

Why Bob Johnson is an Ahole a Hypocrite by Davey D

Written by Davey D ID4131

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Former BET President and founder Bob Johnson is an asshole and hypocrite. Lemme not pull punches, be politically correct, beat around the bushes or try to impress high brow readers who feel I should be less crass and gentler with my words so I can appeal to their sensibilities. It's 2008 and unfortunately being nice and proper doesn't quite get the message across, especially when it comes to Bob Johnson and his recent disparaging remarks about presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama.

For those who don't know what I'm talking about, I'm referring to Johnson getting on stage to introduce Senator Hillary Clinton at a rally and expressing outrage about Obama's past. He said; "Barack Obama was doing something in the neighborhood. I won't say what he was doing, but he said it in his book."

It was a cheap shot referencing Obama's drug use when he was a young man. This was an activity that Obama freely admitted to in his memoirs "Dreams from My Father" and on some level I can see it being fair game, but coming from a guy like Johnson, that's like former President Bill Clinton giving marital advice to Hallie Berry's former husband admitted sex addict Eric Benet. I heard Johnson make these remarks and I was like "Negroe go back into your cave, please sit down and leave the politics to someone else".

I keep asking myself, where does Johnson get off slamming Obama about the wrongs of drug use when he piloted one of the largest media institutions [BET] that provided a worldwide platform that for the most part glorified and legitimized the lifestyles of those who not only used drugs but also sold them. In all the years we've known of "billionaire Bob Johnson we have not seen him get on any stage and diss former drug dealers like Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Rick Ross or any number of artists whose videos he would routinely play coupled with sit down interviews conducted by fawning hosts who never ever challenged these artists for resurrecting a "criminal" lifestyle in both their songs and videos they supposedly left behind.

The Bob Johnson we know, has never gone out of his way to publicly smash on artists who like Mary J Blige or Fergie who admitted to using drugs in the past and have since gotten their lives together and moved onward and upward. If anything, the former head of BET could be seen publicly praising them while courting them to appear at his award shows or Spring Bling concerts.

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Johnson certainly never came out swinging on admitted drug abusing artists like Whitney Houston, Bobby Brown, Flava Flav or DMX who all had reality shows either on BET or the one of the other stations within the Viacom network where he had influence as a VP.

One would think a guy of Johnson's new found "high moral character" would've been smashing on drug use and drug peddling a long time ago. Could you imagine what sort of shockwaves would've been sent around the world if Johnson even as a retired media mogul had spoke out and said; "No Bobby! No Whitney! We won't give them a reality show until those two get themselves healed and free of drugs"? Can you imagine if he insisted the DMX show 'soul of a Man' was centered around him getting over cocaine addiction?

Imagine the shockwaves if Johnson said; "Hell no Jigga we ain't supporting your album "American Gangster" cause you highlighting the sordid lifestyle of heroin dealers like Frank Lucas and we are against that type of behavior?"

Could you imagine if Johnson found his nuts when at the helm of BET and shut down any and all videos from artists who had "dirty pasts" that they were trying to exploit?

Sadly the Bob Johnson we know, has seemingly had no problem in making billions from highlighting the drug dealing, drug using lifestyle. Adding to this disappointment is the fact that this proud African American billionaire did things like remove programming that would make us question and shun such questionable behavior. It was on Johnson's watch that BET got rid of great award winning shows like Teen Summit.

It was on Johnson's watch that we saw incredible commentators like Tavis Smiley and Ed Gordon disappear.

It was on Johnson's watch we saw the BET nightly news shrink and then became a non existent. These shows were shut down in spite the objections ranging from scholars like Dr. Cornel West to the 8 major Black fraternities and sororities to more recently church groups leading the Enough is Enough campaign. It was on Johnson's watch that many in the community were up in arms protesting BET when they had that Step-N-Fetcher like cartoon called Cita's World. Y'all remember that one right?

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As I'm penning this article, I'm vividly recalling Johnson arrogantly responding to critics on a widely televised "townhall" where he was confronted for firing Tavis Smiley, Johnson said that BET stands for "Black Entertainment" and he is in the business to entertain the masses and that he was not obligated to provide news programming. Who knows, maybe Johnson was trying to be "entertaining" when he made his divisive remarks about Obama.

How is it that Johnson found the courage to stand up against Obama but was mealy mouthed against the artists with questionable pasts that he highlighted on his network who in turn became the face and MIS-perception of all African Americans to the rest of the world? Many of us who are not celebrities and have traveled overseas know the pain we've endured of having to explain to fascinated yet misguided individuals in far off lands that we are nothing like the characters and depicted in the videos shown on BET? I know I've had my share of conversations where I had to put things in proper context in places ranging from Barcelona to Scotland to Beirut where BET specifically was cited as the referencing point.

Instead, of being a champion for our people who could use his resources and influence to change widely held, worldwide misperceptions and stereotypes of us, he opted to become something more foul than any drug dealer. He became a propagandist of the worse kind. Instead of hustling crack, Johnson hustled Black pathologies, distorted images and misinformation under the banner of Black culture which has resulted in many believing we are part and parcel to the unchallenged buffoonery he allowed highlighted.

