

Johnson

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radio show host and commentator, Tavis Smiley; radio's Fly Jock Tom Joyner and his wife, fitness guru Donna Richardson Joyner; Lerone Bennett, *Ebony's* executive editor emeritus; Motown founder Barry Gordy; *Black Enterprise* founder and publisher Earl Graves Sr.; BET founder Robert Johnson and current CEO, Debra Lee; Rev. Al Sharpton; legendary boxing promoter Don King; ambassador and former U.S. Sen. Carol Moseley Braun; Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-2nd); Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.); Rep. Bobby Rush (D-1st); Rep. Danny Davis (D-7th); Gov. Rod Blagojevich; State Senate President Emil Jones Jr. (D-14th); Cook County Circuit Court; Bishop T.D. Jakes; comedian and activist Dick Gregory; record, film and television producer Suzanne de Passe; Time Warner president and CEO Richard Parsons; and Christie Hefner, CEO, Playboy Enterprises Inc.

Johnson's wife of 64 years, Eunice, sat on the front row on the right side of the church with her daughter and Johnson Publishing Com-

pany CEO Linda Johnson Rice, granddaughter, Alexa Rice, and son-in-law, Mel Farr Sr.

Rev. William H. Gray III, senior minister of Bright Hope Baptist Church of Philadelphia, officiated and delivered the eulogy.

Then several of the invited speakers offered touching and sometimes humorous tributes to the man who changed the nature of the publishing industry.

Clinton, who escorted Eunice Johnson into the service, said he was honored to talk about a man he liked and admired.

"He was proud of his success without arrogance. He never lifted himself while kicking someone down," said Clinton of Johnson, who he awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1996, the highest honor bestowed on a civilian.

"He has gone to a richly deserved reward, leaving us behind to thank God for his life."

Obama called Johnson a man of big dreams.

"Mr. Johnson said people are not limited by the place of their birth or the color of their skin, but by the size of

their hope," Obama said. "His was a life of inspiration and hope."

Graves praised Johnson for embracing him as a friend and allowing other Black publications and businesses to thrive, rather than seek their failure as competitors.

"It is safe to say there would be no *Black Enterprise* magazine today without the vision and tenacity of John Johnson," said Graves.

"He was an American original," Bennett said of Johnson during a passionate delivery of remarks.

Hefner addressed Rice, saying she knew full well what it was like to work for a father, and a founding father at that.

"Both he (Johnson) and my father (Hugh) had a dream. They built an empire and turned it over to their daughters," she said.

The tributes were interspersed with musical selections performed by gospel superstar Vickie Winans, Santita Jackson, Rev. Jackson's daughter, and the Sanctuary Choir of the Apostolic Church of God.

There was an overflow crowd in the beautiful, cavernous house of worship, and

those who couldn't get inside waited patiently in the street for the end of the two and a half hour ceremony.

Standing outside of the church seemed to put no damper on attendee's feelings. Whether they knew Johnson personally or not, many said they hold his memory very near to their hearts.

Charmaine Thomas works on the campus and was completing her daily power walk. She said she wanted to pay her respect because Johnson had done a lot for African-Americans.

A worker in the Clerk of the Circuit Court office, Garry Smith, said he never met Johnson but an edition of *Ebony* or *Jet* was a mainstay in his household.

"Ever since I was born, my parents held a lifelong subscription to *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. I grew up reading it and I was always impressed by the positive acknowledgment of the Black community, so it always inspired me," Smith said.

Wayman Hollis said Johnson and his publications showed Black people that they could be more than an entertainer or athlete.

"He had a vision and showed a lot of people the vision," he said.

Real estate developer, Warren Barr, said Johnson made a powerful impression on him about three years ago when they met to discuss business.

"I was amazed at how a man who had all of the success he had and yet be so humble and down to earth as a person," Barr said.

The Rev. Paul Jakes, was among those who stood behind police barricades.

He said he attended the funeral because it is a chapter in history.

"John Johnson joins a renowned league of publishers. He gave our community and world hope," the leader of Old St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church said after the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. revved up the crowd in and outside of the church.

Rev. Jackson began his benediction with the question, "How do we say goodbye?"

He thanked Johnson for giving him the opportunity to fulfill his destiny as a communicator and for giving Black people "clean water and a clear mirror" in which

to see their beauty and potential.

He told Rice, "The world saw us through a keyhole, but your dad saw us through a door."

Alexa Rice was the only family member to address the mourners.

Her polished delivery was marked by slight quivering in her voice as she thanked the attendees, the public and all the Johnson Publishing Company supporters who offered their condolences.

Clinton escorted Johnson's widow, Eunice, out of the church after the ceremony, gaining a burst of applause and cheers from those outside of the church. They also cheered and applauded when Johnson's casket, covered almost entirely with red roses, was rolled out of the church.

The John H. Johnson School of Communication at Howard University was one of two entities the Johnson family designated for tributes in lieu of flowers. The other was the United Negro College Fund.

Compiled from reports by Karen E. Pride and Leslie Jones McCloud, writers for the *Chicago Defender*.

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