

S3 E12: The State Of The U

(AJ II & Kelley D. Evans)

Previously recorded on Sunday, May 5, 2018

0:00 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:36 AJ: How we doing? Thank you for tuning into *Max Out Time*, to quote my man, Kevin Merida, editor-in-chief of the sensational platform with many iconic black journalists, *The Undeclared*, this season isn't 'conventional and never boring', The *U* is the premier platform that explores the intersection between race, sports and culture and celebrating its 2 year anniversary. My special guest is a general editor at The *U* and she has been crushing it for *The Uplift*, a beyond the field look at athletes stories. Kelley D. Evans has one of the coolest jobs at the award winning ESPN operated platforms, so Kelley is discussing some of her highlights at the *U* today, including what's blooming over aon Desales Street for the years to come. Kelley, it is great to see you, how are you?

1:16 Kelley: I am good, how are you?

1:18 AJ: I'm doing good, I just want to have you on the show today, you know, your guys big two year anniversary is coming up so we want to talk about some of the issues and some of the highlights for you at the *U* over the years. I think one of the one things I'd really like to point out for your story is the human interest aspect of it is, more than just the athletes on the field. What do you like about doing those stories and how do you get those stories and pitch those, and what is your process there?

1:47 Kelley: Well, first, I really love doing 'em and you have to excuse my dialect, I am a Southern girl so you will hear –

1:55 AJ: Memphis strong right?

1:56 Kelley: Yes, you'll hear a lot of Southern dialect here so...

2:03 AJ: We got some Memphis viewers, we got some South Carolina mixed in there –

2:08 Kelley: Good, good, good! So I'm a country girl so pardon the accent in advance. But I really like that aspect of the *U*, I like the *Undeclared*, I like the fact that Kevin was really prominent about wanting some of those off the court, off the field stories. He really wanted to go beyond, just, sports and do a lot of culture, off-beat stories that just highlight people of color in different communities doing good stuff around the world.

2:46 AJ: And that's something we definitely need, people of color doing great things around the world. Whether it's athletics and politics, or any other areas. We go back to LeBron James and how he is more than an athlete, more than a shut up and dribble, you know, him and KD, in the carpool with Cari Champion, I know you remember that skit. They're saying more than an athlete and your stories really hits on that and they are uplifting.

3:10 Kelley: Yeah they do and they really aren't hard to find. I know we see them play every other day on Sundays you know, we see them competing at a high level. But they aren't hard to find, they are actually right in our backyards. A lot of athletes really don't like to toot their own horn despite what you may think, they are pretty quiet about things they do in the community, but when they hire PR reps or they have people in their corner, they like hey,

folks need to know about this. So I skim the web of course, I am a naturally inquisitive person, when I was younger it was called, 'you're nosy as hell.' Can I say that? [laughs]

3:58 AJ: Oh no, no, no, we ain't got no FCC or nothing like that, so we're good –

4:02 Kelley: So, you're nosy as hell because I am a country girl, they would always tell me, my grandmother, 'leave the room with all these grown folks girl!'

4:11 AJ: That's the true essence of a journalist, getting to that story, you have to kind of get in there –

4:16 Kelley: We have to know, so I really, really keep up with what they are doing because I want to see, what does your day look like or what does your night look like after the game? When you win, when you lose, what do you do after that, your daily routine, what are you doing? During the off season, what do you have going on? They're not hard to find especially if you know people from different communities, they will tell you, oh my daughter goes to LeBron James' prep academy and it's like, oh he has a prep academy, okay, let's see what's up with that.

4:55 AJ: For someone who is not a quote on quote, superstar, this day and age, he was definitely in his prime or whatever, someone like a Darrell Green, how do you find those stories like that when you're not in the limelight every day, like a KD or a Cam Newton or what have you.

5:13 Kelley: Well, for Darrell Green, especially since I'm in the DC area, you know those guys, so what happens with that is I have a section on the uplift called, *The Next Chapter*. This is about athletes after they are retired, what they doing when they just stop playing the game. So I have a list, a recurring list of retired athletes or just off the court – athletes, what they're doing off the court. So sometimes, it's pitched to me, sometimes it's not.

5:47 AJ: From the athletes, from the PR people? Do you think that's more of them wanting to getting exposure or give exposures to the issues?

5:57 Kelley: Both. I think it's both –

6:05 AJ: There's definitely a thin line between that, I feel like someone who has been out of the game for a while might just need more exposure, more light on his name.

