

Blacks pitch commercials

By Olu Alemoru

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LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - Black culture and style is increasingly being used by corporate America to sell products — and not just to African-American consumers.

Grammys night was sweet for Mary J. Blige — picking up three Grammys and delivering a thousand thank yous — but one can also imagine that pinstriped executives at Chevrolet might have also been dancing little jigs of joy. Blige is the star of a new commercial for the company's 2007 Tahoe sport utility vehicle, a spot that ran multiple times during the awards telecast,

and followed her taking a hand in the vehicle's launch with a New Year's Eve performance in New York City's Times Square.

As an entertainer who won stardom with an urban, largely Black fan base, but is now viewed as a pitchwoman with an ability to drive sales from Brooklyn to Bismarck, Blige is far from alone. Corporate America, it seems, is not only using Black music, style and attitude to sell its wares, it is increasingly doing so from the standpoint that no matter who is being sold to, it pays to be seen as cool, hip and urban.

"Historically, the most successful companies are those that have figured out

early that it is absolutely essential to reach different pockets of America — not just mainstream America," said Forrest Beanum, a marketing and public-relations expert with Los-Angeles-based Cerrell Associates.

"The savviest keep a close eye on emerging markets, and these are the companies who can successfully demonstrate that a multicultural approach lends to a greater impact and efficacy."

Take, for instance, Washington Mutual, which is now luring customers with a series of ads featuring a laid-back brother who consistently outfoxes a geriatric bunch of stuffy, White bank executives. Chrysler has sold

cars by making golf buddies out of former company chairman Lee Iacocca and rapper Snoop Dogg — who in turn has acted alongside Paris Hilton as T-Mobile spokesman, and most recently, has stuffed his famously "dirty mouth" with Orbit gum.

Meanwhile, rap icon Jay-Z, who was tapped recently to help Coca-Cola re-energize its Cherry Coke brand, is already the face and co-brand director of Budweiser Select, whose "Show Me What You Got" commercials simultaneously promote his comeback album.

The rapper also stars in spots for Hewlett-Packard notebook computers, and in (See *Commercials*, Page 12)

Health costs on upswing

WASHINGTON (AP) - Healthcare is expected to account for \$1 of every \$5 spent in the United States in another decade.

That means a rise in out-of-pocket expenses, such as the co-pays for medicine, from about \$850 this year to about \$1,400 in 2016, a 5.3 percent annual increase.

The cost of health insurance is projected to rise even more quickly during that same time — 6.4 percent annually.

Over the coming decade, spending on healthcare will continue to outpace the overall economy. By the year 2016, it will total nearly \$4 trillion, economists at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said in a report being released.

Today, the number is closer to \$1 out of every \$6, or \$2 trillion.

Consumers are spending more on the latest treatments, despite their rising costs. For example, federal officials cite a significant increase in the use of imaging to detect blockages or other diseases.

Income will also play a significant role in the greater health spending. Historically, when income rises 1 percent, health expenditures go up about 1.5 percent, officials said.

"What that indicates is a desire to purchase good health," said John Poisal, deputy director of the government's National Health Statistics Group.

Dr. Mark McClellan, an analyst who used to oversee the Medicare and Medicaid programs, said greater spending on healthcare has its benefits. People are not having heart attacks because they're taking medicine that lowers their blood pressure and cholesterol. They're surviving cancer because of more frequent exams and new treatments.

"Greater healthcare spending is having a tremendous impact on the length and quality of people's lives," he said.

But the United States could be doing much better, he said.

"We know that much of the spending is going to

treatments that are unnecessary or lead to medical errors, so we're not getting nearly as much value as we should," McClellan said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said the rising costs are creating anxiety for everyone, as well as a political will to change that trend.

"America's per capita health spending is the highest in the world," he said. "There is simply no place on the economic leader board for a nation that spends a fifth of its domestic product on healthcare."

The administration is pushing government agencies, insurers and healthcare providers to make information available that would help consumers become good shoppers. For example, Medicare lists the percentage of pneumonia patients at various hospitals who received a timely antibiotic, an indicator of the quality of care.

"The only force strong enough to change the course of healthcare is a marketplace where consumers have the information and the incentive to choose quality and keep costs low," Leavitt said.

