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## Actor: 'Don't cheat yourself with easy path'

**Jurnee Smollett talks art, activism as last speaker in president's lecture series**

By Jordan Hampton Editor-in-chief

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J'Brionne Helaire/Courtbouillon

Actor Jurnett Smollett speaks to the audience in Georges Auditorium with President Walter Kimbrough at her side on Nov. 2.

NEW ORLEANS (November 22, 2021) – You cheat yourself when you take the easy path, actor Jurnee Smollett told Dillard University students during a visit here Nov. 2.

“Hard work is required to be the best,” said Smollett, told the audience packed into Georges Auditorium. She spoke in a casual format with Dr. Walter Kimbrough, university president, seated beside her.

The former child actor, now 35, discussed her art and activism at the final speaker in Kimbrough's lecture series.

Smollett has starred in 12 movies and some two dozen television shows. Her movie role as 10-year-old Eve in "Eve's Bayou" in 1997 received critical acclaim and kick-started her career. Most recently, she portrayed Letitia "Leti" Lewis in HBO's "Lovecraft Country" in 2020, for which she received an Emmy nomination.

She is next due to start in a solo Black Canary movie (Warner Bros./DC Films) on HBO Max. Smollett noted she's been acting since she was 10 months old, starting in diaper commercials. She also played Michelle Tanner's best friend on the ABC sitcom "Full House."

Smollett said she wants to be challenged in her roles and enjoys working with directors who challenge her. Smollett has worked with notable actors like Samuel L. Jackson and Denzel Washington. She appeared in "The Great Debaters" in 2007 alongside Denzel Washington, who both directed and starred in the film.

Smollett said she learned a lot about acting from Washington.

"Denzel taught me to trust my instincts, know my character and learn by doing," she said, important advice since she did not attend acting school.

Acting is a process, and an actor must know his or her character, she said, so she does a lot of research and dives deep into each character to make the role come to life and connect with her audience.

Smollett said her mother taught her the value of hard work through community service.

"Service has always been a part of my life," she said, starting with her work with HIV/AIDS at age 12, when a crew member she came to know died of the disease. She is now on the board of directors for Artists for a New South Africa.

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