meet the unique needs of students. Together, we made our voices heard, and thankfully, the bill failed to advance out of committee. Now, we can turn our collective focus toward making sure our students and educators have what they need to thrive. A growing body of research confirms that students' well-being and academic success are closely connected. We must ensure our system has the resources to support this, and students and teachers can access them.

Our schools have made great academic progress over the past 15 years in a system that values their autonomy and accountability. That progress can, and must, continue.

Like so many cities, New Orleans' schools face real challenges, many of which stem from issues beyond the classroom. Today, 80% of our students are considered economically disadvantaged, and cope with poverty, systemic racism, and inequities. Tulane's Education Research Alliance found that 40% of students they surveyed reported greater concerns about their academic performance and mental well-being since the start of the Pandemic.

Devastatingly, we're also losing many students to gun violence; these losses are horrific, and these young people are deeply missed. Students are taking action to heal, promote peace, and resolve conflict, and schools have taken holistic, restorative approaches to help students manage grief and other complex emotions. We see great examples of this in the student rallies against gun violence, such as one at Booker T. Washington High School, the inspiring NOLA Love Initiative and Rally led by InspireNOLA Schools, and in the restorative practices and structures at Educators for Quality Alternatives' schools. But schools alone can't address all that our children are up against, and they can't provide all the support they need. At NSNO, we're proud to partner with schools to do so.

We can move toward partnerships that offer children what they

need. I'm given hope by NOLA Public Schools' exciting recent partnership with Children's Hospital, through the crucial recent \$10 million investment of New Orleans City Council-ThriveKids. ThriveKids is a powerful investment in our students' mental and physical health and well-being. This helps students feel whole and well, and it helps them show up at school ready to learn. It also allows teachers to teach, and not serve as nurses and therapists, too.

I'm also excited about the work we're doing at NSNO in launching the Allstate Sugar Bowl New Orleans Teacher Community. We want to support schools as they tackle the crisis in teacher retention and recruitment. We've partnered with the Allstate Sugar Bowl and College Football Playoff Foundation, who have generously committed \$1 million over five years, to support schools in addressing the challenge. Together, we're working to make New Orleans the best place to teach in the country. Our teachers need to feel a sense of well-being, too. They need to know they belong here, and that they are loved by our city. We've approached that in a number of ways—like hosting NOLA Teacher Fest and the New Orleans Excellence in Teaching Awards Gala, and by running the New Orleans Teacher Job Board, which makes

it easy to apply to any job across our city's public schools. We also support the growing number of "Grow Your Own" Programs in our public schools that are preparing our city's own students to teach here someday.

ThriveKids and the Teacher Community remind us that, in our system, schools don't have to "do it all." We give educators the freedom and flexibility to build strong classrooms, and we let them focus on that. We know they have enough on their plates already. Our teachers should be able to focus on teaching. Our students should be able to focus on learning. Today, there are still real barriers to this, so we need to turn our energy away from legislative debates and onto creative solutions. We must braid public resources and leverage the many providers across our city that can address this.

And as we do so, we must continue to support the academic progress of the last fifteen years. Our students still need to catch up from time out of school during the early Pandemic and Hurricane Ida. We must also drive resources toward high quality curriculum, finding and retaining great teachers, and driving early literacy. If we can do that, while also providing key support outside of academics, we'll see our children achieve and thrive in the way we've all been dreaming of.

Newsmaker, Continued from page 6.

support, and the understanding that my community hears my sirens everyday... until you can hear those sirens, don't tell us what our community needs," said Ozane. "Trust us when we tell you [what our community needs]."

"Every time we're faced with a

challenge, we sharpen our claws, we learn more, we collaborate. We're getting stronger," continued Ozane. "The Petrochemical Industry wants to poison the soil in the earth because we are so connected to it."

Speaking on the expectations of Black women to constantly remain resilient while on the frontlines, Jo

Banner stated, "We did not create this pollution problem, but here we are being the ones who have to stop it."

Shamyra Lavigne shared a call to action from Rise St. James to stop the deadly build-out of DG Fuels and Air Products in Cancer Alley. "Twenty years from now, St. James will be a healthy place for our chil-

dren," said Lavigne. "We're laying the grounds for that."

