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Cablefax Daily™

Tuesday — February 4, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

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On Deck: Marquee Network GM Talks Carriage, Gambling & WGN

With the Chicago Cubs **Marquee Network's** debut less than three weeks away, there's plenty of speculation over what sort of carriage **Sinclair** is going to be able to garner for the regional sports network. All eyes are on **Comcast**, but there are still smaller players like **WOW!** and the virtual MVPDs that don't have deals in place for its Feb 22 launch. The latest from Comcast is that it "recently" received a proposal from Marquee and is reviewing it. **WOW!** confirmed the two are in discussions, but didn't elaborate. Deals have been signed with **Charter**, **AT&T**, **DirectTV** and **Mediacom** as well as smaller distributors. "Without speaking specifically about this situation, these things tend to get solved when time is of the essence. And there is a little bit of time, perhaps not a lot, but I would be very surprised if these particular carriages you're bringing up don't get resolved soon," Marquee gm *Mike McCarthy* told **CFX**. "We view, and any of us who have moved here to take these jobs, know that the Cubs are sort of must-see TV here in Chicago. It's not a passive interest that this fanbase has. We're certainly aware of other markets and what's going on with carriage, but this is a very unique animal." Marquee owner Sinclair is acutely aware of what's going on with other RSNs, as the **Fox** RSNs it acquired last year have been off **DISH** since late July. More recently, **fuboTV** dropped the Fox RSNs and **YES Network**. "Standalone rates for these RSNs are not consistent with fuboTV's mission to provide value and keep costs low to consumers. As of January 1, 2020, these networks have left fuboTV, like they have with other virtual MVPDs," fubo said. With cord cutters often looking to shave costs, is Marquee giving up on the **YouTube TVs** and **Hulu Lives** of the world? It doesn't sound like it. "I think time will tell, but it would not shock me if we were announcing deals with those very kinds of folks shortly," McCarthy said. McCarthy and the rest of the Marquee team don't just have a brand-new network to launch. They have to step up and replace the storied **WGN**, 72 years the TV home of the Cubbies. The number of local games on WGN had dwindled since 2015 when ABC Chicago and Comcast's **NBC Sports Chicago** won rights to several games, but it still carried some games through September. Longtime WGN Cubs exec producer *Bob Vorwald* is serving as a consultant to help with the transition. "Between replaying the Cubs classic games, particularly the *Harry Caray* games, and going through all these historical archives, I think we're going to pay quite a bit of homage to the fact WGN and its long alliance with the Cubs helped build one of the biggest team awareness' in history," McCarthy said. "We're very cognizant of it, and we'll be

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honoring it regularly.” Something that could work to Marquee’s advantage is Illinois’ new sports betting law, which should allow legal sports wagers later this year. Marquee will air **Vegas Stats & Information Network’s** sports betting show “Follow the Money” (it’s also carried by McCarthy’s former home **MSG Network** as well as **NESN**). “That’s our toe in the water in the gaming space, but I would expect more to come from us,” he teased. Programming chief *Mike Santini*, former vp, production at **MLB Network**, said these weeks leading up to the first spring training game on Feb 22 have been for some fine-tuning and rehearsals with the production and talent teams. “We’re excited to give Cubs fans more content than they’ve had maybe ever,” Santini said. “The team’s been fantastic and we’re looking forward to being able to do some really special things with players to get to know them on and off the field.” As for those 25 or so affiliates who are already on board, Marquee promises to roll out the red carpet—from events at minor league games in markets like Des Moines to viewing parties in outer and inner Cubs markets. “We’re going to be very hands on with our affiliate partners,” he said. “You’ll find some of them joining us for spring training. They are very dear to us.”

Pai to Circulate C-band Item This Week: The **FCC’s** next steps towards auctioning C-band spectrum will be revealed by FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* during a speech Thursday at the **Information Technology and Innovation Foundation**, according to the org. He’s expected to outline an item that will be circulated to the other commissioners that day. Pai previously announced that the FCC would conduct a public auction of 280MHz of the C-band. An additional 20MHz will be cleared and used as a guard band. What hasn’t been settled yet is what portion of the auction’s proceeds will be used to reimburse satellite operators for costs associated with moving off the band. The **C-Band Alliance** has proposed that the FCC require bidders in the upcoming auction to also pay for “accelerated clearing” of the band to incentivize satellite providers to assist in the clearing of the lower 300MHz. Recently-introduced Senate bill The Spectrum Management And Reallocation for Taxpayers Act would give the FCC \$1bln for payments to incentivize incumbents and set aside \$5bln of auction proceeds to relocate them.

