

BET Turns 25

Written by Robert ID701

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BET turns 25 this month and sparks its silver anniversary celebration with a renewed commitment to original programming, led by the return of COLLEGE HILL, BET's ground-breaking Black reality series; THE COUSIN JEFF CHRONICLES, a four-part series featuring Rap City's own "Cousin Jeff" Johnson, urban America's newest voice of social and political consciousness; and RIP THE RUNWAY, a red-hot catwalk collision uniting the worlds of hip-hop music and high-fashion. A new made-for-television movie, BOOK OF LOVE -- The Definitive Reason Why Men Are Dogs, pokes fun at male/female relationship drama and combines with BET's signature CELEBRATION OF GOSPEL special to anchor the network's Black History Month offerings. High-velocity mega-specials BET AWARDS '05, BET COMEDY AWARDS, SPRING BLING and BET's 25th ANNIVERSARY are poised to set the year's hottest personalities and performers from music, sports and entertainment strolling down the red carpet and blazing across the stage. Debra L. Lee, BET President and Chief Operating Officer, unveiled the new programming plans today at the Television Critics Association winter media tour.

"BET's commitment to fresh, original programming is as strong as it has ever been, and the first quarter of 2005 will really showcase some exciting shows," said Lee. "This strategy will continue throughout the year as we build momentum toward our milestone celebration of BET's 25th year as a network in the fall."

COLLEGE HILL launches its 13-week run on BET in the "Wild Wild West" of the Oklahoma plains at Langston University with a special one-hour series premiere on Thursday, January 27 at 9 p.m. ET/PT. It's a new cast of eight, but with the same saucy, volatile mix of eclectic personalities and on- and off-campus hijinx that marked its break-out debut last season. From classroom to chaos, the network's cameras are there 24/7 to catch all of the action.

This time around, BET and Edmonds Entertainment flipped the script with an off-campus housing arrangement -- the cast mates share a luxurious Western-themed ranch in the middle of nowhere, and whenever they get together sparks fly. From "baby mama drama" and streaking through the house naked, to off-the-hook Jacuzzi exploits and late-night rendezvous, COLLEGE HILL is a no-holds-barred, uncensored look at the experiences, triumphs and growing pains of eight college co-eds.

THE COUSIN JEFF CHRONICLES, a new, in-depth quarterly forum and talk show featuring BET's own "Cousin Jeff" Johnson, bows on BET in February 2005. Quickly earning a reputation as urban America's newest voice of social and political consciousness, Cousin Jeff will host this four-part series addressing issues which affect the Black and Latino communities. Through compelling and frank discussions with experts and specialists as well as man- on-the-street commentary, Cousin Jeff will engage viewers with his unique ability to stimulate dialogue and examine differing perspectives in an effort to frame and explore social ills. Focusing on topics like bridging the gap between the Civil Rights and the Hip-Hop generation; Black youth and obesity; and our American judicial system, the Cousin Jeff Chronicles will enlighten, connect and inspire.

Produced by BET Pictures in association with Strange Fruit Films, original made-for-television movie *Book of Love -- The Definitive Reason Why Men Are Dogs* features an all-star ensemble cast and delivers comical insight to this tale of unrequited love and relationships gone bad. Written by Jeffrey W. Byrd and Eric K. George, the film was directed by Byrd and stars Robin Givens (*Head of State*, *Boomerang*), Salli Richardson Whitfield (*Biker Boyz*, *Antwone Fisher*), Richard T. Jones (*Twisted*, *The Wood*), Anthony "Treach" Criss (*Playas Ball*, *Jason's Lyric*), Mari Morrow (*National Security*, *How To Be A Player*) and Eric K. George (*NYPD Blue*, *The Practice*). The film's story line focuses on main characters Jay, Will and Ben -- three men living, dating and loving in Los Angeles in the 90's -- who struggle with heartbreak and insecurity as a result of failed relationships. Byrd takes a "mock-u-mentary" approach to telling the men's stories, with their trials and tribulations revealed during comical sessions with a therapist. *BOOK OF LOVE*'s worldwide premiere is set for Monday, February 14 at 9 p.m. ET/PT.

BET explores the world of high fashion with the March special *RIP THE RUNWAY*, premiering on Thursday, March 24 at 9 p.m. ET/PT. The hottest urban apparel design labels Sean Jean, Baby Phat, Rocawear and Apostrophe will adorn fashion's finest celebrity physiques as they work the catwalk to sizzling live musical performances. *RIP THE RUNWAY* will also feature appearances by top supermodels and give viewers an insider's perspective on the process of developing a major fashion line.

CELEBRATION OF GOSPEL returns to Los Angeles' historic Orpheum Theatre with a live taping at 7 p.m. Pacific Time on January 22, and features some of the top names from traditional and contemporary gospel. The lineup of performers for the spiritual salute includes Ruben Studdard, Fantasia, Pastor Donnie McClurkin, Yolanda Adams, BeBe Winans, Smokie Norful, Mary Mary, Kirk Franklin, Fred Hammond, Pastor Shirley Caesar, J. Moss, BET's own Dr. Bobby Jones, The Clark Sisters, Kiki Sheard and others. *CELEBRATION OF GOSPEL* premieres on Thursday, February 24 at 9 p.m. ET/PT.

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The BET AWARDS has distinguished itself as the preeminent urban entertainment awards telecast, delivering unprecedented ratings success for the network including a 29.0 Black household rating in 2004 and a 4.61 household rating (5.6 million viewers). This year, BET AWARDS '05 returns to Hollywood's prestigious Kodak Theatre on June 28 for another year of stunning performances and 14 categories of recognition across the worlds of music, sports and entertainment. BET will again team with renowned Cossette Productions to helm the three-hour live telecast. BET COMEDY AWARDS (September) and SPRING BLING (April) round out the network's 2005 menu of mega-specials. And BET's 25th ANNIVERSARY celebration will kick into high gear this Fall with a special two-hour live telecast in November, featuring an A- list celebrity gathering to pay tribute to 25 years of pioneering excellence.