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The 40/40 Issue

BENAISHA POOLE

MARIA TAYLOR

CANDACE MITCHELL

APRIL-MAY 2023

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APRIL-MAY 2023



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The

UPSCALE

40

CLUB

We searched for some of the most inspiring leaders in the Black Community. Forty dynamic individuals who are under 40 years which influence all spheres of life, including athletes, publicists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, lawyers and marketing executives, were identified and comprised this year's 40 Club. These players overcame many obstacles in life, and their stories teach us that we can have community-changing careers with determination and dedication.

WORDS BY JONELL WHITT



Sports Host Maria Taylor Adds Femininity to Football

Maria Taylor is a television host and producer. She was a two-sport player at UGA, on the volleyball team as an ALL-SEC player and on the basketball team. As a proud double dawg, Maria graduated from the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication and later earned her MBA from the Terry College of Business. Taylor's extensive football knowledge is quite impressive.

The 6'2 tall, beautiful, smart host created quite the name for herself in the 2022 NFL football season as she moved on to NBC and joined the Sunday night Football studio show 'Football Night in America.' It's the most-watched studio show in sports. Taylor is always poised and in a full fashionista-style wardrobe when serving as the first female full-time primary host. She is also a 2023 TEDx GA featured speaker.

When it comes to race and gender in a male-dominated industry, Taylor exclaims, "The reality is that all people are running the same race, and they're just trying to get to that finish line, whatever that success or the goal. The real reality is that people of color, and specifically women of color, have way more hurdles in that race than anybody else. Still, we don't sit around asking for pity, and we don't sit around asking for anyone to help us."



Diamond DeShields WNBA Player

At just 27 years old, she is a WNBA All-Star, an ESPN ESY-award nominee, and a WNBA champion (Chicago Sky, 2021) and was chosen to play in the 2023 NBA Celebrity All-Star game. As much as she is celebrated for her athletic talents, she has also become recognized as a fashion force. She has easily fused her fancy style of play with her love of fashion. She is the face of world-known eye designers Oakley and has graced magazines and billboards for clothing designers, Fear of God, and many others.



LaMonica Madden Associate Director, Inclusion Experience

LaMonica is the foremost thought leader and subject matter expert on the topic and practice of Multi-Cultural Marketing. Her work helps to ensure that Brands don't get "Canceled" by holding them to a higher standard of real allyship to the communities that they wish to serve and by developing both organizational transformation and marketing strategies that ensure brands are "walking their talk" both behind the scenes and in front of the camera.

LaMonica has developed a proprietary framework for Influencer Marketing that not only amplifies black and brown content creators but helps to close the ethnic pay gap and addresses pay disparities suffered by marginalized creators by pairing them with brands seeking ways to authentically connect with minority audiences.

LaMonica is an Associate Director of Inclusion Experience at VMLY&R. She consults some of the world's largest brands on organizational transformation with an emphasis on making brands more culturally cognizant.

She is a thought leader and digital storyteller and aims to bring out the human element in corporate advertising to create a deeper brand affinity between a brand and its consumers.

Before joining VMLY&R, LaMonica consulted and led brand, content, and digital strategies for both public and private sectors as well as small to mid-sized businesses before deciding that telling stories that globally shape and influence our modern culture was her passion.

Her expertise has been featured in publications such as *Black Enterprise*, *Essence*, *Forbes*, *Rolling Out*, and *The Huffington Post*.

Braxton Simpson Entrepreneur

Braxton Simpson is a 24-year-old native of Atlanta, Georgia, who resides in North Carolina. She graduated from Tennessee State University. Braxton is the CEO of Braxton Simpson Enterprises. She focuses on taking her customers from "PASSION to PURPOSE" through social media management, business-marketing campaigns, speech writing, digital media, and career services.



Ashley Austin

WeightWatchers (WW) Manager of Multicultural and Brand Marketing

She is an accomplished Marketing Executive with a 10-year career encompassing demanding leadership roles and delivering innovative, 360-degree marketing strategies across advertising, media, content creation, digital/social, and experiential disciplines that elevate brand equity. Austin is known for bringing a game-changing perspective and developing branded entertainment partnerships across key lifestyle and multicultural platforms.



