

The Virgin Islands Consortium

The Caribbean American Cultural Foundation, Founded By A Virgin Islander, Hosts Star-Studded Forum At Georgia State University

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Just before the New England Patriots took on the Los Angeles Rams at Super Bowl LIII, students at Georgia State University were filling seats at the school's Speakers Auditorium to listen to a group of powerful and successful athletes speak. The discussion was part of the Caribbean American Cultural Arts Foundation's, "I AM" University Panel Series on Friday, February 1st, 2019. Students were welcomed with Caribbean dancers, live music, Caribbean cuisine, drinks and lively discussions. Panelists and speakers included, WNBA Champion & Author, Simone Edwards, Former WNBA Player, Rushia Brown, Former NFL Player & Actor, Sergio Joachim, Democratic Presidential Candidate

& Former College Football Coach, Robby Wells, and the conversation was moderated by General Manager of Telemundo Atlanta, Ivan Shammas.

The event is part of the ongoing vision of the Caribbean American Cultural Arts Foundation (CACAF) which is dedicated to disaster relief and assistance, Caribbean cultural awareness and educational mentorship. CACAF Founder, Michael Thomas said, "Through the "I AM" University Panel Series, We want students to say to themselves, I AM...Me, I AM...Somebody, and I AM Great."

The idea is to provide young people access to professional relationships as they prepare to make their mark on the world. Mr. Thomas said, "We work hard to provide unique opportunities for students and to connect them with successful cultural mentors."

For Mr. Thomas, that means putting students in the path of those who could open doors or guide them on their journey. Former WNBA Player, Rushia Brown, who delivered the keynote message told students that even though the odds were stacked against her, as a young athlete, all she needed was a shot, "I believed I was good enough. I just needed an opportunity." That's exactly what the "I AM" University Panel Series is all about; supporting the next generation of innovators, leaders and global change agents by giving them a shot.

According to the release, organizers wanted students to know that the future is in their hands and they cannot give up on their dreams. The message was consistent throughout the discussion. Ms. Brown told students, "Never quit. The only time you fail is when you quit."

Presidential Candidate & Former College Football Coach, Robby Wells told students, his formula for success, "Start small, think big and never quit." Former NFL Player turned Actor, Sergio Joachim, said he had to overcome challenges like a language barrier after he migrated from Haiti, but he balanced success and failure by never giving up and by maintaining an attitude of gratitude, "Every day I adapt, I struggle. To overcome any challenges, I say I am grateful that I woke up today."

The event was sponsored by the Georgia Caribbean Student Alliance (GCSA), Golden Krust Caribbean Bakery & Grill, Grace, Microsoft and Infiniti of South Atlanta. Students received gift bags and giveaways including a weekend luxury car ride care of Infiniti of South Atlanta. Special thanks to Georgia State University for supporting the initiative. CACAF plans to host future "I AM" University panels in metro Atlanta in the coming year; in addition to their annual *Captains of Industry Awards Gala* at the Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta on June 29th, 2019.

CACAF was founded in 2016 by Mr. Thomas. Since then, the foundation has established programs that have fed hurricane evacuees, offered resources toward recovery and gathered strategic support before disaster strikes. The fund has supported educational mentorship programs for young people seeking higher education and projects that have promoted workforce and skills development.

In addition, the foundation has been committed to the study, advancement and presentation of Caribbean arts, culture and humanities. To learn more about the work of the Caribbean American Cultural Arts Foundation, visit www.caribbeanculturalarts.org.

