

Time might be limited at Essence magazine

By Makebra M. Anderson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) When White companies purchase Black-owned businesses, everyone says African-Americans have nothing to worry about. If the takeover of Essence Communications by media giant Time Inc. is any indication, those assurances are made to ease the transition.

It's only March, and *Essence* has experienced more changes than most publications experience in a year. In January, the company sold its remaining 51 percent to Time Inc., the publishing division of Time Warner. In February, the company put its new urban fashion and style magazine *Suede* on hiatus and now, Diane Weathers has unexpectedly stepped down as editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine. Some think this is only the beginning.

"I don't think people should be surprised by anything when you have a merger, partnership, acquisition or a new business because you never know what can happen. When there are new people leading, a change at the top or a change in ownership all bets are off," explains magazine publishing specialist Yanick Rice-Lamb.

Weathers, who had been editor-in-chief of the popular Black women's magazine since 2001, told her staff she would be stepping down to pursue other goals and spend more time with her family. Her predecessor, Monique Greenwood, lasted one year. Counting Founding Editor Susan Taylor, the publication has seen three editors within the past five years.

"I'm leaving for personal and professional reasons," said Weathers in an interview with Target Market News (TMN). "I'm going through some things with my family, and I really need more time to focus on them. I don't have the energy to really put the attention that I need into the magazine. I need to focus on my family issues."

Lamb, who is the former editor of *BET Weekend* and *Heart & Soul* magazines, understands the pressure that the high-profile editor position can put on your family. She was able to balance being an editor, mother and wife for several years before deciding to put her family first.

"Having been in that posi-

tion before, I know how hard it can be. When you are the editor, there is a lot of travel, a lot of interaction with the public, a lot of interaction with the staff and a lot of interaction with the business side," she said. "I've had situations where I've left work to go to my son's baseball game and then went back to work." Some critics say Weathers is merely mouthing the company line and that the problems are more serious than she lets on.

After Time Inc., the largest publishing company in the world, purchased 49 percent stake in *Essence* and started moving many of its people into key positions on the business side, it was expected the media giant would eventually move to acquire total ownership. At the outset of the *Essence*-Time Inc. partnership in 2000, president and co-founder Clarence Smith



announced his resignation, presumably to make way for a Time, Inc. executive.

When the publishing giant purchased the remaining 51 percent, it was expected further changes would be made. One month after the acquisition was complete, Time Inc. put *Suede*, the new magazine published by *Essence*, on hiatus. The magazine only had four issues, making it the shortest lived magazine published by a prominent media company. No one knows what Time, Inc. plans for *Essence*.

"I've been reading *Essence* magazine for at least 10 years. I've seen the magazine grow and I've seen it go through some changes," said New York resident Marsha White.

"When I heard that they were going to sell to Time Warner, I knew that things would be different, but I didn't think it would be so soon and so dramatic. It really makes me wonder what Time Warner's vision is. Where are they going with *Essence*?" Lamb agrees that

to ease the difficulties that come with transition, everyone must be on the same accord.

"It all depends on the plans that the person that comes in has and the plans that Time Inc. has for the publication. Sometimes people take the wait-and-see approach and gradually make changes, and sometimes people will come in and use the transition period as a time to make radical changes," she explains. "It doesn't have to be disruptive, but often if people are used to working with one person they can feel kind of unsettled." To help ease the transition from one editor to the next, Weathers will remain at *Essence* as an editor-at-large.

Her experience as a journalist, working for publications such as *Black Enterprise*, *Newsweek*, *Red Book*, *Consumer Reports* and *Essence* as a senior editor from 1993 to 1997, contributed to her success as the editor-in-chief. "I'm proudest of the quality of the magazine. I think it has never been better. I'm proud of our campaigns, the War on Girls, Saving Our Sons and now Take Back The Music. And I'm proud of our numbers — our newsstand sales are up at a time when many women's magazines have been suffering on the newsstands," she told TMN.

Some readers are unsettled. "*Essence* is a popular magazine, but they really need to get focused and get settled," said White. "They are really losing a lot of their loyal customers because of all of these changes. It appears to the public like they aren't secure with their product, so why should we be?" *Essence* is not the first Black company to sell to a White company. The sale of *Essence* is part of an accelerated trend of major Black business being bought by White-owned companies.

That list includes Johnson hair products, Motown and Black Entertainment Television (BET). With the U.S. population expected to grow by 50 percent over the next 50 years — with 90 percent of that growth among people of color — major White companies are expected to increasingly seek to buy Black companies.

"I'm really disappointed in *Essence*," said Michelle Winters, a writer/editor in Washington, D.C.

Cochran

(Continued from Page 1) Bridges on attempted murder charges, rappers Tupac Shakur on a weapons charge, Snoop Dogg on a murder charge and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs on gun and bribery charges stemming from a nightclub shooting.

Cochran used the "if it doesn't fit" phrase in his closing argument at the Simpson trial, describing the moment when the former football player tried on bloodstained "murder gloves" to show jurors they did not fit. One glove was found at the murder scene; the defense said the other glove was planted at Simpson's home by racist police. Jurors found Simpson not guilty of the 1994 slayings of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman.

"I've got to say, I don't think I'd be home today without Johnnie," Simpson said Tuesday by telephone from Florida.

After Simpson's acquittal, Cochran appeared on countless TV talk shows, was awarded his own show on cable's Court TV, traveled the world giving speeches, and was parodied in films and on such TV shows as "Seinfeld" and "South Park."

In other cases, Cochran also represented former Black Panther Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, who spent 27 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit. When Cochran helped



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

During the O.J. Simpson trial, Johnnie Cochran showed how Simpson's hands didn't fit the killer's bloody glove.

Pratt win his freedom in 1997 he called the moment "the happiest day of my life practicing law."

He won a \$760,000 award in a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the family of Ron Settles, a Black college football star who died in police custody in 1981. Cochran challenged police claims that Settles hanged himself in jail after a speeding arrest. The player's body was exhumed and an autopsy revealed that Settles had been choked.

His clients included the family of Tyisha Miller, a 19-year-old Black woman shot to death by Riverside police who said she reached for a gun on her lap when they broke her car window in an effort to disarm her.

"He was an inspiration to many, many young lawyers," said Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz, a colleague on the Simpson case. "It's a sad, sad day."

Cochran became one of

two dozen Black students integrated into Los Angeles High School in the 1950s. His skills as an attorney took shape as a child. He loved to argue, and in high school he excelled in debate. He came to idolize Thurgood Marshall.

After graduating from UCLA, Cochran earned a law degree from Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. He spent two years in the LA city attorney's office before establishing his own practice, later building his firm into a personal injury giant with more than 100 lawyers and offices around the country.

Nevada Assemblyman William Horne has fond memories of his brief encounter with Cochran, calling it "very positive."

Said Horne: "He was a humanitarian who was gracious and generous with his valuable time."

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