Netta Jenkins

Author

She is the author of *The Inclusive Organization*, listed by *Forbes* as one of the top 4 DEI books to read. She is CEO of AeroDEI, a DEI tool that helps organizations measure and quantify the impact of their DEI initiatives through gamifying employee experience. Netta has been advising corporations and audiences of all kinds for years on the most effective strategies to address inequitable gaps. That led to a 300k+ LinkedIn audience and played a key factor in *Forbes* naming her as one of the top 7 Anti-Racism consultants in the world. She also gave a ground-breaking TEDx talk, "Reimagining the Workplace".



Marcus W. Tyler

Multicultural Marketing Lead, Oncology

With over a decade of successfully growing businesses and building brand equity with global brands, Marcus now works at Eli Lilly. He leverages his brand marketing expertise to help people live longer, healthier, and more active lives. He recently oversaw the launch of the company's first campaign targeted at Black metastatic breast cancer patients with a 41% higher mortality rate than the general population. As part of the pharmaceutical giant's Multicultural Marketing hub, he is developing further marketing initiatives to attack other health disparities within the African-American and LatinX communities.



Hannah Ramanou Pianist

Ramanou is a 24-year-old, self-taught classical pianist who received her Bachelor's Degree in Piano Performance at Mercer University. Hannah's introduction into the world of music began at age six when she was asked to play the Glockenspiel for a Pre-K school performance. This started her love of all music. Hannah has received awards and accolades for her piano performance, placing first in the 2018 College Piano Competition for the Southeast Young Artist Piano Performance at the Steinway Galleries. She is now a graduate student and Teaching Assistant at Georgia State University.

Andrea Fernandes Public Relations Lead

Fernandes serves as the public relations correspondent for Revolt TV, Ciroc, DeLeon Tequila, and many more. She loves communications as a whole and being able to help transform her clients while promoting the wonderful things they are working on.



Terrance Addison Business Leader

He is the Co-Founder and President of United States Operations for MAYVENNTM. MAYVENNTM is a Corporate and Federal Recruitment Firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Addison began his career in the Corporate Staffing world. He traversed the corporate ladder spanning a 12-plus year period, where he sharpened his skills and enhanced his abilities to lead and build organizational recruitment processes and human capital pipelines. Addison established himself as the connector and convener for innovative workforce solutions in MAYVENNS' corporate structure.



Margo Taylor (Margo the Beauty Guru)

Margo Taylor is a native of Miami, Florida who currently resides in McDonough, GA. She's known to her clients as Margo the Beauty Guru. Taylor has always had an interest in the beauty industry and decided to pursue her passion. In 2016, Margo became the founder of Sheek Studio. As a licensed Esthetician and Multi-Certified Lash Artist, this career has given her the platform to showcase her creativity as well as make her clients feel their absolute best! Margo's expertise and passion is providing services to empower and naturally enhance the beauty of clients. Sheek Studio Spa currently have three locations located in McDonough, Fayetteville, Avondale Estates, Georgia. Margo is a beauty expert on a mission to empower women to embrace their inner beauty and feel confident in their own skin. With over 6 ½ years of experience in the beauty industry, Margo the beauty guru is a leader in her industry.

Images Courtesy of Subjects



Will and Channan Kennedy

“Will and Channan Kennedy are the owners/operators of Images by Kennedy, Photography Studio. “Images by Kennedy” studios is an Atlanta Georgia based high-end portrait studio. Specializing in commercial beauty, fashion, and entertainment portraiture, the duo has become known for the unique creative flair in their artistry. With over 10+ years behind the camera, Will Kennedy have been commissioned by multiple brands, publications, televisions networks, and entertainment companies. Although well known for his ability to create eye-catching images, Wills’ philosophy on dealing with clients has never been one that focused solely on his vision alone.



Kevin Savage Actor

FOUNDER/CEO OF
THE KEVIN SAVAGE BRAND

As a singer, actor and model in the entertainment industry it’s important you treat your brand as the business that it is. Kevin ended 2022 completing several acting projects starring opposite A-list celebrity talent. He’s currently developing a sunglass line and his own workout gear. He enjoys working out and mastering his craft to always be prepared for the next big project. Follow him on social media for updates @kevinsavagebrand



Croix Bethune Athlete

Bethune is an attacking midfielder who has been named a first-team All-American twice (2021, 2022), a semifinalist for the MAC Hermann Trophy twice (2021, 2022), the Pac-12 Midfielder of the Year twice (2021, 2022) and the All-Pac-12 first team three times (2020, 2021, 2022). The only other Trojan to earn All-America first-team recognition twice in their career was Kristin Olsen in 2007 and 2009. Bethune is also the only Pac-12 player named to the first team this year. She was named to the United Soccer Coaches All-America first team in February, becoming the second player in USC history to earn first-team honors twice.