6:13 Kelley: Some of that like to stay relevant. Some of them when they retire or they're done playing, they're done. If you, if you ever read the *Next Chapter* series, you will see I ask a question, do you miss the game? That's like the major question, do you miss the game? Some people will say no, but a lot of people will say, Tamika Catchings, I did her and she's very new off the court, (AJ: Indiana. Indiana Fever.) she said absolutely not, that was her answer. (AJ: She a baller too.) She grew up in basketball, her father was a NBA player so she grew up in it and she was like, 'absolutely not'. She still close to the game and she's enjoying her time off the field and some people will tell you they miss it and some people will say, 'no I'm good.'

7:10 AJ: So outside of Tamika Catchings, I mean you talked to Kobe, Darrell Green, you know, everybody from the whole spectrum. It's your two anniversary now, what's next, who's next, what do you want to do now to push things forward?

7:23 Kelley: We definitely want to get more video out, we want to have more video, we want to have more audio content, we do have a podcast, we have a couple of them going on, but

we want a little more of that. We want to make sure that our multimedia meets the same as our writing, we want to continue to reach more people, we want to continue to expand, we want to continue to get into the homes and the hearts of our readers.

7:55 AJ: It is definitely changing media landscape right now especially in the next 5-10 years in journalism. I work for CBS news and I wrote a piece on 60 minutes it's their 50th season and they said in the last 50 years, nothing has really changed in the way that they tell their stories, research their stories, how it's transmitted into television but the one thing that has changed is you watch it on your phone now. So everything is is digitally streamed now and the way we report the stories, nothing has really changed with the pen and the paper and however you do it but it's on your phone and 10 years from now there's going to be some new device. An iPhone x,y, z and they're going to be watching it that way, so definitely if you can get more video out there on the different platforms and streaming sites, *The Undeclared* is going to have a 10 year anniversary, a 20 year anniversary, a 30 year anniversary and on and on and on. I think it's definitely a good move. Do you think ESPN really looked out in doing *The Undeclared*?

8:51 Kelley: I think so, they now, as you probably know, they announced ESPN 3 and that's part of the digital streaming service, it is a paid content but you get to see more than what wouldn't normally see on the website. If you want to go behind the scenes and see some of the stuff going on, some of the new media storytelling, ESPN 3 is the perfect place. So you'll see some of our content on there as we evolve more into the streaming space.

9:24 AJ: Okay, I expect to see more collabs with Kobe because is everywhere winning Oscars and Emmys.

9:29 Kelley: He is, he is and we were happy about that. Actually my colleague Kelley Carter sat down with Kolby, she went to his studio so that was major that was major major major, yeah!

9:40 AJ: I don't usually get star struck but if I was able to go now and sit with Kobe and just be able to rap with him talk about the early 2000's Lakers, that would really put me in in a place right there. That's my favorite player that might be one of my favourite athletes. Just on the court watching him and studying his game when I really was a baller back in the day so I really those Kobe stories and I want to get to watch 'Detail' his new show that he is kind of analysing, the different players and the playoffs and their games. I mean, to have somebody like Kobe analyzing where you spot up and shot from, what you can do on your spin move, that's crazy to me.

10:21 Kelley: He is an amazing person to interview, period. When I cover the NBA down in Memphis, for the Grizzlies, whenever I would ever go into the visitors' locker room to get some footage, I would always speak to him about post game stuff and he was just really cool, he's a student of the game, he's straight forward, despite what people may think, he was very open with you asking him about the game, we could ask him anything and he would respond as long it was respectful, but he would always respond. We never had an issue with Kobe, but he was just a good guy, he is just a good guy.

10:58 AJ: You know, speaking of being star struck and people that you really want to work with, how has it been working with, I don't know if you have yet, but Jemele Hill is with y'all now, how's it like been having her on the team, having her name attach and tagged to *The*

Undeclared, Jemele Hill and then you Kelley D. Evans, you're the editor, and like, do y'all ever cross paths?