No Super Bowl Return for DISH: A late-hour offer by **Apollo-owned Cox Media Group** to allow the Super Bowl to be carried by **DISH** on blacked out Fox stations yielded no fruit. “Today’s big football game is a national cultural moment that transcends business disputes. As such, we will waive any retransmission or other fees to DISH associated with broadcasting the game and we implore DISH to take us up on our offer and not continue to hold you, their customers, hostage,” Cox Media said in a statement Sunday. DISH said the olive branch didn’t give it enough time to act. “Apollo waited until an hour before the game to give permission for its Fox stations to be aired on DISH. That did not allow sufficient time to restore the channels without the risk of affecting customers in other markets, given the need to adjust



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live broadcast systems,” DISH told CFX. “Two weeks ago, DISH offered to extend the contract with payment so that customers would not miss the NFL conference championships or the Super Bowl, but Apollo refused. We hope Apollo chooses to engage in productive negotiations to reach a long-term agreement for the benefit of our mutual viewers.”

Super Bowl Stars: The Super Bowl scored a major touchdown on **Fox**, earning its first ratings increase in five years. Across Fox, **Fox Deportes** and Fox, **NFL** and **Verizon** digital properties, the matchup between the San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs pulled in 102mln viewers, the 10th most-watched Super Bowl in history. For a while, it looked like **Roku** customers wouldn't be able to stream the game due to an expiring distribution deal with standalone Fox apps. The two groups struck a deal the evening of Jan 31, keeping Fox's suite of apps on the platform. Super Bowl LIV saw 43.9mln total interactions across **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **Twitter**. *Shakira's* halftime performance drew 1.17mln mentions on social media as of 8:45pm Sunday night, according to analytics firm **Talkwalker**. *JLo* had around 250K (though *Shakira* has a more active social fanbase). Sentiment surrounding the halftime show was 44% positive, 6% negative and 50% remained neutral. Avid Chiefs fan and **FCC** chmn *Ajit Pai* also took to [social](#), hoping for no wardrobe malfunctions. On the brand side, **Hulu's** commercial was the No 3 trending spot, pulling in 84K mentions (10.5% of the conversation).

Circle City-AT&T Update: In the early morning hours Saturday, **AT&T** and **DirecTV** lost **CW** and **MNT** affils **WISH** and **WNDY**, the duopoly in Indianapolis that Circle City Broadcasting acquired from **Nexstar** in September for \$42.5mln. “We share our Indianapolis customers' frustration, regret any inconvenience and appreciate their patience while we work to settle this matter as immediately as possible,” AT&T said, noting the channels are available free over-the-air and via streaming.

Cox Closing Videa: **Cox Enterprises** is shuttering its advanced advertising unit **Videa** on March 31. “Over the years, the company made significant progress in the programmatic television space, but it is no longer sustainable to continue operations. We thank our extraordinary employees for their hard work and will continue to provide resources to help them through this transition,” the company said in a statement. Videa launched in January 2014 under pres *Shereta Williams*, and debuted its supply-side platform in 2015. Last year, the company divested Cox Media Group and its TV stations to **Apollo**, and closed its programmatic exchange in October 2018. While Cox will no longer support ad tech in house, it remains part of sales consortium **Ampersand**, which launched its own programmatic tech in September of last year.

Workshops Announced on Vertical Mergers: The **FTC** and the **DOJ** are holding two public workshops on March 11 and March 18 on the draft vertical merger guidelines the pair released in early January. The guidelines outline the agencies' analytical techniques, practices and enforcement policies in regards to vertical mergers. The agencies will select panelists for the workshops from those that file public comments and are willing and available to participate in one of the two sessions. The agencies are also extending the deadline for submitting public comments regarding the draft vertical merger guidelines to Feb 26.

