

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MWB powered *Spark-O-Matic* program incubates first student-led digital production company.

Command-Z produces Medgar Evers tribute video in initial project.

JACKSON, MS - In the fall of 2016, Marc Leffler - creative director and equity partner with the Jackson-based creative firm Maris, West & Baker (MWB) - launched a pilot program focused on teaching digital media creation skills to youth in underserved communities. The program, called *Spark-O-Matic*, took on about a dozen regular students from neighborhoods across south and west Jackson. This month *Spark-O-Matic* officially incubated it's first student-led production company, Command-Z Productions. The company's initial media offering is a tribute film about Mississippi's legendary civil rights hero, Medgar Evers, told from the standpoint of patrons of the Jackson public library that bears his name.

[Click to watch the video from Command Z Productions to learn more about Medgar Evers the man as well as the Jackson library named in his honor.](#)

"It all started with a field trip," explained Leffler, who serves as *Spark-O-Matic's* program director. "One day this fall, a group of *Spark-O-Matic* students in grades 6-12 travelled from the Medgar Evers Library to Medgar Evers' house less than a mile away. This short trip opened a world of ideas for the students."

Early on, *Spark-O-Matic* partnered with the Jackson Public Library System, which allowed students to utilize the Medgar Evers Library as classroom space.

"Before the trip, the students started discovering more about the namesake of their library, a place that means so much to them, their families, and their community," said Leffler. "Not only did they learn more about Mr. Evers as a civil rights leader, but also as a father, mentor and role model."

"Medgar Evers as a man was good," commented *Spark-O-Matic* participant and Medgar Evers Library patron Chris Bell. "He saw a problem and he wanted to correct it. I believe more people need to be like that today."



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After the field trip, the students decided to create a documentary to tell their own stories of where Medgar Evers lives today—through video interviews, photos and even illustrations.

Leffler was able to utilize MWB talent and resources to provide additional mentorship and assets to the *Spark-O-Matic* program. Using office space at MWB's headquarters, a group of *Spark-O-Matic* students officially founded their own production unit, Command Z Productions.

"We chose Command Z because it literally describes our approach to digital film making," said Command Z founding member, Emmanuel McDougal. "From the start we have been encouraged to experiment and take chances... and you can always undo."

"Command-z" is the keyboard combination on Apple computers that allow you to undo a recent change.

MWB is helping Command Z/*Spark-O-Matic* promote the video in advance of the opening of Mississippi's National Civil Rights Museum.

"As a creative company, we have a vested interest in helping engender a love of creating among youth, and demonstrating to youth how they can build this love into a successful career" said MWB president Tim Mask. "*Spark-O-Matic* is a program very much in line with our company's culture and mission. We are proud to have helped incubate Command Z Productions, and look forward to following what is sure to be successful, creative careers of *Spark-O-Matic* alumni."



An original digital illustration from *Spark-O-Matic* student Destini, based on the icon photo portrait of Mr. Evers. The illustration is featured in *Command-Z's* production.

The tribute is made even more special by the fact that *Spark-O-Matic's* main teaching platform is the Medgar Evers Library, and most *Spark-O-Matic* students are also library patrons.

Virtue Hill, a high schooler and *Spark-O-Matic* student, reflects on the spirit of the civil rights hero "living" at the library: "To me, this library is an honorary place for Medgar Evers. And I'm really thankful that we have it so we can remember him by it. And it helps a lot of kids throughout the community, gives them something to do, a place to go if they need one."

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Medgar Evers Library is home to *Spark-O-Matic*: digital arts mentoring and marvelous mayhem. The program meets after school on Mondays at 4:30, and is open to any student to participate and any adult to observe. *Where Medgar Evers Lives Today* was created by the students and teen mentors in Spark-O-Matic, including Angel, Kelvin, Virtue, D'Anthony, Destini, Chris, Zale, and Jaquarious. This documentary also marks the launch of Command Z productions, started by five Spark-O-Matic teens who did the videography, voiceover, art direction and editing for the film. Command Z is Emmanuel McDougal, Destini Ruffin, Chris Bell, Kelvin Walton, and Zale Smith.

RESOURCES (CLICK LINKS)

[Where Medgar Evers Lives Today](#) (a video tribute by Command Z Productions)

[Spark-o-Matic related photographs](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

James Bridgeforth, Mississippi Heritage Trust, for the field trip to Medgar Evers home.

Mrs. Mangum, a library patron who personally remembers Medgar Evers' fight for justice and equality in Mississippi.

A **big thanks** to librarian Ann Sanders for helping make the Medgar Evers library such a welcoming place to be.

ABOUT SPARK-O-MATIC

Spark-O-Matic is a program founded by MWB partner Marc Leffler and powered by MWB resources. *Spark-O-Matic* focuses on delivering digital creative skills training to youth in underserved communities. The program is focused on students within the Jackson, Mississippi public school system, and is taught primarily at the Medgar Evers Library.

ABOUT MWB

MWB is an idea + creative company that focuses on creating positive social impact while helping partners maximize visibility. Through the disciplines of social marketing, purpose marketing, cause marketing, and corporate citizenship awareness, MWB specializes in creating and implementing campaigns that have a net positive effect within communities. MWB's internal #Create4Good initiative recognizes and promotes projects across the globe that utilize creative skills to effect positive change. #Create4Good also guides several MWB-backed programs focusing on teaching creative skill sets to underserved populations. mwb.com.

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