

Johnson

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publishing company.

Throughout his career, Johnson was the recipient of numerous honors, honorary doctorates and awards for his entrepreneurial prowess.

He also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in 1996 from President Bill Clinton.

In 2003, the Howard University School of Communications was named in his honor. His childhood home in Arkansas City was dedicated as the John H. Johnson Delta Cultural and Entrepreneurial Learning Center earlier this year.

Johnson wielded enormous influence over many of the people with whom he worked over the years, but he had perhaps the longest and strongest relationship with Lerone Bennett, *Ebony* and *Jet's* executive editor emeritus.

"I was just overwhelmed when I heard the news," said Bennett, who worked with Johnson for 51 years. "I saw him about a week ago, at the hospital, and he was still alert and on the case. I knew things were serious, and I was just honored, once again, to be able to talk with him and share a few moments."

Bennett said Johnson was "an American original" who gave Blacks a sense of self.

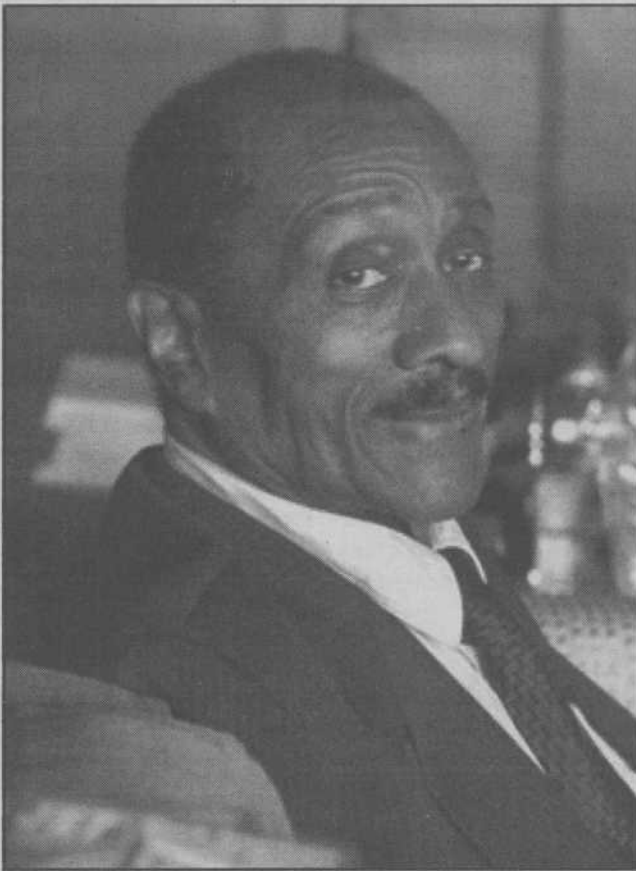
"His passion was the African-American press," said Bennett. "He admired the *Defender's* founder, Robert Abbott, and he almost single-handedly persuaded Madison Avenue and corporate America it was in their best interest to use Black models to appeal to Black consumers."

John H. Johnson was considered the gold standard for many journalists and media practitioners, such as Earl Graves, founder and publisher of *Black Enterprise* magazine.

"Legend. Pioneer. Visionary. Those are some of the appropriate words for John H. Johnson. He was ahead of his time, not as an African-American, but as an American, period," Graves said. "He represented all of us. As an icon, he's really part of Americana now."

But Graves and Johnson weren't always on friendly terms.

"Anyone who started a Black business, as I did, over 30 years ago, had to look up to someone. And at that time, the only thing out there was *Ebony*. But in the beginning, he treated me as the competition," Graves said. "But one day, he called me and wanted a meeting. By the end of the



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meeting he told me he wanted to be my friend. I told him he was already my friend. He said, 'No, when I leave here I'll be your friend. When I came in here, I was not your friend.'"

Graves said Johnson even advertised in his magazine.

Accolades and tributes came from colleagues and former employees around the country.

"Johnson was a true media pioneer," said a spokesman for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "His passing creates a huge vacuum in the publishing industry and in our community. Long before the mainstream community covered the Black community, *Jet* and *Ebony* provided non-stereotypical news of our community." In 1965, the NAACP awarded Johnson the coveted Spingarn Medal, the NAACP's highest honor presented for outstanding achievements.

