

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Progress Check: Corporate America's Commitment to Social Justice

It's been over a year since *George Floyd's* murder in Minneapolis shook the nation and spurred numerous conversations about social justice in personal and professional circles. Some corporations took that as a signal that they needed to do more to support their employees and communities on those fronts, and the hope is that this moment in time is the one that creates lasting change for BIPOC in America.

"The business case, the economic case, the political case for leaders, be they in corporate America, be they in elected office, be they occupying positions in academia or the media is to understand where America is going, where America is moving," **National Urban League** President/CEO *Marc Morial* said during a town hall meeting at **NAMIC's** Annual Conference Thursday. "Black America has a profound impact on so much of what happens in this nation. And it is important for leaders to embrace that and recognize that in this moment. Learn what you don't know, understand what you may not be aware of."

There are plenty of examples of how organizations in the media and cable industries stepped up to try to meet the moment, whether that meant having difficult conversations and revamping DEI policies or investing more funds into underrepresented communities that have been left behind technologically. But there does still exist a level of skepticism about how committed corporations are to being a part of long-term change, and if some will abandon those communities again

once more time has passed.

"I would love to not be skeptical and believe this moment is going to be a fundamental driver of change in the future," **Combs Enterprises** President *Tarik Brooks* said. "I want to be careful not to lock corporate America, the business community into a monolith. We've had great partnership and change from companies like **Comcast, AT&T, State Farm** and others where they've shown that commitment... but you can just look through social media quickly to find examples where that hasn't really happened."

George Cheeks, President/CEO of **CBS Entertainment Group**, said leaders that want to be a part of this inflection point have to deal head-on with the skepticism about whether long-term change is coming for America's underrepresented groups. He said one of his biggest priorities is fighting misinformation about his intentions when he talks about inclusive leadership, and that means accepting that some may believe you're only hiring a diverse executive to meet an internal quota.

"You've got to sit down and say that is not what I'm doing. What I'm trying to do is make you realize that the legacy way that you have made decisions has excluded many underrepresented people and the only way we're going to change that is if we re-examine what it is that we need for someone to optimally take whatever role it is," he said.

Now, when a role opens up in the upper ranks of CBS, Cheeks sits down with his team and establishes what the objectives are for the position and what success would mean. "It's more



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than just going back to the same people they went to time and time again and put the same people in those roles,” he said.

Morial said efforts to widen pools of candidates and ensure BIPOC executives have a chance to shine are imperative to create lasting change in the corporate world. He applauded the elevations of people like **MSNBC** President *Rashida Jones*, who is the first Black woman to run a cable news network.

“You are pioneers, champions and influencers to carry a message that those of us on the outside may bring in, to now bring that sensibility to the inside conversations,” he said. “It is about enlightened self-interest in understanding how the nation is changing, how its demographics are changing, not to mention the justness of this cause for this nation to try to overcome its long legacy of racial injustice.”

STARRY GOING PUBLIC IN FIRSTMARK DEAL

Fixed wireless broadband provider **Starry** entered into a merger agreement valued at \$1.66 billion with SPAC **FirstMark Horizon Acquisition Corp**, an affiliate of **FirstMark Capital**. The combined company will continue to operate as Starry and will be listed on a national exchange under the ticker “STRY.” “We believe the broadband market is ripe for disruption, with nearly 70% of a market in the hands of a single cable company in most markets, over \$100+ billion in revenues on an annualized basis and incredibly low net promoter scores,” said Starry CEO *Chet Kanojia*, who will continue to lead the company post-merger. Kanojia co-founded Starry in 2014 after **Aereo** was shutdown following copyright challenges from broadcasters. Starry covers more than 4.7 million U.S. households today across six markets, including Boston, DC and Denver. Its goal is to cover 25 million households over the next five years with a projected 1.4 million residential and small business subscribers. The transaction implies a pro forma enterprise value of \$1.66 billion and will give Starry \$452 million in cash on the balance sheet (assuming no redemptions of the common stock held by FirstMark’s stockholders), including \$130 million from a fully committed PIPE and contemporaneous equity round in Starry that includes ArrowMark Partners, Atreides Management, Fidelity Management & Research Company LLC, Tiger Global Management, and affiliates of FirstMark Capital. FirstMark Capital is an existing long-term investor in Starry and will retain its board seat.

