



If You Can Dream It, You Can Achieve It at an HBCU or PBI!

February 22, 2017

Dr. Debra Lee
Chair & CEO
BET Networks
1235 W. Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20018-1211

Dear Chairwoman Lee:

I am writing as President and CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the nation's only national membership and advocacy association of all HBCUs and PBIs. I am writing also as one who was privileged to meet you many years ago, when you and Bob Johnson were strategically and masterfully growing and transforming BET. I worked with Bob on projects and campaigns through my early years in DC, including when I was counsel to Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, and head of the CBC's national legislative and networking arm, the Black Leadership Roundtable that the Congressman was chairing at the time.

I have stood a little taller through the years and watched in awe as you continued to transform BET into the premiere powerhouse outlet for the celebration and highlighting of black people. In recent years I have watched with enjoyment and pride the BET Awards, Black Girls Rock and other BET programs. I awaited the roll-out of "The Quad" with great anticipation. I thought that after a number of programs about the darkest side of a few HBCUs, (to what are you referring--are there specific programs you are referencing????) we would finally have a fair and objective depiction of HBCUs for the world to see. Knowing what I do about HBCUs and having worked with and for HBCUs for 20 years, pro bono, and for the last 13 years as CEO of NAFEO, I anticipated a balanced, yet engaging and entertaining program that would evidence the multifaceted aspects of HBCUs, especially the manner in which they are spawning grounds for professionals who anchor the African American middle class, for social justice activists and other confident students who test their ideas against those of others, and for young love, to be sure, as many students grow from childhood into young adulthood in college.

I watched the first episode of "The Quad" and I was sorely disappointed. I am writing to share the basis for my disappointment, but importantly to propose concrete ways in which I believe some of the HBCU and PBI presidents and chancellors, faculty, students, athletic and band directors and I might serve as a focus group for the writers and producers of The Quad, to assist them in adjusting the show to more accurately depict the realities of HBCUs as we know them. We want to be of assistance to the writers and producers in depicting a more full and balanced view of twenty-first century HBCUs.

I sincerely feel that the episode of "The Quad" that I watched cast HBCU CEOs and other administrators, faculty, staff, students and board members in a false light. What I saw was the depiction of the worst aspects of some truly objectionable human beings, all on one campus. Disproportionately depicted were miscreants, assailants, adulterers, rappers, drug and alcohol abusers, card sharks, misogynists, hazers, felons, thugs, administrators who abused their power, engaged in inappropriate and perhaps unlawful activity with students; board members who were derelict in their duties and who were perhaps engaging in unlawful activity; and a band director and cronies whose actions were at times dubious, despicable and unlawful. The president, an otherwise bright, strategic, professional woman, engaged in an unlawful or inappropriate relationship with a grad student in Connecticut, who followed her to Georgia where they continue their inappropriate relationship. The president indicated she was only serving at an HBCU, "because it was the only job [she] could get," in the wake of her scandal with the grad student in Connecticut.

On the positive side, there is a strong male character who exhibited caring for his daughter and ex-wife despite her adultery. There is a female faculty member who exhibited sisterly caring for the president and in the three-minute classroom scene, exhibited a command of the subject matter for the course she was teaching.

Because there are so few depictions of HBCUs on television, and because the most frequent references to HBCUs are about their football teams, the "dancing dolls" and their drum lines; and most especially because the target audience for The Quad and so many of the BET programs is students and families who get their worldview from BET, The Quad should depict HBCUs in a holistic, yet entertaining manner. Because many who watch BET use the information they receive to vicariously experience aspects of life unknown to them, but alluring, The Quad should strive to a greater degree to educate students and families about real college life. To the extent that The Quad might be adapted to present a balanced view of college life, and HBCU college life, in particular, the viewing audience would learn that HBCUs are a cost efficient, excellent environment for their professional and personal development.

NAFEO and I want to work with the appropriate members of the BET team involved in the writing and production of The Quad to make certain that the depiction of HBCU life is balanced and highlights the breadth and scope of what is happening on most HBCU campuses like that which is occurring on most American college and university campuses with added soul. The added soul is what we call "education liberation." In most HBCUs the professors are teaching students not just for a living. They are teaching students the curriculum, pedagogy, and about how to live. The administrators, faculty and staff are teaching students the appropriate curriculum, but also how to be both independent and interdependent. The students are learning how to be on their own, but also to be at their best—to test their boundaries, take risks, study hard, serve the campus and neighborhood community and to party, sometimes with a purpose. They are learning to be safe, respectful of themselves and others. These are the things at which The Quad fails to even hint in passing. By these failings and others, The Quad casts HBCUs in a negative and false light, and BET misses a tremendous opportunity to use The Quad to entertain, inspire, and

educate—a model that would most assuredly be attractive to current and additional advertisers.

Please afford me an opportunity to meet to discuss ways in which we might work together to remedy the initial shortcomings of *The Quad*, and to provide a focus group that could provide ongoing input to the writers, producers and BET on all things HBCU. I may be reached at (202) 439-4704.

As I urge you to permit an HBCU focus group and me to assist BET in modifying *The Quad* to more accurately reflect HBCU life, I thank you again, for all of the groundbreaking things you are continuing to do through your medium and by serving as a beautiful, brilliant role model for all women.

With every good wish, I am sincerely,



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