Instead of celebrating Obama for overcoming the odds including the scorch of drugs to possibly become the next president of the United States, this "negro" Bob Johnson wants to act like a lap dog for Hillary Clinton and bash on him all while being a media drug peddler of sorts who is in a big way responsible for normalizing drug culture.

And please don't get me wrong, I am in no way saying Obama is not above criticism. I have lots of critiques that I can launch at him. For the record, I am not the biggest Obama fan. He gives great speeches and has lots of charisma. There's no deny the energy he brings to mainstream political discussion, but from where I sit his politics don't go quite so far enough. I want Obama to be the type of politician to have been on the ground front and center leading the masses when we went to protest in Jena. Instead all I got was a press release.

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I want Obama to have been the politician who is bold and assertive and uncompromising to the point that he would speak out on behalf of the SF8 or the Puerto Rican activists who are being jammed up by the Feds. I want Obama to be the type of guy who is smashing hard on police brutality and this current wave of gentrification. I want Brack to have been present in New Orleans when they were demolishing all that public housing. However, when I argue with my colleagues like writers Adisa Banjoko or Eric K Arnold, our spirited debates center around Obama's position on issues.

Even the big debate between rap stars Rhymefest (Obama supporter) and Lupe Fiasco (Hillary supporter) has centered around the politics of the candidates. Nobody is brow beating Obama for having used drugs in the past. The Obama we know and see today is clean, smart and razor sharp and we don't see him coddling and being a big enabler to drug culture the way that billionaire Bob Johnson has been over all those years. He made his billions by pimping drug culture on his network to the fullest.

The biggest challenge that all of us as African Americans have is because Johnson had made some significant economic accomplishments he led many into believing what he was doing as the head of a multi-billion dollar conglomerate like BET was building upon past freedom struggles waged by the likes of Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and others.

The sad irony to all this is that if King and X were still alive waging battles against oppression, they would probably be excluded from the day to day banter of BET. We barely see or hear about these past leaders on the station today. What was the last in-depth discussion you saw or heard on BET under Johnson's reign about King beyond I have a Dream speech? What's the last insightful story you saw on Malcolm X?

If you listened to Dr. King's thoughts on media then you know one thing, that BET and the foolishness its put out in the name of our people would've been in stark opposition to where King stood in terms of using media as a tool to uplift and inform the community. Like I said Martin and Malcolm would never be on BET aside from a few documentary clips and sound bites if they were around today. If you don't believe me and think this is far fetched lets take a short trip down memory lane.

Those of us who are old enough to recall, when BET first came out it held a lot of promise and became a source of pride. It promised to fill the void and become a much needed answer to

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MTV which started out refusing to air videos from Black artists. Eventually Michael Jackson, Run DMC and later Yo MTV Raps knocked down some of those doors, but BET started off promising to be our uncompromised mouthpiece.

I recall in the late 80s as the cable industry expanded, BET was not included on many of the cable systems and there were spirited campaigns to get them on. It was young 20 something year old activists who were then part of what I would call the Public Enemy/ Afrocentric generation that took to heart some of the promises made by Bob Johnson who at that time called upon people to stand up for BET and demand it be included as a cable channel. BET's exclusion from local cable systems was seen as yet another example of how prevalent racism was in this country. Many of us were coming out of the tailspin of the crack era and as Hip Hop's Golden Age kicked in many eagerly sought to fight the power. Getting BET on cable was one such fight.

Here in the Bay Area it was rap activists like artist Chill E.B. who worked tirelessly, organizing letter writing campaigns and call ins to get BET on cable systems outside of Oakland in neighboring cities like Concord, Fremont and other areas it was absent. I recall doing radio shows and even having someone from BET (it may have even been Johnson himself, I have to check my tape archives) come on the air to talk about the importance of all of us pulling together to help insure that BET got a fair shot. I recall giving out phone numbers to the offending cable outlets and encouraging listeners to stand up for BET. Years later many of the activists who spearheaded the fight to get BET on cable for the masses to see can't get on BET themselves to share and inform viewers of on going struggles in our community. For example, I know Chill EB who is a war vet and has spoken out against the war and has even done songs and videos about the topic never has been invited to sit on the 106 & Park couch.

It's ironic that Obama who at 40 something would've been part of that Public Enemy/ Afrocentric generation that initially rallied for causes like getting BET on cable systems now finds himself being criticized by a guy like Bob Johnson. How quickly they turn. But I guess we shouldn't be surprised. Shiesty people rarely change their stripes.

My boy and fellow writer, Jelani Cobb raised an important question in his recent article on this topic for the Washington Post which was; "What were the Clintons thinking when they got Johnson to stomp for them? She might as well gotten Fox News owner Rupert Murdoch or his employee Bill O'Reilly to stomp for her. Her picking Johnson is like me running for office and getting a gestapo like guy like Rudy Giuliani to stomp on my behalf-its not a good look and brings into question Senator Clinton's clear lapse in judgement. All she had to do was look at the number of protests launched against BET in the past few years for their degrading images

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of women. That should've been a clear enough message. In other words if Hillary thinks so little of Black people that she went and dug up a cat likes Bob Johnson then I'm gonna have to close the book on her and bounce the other way and roll with Obama, Cynthia McKinney, Jared Ball or Dennis Kucinich-anyone but her.