Angelica Faith

Owner and creative director of Angelica Faith Creative Design Co. Where we give your business a Brand-New Transformation. She's self-taught designer with over 12 years of experience. When I was pregnant with my son, I had a choice: work part-time, or go full-time. I chose to go full-time to have the time freedom to raise and spend more time with my son without asking permission from my employer.

Now, as an entrepreneur, designer, and mother, it's my mission to empower Boss Moms/Boss Women to design their own lanes in life and in business unapologetically.



Pinky Cole

Pinky is a serial entrepreneur, brand strategist and CEO/founder & visionary of Bar Vegan, Slutty Vegan – a nationally acclaimed, Atlanta-based burger joint offering creative takes on plant-based burgers with names like PLT, Fussy Hussy and One Night Stand – Founder of The Pinky Cole Foundation - a charitable organization dedicated to empowering under-served populations with the resources to help break cycles of poverty. Pinky made national headlines for raising 25 million in series A funding and the company has been valued at over 100 million. Pinky has graced the cover of Essence Magazine & INC 5000 , as well as featured in Business Insider, Washington Post, People Magazine, Forbes.



Ralph Pittman Jr.

Producer/Consultant
Reality Television
Star/ Author of
The Step In Parenting
available at Barnes &
Nobles

Sebrina Rowe & Sharlinda Parker



Founders of Tu La 2 Nail Salon & Company early on opened the nail salon because they wanted to change the narrative of having someone that looked like them in this dominant Asian business. African Americans spend billions of dollars in the nail care industry and only 10% are licensed to provide the service the legitimate way. Tu La 2 Nail Salon & Company 1133 Huff Rd. Suite E., Atlanta, GA. 30318.

We both believe that Tu La 2 Nail Salon & Company would be successful because anything we do we give it our all. Providing the services boost our clients mind, body & spirit makes us feel like we have offered something genuine and awesome in the universe. We pride ourselves in giving the best Tu La 2 Experience.



Leon Bernard Buie IV

It was in Buie's native city of Philadelphia where his passion for fashion evolved.

After moving to Atlanta in July of 2008 and attending AIU he began working for upcoming designers which inspired him to create his own clothing line ' Bernard Buie Clothing. Fast forward, It was in his generation's worst time during the global Pandemic, Bernard started VIP THERE NOW, a luxury technology concierge service company in Atlanta that provides a one stop marketplace to complete an experience for the client. To date, this company manages 50 million in assets around the world.

Candace Mitchell Creator of Myavana App for Hair Analysis

Candace Mitchell is a graduate of Georgia Tech and CEO and developer of the Myavana App. What's impressive to me is the fact that Candace was inspired to create her own brand from something not right in front of her but on top of her head. It was because of the crisis Mitchell was having with her own dry and damaged hair, bad hair coloring at salons and damaged hair experiences from using the wrong hair products she decided to turn her pain into profit.

With the Myavana app a person can use technology to get online customer service (with membership of course), and you are able to send your hair strands to their facility and obtain a scientific assessment of your elasticity, texture and porosity. They can use this analysis and determine the best type of products for your hair.

There are a staff of nine people working for Myavana that cater to more than 25k registered users on the free Myavana free mobile app. This is truly artificial intelligence and image recognition technology working at its best. Imagine eliminating the perils of buying a bunch of hair products to test only to discover you have wasted your money because nothing works! Hats off to Candace Mitchell truly thinking outside the box. Download the app and check out how to make your crown shine more radiantly,



Jakeem Smith

Owner of Jay Productions Agency launched his media house after recognizing amongst his many talents his passion was in production and photography. He built his huge portfolio of work by shooting some of the most notable names in the entertainment industry. Over the years Smith has worn many hats but with all his accomplishments, he never stops thinking about others. Currently he serves as a segment and casting producer for Viacom.



