

Artel J. Great

{ Artel J. Great is a young man who is a great visionary looking to change the world of film and television. Top of his class at UCLA, and now looking to bring the community together with cinema, visual arts, music and technology. }

"After graduating summa cum laude, the first black valedictorian from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Theater, Film & Television, Artel J. Great is already raising the bar. A young, innovative visionary, Great is the 2014 recipient of the Cinema Research Institute Fellowship for innovation, which puts him in a class by himself at the onset of what may very well be a long and rewarding career.

Already an entrepreneur, Great has designed and founded Project Catalyst, a transmedia organization that combines creative community building practices with cinema, visual art, music, and technology. With the recent launch of the Project Catalyst App, there is no telling which direction Great will be heading when he gets off running.

BlackEnterprise.com recently spoke with Artel about innovation, his drive to succeed, and being a visionary.

BlackEnterprise.com: You are the founder of Project Catalyst. Explain what the company is and describe your role.

Artel J. Great: Project Catalyst is a media platform that uses technology to provide access to alternative entertainment. We

specialize in showcasing groundbreaking artists who are creating from diverse humanistic perspectives in film, music, and visual art. Our mission is to offer a space for the expansion of multicultural media visibility. I'm responsible for the overall vision of the company and for overseeing business operations. I'm also the inventor of the Project Catalyst app, which allows users to watch amazing multicultural films, music videos, and documentaries on their smartphones or tablets on both Apple and Android devices, and I serve as the chief curator of the content we program into the app.

You were announced as the 2014 recipient of the Cinema Research Institute Fellowship for innovation. Congratulations! What does this mean, and how will this achievement help you in your line of work?

Thank you! The CRI fellowship means that executives in a film think-tank believe my ideas are cutting-edge and promising enough to nurture. It also means that I have financial support for one year to test an innovative model in the market, which will help procure long-term funding to secure the company's growth.

Why did you choose a career in film?

I realized film's ability to impact the viewer's vision of possibilities. A good film is like a direct portal into memory— a waking dream. Film helps us understand the human experience so we can figure out who we are in the world. And since I'm committed to critical intervention through creative engagement, I understood that film could be a powerful tool to rally an advancement of consciousness.

After graduating summa cum laude as the first black valedictorian at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Theater, Film & Television, what is next for you?

The funny thing is I never set out to be valedictorian. I was just determined to do my best and work to the highest of my ability. When I was told I would be valedictorian and that I was the first black person to achieve that distinction, I was humbled. That wasn't my objective, but it happened and I'm grateful. I earned it. It's historic. In terms of awards, I don't really focus on that. I focus on doing my work. Making a positive contribution. That's what I think about— what can I give of myself to make a contribution to our culture? If I'm blessed to win more awards I'd be grateful to accept them in the spirit of the ancestors who sacrificed so much for me to even have an opportunity. They're my motivation.

Currently, I'm touring across the U.S. launching the new Project Catalyst app. We've successfully organized live events and presentations in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles to introduce our new film and music app to the world. We now have users in 11 countries across Europe, Asia, North and South America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Our Project Catalyst App offers a progressive voice to multicultural communities with fresh, insightful entertainment that empowers and illuminates.

What drives you to succeed, and how long do you anticipate doing what you do?

I'm driven by a deep sense of responsibility. I'm a scholar and historian, so I understand the sacrifice of so many dynamic figures in

our culture that gave so much for us to have a chance, people like Paul Robeson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Oscar Micheaux—truly exceptional black people who fought the good fight. I'm driven by their sacrifice. I'm actually working to extend their legacies through my own pursuits. I love research. I'm really a knowledge worker. I will always pursue knowledge and discover innovative ways to apply that knowledge creatively and artistically to galvanize excellence in our people. I've dedicated my entire life to that mission, and that's exactly what I'm doing.

I'm sure you have a long career ahead of you. What is your greatest achievement to date?

Winning the Film Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Debut Performance was pretty incredible. The Spirit Awards are like the Oscars for indie film but way cooler. That was a huge honor. But my greatest achievement hasn't happened. That'll come when I defend my dissertation and finish my Ph.D. at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. That's for my role models Drs. W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King Jr. They inspired me to earn my doctorate— that will be my greatest achievement.

What advice would you give to those who are pursuing careers in film?

Be educated about film. It's such a vast industry with multiple points of entry, but you have to be clear and strategic about what role you play. The best way to know your role is to first know what the possible roles are and decide what's suitable for your interests and develop the skill set to become an expert in that area. Learn the ins

and outs. Become a student of that area. Learn the history, the vocabulary, the leaders. Learn the stories and methods of the leaders –hone your talent and create constantly to develop your craft. The key is to always be prepared. When opportunities come, if you're prepared, success is inevitable.

What's the best advice you've received that has helped you get this far?

Life is about perception. It's not what you see, it's how you see it. So if you never give up, you will never truly fail.

What makes you a visionary?

My sacrifice. My ability to forecast what's next and see something that doesn't exist— that should exist, and bring it into existence. A visionary is a person who believes the idea that's true in their heart is also true for the world. Visionaries inspire people. That's my goal, to inspire others like the visionary leaders who inspired me."

Source: Good Black News

Link:

<https://goodblacknews.org/2014/09/11/artel-j-great-1st-black-valedictorian-of-ucla-school-of-theater-film-television-wins-cinema-research-institute-fellowship/#more-9010>