TEGNA STATIONS OFF DISH

Another week, another dispute. **TEGNA** stations went dark on **DISH** at 9pm ET last night, affecting nearly 3 million customers across 53 markets. TEGNA put the onus on DISH for the blackout, claiming the satellite provider refused terms TEGNA has used to reach deals with “numerous other providers” and that reflect the current market. “While DISH is one of our smaller distributors, we regret any inconvenience for any of our custom-

ers, and hope that DISH will come back to the table to get a deal done to return our valuable programming to their system,” the broadcaster said. DISH argued that TEGNA is demanding that the satellite provide pay for 100% of its subscribers in TEGNA markets, regardless of whether those subscribers receive or want TEGNA’s programming. “As one of the nation’s largest local station owners, they are more interested in increasing their bottom line by charging our customers more money than providing programming to viewers under fair terms,” DISH TV Group President *Brian Neylon* said in a statement. **The Ameri-**

Cablefax Executive Round Up

We asked Cablefax Diversity List honorees: Which celebrity do you think is setting a strong example for the next generation?



Jamila Daniel
Chief Diversity Officer, Lionsgate & SVP, Human Resources **STARZ**
“I would say Beyoncé is setting a strong example for the next generation. Through her art, celebrity and global platform she continually brings awareness to social justice issues. Beyoncé is a true activist and is fearless in her commitment to equality. I also love how she not only celebrates Black culture, but also creates opportunity for Black creatives and Black businesses. A feminist, humanitarian, and philanthropist, Beyoncé is the blueprint for the next generation.”



Ayo Davis
President **Disney Branded Television**
“I am so inspired by Avantika, the star of our latest Disney Channel Original Movie ‘Spin’. As our first American Indian to lead a movie and Gen Zer, she is a force with her powerful message to just be yourself. I love that, and I think that’s something we can all learn -- at any age.”



Mark Kang
SVP, Worldwide Distribution **INSP**
“Aside from being a great guy and a performer, Anthony Ramos knows what it means to struggle, stay hungry and overcome obstacles as a Puerto Rican growing up with a single mom in the projects of Brooklyn. If you observe all of his acting roles, he embodies a true sense of diversity and what it means to stay genuine to one’s self. He demonstrates who he is and where he came from through his roles, both on and off camera.”



Jerry Lambert
GVP, Legal Affairs **Mediacom Communications**
“Colin Kaepernick, for sure. He has risked his career and economic security to tell the world about injustice in America’s policing paradigm. Enough said...”

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can Television Alliance scolded TEGNA for the timing of the blackout, particularly for football fans that may be without a way to watch **NFL** showdowns this weekend.

FCC TO AUTHORIZE MORE RDOF DOLLARS

The **FCC** said it's ready to approve more than \$163.8 million dollars for 42 providers in the second round of funding for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Under pressure from Washington to make sure the funding goes to unserved areas that need broadband, the agency has been cleaning up the RDOF program. As part of that process, 85 winning bidders have chosen not to pursue buildout in 5,089 census blocks in response to letters the FCC sent asking applicants to review their bids in areas where there was evidence of existing service or questions of potential waste. The latest wave of funding will bring FTTH gigabit broadband to some 65,000 locations in 21 states over the next 10 years.

