

'Hot Ghetto Mess' tepid, disparages Black lives

NEW YORK (AP) - If you truly want to see the definition of a "hot ghetto mess," turn on VH1 on any given Sunday and watch one of the endless reruns of "Flavor of Love" or any of its other spinoffs and variations. Chances are, you'll be thoroughly educated and offended (and, shamefully, entertained).

But if you thought you'd get that kind of knowledge watching Wednesday's premiere of BET's revamped "Hot Ghetto Mess" show — now simply titled, "We Got to Do Better," hosted by Charlie Murphy — you were shortchanged. While there were examples of trifling behavior and crazy antics, for the most part, the show seemed like a reject reel from "America's Funniest Videos."

Certainly, there are some camps breathing a sigh of relief: The show was roundly criticized even before it made its debut by some who feared it was yet another BET show that would degrade Black people by presenting offensive stereotypes as comedy.

Given BET's track record, those critics had reason to worry. After all, the Black Entertainment Network has

provided a seemingly endless platform for hip-hop thugery, booty-shaking video girls, lowbrow comedy shows, and Toccara.

Perhaps the creators of "We Got to Do Better," which is based on the website hotghettomess.com, were leery of being another example of offensive BET programming.

The show hardly had any examples of the outrageous behavior the website deems "ghetto." There were no images of pimp-my-ride coffins, 5-foot-high lacquered hairdos, infants posing with 40-ounce bottles of beer, or pink-spandex outfits on a Mo'Nique-sized frame.

Instead, the show offered lame video clips that circulated on sites like YouTube months ago, and commercials that wouldn't pass the cable-access test.

To make clear the show wasn't trying to pick on Black folk, there were also plenty of White faces, as in a clip of a redneck Olympics-style event.

The show was racially balanced — and equally unfunny — on all levels.

"We Got to Do Better" also attempted to show it had a redeeming aspect by ask-

ing history questions to mainly uninformed people on the street ("How many Blacks are on the Supreme Court?"). But "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" does it better — and on that show, it's funny.

Whether a show titled "Hot Ghetto Mess" or "We Got to Do Better" has a place on BET is open for debate.

Clearly, there are enough negative stereotypes surrounding Black people — and clearly, the celebration of Black foolishness has become more popular than ever.

VH1's "Flavor of Love," which has featured Black women pulling on each other's weaves, cussing each other out and even defecating on stairwells, has been a low-point for Black images over the past two years, while scoring record-breaking ratings. That's not to mention the head-shaking, eye-rolling antics on talk shows like "Maury" or other reality shows. Or the offensive behavior that seems to define every other hip-hop video.

When more people know about the agenda of "New York" than Condoleezza Rice, clearly there's a problem in America — and an opportunity that's ripe for satire and profound skewering. But BET has too much baggage of its own to tackle such a project. Indeed, there's more biting (and hysterical) criticism of so-called ghetto culture on Black websites than could be found on BET's "We Got to Do Better."

Once again, BET has got to do better — but it may not know how.



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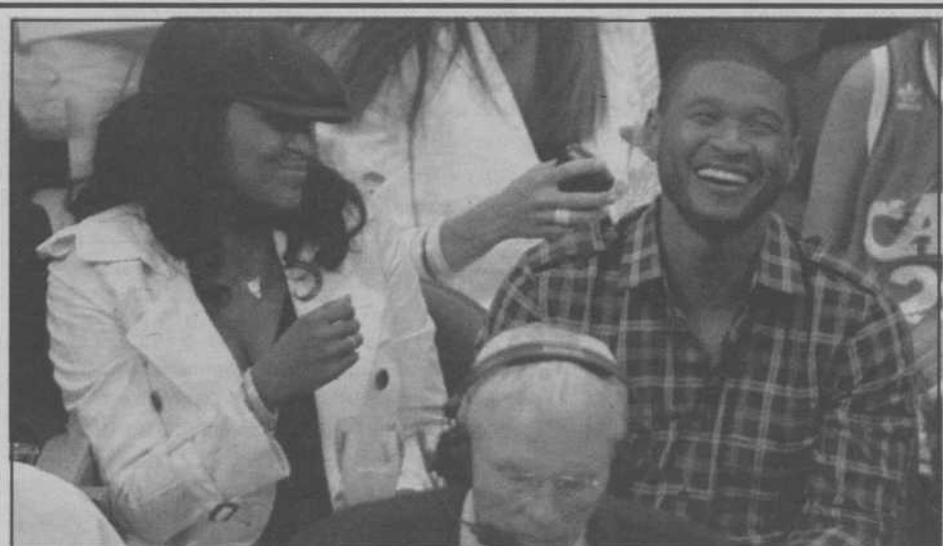
Twista

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to clean up offensive content.

Twista said that typically, when he performs at events that are more mainstream and that attract kids, he cleans up his lyrics, and had intended to do so for the Chicago performance.

"I was actually going to have a school with a choir come sing the song 'Hope' with me. So now... McDonald's have to tell the kids that they can't perform."



MY BOO-HOO

Usher and his pregnant fiancée, Tameka Foster, canceled their wedding last weekend, but they're apparently still together. The 28-year-old singer and Foster, his longtime girlfriend, called off their wedding Saturday, saying no details about the circumstances of the cancellation would be released.

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