The economists said their study doesn't determine how much the rising costs will affect the average American family. There are too many factors involved, particularly when the federal government accounts for about half of overall health spending through programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The economists also predict that government programs will gradually replace employers when it comes to providing health insurance for millions of Americans.

"We are moving incrementally away from traditional sources of insurance, such as employer-based coverage, to a system comprising more federal and state government-provided healthcare," said the economists, whose report will be published in the journal *Health Affairs*.

Guns

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fyng himself as manager, denied the accusations made by Cooks, mother of one of the boys.

"I don't sell the guns to kids, they steal them," said Cho.

However, Cooks dismissed Cho's comment and said, "My son doesn't steal."

According to Cooks, the guns have a warning label forbidding the sale of the product to minors under age 18. Also, according to Cooks, the guns had another label warning of radiation from a laser-type sighting device similar to those found in real weapons.

"The laser," she said, "would shine a red beam of light and a red dot would then appear on the target."

Interviewed in his store recently, Cho gestured with his hands indicating how the kids stole the product by stuffing it down the front of their pants and then fleeing the store. He also gestured with his hands that the range the plastic pellets travel from the muzzle of the type of toy guns the store sold is only about three feet.

On the day of the store visit to Cho, the guns in ques-

"I was angry and concerned that the guns could be mistaken by police for the real thing."

— Dianna Cooks

tion were not on the shelves.

Cho pointed out that when he was recently confronted by Cooks to remove the guns from the store shelves and thus from being sold, he capitulated. As a result, he said he has not only removed the guns, but also stated he has no intention of reordering them from the distributor.

He also expressed his concern and he felt he was being "threatened and pressured" by Cooks.

Cooks had described the guns: "The guns have an orange tip, black body, a scope and pop-out clip."

In addition, another aspect of the toy guns was of further interest to Cooks: the name imprinted on the toy guns displayed the Smith & Wesson brand.

A call to Smith & Wesson, precision firearms dealer since 1872, was referred to Cyber Guns of California.

Cyber Guns is a wholesaler of this manufacturer and other brand name pellet and BB gun products.

According to Heath Franklin, in charge of Cyber Guns retail stores where Smith & Wesson brand products are sold, Save 99 Cents is not a retail store customer of Cyber Guns. The toy guns stamped with the Smith & Wesson name "are not one of our products," he said.

Franklin stated: "Overseas factories get hold of the molds and then sell them for a cheaper version. The outside may look the same, but the internal workings are not."

The toy guns were also stamped Made In China.

Franklin acknowledged his company licenses Chinese factories to manufacture products under Smith & Wesson's trademark name.

Also noted by Cooks, two

sets of letters and numbers were stamped on the product.

"They are serial and model numbers — SW5404 and T.902," she said.

When told of the letters and numbers, Franklin said, "No. They are not ours. They're counterfeit." Franklin added, "Our pellet guns start at \$34."

The least expensive Smith & Wesson pellet gun pictured on its website sells for \$155.

Cooks said the toy guns in question are made of plastic only. The difference between that product and the way real air guns, CO2 gas and spring loaded pellet and BB guns look is that the real ones are made of metal and shoot either a plastic projectile or metal small round balls. They are mainly designed for and commonly used for target practice. However, the more expensive and powerful models can discharge a lethal fusillade of pellets and metal balls with a risk of causing injury to parts of the body, especially the eyes.

Cooks took action to prevent what she believed was a tragedy waiting to happen from a dangerous combination of children and so-called toy guns.

Sojourner

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hailed Daley.

Sojourner was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in New York's Hudson Valley in 1797. She was the mother of several children, all sold into slavery. After gaining her freedom in 1826, she moved to New York City. In 1843, Baumfree changed her name to Sojourner Truth.

Some people believe not

knowing the whereabouts of her children may have been the catalyst for her travels across the country, preaching for the abolition of slavery and secretly helping set Black people free.

After President Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery, Truth made women's suffrage a focal point of her speeches, portraying women as powerful, independent fig-

ures. Her most famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman," was recited by Josephine Poole, a seventh-grader at Jefferson Junior High School in Washington, D.C.

"If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, dese women togedder ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again," read Poole.

Sojourner Truth died Nov. 26, 1883, in Battle Creek, Mich. In 1981, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, N.Y., and the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1983. A U.S. postage stamp was dedicated in her honor at the Sojourner Truth Library in 1986.

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