

Group shows 'Eyes on the Prize'

NEW YORK (AP)—The documentary "Eyes on the Prize" is lauded as the quintessential work on the civil rights movement, but don't expect to buy a new copy or watch it on PBS any time soon. Legally, that is.

Copyright laws keep the 1987 film out of print. The documentary's owners are trying to get it back in circulation, but must first untangle a nest of laws. In the meantime, the activist group Downhill Battle is organizing a nationwide screening Tuesday, and until recently, had illegal copies of the film on its website.

"I learned my politics from this film, I can't believe people don't have the opportunity to see it, and learn from it," said Tiffiny Cheng, one of the founders of Worcester, Mass.-based Downhill Battle. "This is a national treasure, it's wrong that it is being kept from the public because of slow negotiations."

A touching and intimate scene in the film shows staff members singing "Happy Birthday" to Martin Luther King Jr. on his 39th, and last, birthday. But copyright laws protect the song, as well as much of the television footage and photos used. Most of the rights purchased by filmmaker Henry Hampton have expired, and the film can't be sold or shown on TV until licenses are renewed.

The 14-part film was last shown in 1992. It chronicles the movement, from Rosa Parks and the bus boycotts in the 1950s to the rise of Black mayors in the 1980s. The first six hours aired in 1987, the second eight in 1990. The film won six Emmys, and the segment "Bridge to Freedom 1965" was nominated for an Academy Award for best feature documentary.

Hampton died at age 58 in 1998, and left his production

company, Blackside Inc., to his sisters. Attorney Sandy Forman is working with Blackside to renew the copyright agreements, and said copyright owners have been cooperative, but legal wrangling takes time.

"I'm very optimistic," Forman said. "There is enough of a clamor and interest, and it's such an important project. It needs to be given an important status. I'm working on it."

Forman said the costs for clearing rights are considerable, but she didn't have figures yet. Reports say it will cost at least \$500,000, but she says that's inaccurate.

"If anyone should know, it's me. And I don't know yet," she said.

People, whom she wouldn't name, were waiting in the wings to foot the bill. That's not good enough for Cheng.

"We want this available now, we can't wait any longer to bring it back into culture," she said. "But we also wanted to bring to light how long negotiations are taking."

Cheng and Downhill Battle, a year-old copyright-reform group with a staff of five, are organizing the screening for Black History Month. So far, 35 showings are planned in homes, on school campuses, in libraries and theaters across the country.

The group obtained a VHS tape of the miniseries (it was never printed as a DVD), digitized it and put it up on their Web site for free, but were ordered by Blackside to take it down, Cheng said. Available tapes are selling on auction sites for nearly \$900. Libraries have copies that can be rented.

Blackside lawyer Tony Pierce says he appreciates the sentiment, but Downhill Battle is violating copyrights

owned by Blackside and by other organizations shown in the documentary.

"I think their hearts are in the right place, but they should be writing their congressman or lobbying instead to change copyright laws," he said. "Everyone involved in this wants to see the film back on the shelves. But there are right ways to do that."

He said he wasn't sure if he would take legal action against Downhill Battle if illegal screenings take place, which also could harm efforts to secure licenses for the film.

Activist Lawrence Guyot, who appeared in "Eyes on the Prize," agrees with Downhill Battle's efforts.

"This is a documentary that stands for the proposition that ordinary people can influence people nationally and internationally," he said from his Washington office. "That is harder to see without 'Eyes on the Prize.'"

The film, Hampton's life's work, has been plagued by legal woes since its airing.

In 1992, the filmmaker received a letter from attorneys for Martin Luther King Jr.'s estate, charging he had used films of King without the family's authorization.

Hampton said he offered the Kings \$100,000 for the material. But the family turned down his offer, saying they wanted more money and control over how the material was used.

Hampton's production company eventually sued King's estate in U.S. District Court, saying the King family's threats and demands for exorbitant payments "had a chilling effect on Blackside's right of free speech." The case was settled out of court and the King family received less than \$100,000, Hampton said at the time.