Images Courtesy of Subjects; Candace Mitchell Courtesy of Moses Brown/Rocket Pwer



The Whitley Agency

Dora Din Whitley
 Founder/CEO of
 the Whitley Agency
 Mike Whitley
 Co-Founder of
 the Whitley Agency
 Both have spent over 15
 years working in sales and
 marketing in the corporate,
 film, television and
 telecommunications industry.
 The Whitley Agency, a global
 talent, business management
 and consulting firm that
 specializes in marketing &
 strategic planning, product
 development, and project
 management.



DeBonair DJ Pnut

DJ Pnut was exposed to art, athletics, and music from an early age. With a father who was a guitarist and an uncle who was a DJ and a producer, it was inevitable that he'd get involved in music. He now resides in Atlanta, GA where he moved after high school to attend Morehouse, College. To date his track record includes exhilarating sets at the Super Bowl, NBA All-Star Weekend, Essence Festival, and the infamous Hard Rock Casino. His prowess is not limited by geography and audiences in the Dominican Republic and the O2 Arena- London also had the pleasure of experiencing his excellence. www.DJpnut.com @djpnut on IG

Tammy Rivera

Is an amazing mom, Singer, Songwriter, Executive Producer on WE TV, Reality Star, Fashionista and Creator of T-Rivera Swimwear and comfortable resort wear. She's what you call the ultimate entrepreneur & influencer. Rivera recently opened her new Boutique T-Rivera located at 2115 Piedmont Rd NE, Atlanta, GA. Her latest invention is a skincare line Beccare by T-Rivera. Follow her on social media to keep up with her Pop-up Shops and Sales @beccarebyrivera @triveraswim @charliesangelll



Images Courtesy of Subjects



Kelli Ferrell

Chef/Restaurateur/
Mom Owner of
Nana's Chicken &
Waffles located in
McDonough, GA



Omar Lewis Attorney

Lewis is 25 years old and grew up in Alpharetta, Georgia. He played soccer for the University of North Georgia in his past life. Subsequently, he attended Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. Currently, he lives in New York and practices corporate litigation.



Jeff Johnson

President/CEO Vinton Capital Seek partnerships with strong management teams and entrepreneurs to provide them with significant liquidity while still maintaining ownership in their business. Additionally, his company works with CEO's to design equity ownership packages for key management team members to align incentives and allow them to participate in the value they help create.



Destiny Peyton

Actress/Singer/
Business Owner
of Madonni
Beauty Supply
in Huntsville,
Alabama



Rwanda Ray

Rwanda Ray CEO and Founder of the Afrolicious Hair and Beauty Expo CEO and Founder of the Afro City Marketplace in Los Angeles located inside the of the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Mall. Rwanda has always had a passion for entrepreneurship and helping small businesses develop and scale. She came up with the Afro City Marketplace Concept to have all black owned businesses under one roof during the pandemic in order to recycle black dollars in the community and provide affordable retail space for black on black businesses. She's looking to partner and expand "The Afro City" concept to other cities and states like Atlanta, Houston and Dallas.



Frederick Anderson

FreddyO-Worldwide Social Media Influencer and Blogger based out of Atlanta, GA



Quiana Watson

CEO of Watson Realty Company A full service real-estate brokerage bringing you top of the line marketing and representation.

Candace Washington

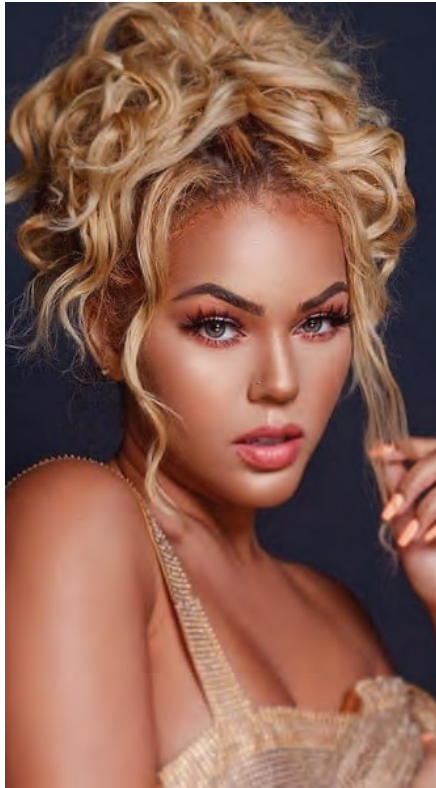
Clinical Social Worker/Therapist CEO of Restorative Minds Therapeutic and Wellness Services in Bowie, MD.





