MEL HOPKINS
MULTIMEDIA JOURNALIST
"COIN COLLECTOR," PAGE 22
"WOMAN IN THE MIRROR," PAGE 56
Hopkins left her birthplace of Brooklyn, New York, to live in Frankfurt, Germany, for a couple of years when she was just shy of 4 years old, and she's been on the move ever since. She traces her love of storytelling back to childhood and has found multiple outlets to express it. Hopkins has worked as a broadcast journalist for the CBS affiliate and a Clear Channel radio station in the Ohio Valley and went on to write and produce several documentaries for radio and TV. She resides in Atlanta. Follow her on Instagram @the_leadstory.

CALVIN ‘PASTOR CAL’ ROBERSON
MINISTER/LIFE COACH
"MAKING MARRIAGE WORK," PAGE 54
This pastor, educator, Wall Street exec and public speaker has been working to build and repair relationships for more than 30 years and he is currently the resident relationships expert on the hit Lifetime TV series Married at First Sight. Though he is a successful businessman, his calling to the pulpit has always been central in his life. He and his wife, Wendy, are the founders of Progression Church in Atlanta, where he has been senior pastor for 20-plus years. Follow him on Instagram @iamcalvinroberson.

CURTIS BENJAMIN
CO-FOUNDER/CEO OF SAVING OUR DAUGHTERS
"EMPOWERING GIRLS . . .," PAGE 18
For the past two decades, Atlanta-based Benjamin—aka “Curtis B.—” has devoted himself to developing programs to empower and educate urban youth. He creates community-based initiatives to introduce teen girls to the performing arts. In 2014, Benjamin and his wife, Debbie, launched the Saving Our Cinderellas Performing Arts on Broadway Program. Follow the movement on Twitter and Instagram @SavingDaughters.

JOANE AMAY
BEAUTY & STYLE DIRECTOR
"FALL BEAUTY ROUNDPUP," PAGE 36
EBONY’s Beauty & Style Director was born in New York City but raised in New Jersey and considers herself a Jersey girl through and through. Of course, that doesn’t stop this Columbia University grad from soaking up inspiration from New York’s lively fashion scene. A veteran of the magazine publishing world, this Ivy Leaguer has worked for W magazine, Lucky, Harper’s Bazaar and Marie Claire. She says she’s in awe of all the amazing Black folks in the industry and feels honored to highlight and share their contributions and stories with the rest of the world. When not taking in runway shows, attending beauty events or tracking the hottest industry trends, you’ll find her indulging her passion for collecting all things sparkly. She’s a confessed hoarder and dreams of one day retiring to her own private island. Follow her on Instagram @joaneamay.
INDIEGOGO, KICKSTARTER AND GOFUNDME are top online crowdfunding platforms through which artists petition the public to help finance their passion projects.

Each of these websites boasts helping creatives, such as award-winning filmmaker Nicole Franklin, raise money to launch their projects.

Using the Indiegogo platform, Franklin raised more than $16,000 to direct and produce her narrative film Title VII in 2016. To save money, she shot and wrapped production in eight days. In February 2017, the film, which exposes Black-on-Black discrimination in the workplace, had its premiere. By April of the same year, Franklin had signed a one-year contract with Porter Pictures for global TV distribution.

Then she hit a roadblock that would eventually lead to a new avenue for funding her art: digital currency known as cryptocurrency.

“One of the strategies our rep had for sales was hours of pitching at American Film Market,” she says.

The Santa Monica, California-based American Film Market (AFM) is one of the world’s top film markets, where more than 7,000 participants from 80 countries look to make movie deals.

“When he gave me the follow-up report from making the rounds, he told me flat out, ‘I gotta get past being told Black films don’t sell overseas,’” the director recalls.

Her Indiegogo Title VII update revealed, “I loved the film and talked us up to multiple industry execs—close to 50 total. It could be the timing or the fact that they just weren’t ready for the subject matter, but our contract ended... with no solid offers.”