Knight accused of violating parole

BARSTOW, Calif. (AP) — Rap mogul Marion "Suge" Knight was booked on suspicion of violating his parole after police found marijuana in his truck during a traffic stop, authorities said Sunday.

Knight was arrested about Saturday evening in Barstow and held by sheriff's officials pending his transfer next week to state prison, said sheriff's Cpl. Lorraine Riser.

State officials would then review his case to determine if he should be held or released, Riser said.

Police said they searched Knight's Ford pickup and found marijuana after pulling him over for making an unsafe U-turn. He was cited for not having insurance.

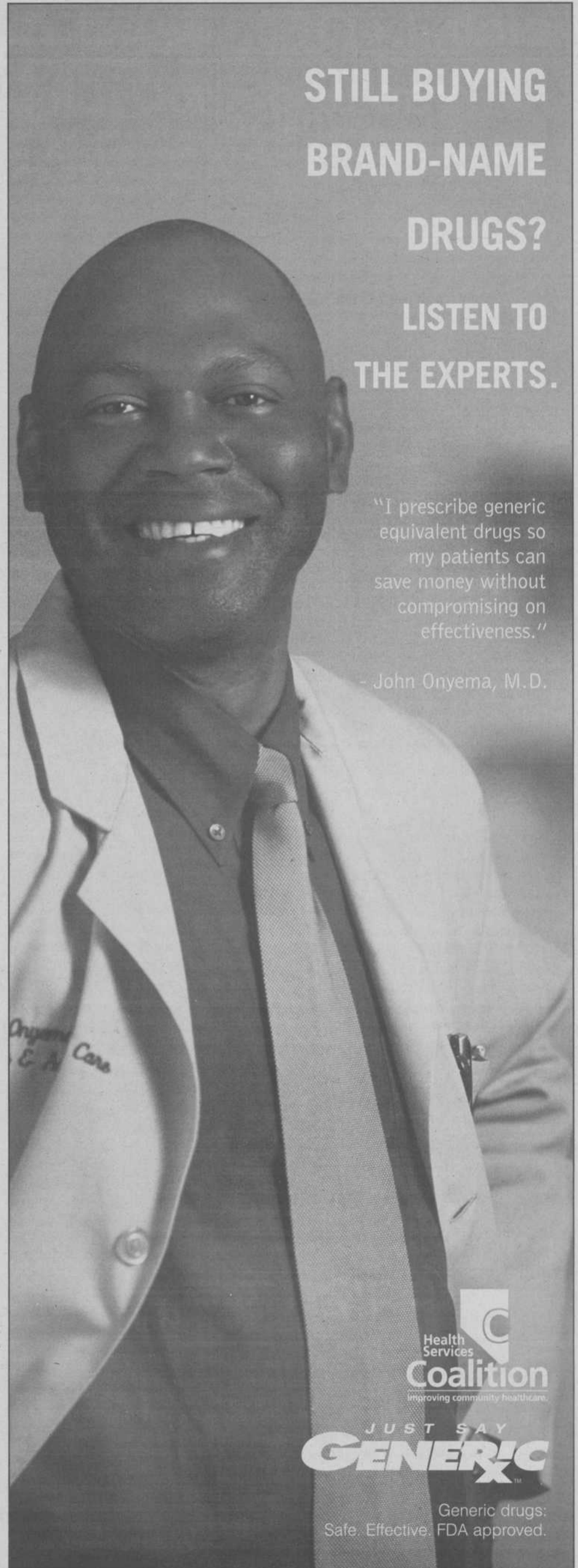
A woman in the vehicle, identified as

Alexis Wilkenson, 18, of Las Vegas, allegedly had a fake ID and was arrested for investigation of providing false information to police. She was later released.

Knight, 39, co-founder of the pioneering rap label Death Row Records, was released from prison in 2001 after serving time for assault and weapons violations. He recently served an additional 10-month prison sentence for violating his parole and striking a Hollywood nightclub valet.

A call to Jonathan Wolfson, a publicist who has represented Knight, was not immediately returned Sunday morning.

Barstow is in San Bernardino County about 100 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles.



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