Christian Keyes

Actor, Writer, Executive Producer, and Author of *Ladies Night & Dr. Feel Good*. Keyes career in the entertainment industry encumbers all aspects from music videos, stage plays, television series, movies, and he currently stars in a television series "All the Queen's Men" created by Christian Keyes. He is an incredible dad.



Jacky Oh!

Actress/ Social Media Influencer, model and CEO of the J Nova Collection



Moniece Slaughter

Moniece Slaughter is a force to be reckoned with. She not only has the voice of a songstress, but she has a heart of gold. Since leaving Reality Television the Independent reality star was able to launch her clothing line and publisher new book *Mayhem A Mental Health Memoir*.



Ramces Rouzard

Owner of In the Mirror, Founder of The Reflection Show, Director/Producer. Television and Radio Host



Benaisha Poole-Watson is a Change Maker for the Culture

As an assertive businesswoman dedicated to making change in communities nationally. Her main objective in business is to economically empower people and put financial stability in their hands and mindset. She is also a real estate broker in more than 16 states. The icing on the cake is that she is a black female business owner; an entrepreneur and the owner of her own Federally Chartered Bank, Prime One Lending Group/Prime One Home Loans based in the state of Texas. They are direct lenders in every state including Alaska and Hawaii. She can also finance commercial real estate up to 650 million dollars.

One thing that Poole-Watson noticed was that the biggest problem in black communities is having access to capital. Benaisha saw the opportunity where she qualified to make a major move to own a bank.

Working as a real estate professional she was already at the pentacle of being in the real estate business selling 400 homes per month. "What I noticed in transactions is that 50% of our loans were being denied because we have job loss and credit issues that causes disruptions in our packets, we have life in our packet. I was tired of seeing our people of color not being able to pass go. They could make it around the monopoly table but not able to pass go. The other 50% that were getting approved were not being treated fairly with comparative rates and comparative services. So, me being able to provide this service was MY WHY. This is the reason I wanted to own my own bank".



Ebony Austin

Restaurateur/Owner of Nouveau Bar & Grill 2 locations in Jonesboro & East Point, GA. Founder of Nouveau Grits



Dennis McKinley

Dennis McKinley is the Owner of The Original Hot Dog Factory Franchise & also the CRU Lounge Franchise. He prides himself on making the franchise partnerships affordable to accommodate people of color who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs and franchise owners. McKinley is also owner of NYAC Cognac with his business partners. He thought it was important in his line of business to promote a black owned liquor product. During the pandemic is when he was able to spread his wings and create over a dozen franchise opportunities as he had the time to travel and provide exclusive training. The businesses are still going strong and franchise opportunities continue to expand.



Crystal Renee Hayslett

Decided to pursue a career in music and acting. Her first opportunity on camera was landing a role in Oscar award winning Matthew Cherry's short film, "This Time". She also made appearances on BET's "The Game" and "Stomp the Yard 2". Currently Crystal can be seen in BET's "Sistas", the spin off "Zatima" and upcoming in Universal's film "Praise This", out this Spring.

She attended the University of Tennessee at Martin & received a bachelor's degree in Mass Communications/Public Relations. #funfact Upon graduating she moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the United States Senate.

Images Courtesy of Subjects; Benaisha Walton-Poole Courtesy of Moses Brown/Rocket Pwer



AN AMERICAN LEGACY

BY TASH VAN DOIMEN

DR. RUTH J. SIMMONS HAS DEMONSTRATED a willingness to break the mold with a fresh perspective and continuous inquisition into the history of slavery and injustices. Renowned for her work at Brown University, where she became the first African American woman to head an Ivy League University, Dr. Simmons has led many student-focused initiatives empowering well-rounded leaders.

She is the current President of Prairie View A&M University, previously holding the role at both Smith and Brown Universities. Dr. Simmons will continue to advance her efforts as a senior adviser to the president of Harvard University on engagement with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and a President's Distinguished Fellow at Rice University.

For the full story of her life and legacy told by the distinguished scholar herself, her recently released memoir, *Up Home: One Girl's Journey*, is now available.

I came to understand the value of education, not just to enable me to make a good living, but to enable me to make a worthwhile life.

—Dr. Ruth J. Simmons