Franklin, a storyteller who advocates for and produces films that showcase a Black woman’s joy, says, “[The rep’s] experience with my film at American Film Market was in November 2017. Keep in mind, that same year we’d seen Get Out, Girls Trip and The Fate of the Furious [of The Fast and the Furious franchise] continue the success from Hidden Figures, out the year before, and a much lower budgeted film called Moonlight defy box office expectations in overseas markets.”

The director of the award-winning documentary The Double Dutch Divas (2001) and Germs no Bess: A Dialogue with Anne Brown (2012) explains: “I did not go through three decades of a very specific ‘no’ to my film career plans and potential overseas business not to finally see change. I knew early on that I would have to be a part of the change.”

Change can be costly but necessary for an independent filmmaker who’s looking to bypass the middleman and sell her film’s foreign rights direct.

AFM’s Managing Director Jonathan Wolf said in a September 2016 On the Page podcast titled “The AFM and the Power of the Pitch,” “We estimate about a billion dollars in business will be closed in the seven days of the AFM.”

Although the AFM is an open market, for some, without cash, it can appear closed.

Franklin says the use of crowdfunding money is limited to her film production. However, cryptocurrency investing caught her attention to raise money that could, in effect, finance her filmmaking lifestyle.

Franklin, a three-time Emmy award-winning video editor for CBS Sunday Morning, says she began to hear about bitcoin in 2015 through television news reports and social media.

“I was always aware of bitcoin having a presence that would most likely stay. Last year, passive income was on my mind, and then everything fell into place.”

She says after reading her friend’s cautionary Facebook post in November 2017 on how he earned but didn’t secure and, as a result,
lost his valuable bitcoins, it convinced her to invest.

In December 2017, Franklin opened an account on Coinbase, a U.S. cryptocurrency exchange where digital currency is securely traded and stored, and made an initial investment of $500.

"I started with my very first purchase of $77,56 on bitcoin, which probably meant I paid $35 with $2 and change for fees.

Initial investments of bitcoin, litecoin and Ethereum ... gave me a tiny profit. I remember really feeling good seeing ETH [Ethereum] profit me $40, and I withdrew it for another coin!"

Early cryptocurrency holders made a lot of money on small investments. When released on Jan. 3, 2009, bitcoin, the first decentralized cryptocurrency, was worthless. By Dec. 15, 2017, the Bitstamp exchange reported bitcoin had soared to a value of more than $17,000.

With the rise and fluctuation in cryptocurrency value, Franklin expects a return on her investment, soon.

"I have about 300,000 of one of my altcoins that's getting buzz. So all of us who are holding are betting on some December 2018 windfalls—at least we expect to see results in June of 2019. The way I look at it, to have a little more than $1,000 grow to minimum $100,000 would be a great turnaround for one year."

Franklin’s next film is a drama about an exonerated inmate suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Her proposed cryptocurrency windfall could come just in time to sell her film at AFM's 2019 conference.

Mel Hopkins, aka The Thriving Writer, is an Atlanta-based freelance writer, author and blogger.

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CRYPTOCURRENCY 101

Bitcoins and altcoins are cryptocurrency coins and can be traded on any cryptocurrency exchange, such as Coinbase, Bitstamp and Kraken. A token is issued by a tech or cryptocurrency startup and derives its value from the project.

BITCOIN: The original decentralized cryptocurrency.

ALTCOIN: Short for bitcoin alternative, it is any coin that is not bitcoin.

TOKEN: A token is representative of something of value within a system.

Similarly, bitcoin.org indicates a token, in the cryptocurrency system, represents a programmable digital asset. This digital asset, also known as an electronic record, functions in a software application built on an existing decentralized technology known as blockchain.

A startup founder can sell tokens for cash or cryptocurrency to fund a new tech or cryptocurrency project.

HOW TO USE BITCOIN (CRYPTOCURRENCY)

Before you begin trading, read up on cryptocurrency or watch a tutorial on bitcoin.org.

1. Choose your digital wallet.
2. Learn about cryptocurrency.
4. Protect your privacy. Cryptocurrency transactions are transparent.
5. Taxes may apply.