Hargray Expands Florida Footprint: **Hargray Fiber** announced its acquisition of Tallahassee-based **Electronet** Monday. The fiber-based broadband provider is a large commercial ISP in Florida's Big Bend region. The transaction expands Hargray's network in the southeast and will allow Electronet's customers to access Hargray's larger suite of communications services. “It was our mission to partner with an organization that shares the same commitment to unparalleled service to our customers while remaining local in the community,” Electronet CEO *Paul Watts* said in a statement. “We have found this partner in Hargray Fiber.”

Pluto TV Launching in Latin America: **Pluto TV** will be available in Latin America beginning at the end of March this year. The free AVOD, owned by **ViacomCBS**, will initially launch with 24 channels in Spanish and Portuguese. Following its initial launch, the company says the streamer will reach more than 80 channels by the end of the calendar year.

Revolt, Comscore Stick Together: **Comscore** renewed its deal with **Revolt Media and TV** for the use of its digital audience measurement for Revolt's audience on desktop and mobile.

Programming: **Telemundo** will announce the 2020 Billboard Latin Music Awards finalists live on Instagram for the first time. The InstaLive Wednesday at noon will feature interviews, finalists' reactions and a live performance from *Emilia Mernes*. The awards take place April 23 in Las Vegas and will be broadcast live on Telemundo.

Obituary: *Anne Cox Chambers*, who served on the **Cox Enterprises** board and was daughter of founder and three-time Ohio governor *James Cox*, died Friday at age 100. “My aunt, a vivacious and charismatic woman, was very proud of Cox Enterprises' success and the accomplishments of its employees,” said Cox Enterprises chairman *Jim Kennedy*. Cox Enterprises put together a [memorial page](#) featuring reflections from former president *Jimmy Carter*, journalist *Monica Kaufman Pearson* and others.

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Celebrating Black History Month

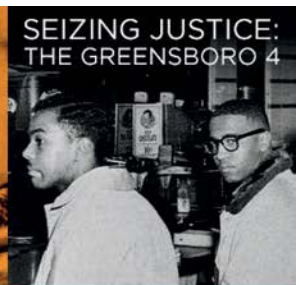
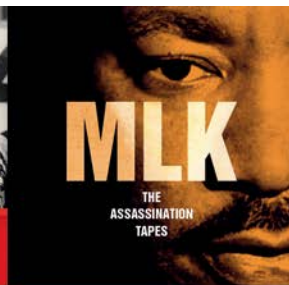
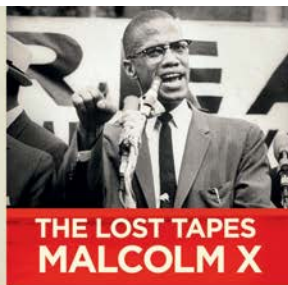
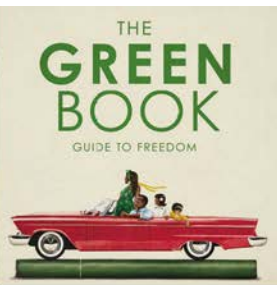
Black History Month highlights the contributions of African Americans from all over the world. And once again, cable is helping to shine a light on those accomplishments.

For the sixth year in a row, **Smithsonian Channel** is showcasing a film for Black History Month. This year, it's the groundbreaking documentary "Black In Space: Breaking the Color Barrier." Last year's doc, "The Green Book: Guide To Freedom," told the true story behind the historic guide for African American travelers on road trips. This year, Smithsonian is delving into the history behind the world's first black astronauts. "I see this one as a companion to the 'Hidden Figures' story," *Charles Poe*, svp, global production and emerging technology for Smithsonian Channel, told **Cablefax**. The documentary looks at the personal stories of several African American pioneers in the Space Race and the efforts to integrate the astronaut corp itself. "This story is the intersection between Civil Rights, the Space Race and the Cold War, and we had access to terrific experts already," said Poe. The doc features the stories of legends *Guion Bluford*, the first African American to go to space,

