

ENTERTAINMENT/LIFESTYLE

The top five: future leaders of black America

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STAFF REPORTER

Influence, clout, leadership skills and one's track record are among the considerations essential for national leadership. Those factors all come into play when determining who might be among the top five future leaders of black America.

In an unofficial poll of 25 students and faculty members at Winston Salem State University, the five names most often mentioned were Jay-Z, Sen. Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Tavis Smiley and Jeff Johnson of BET. Although other people such as Harry Belafonte, Russell Simmons and the Rev. Al Sharpton were mentioned, none was as prevalent as those in this list.

Cousin Jeff: Passionate activist

Some know him as Jeff Johnson, but most of the youth who watch BET refer to him as Cousin Jeff.

Johnson is a regular guest on the BET television show, "Rap City the Basement." Johnson is also an activist who is passionate about social change and issues that affect Black America and the less fortunate around the world. Johnson has also been one of the most vocal leaders in the "Save Darfur" campaign, urging youth to get involved.

As senior Chris Geter said, "Cousin Jeff is easy for the young dudes to relate to. He gives it to you real without cutting corners,

and that's what a lot of these politicians do because they can't handle the truth."

Barack Obama: Community organizer and civil-rights activist

The charismatic presidential candidate is among those classified as representing the new face of politics.

Obama started out in Illinois as a community organizer and civil-rights activist. He has been aiding low-income communities by helping implement effective programs, as well as using his political power to get things done.

Saxton Stewart, a WSSU junior, said he thinks highly of Obama.

"He speaks from a level of sincerity, and that's something that's been missing politics for a long time," he said.

Obama is considered to be one of the few African American men who have a chance of winning a presidential election.

Jay-Z: Trendsetter and entrepreneur

Junior business major Maurice Credle described rapper Jay-Z as "a self made entrepreneur who has the power to



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influence and inspire the younger black generation." Credle is one of many students who feel that Jay-Z is in a position to lead the youth of Black America.

Jay-Z has already made a name for himself as a trendsetter and innovator through his clothing line, music, and by giving back to his community. MTV recently aired a documentary, "Water for Life", which follows the rapper to South Africa as he helps people obtain clean water with "play pumps" that pump clean water. The continuing crisis of unsanitary water supplies in Africa has killed thousands of children.

The rapper also gets political in songs such as "Minority Report" on his latest album, "Kingdom Come", in which he accuses the U.S. government of neglect in its response to victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Tavis Smiley: Asking the tough questions

Smiley has become one of the most influential voices of black America due to his presence in the media. He is mainly known for his tough questions and controversial themes. WSSU's campus radio station, WSNL (90.5 FM), airs Smiley's shows during a two-hour block on Saturday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon.

Smiley got an early start in his career during college, when he received an internship with Mayor Tom Bradley in Los

Angeles. Time Magazine named Smiley as one of its top 50 future leaders of America in 1996; that same year, Smiley landed a spot as host of the BET television show "BET Tonight".

Smiley's passion for politics in relation to the black community inspired him to write a book, "The Covenant with Black America", which is viewed by some as a blueprint to the success of a better black America.

Oprah Winfrey: The power to give back

In the words of O'Kelly librarian Donald Gaddy, "Oprah is definitely in the top five future leaders of America ...

she's always giving back and helps people all the time."

Many feel that Oprah's finances and power are a great help to African Americans. Winfrey recently opened a school for young girls in Africa that provides students with adequate funding and resources. Although the school has undergone scrutiny even among the black community for being in Africa instead of America, supporters feel it shows that she cares and she gives back.



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entertain and keep it moving," Mike-E stated. "I am hopeful that [students] walk away feeling better...for those who smoke I hope they walk away and throw away their cigarettes."

As the nephew of a cancer survivor, Mike-E closely relates to the ACS's mission. "We embrace the American Cancer Society's message," Mike shared. "This is bigger than us, this is creating a platform--We have a bigger movement."

Unlike more familiar household names who neglect their power as musicians, the members of the Afro-Flow Tour understand that they are creating the framework to use music as a universal avenue for life-changing messages that relate to everyone. "Music is universal and the cause and effect of tobacco is universal."

The goal of the Afro-flow tour seems to be much bigger than reaching the appeal of the masses consumed by stereotypes. Mike-E recognizes the importance of his music and the afro-flow tour message despite his lack of commercial fame. "Our people believe you are not successful if you are not on TV."

Stereotypical images are prevalent in the entertainment industry he states.



Photo by Sharrod Patterson

Afro-Flow Tour combines music with lifetime messages.

"They believe you have to be a certain image to be in the media."

Despite a lack of public familiarity, WSSU students responded positively to the live interpretation of Mike-E's Afro-Flow album.

Along with other artists and singers, he raps and speaks eloquently to the substance of black identity, culture, love and afro-centrism. His vivid lyrics paint portraits of the state of black intellect and culture.

Impressed by the work of University Counseling Center, HBCU project manager for ACS in the South Atlantic Division Tatia Ash contacted Dr. Deborah Fountain, director of WSSU University Counseling Center and asked her to be the campus coordinator for

the event. The concert event was free and opened to the campus community. The crowd was compacted with variety of students including an array of students leaders such as Miss WSSU, Mr. Ram, the Student Government President and student activities officers.

According to Fountain the WSSU students left a lasting impression on "Afro-Flow tour" members.

"They really enjoyed coming to WSSU. They appreciated the respect the students had for their artistic ability," she stated.

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they cannot make it onto the campus.

Dr. Valerie Giddings associate vice chancellor of the Division of Lifelong Learning, said this about the new master's degree in rehabilitation studies: "We believe this advanced degree program serves a growing demand for this profession. Already, the workplace demand exceeds supply. Further, many governmental employees in this field will be required to have a masters degree by 2009."

There are, however, disadvantages to online classes. Critics claim that because there is little or no face-to-face contact between students and teachers, it truly is not "education" in the highest sense of the word. Others counter that by saying interaction can be found through audio/video Web conferencing, live chats, E-mail and even blogs.

Another criticism is that by relying on online courses, one can become increasingly isolated. However, discussion forums can encourage students to meet one another face-to-face.

"I believe the pros outweigh the cons," Leak said. "I believe that the only things that

will impede the progress of online education are people's apprehensions and negative perceptions of it. As I mentioned before, competition for careers takes place on a global playing field."

"It is imperative," he added, "for one to acquire the skills to implement technology, not only in their education, but in their daily lives. This means going to the next level beyond text messaging and downloading ring-tones, and seeking to learn the methods to make such things possible."

Since most classes are online, the WSSU distance learning program offers several benefits to students, including time flexibility for classes and tests, and the ability to take classes anywhere in the world. All the student needs is a computer with Internet access.

Students enrolling in the Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling program must have a bachelor's degree in any major and two years experience in the field.

For more information, call (336) 750-2630, or visit the WSSU Web site: www.wssu.edu.

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