"We all grew up with *Ebony*, *Jet* and Johnson publications. Mr. Johnson was a pioneer, a visionary, and an inspiration to us all," said Bryan Monroe, National Association of Black Journalists newly-elected president and assistant vice president for news at Knight Ridder in San Jose. "He is responsible for the careers and success of hundreds of Black journalists and his voice will be missed."

Christopher Benson, a former writer and editor at *Ebony* and co-author of "The Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America," said: "He was a taskmaster but someone who you wanted to please. You wanted to get his

approval, so you wanted to do an excellent job; he demanded that," said Benson. "He surrounded himself with the best and brightest talent. He did so much to help portray a strong image of African-Americans to this country and persuaded national advertisers to spend on his publications."

He said many staffers looked at Johnson as a father figure.

"The 15 years, on and off, I worked for him was an extraordinary experience," Benson said. "We recognized we were working for someone who had carved out a place in the history of this country."

Rev. T.L. Barrett Jr., pastor of Life Center Church Of God in Christ in Chicago, recalls that before he went to work for John H. Johnson as a 950/WJPC-AM morning radio personality — Johnson owned the station — Barrett had only dreamed of building a church. But after observing Johnson's conscientious work ethic, Barrett knew his dream could become a reality.

"Johnson was a consistent, dedicated working man who wasn't caught up in the luxury of his success. He was all about doing more and building," said Barrett, who hosted a daily show, "The Wonderful Hour," on the station.

Johnson was a great pioneer in communications, said Rev. Stephen J. Thurston Sr., pastor of New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church and president of the National Baptist Convention of America.

"He brought history, current events and future events within the confines of Afri-

can-American homes across the United States," he said. "When we couldn't hear from anyone else, we heard from *Ebony* and *Jet* and when we couldn't be in anyone else's magazine, we became stars in John Johnson's publications. May his legacy live long through his family, especially his daughter who carries on that legacy."

Rev. Al Sampson, pastor of Fernwood United Methodist Church, said, "John Johnson was the most important personality on the pages of African-American history. His brilliant mind gave us, in *Ebony* and *Jet*, presidents to vote for and leaders like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela to emulate in order to struggle for our independence. Lerone Bennett (senior executive editor emeritus) has lost a great friend; the Johnson family has lost a mighty patriarch and we as a people have lost the wind beneath our wings."

Johnson is survived by Eunice Johnson, his wife of 65 years, and daughter, Linda Johnson Rice.

Contributors: Roland S. Martin, Theresa Fambro Hooks, Earl Calloway, Leslie Jones McCloud, Rhonda Jones, Corey Hall, Ken Smikle and Alphonzo Stein.

Asylum probed in Taylor's deal

Special to Sentinel-Voice

MONROVIA (NNPA) - The leaders of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone have publicly asked Nigeria to review the asylum deal which stands between former Liberian president Charles Taylor and a trial to face charges of crimes against humanity.

Accusations have been mounting that onetime warlord Taylor, currently holed up in a luxury compound in the remote town of Calabar in the Niger Delta, has been violating the terms of his exile agreement that was drawn up in August 2003 and helped end Liberia's 14-year civil war.

"We agreed to suggest to the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that there may now be need for a review of the terms of the temporary stay granted to Charles Taylor," Liberian interim leader Gyude Bryant, Guinean Prime Minister Cellou Diallo and Sierra Leone's President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah said in a joint statement.

The three leaders met recently in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown.

A UN-backed court in the same city wants to try Taylor on 17 counts of crimes against humanity perpetrated in Sierra Leone's civil war, which officially ended early in 2002.

The former Liberian leader is accused of funding the Revolutionary United Front campaign, keeping the rebels stocked with guns and ammunition in exchange for smuggled diamonds.

The joint statement from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea made reference to a number of recent allegations that, if true, would violate Taylor's exile agreement.

It noted accusations that Taylor had been involved in an assassination attempt on Guinea President Lansana (See Taylor, Page 15)

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