BETTMAN READY TO BET ON HOCKEY, ESPN

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said he's been accused of being a contortionist because he was a leading opponent of sports betting for decades. He's singing a different tune these days. "Frankly, there's an opportunity to engage more fans, particularly casual fans, and bring them to hockey," Bettman said during a **Paley Center** virtual discussion Thursday. "We are certainly in the early days. It's something that I think all the sports are embracing because it's a fact of life." With **Disney-ESPN's** new seven-year deal with NHL, the company is working closely with the League and having conversations about potential wagering partnerships, said fellow panelist ESPN Chairman Jimmy Pitaro. "We're starting to explore some options, but to be clear, our first priority is our NHL coverage—getting all these games on the air through world class productions. You've got to be careful here not to get distracted. First priority, let's blow people away with world class coverage." Bettman's certainly excited to have ESPN televising hockey once again. "Having not been promoted by ESPN for the last 17 years, I know what a difference that can make. We expect our growth to be very robust in terms of viewership this year because we're back with ESPN." The season returns Oct. 12 with a doubleheader on ESPN, with Game 1 featuring Pittsburgh vs Tampa Bay, followed by Seattle against Las Vegas.

POWELL: IT'S TIME TO UNITE

With no **Walter Kaitz** fundraising dinner this year, the diversity organization held a virtual celebration Wednesday evening. The night praised the industry's DEI successes, while encouraging it to keep working. "More corporations and businesses than ever have moved beyond lip service about diversity, and have dedicated themselves more deeply to this unfinished work," **NCTA** President & CEO **Michael Powell** said. He also spoke about the pandemic, lamenting that vaccines meant to save lives have become controversial and broken down by politics. "It feels as if we are entangled in a floating trash net of zero-sum beliefs that restrict us from making our way to a better society," Powell said. "We all need to take a breath and recognize the mutuality of our destiny... It is hard to hope for a better day when every action is met this hyperbolic, fearful reaction. This division is

toxic to our moral values and it is literally lethal when it comes to COVID. As the pandemic is proven with ruthless efficiency, we humans are unbreakably interdependent."

CYBER SECURITY

CableLabs has released a set of best common practices to secure gateway devices against cyber threats. The release includes the full range of applicable security considerations, including hardware and manufacturing considerations, default security settings and configuration procedures, secure boot and root of trust, software and firmware development and verification, encryption requirements for both data in transit and data at rest, and physical security, among others. CableLabs will hold a virtual panel session on Gateway Device Security next Wednesday at 3pm ET as part of **SCTE Cable-Tec Expo**.

CARRIAGE

Redbox's streaming app was added to the PlayStation 5 console, giving users access to thousands of AVOD movies and TV shows as well as more than 100 FAST channels. The app will soon be available on the PlayStation 4 console.

READING LIST

In case you missed it, *Reuters* [reported](#) this week that **AT&T** played a role in funding and creating **Herring Networks' One America News**. "They told us they wanted a conservative network," CEO *Robert Herring* said during a 2019 deposition in an employment lawsuit seen by Reuters. "They only had one, which was *Fox News*, and they had seven others on the other [leftwing] side. When they said that, I jumped to it and built one." An OAN accountant testified that AT&T provided 90% of Herring Networks' income. – The *Philadelphia Inquirer's* [recent take](#) on a **Youtuber** charged by **FBI** in one of the largest cable TV piracy cases ever is a must-read. Just check out this opening line: "With the business acumen of a Wharton grad and what authorities describe as the recklessness of a common thief, local YouTuber *Bill Omar Carrasquillo* went, in the span of just three years, from slinging drugs on a North Philadelphia street corner to running a multimillion-dollar streaming TV empire."

PROGRAMMING

StarzPlay and **Sony Pictures TV** are teaming with **Weekend Studio** to develop eight-part scripted series "XRey," based on the hit Spanish podcast about King Juan Carlos I, who suddenly abdicated the throne in 2014 after a popular 40-year reign. – **Univision** inked a first-look deal with *Eugenio Derbez* and **3Pas Studios**, giving it first go at all Spanish-language television and theatrical motion picture projects. Univision is gearing up to launch a premium, global SVOD next year offering originally produced Spanish-language content. – **FX** ordered limited series "The Patient," starring *Steve Carell*. The 10-ep series from *Joel Fields* and *Joe Weisberg*, the creative duo behind FX's "The Americans," is about a psychotherapist being held captive by a serial killer.