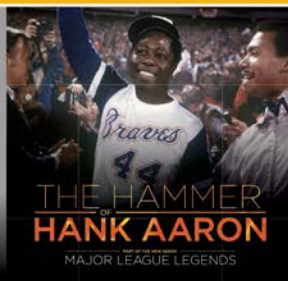
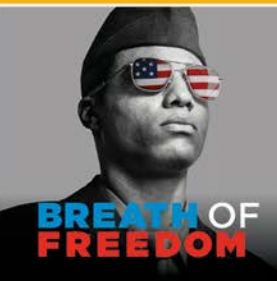
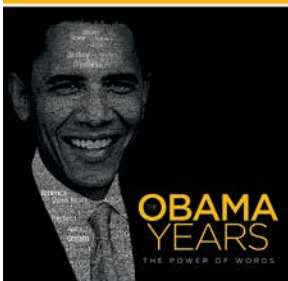


Smithsonian Channel's documentary 'Black In Space: Breaking the Color Barrier' tells the stories of the first black astronauts Ronald McNair, Guion Bluford and Frederick Gregory (pictured). It premieres Feb 24 at 8pm. (Credit: NASA)

Frederick Gregory, the first African American to pilot and command a NASA mission; and *Ronald McNair*, who perished in the Challenger disaster, including interviews with his widow and brother. The special also features



Honoring the achievements. Remembering the struggle.



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an interview with the Soviet Union's contender, Cuban Air Force pilot *Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez*, who became a national hero. The doc premieres on the linear channel Feb 24 at 8pm, but will be available to stream on Smithsonian Channel Plus all month.

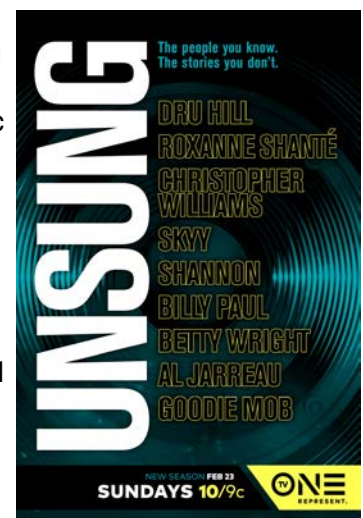
However, the story is too important to remain just on the network. Continuing the tradition of taking its films on the road, Smithsonian is one-upping itself and bringing Black in Space on its largest tour to-date. It will roll into 20 individual markets in partnership with **Comcast, Charter, Altice USA, ViacomCBS, Hulu** and **Google X/YouTube TV**. "The screening tours have been a great way for distributors to connect with their local communities and for us to support these efforts by delivering diverse content directly to their subscribers," said Poe. "It's also exciting to experience each film with live audiences. The post-screening discussions are always fascinating, and we often discover surprising local angles to our stories." The conversations include various astronauts from the doc, Smithsonian institutions curators and historians, Emmy-award winning filmmaker *Laurens Grant* and "Entertainment Tonight's" *Kevin Frazier*.

It's impossible to celebrate black history and culture without talking about music. Throughout the month, **TV One** is diving into the theme "Represent Black History," headlined by its longest-running docuseries "Unsung." Each week of the month, the net will celebrate 40 years of music and feature *Unsung* episodes from a specific decade, kicking off Feb 5 with the '60s and ending with the '90s. "Music is really representative of African-American culture," said TV One marketing svp *Lori Hall*. "It's relationship-based, it's emotional. It drives not just African-American culture, but pop culture. I think that's one of the things we're seeing in today's culture as well."

Over on **BET**, the net is gearing up for its first time broadcasting the **NAACP** Image Awards (Feb 22, 8pm). "The Image Awards, BET, we were all birthed at a time where there was no platform to celebrate and honor excellence for black Americans," said *Connie Orlando*, BET's evp of specials, music programming & music strategy. "Black History Month is the one month that the world dedicated to honoring the black community, but we do it 365 days a year. It's always important to honor and celebrate, and we love celebrating excellence and showing our community that we've come a long way and we're not going anywhere."

