

Robert Johnson to retire as BET chief

NEW YORK (AP) - Robert Johnson, who built BET into the leading TV network for Black Americans, announced on Thursday he would retire from the company in January.

Debra Lee, the company's president and chief operating officer, will assume Johnson's CEO role upon his exit.

Johnson started Black Entertainment Television from the basement of his Washington home during cable's infancy in 1979. BET is now seen in more than 80 million homes in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean.

Johnson, 59, became one of the nation's first Black billionaires when he sold BET to Viacom for \$3 billion in 2000, joining the company that also owns MTV and Nickelodeon. He received a five-year contract to stay with BET after the sale.

He's the owner of the National Basketball Association's Charlotte Bobcats and is involved in several businesses, including real estate, hotel ownership and a jazz record label.

During a springtime programming presentation to advertisers in New York that doubled as a 25th anniversary celebration, Johnson reminisced about starting BET after securing a \$500,000 loan from longtime cable executive John Malone - more money than he expected.

Yet it was clearly Lee's show that day, as she filled in advertisers about upcoming plans. BET focuses on reaching an 18-to-34-year-old audience with heavy music programming.

Lee started with BET as general counsel in 1986 and moved into her current position 10 years later.

"I am convinced that BET's legacy is in great hands with Debra at the helm," Johnson said.

BET has received criticism in recent years for de-emphasizing news and public affairs and not investing in quality original programming.

Johnson has pointed out that "entertainment" was BET's middle name and that it had a programming mix similar to MTV.

He's expanded BET by creating smaller digital networks geared to fans of jazz, gospel and hip hop, a publishing house and event production firm.

Book attacks Cosby's personal life

Is Bill Cosby Right? (Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?)

By Michael Eric Dyson;
Basic Civitas Books; 288 pp.; Hardcover, \$23.
ISBN: 0-465-01719-3

**Review by Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice**

"On May 17, 2004, Bill Cosby stepped to the podium in Washington, D.C.'s Constitution Hall... to receive an award for his philanthropic endeavors during an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision... When Cosby opened his mouth, instead of lauding the efforts of civil rights pioneers, he bitterly scorned poor Blacks for not holding up their end of the deal."

On and on Cosby went, berating Black parents and youth for their numerous faults, his ramblings united by one theme: the miserable condition of the Black poor brought on by their own self-destructive behavior. Cosby's remarks are not the isolated ranting of a solo rhetorical gun slinger, but simply the most recent, and the most visible, shot taken at poor Blacks in a more than century-old class war in Black America.

His views are widely held among the Afristocracy: up-

Brown

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"One Life," "Watermelon Man" and "Afro Blue."

Recently, his compositions have become more popular and have established him as a significant human entity in modern music and theatre. Brown recently established The Oscar Brown, Jr. H.I.P. (Human Improvement Potential) Legacy Foundation to continue his life's mission. Screenings are planned nationwide for a just-completed documentary about Brown's life, entitled, "Music Is My Life/Politics is My Mistress."

Said Maggie Brown, "He has passed us the torch, and we are carrying it proudly. Generations to come will not only enjoy but finally truly appreciate the contributions he has made."

He is survived by his wife, Jean Pace Brown; daughters Africa Pace Brown, Maggie Brown, Donna Brown Kane of Atlanta, Iantha Case of Maryland; son Napoleon Brown; 16 grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Earl Calloway writes for the Chicago Defender.

per middle class Blacks and the Black elite who rain down fire and brimstone upon poor Blacks for their deviance and pathology. If Cosby's implicit claim is that the Black poor have lost their way, then I don't mind suggesting that the Black middle class has, in its views of the poor and its support of Cosby's sentiments, lost its mind." — Excerpted from the Preface

I wonder whether Bill Cosby has had any regrets over delivering his thought-provoking speech essentially calling upon the Black community to reorder its priorities in terms of education, employment and culture. If not, he certainly might after hearing how very intimate aspects of his own personal life have been held up to public scrutiny in "Is Bill Cosby Right? (Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?)."

The book was written by Michael Eric Dyson, ordained street minister and the prolific author of a plethora of books on African-Americana. And though he earned his doctorate of divinity at Princeton, he currently teaches at another Ivy

League institution, namely, the University of Pennsylvania.

Like Harvard's Timothy Leary did with the Sixties' Hippie Generation, Dyson, serves as the self-anointed guru and spokesman for the Hip-Hop Generation, at least in the hallowed halls of academia. This gangsta' rap apologist can always be depended upon to lend his pen and lectern to the spirited defense of the so-called thug life.

As a critic who has reviewed several of his books, I have been so underwhelmed by the earlier work of Dyson that I had, quite frankly, long since dismissed him as an intellectual lightweight more given to a superficial sensationalism than to anything of substance. How else might one respond to his building a biography of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. around a false FBI allegation that the slain civil rights leader was gay? Or, by contrast, his uncritical veneration of Tupac Shakur despite the late rapper's felonious, misogynistic, profane, violent and self-destructive ways? In fact, I found one

opus so awful, that I put in unreturned calls to Dyson's colleagues to ask why they had praised it in blurbs on the back cover, because it was readily apparent that they couldn't possibly have bothered to read it.

It is no surprise, here, to see Dyson cashing-in on the celebrity of another icon, since Cosby's controversial remarks certainly have generated considerable publicity while initiating a healthy debate in African-American circles. After perusing Is Bill Cosby Right? I have both good news and bad news to report.

The good news is that this is the first Michael Eric Dyson book which I have found to be coherent, absorbing and entertaining. The bad news is that its title is misleading, for rather than a debate about any simmering tensions between poverty-stricken Blacks and the African-American upper-crust, this tabloid-toned page-turner mostly mounts a no holds barred assault on Cosby's private life.

Imagine The National Enquirer or The Weekly (See Cosby, Page 14)

Expertise Student of the Month

Lakawishwa Oates was recently selected as Expertise School of Beauty's June Student of the Month. She is also a member of the U.S. Air Force and is currently stationed at Nellis Air Force Base in North Las Vegas. Oates, a native of Louisiana, said that joining the Air Force has proven to have been a good decision because the service has afforded her the opportunity to earn a decent living and learn valuable life lessons. However, she went on to say that becoming "enlightened" to what she believes is her true life career has her "stirred up" and "looking to the future." "I graduate from cosmetology school in October" she said, "...after I finish my Air Force requirements next year, I'll go back home" where she plans to open a one-stop beauty enterprise that will offer day care and have a restaurant available on-site for customers being serviced by the salon or barber shop. "You don't get to the top being lazy or undetermined. You have to keep going and don't give up. Follow your heart, and God will see you through."



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MARIAH, OH MY

Singer Mariah Carey performs during the MTV Movie Awards on Saturday, in Los Angeles.