11:18 Kelley: Of course! I tell people all the time, Jemele hasn't been in the newsroom much yet but she will be in the newsroom in the upcoming months. In our newsroom, her desk we're back to back, so I look forward to it and I tell people now when I'm travelling and people are like, oh so what do you do, that's a big question now, people want to know what do you do? I usually say, oh you know, I'm a writer, gentle with it, I'm a writer –

11:59 AJ: You should be like, I work with Jemele Hill –

12:03 Kelley: But no, if I say I work for ESPN and I am traveling from DC, they say, what do you do at ESPN? I say, I'm an editor and writer for *The Undeclared*, the first thing they say is, "oh with Jemele Hill!" [laughs] So when I see her, that's what I tease her about, like yeah, even I had somebody from Xfinity Comcast come to my apartment and they said, so you work for ESPN? Where do you work, The Undeclared, oh, how's Jemele? Like, she's good! [laughs].

12:36 AJ: In the news right now, last weekend was the White House correspondents' dinner and might not be a journalist but they definitely try and sensor comedians coming to that dinner, what did you think about Michelle Wolf and her performance, if you will?

12:51 Kelley: I didn't think anything of it, to be honest with you.

12:57 AJ: In a good way or in a bad way?

13:00 Kelley: I'm not. I'm indifferent, I haven't been as engaged. As a journalist I have to keep up with what's going on but I'm so indifferent about it, it didn't matter if she had a potty mouth, it wouldn't have mattered to me - I probably would have side eyed, giggled and kept it moving, I'm so indifferent about it. I am glad to see women evolving in different roles –

13:30 AJ: Because mostly men have been doing that dinner for a long time.

13:34 Kelley: Exactly, so I'm happy to see her in that role and to see her get her voice out –

13:43 AJ: She's funny too!

13:44 Kelley: She's hilarious!

13:46 AJ: You might be indifferent but I though it was, you know, I chuckled a little bit.

13:50 Kelley: Yeah, she's naturally hilarious, she's a naturally funny person.

13:53 AJ: She's like awkwardly funny but I liked it.

13:56 Kelley: That would definitely show in her time at the dinner, so I looked forward to that and I kinda knew it, I knew she was going to be a hoot before she got there so as a woman I was very proud to see her in that role.

14:15 AJ: I thought it was great too, I thought the jokes were on point, I didn't think too many of them crossed a certain line or got into where she really should have stopped. People are really scolding her, especially the president of course, because a lot of those jokes are about him and his administration, but I heard a little bit of back and forth about how the same treatment wouldn't happen for a male comedian, what do you think about that?

14:44 Kelley: That's usually always the case, sometimes, especially in the media and the landscape of the media, the landscape of America and where we are now, with women's rights, women's progression in the workplace and the media just period, it does come with differential treatment, but it's nothing new, it's nothing surprising, it's something that's been talked about over and over again. At this point, I think a lot of women are like, okay the conversation is in the atmosphere but how do we move it forward? How do we change it? Since the women's march, I'd like to see more of it, I'd love to see more conversation about it. Now, you will have some conversation upcoming about it but it's more women in technology, women and black women in technology. We will forward the conversation on *The Uplift*, I'll have an ongoing series of women in tech but, women- it's a disparity between women and men and how men are treated differently when it comes to certain things that are said so it's a different type of backlash I think.

16:13 AJ: It's interesting you're saying editorially, you're going to put more women in tech in your stories but how about hiring wise?

16:19 Kelley: Kevin does an awesome job with hiring women. We have tons of female editors, a lot of female writers, it may be a disparity with men in our newsroom. But, no, Kevin, has balanced the newsroom out a lot. He has two deputy editors that are women -

16:39 AJ: Right, I was going to say, they are definitely on the frontlines -

16:42 Kelley: Yeah, we have Latoya Petersen, she's the deputy editor of digital innovation. You have Danielle Kadette, who just got promoted to a deputy editor and she runs our day to day editorial process. (AJ: Okay editorial.) We have our senior editors, Danielle Smith, super editor in hip hop and culture from vibe billboard so we all know Danielle Smith. We have Lisa Wilson, she was like the last African American female newspaper editor out. She was at the Buffalo news, and she's the last black woman newspaper editor. There are no black newspaper editors that I know of -

17:35 AJ: That is a crime. You know. I know everything is digital, I know everything is digital now but there's always a paper somewhere and we need to promote that-

17:44 Kelley: There are still plenty of newspapers but you have to look at sports now. I'm talking about sport editors. (AJ: I'm talking sports papers.) Of course you have our black newspapers and salute to them, that's how I got my career started. I worked for the Tri State Defender in Memphis, the historic Tri State Defender. (AJ: Shoutout Tri-State Defender.) Shout out to the black papers, keep breeding us, don't sleep on us. That started my career path and I am sure there are a lot of writers who can say the same. Lisa's at the Buffalo news and for the sports newspaper editor, she was the last black woman in the role and now she's with the undefeated doing great things and that's just editors. Can't leave out the senior writers, Lonnae O'neal, Kelly Carter, Jemele...so Kevin has a powerhouse full of women.