For the seventh consecutive year, **AMC Networks** is airing its Black History Month PSAs across all five of its national nets as well as its SVOD services. The campaign is in partnership with **NAACP**. The PSAs feature seven members of the Congressional Black Caucus discussing topics such as HBCUs, black women in history and voting. **SundanceTV** will kick off its month-long celebration with the all-day marathons of the most watched mini-series of all time, "Roots," beginning Feb 2 and again on Feb 16. **IFC's** "Sherman's Showcase" is taking BHM into the summer, with an hour-long "Black History Month Spectacular." "Who decided that Black History only gets one month, and a cold one at that?" said *Blake Callaway*, executive director of IFC and SundanceTV. **Revolt TV's** Black History Month Excellence initiative features its largest offering yet of network premieres, including the return of talk show "State of the Culture," new seasons of "Funny AF" and new episodes of "The Breakfast Club." The net also will be publishing articles and artist interviews dedicated to black excellence on its social media channels all month long. **History** is premiering "Black Patriots: Heroes of the Revolution" featuring NBA legend and activist *Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*, airing Feb 19 at 10pm. The special dives into the African American experience during the Revolutionary War.

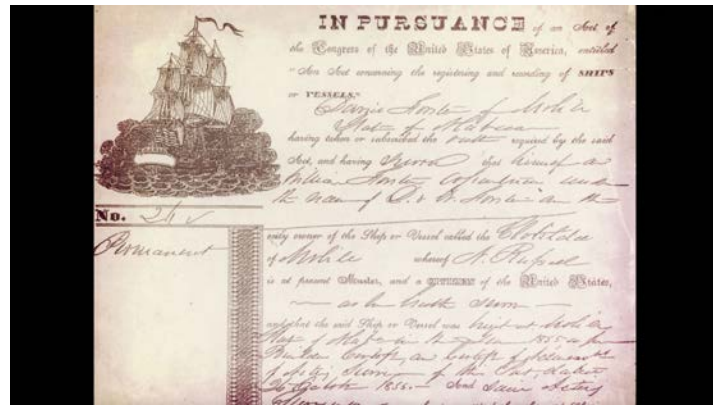
Distributors aren't missing out on the importance of the month, on both the programming and platform side. On its On Demand platform, Charter will be promoting collections of black history themed movies, including Classic Cinema ("Dreamgirls," "Precious,"), Historic Heroes ("Ali," "Harriet,") and New Favorites ("Get Out," "Queen & Slim"). Charter's **Spectrum News Networks** across the country will produce and air special series and reports throughout the month, including a feature on *Dr. Dudley Flood*, former educator and administrator in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction who was instrumental in de-



TV One's series 'Unsung' is highlighting four decades of musical history throughout the month.

segregating North Carolina schools. Other stories on tap include a profile of *Jonathan Gregg*, an 86-year-old civil rights activist in Kentucky; the history behind the iconic Watts Towers that took 30 years to build, and survived two riots to stand as one of six national historic landmarks in L.A.; an in-depth story about the Milton House for a look at Wisconsin's Underground Railroad past; and the untold stories of four African Americans who had a unique influence on local sports and/or educational history in Central New York. Charter is also one of the first pay TV providers signed on to offer the upcoming **Black News Channel**, set to launch Feb 10. The channel, co-founded by former Congressman *J.C. Watts*, also has a carriage secured with **Comcast** and **DISH**.

SVODs like **CuriosityStream** are doing it a little differently than traditional programmers. "Traditional broadcast rules have flown out the window," said *Jorge Franzini*, director of content and development. "Not everything needs to be



Curiosity Stream's series 'Bright Now - The Last American Slave Ship' tells the story of what happened after the last known slave ship *The Clotilda* went down in Alabama's Mobile River. Generations later, the ship has been found.

an hour, not everything needs to be a huge series. Sometimes a nine-minute piece can hit you and impact you in an amazing way." CuriosityStream's original series "Bright Now" has a new installment with "Last American Slave Ship," which premiered Jan 30 and tells the story of the last known American slave ship and the community that rose from its destruction. "We have this amazing flexibility to actually follow the story and keep going with it," said Franzini. CuriosityStream is truly international, now boasting a subscriber base of over 13m in worldwide. "Being a global service is quite different," said Franzini. "We should be telling these stories all the time, not just this one month. It's incredibly important to highlight anything that at times can make us feel uncomfortable and the atrocities that occurred, and sometimes people want to turn a blind eye. To understand where you're going, you have to know your history." – *Mollie Cahillane*



The survivors of *The Clotilda* built a new life, and their descendants may finally have the details of their enslaved ancestors' experience. The series premiered on Jan 30.

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