To close out the event, New Orleans-based renowned spoken word artist Sunni Patterson wrote and shared a poem that encapsulated the event, touching on resistance, community, and the essence of liberation in the face of petrochemical violence.

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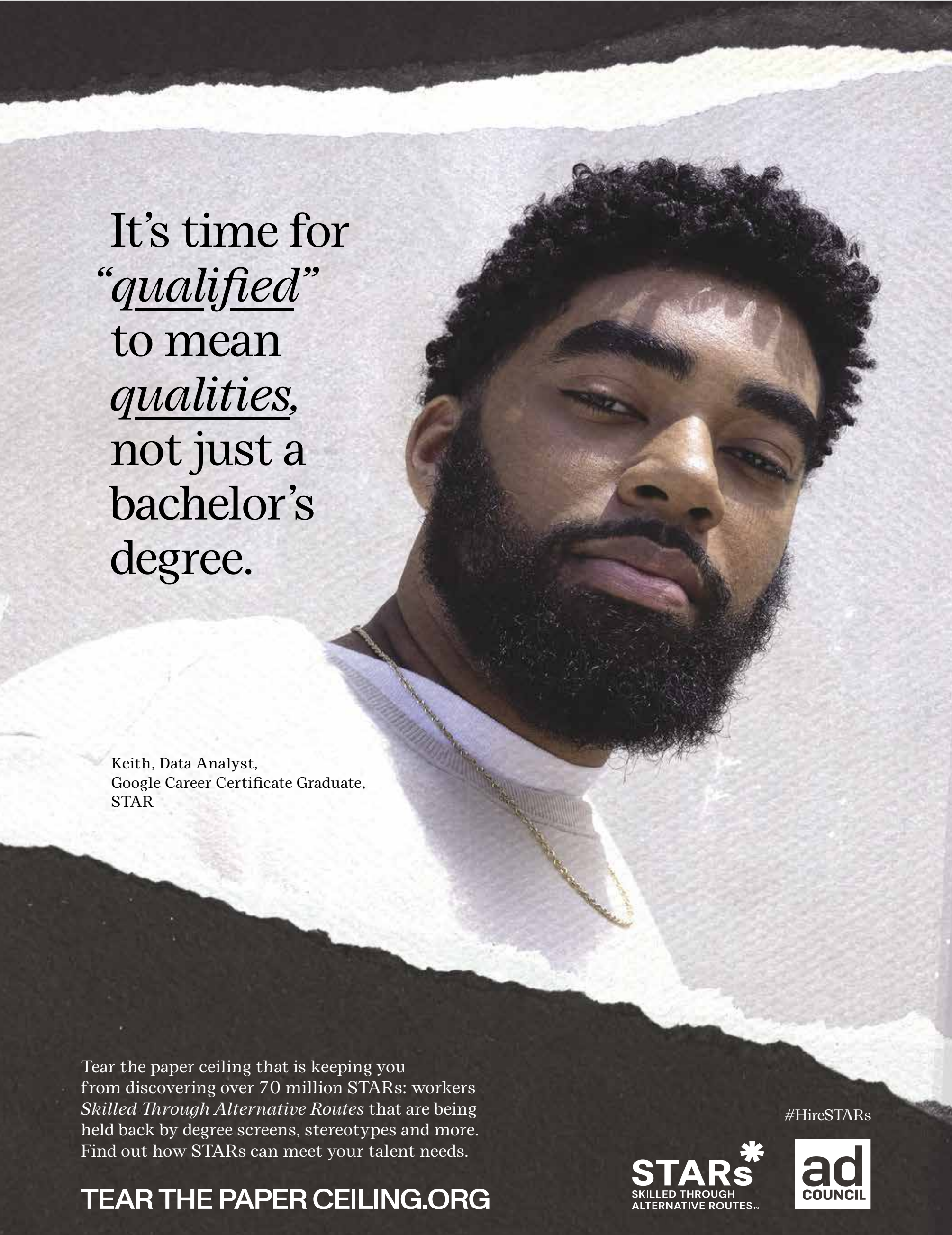
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