18:46 AJ: More power to him, he knows what he is doing. A very smart man.

18:50 Kelley: He does, our photo editor is a woman, she is very good. He does a great job with his women.

18:57 AJ: I'm starting to think, I can count on one hand and we can be brothers in there now that you started talking! I can count on Jerry -

19:05 Kelley: Jerry Bembry, Justin, Clinton – [laughs] Jon X Miller. We have some people, Martenzie, Ozzy, Monice, Marcus so he has a pretty good balance of men and women. But in our newsroom -

19:26 AJ: Which is like unlike any other newsroom, let me tell you right now.

19:30 Kelley: Especially in a sports capacity and it's such a great newsroom that Kevin and Lisa can call on any one of those people to send to a basketball game or a football game. If he wanted to take all his women and say, 'yo this week only my women are doing sports' he could do it. He would have a good list of all women of color, just out on the field reporting on sports, he could actually do it.

20:02 AJ: The undefeated is pioneering in so many ways. When you talk about gender and diversity and everything that is going on there right now and more looking into the future in different areas. In journalism and in the black press in general, what do you want to say to the next generations of the media?

20:23 Kelley: For the next generation, I would say to be multifaceted and multitalented. I come from a city of hard knocks and what I mean by that, my city in journalism, I had to be able to do everything and working for a black paper, you wear many hats. I had to be able to do anything, I would tell the new generation to diversify your talents, don't be so caught up in, 'oh, I just want to be on TV,' or 'oh, I just want to write' be able to say, 'sure, I can be your face on TV but I can also write this story.' Be able to bring something to the table that is more than your education, make a name for yourself, increase your brand, become a brand and not just a name on a resume because there are so many journalists with names on resumes, you have to –

21:34 AJ: You really skim through them and you have to see the ones that stand out.

21:38 Kelley: Yeah, yeah become a brand, that's what I would suggest. When I look at women and the men, Marc Spears, Jason Reid. Marc is a brand, he's not just a writer, you get Marc Spears on your team, you're getting Mark Spears brand. When you get Jason Reeds on your NFL stories, you're getting the Jason Reid brand, those are guys that ESPN can say, 'hey, Marc Spears, you covering The Warriors tonight, we're going to put a camera in front of your face.' Mark is a writer but he can do television. It's so much stuff he can do, same with Jemele, she's a brand but she's a writer, she's a TV person, she's on radio, she's done all of the games. Stephen A Smith was a beat writer. Just be a brand, it doesn't always say hey, 'you're beautiful and you're talented and you're great, I'm going to put you on TV today,' it's a grind, you have to work for it. You know you may have some people who get it a little bit easier but for the most part, it's hard work, it's not easy.

22:50 AJ: I know, I think two things that I really learned at NABJ last year. My first one, you know being in the professional industry and everything, you got to learn how to write. It's all about writing, whether if it's in front of the camera, behind the camera, beat reporter, it does not matter. Telling a story in its essential form is putting the pen to paper and writing it out. Whether you writing your script on camera or off camera, the other thing is, like you said and hit on - being your own brand, being your own company, your own force, being behind the camera and expanding that to something bigger than just yourself in you being a talent, if you will. So, I 100% agree with you and it's been a great conversation, talking about the press and *The Undefeated* and your guys' two year anniversary and everything going on over there with your profiles and *The Uplift*. I really appreciate this conversation as always

this is my special guest, the general editor at *The Undefeated*, Kelley D Evans, do you have anything to leave us with?

23:54 Kelley: Keep reading the *U*, don't sleep on us. We're out there, we're telling many stories, we have many more to tell. Look out for us, we're going to keep telling them, we're going to keep coming your way, so don't stop.

24:10 AJ: [laughs] Don't sleep, don't stop. Thank you so much Kelley, I really appreciate this.

24:14 Kelley: You're welcome!

24:15 AJ: Please continue to subscribing at Max Out time with AJ II on Itunes. Add @Kelleysthrngri on social media, like on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today. AJ Out!

24:32 Outro Song: 'For The City'

24:53 --END--

[Max Out Time W/ AJ II](#)