PEOPLE

FreeWheel promoted *Virginie Dremeaux* to VP, Marketing and Communications. She's responsible for expanding FreeWheel's international marketing team to support efforts in the U.K. and Europe.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

'Introducing Selma Blair' and Her Journey with MS

It was late 2018 when actress *Selma Blair* ("Legally Blonde," "Hellboy") received a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, a chronic disease affecting the central nervous system. She offers a look into her health journey with "Introducing Selma Blair," a documentary hitting theaters on Oct 15 and streaming on **discovery+** on October 21. While the film has its fair share of challenging moments, Blair adds a levity to it all with her quick wit and ability to see the humor in each situation. Director *Rachel Fleit* was prepared to cut the cameras any time that Blair's symptoms became overwhelming or if she needed a moment to collect herself in the midst of filming. But Blair never asked for that time, no matter what challenges she was facing that day. "One of the things that was so astounding was... that there was nothing off limits. Selma was ready to tell this story in all of its honesty and rawness and truth," Fleit told critics during a **TCA** panel. "She had a few medical emergencies in the midst of this and I knew that I needed to document this moment because she was so willing to share who she was and I knew it was going to be helpful." The good news for Blair is that her MS is currently in remission thanks to a treatment called hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation. While she does hope that her story helps spread awareness of MS and offer those suffering from the condition some comfort that they're not alone, she doesn't have any advice to offer others diagnosed with MS. She holds that each journey is different, and she just wanted to offer a peek into hers. "I just wanted to lead by example by saying this is just where I am," she said. "I don't know except if I slow down and have patience with myself, I do find this too shall pass, whether it's a glitch in thinking, a movement or something else." – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

We know it's an unusual moment, so we'll take a slight detour from our usual review of previews. Perhaps it's because we're in an unusual moment, but some of our favorite series, which returned during COVID-19 or are about to, seem slow and very talk-y. At least the initial eps. We're thinking of Season 5 of "Billions," on **Showtime**, "The Morning Show," on **Apple TV+** and the news season of "Succession," which begins Oct. 17 on **HBO**. Is it possible these series lack the pizzazz we've come to expect because writers and other creatives are working remotely for the most part? Does script creation suffer when meetings are held via Zoom? Did health precautions prevent actors from filming scenes freely? Based on the early eps of this trio of hits, the answer is yes. In fairness, *Billions'* recent Season 5 ending ep was terrific. But getting to that ep wasn't easy. Besides being slow, *The Morning Show's* problem is that, even with a Season 1 recap, it was hard to remember all its plotlines. *Succession's* opener offered plenty of caustic wit and strong writing. Overall, though, it missed the mark. Fortunately, the *Jeff Daniels*-led "American Rust" on **Showtime** is gaining steam, beginning with ep 3. And beginning Oct. 15, the original "House of Cards" debuts on **BritBox**. It's a must-see. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(09/27/21-10/03/21)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
ESPN	0.959	2988
FNC	0.725	2258
MSNBC	0.397	1236
NFL	0.378	1177
HGTV	0.312	972
TLC	0.257	802
INSP	0.256	798
HALL	0.237	737
DISC	0.224	698
TBSC	0.219	682
FOOD	0.211	657
USA	0.203	632
CNN	0.193	601
HIST	0.174	542
ID	0.174	541
FRFM	0.165	514
TVLAND	0.152	473
TNT	0.147	457
HMM	0.143	445
FS1	0.141	438
LIFE	0.140	435
AMC	0.139	432
ESPN2	0.138	431
WETV	0.136	424
A&E	0.135	420
BRAVO	0.124	385
GSN	0.112	350
FX	0.105	328
NATGEO	0.097	303
SYFY	0.095	295
TRAVEL	0.089	278
MTV	0.089	277
ADSM	0.088	275
APL	0.088	274

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



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