

BET, Are You Listening?

Contributed by Rozena Henderson--Black College Wire
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Tuskegee student disappointed with 'College Hill,' 'Blackbuster,' 'big momma'

In 1979, Robert L. Johnson saw the need for a television channel that catered to the black community in a way that no other channel at the time was willing to do. Black Entertainment Television (BET) was the result. As BET gained momentum over the years, it transformed from a station that showcased the music other stations wouldn't into a viable forum for black thought. It featured such shows as For the Record, a show involving the Congressional Black Caucus; Teen Summit, a show discussing topics pertaining to the younger crowd; and On Stage, which aired plays written and performed by blacks.

As the years progressed, it seemed that Black Entertainment Television had nowhere to go but up with such groundbreaking programming as BET Nightly News and The Cousin Jeff Chronicles, which reported the news most relevant to blacks. Unfortunately the high did not last. In 2000 Johnson sold the network to Viacom Inc., marking the end of an era. Although now headed by a black woman, Debra L. Lee, BET still has to answer to its new "parent";

After going nowhere but up, BET seems to be settling quickly to the bottom.

Slowly this network has become a heap of reruns, never-ending music videos and black stereotypes. Teen Summit quickly turned into College Hill, a terrible and degrading example of black American college life. While mentioning College Hill, I would also like to mention the horrible illustration of black educational practices it presents.

I'm sure people in America and now other countries are wondering if black students really act like that when so many in the world are struggling to get an education.

You hardly ever see them go to class. The most you ever see is them fighting or having sex with each other or getting drunk. The creators of this show had a chance to present positive examples of black college life, but instead they chose to take the Real World approach. Instead of trying to be like MTV, they should have used this broadcast to encourage black youths to go to college.

It should have shown how great an opportunity education is and what you could get when you have one. You would think the young people connected to this portrayal would have a problem with it. Obviously, they don't, according to the ratings. Since these types of shows debuted on BET the ratings have gone through the roof compared to past years.

I like seeing The Jamie Foxx Show and Sanford and Son again as much as the next person, but seeing them all day everyday is sickening. I thought the cartoon character named Huey from The Boondocks was exaggerating on the episode where he watched BET all day and turned into a walking black stereotype. But unfortunately he wasn't.

Before writing this article, I watched BET all day so I could accurately give my opinion, and I temporarily lost my hearing. I have a theory that my ears were desperately trying to block out what was spewing from my television set.

All day long videos stream in one after another between reruns of cancelled shows from other stations. To cap off the night we get to endure a Blackbuster Movie usually featuring black men getting shot in a God-forsaken piece of alleyway after "big momma", the only positive black woman in the movie, dies. It's a disappointing end to a successful run, but maybe Black Entertainment Television will make a comeback.

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Rozena Henderson is on the staff of the Tuskegee University student newspaper, the Campus Digest, which originally published a version of this article.