

Publishing companies recognize work of African-American authors

NEW YORK (AP) — Have publishers finally learned to love African-American authors?

In the past year, Time Warner, HarperCollins and Kensington Publishing are among those who started or acquired imprints specifically to release books by African-Americans. The most recent one is Strivers Row, a division of Random House that begins publishing next winter.

African-Americans have long complained the industry ignored them, that it did not believe they actually read books. Now, with the industry apparently paying attention, many say demand for African-American writers has never been stronger.

"I am in a buying frenzy," said Anita Diggs, a senior editor at Ballantine Books and director of One World, a multicultural imprint with a strong focus on African-American

writers. "It's very exciting right now to be African-American and to be working in publishing."

"It's very competitive these days," said Melody Guy, who heads Strivers Row. "A couple of times recently I've been looking over a manuscript only to find out that another publisher was already interested."

Most agree the turning point came in the early 1990s with the publication of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*. Her novel about the lives of four upper-class African-American women sold millions of copies. It proved not only that there was a large African-American readership but that a market existed for subjects besides "protest literature."

In the past few years, the market has broadened. Literary authors such as Nobel laureate Toni Morrison still sell millions of

copies, but there is also room for mystery (Walter Mosley), romance (E. Lynn Harris),

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Eric Jerome Dickey) and self-help authors (Iyanla Vanzant).

The imprints, themselves, reveal the num-

ber of potential markets. Strivers Row emphasizes paperback first editions of commercial fiction. Hyperion's *Jump* at the Sun specializes in children's books. Time Warner's imprint will focus on religious books for women.

"After Terry McMillan's success, African-Americans were buying books just because of the novelty. Taste wasn't really involved. Now, a decade later, readers are more discerning," said Manie Barron, publisher of Amistad Press, an imprint of HarperCollins that publishes fiction and nonfiction by African-Americans.

Many authors initially published themselves, selling thousands of copies. Tawana "TJ" Butler, whose novel *Sorority Sisters* came out earlier this year from Villard, used to travel around the country on her own, relying on African-American-owned stores to help promote her. Early copies of Harris' popular *Invisible Life* were sold from the back of his car.

"When I first started publishing myself, I was advised against it because I was told the industry frowned upon it. "But within the African-American community I saw lots of sales," said Harris, a Doubleday author with 2 million books in print.

Writers once passed over by publishers now have deals. Author Solomon Jones saved the rejection slips, all 50 of them. They had much to praise about *Pipe Dream*, his novel about four drug addicts and a murder they did not commit.

But they told Jones there was no market for his book.

It is the kind of statement African-Americans say they have been hearing since the earliest days of publishing.

"I was just about ready to put out the book myself," said Jones, a writer with the *Philadelphia Weekly*, an alternative paper.

Former publisher of Providence Journal dies

NEWPORT, R.I. (AP) — John C.A. Watkins, the longest-serving publisher of The Providence Journal and a decorated World War II fighter pilot has died. He was 87.

Watkins died Wednesday of complications from a broken hip and a stroke he suffered earlier, his family said.

He was credited with shepherding the newspaper into a new era of journalism, building morning edition sales, buying radio stations and cable TV systems and building a national magazine-printing subsidiary.

Watkins was publisher of the Journal from 1954 to 1979 and held several other posts with the paper, including chairman of the board of The Providence Journal Co.

He was among those who predicted the increasing importance of morning newspapers and led a successful drive to double sales of the morning Journal. The company's Evening Bulletin stopped publishing in 1995.

Also under Watkins, the newspapers won a Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for national reporting when it broke a story about President Nixon's small tax payments.

Watkins oversaw the company's entry into broadcasting, overseeing the purchase of its first radio station in 1948.

The company entered the television business in 1968, with the purchase of a small cable-TV system in Westerly; the business grew to serve 850,000 subscribers nationwide. The Journal also acquired its first TV station in 1978 and entered the cellular phone business.

Also under Watkins' leadership, the company in 1962 started a roto-gravure-printing business which included plants in Texas, Virginia, and Illinois. It printed such periodicals as Time magazine and TV Guide.

Before joining the Journal, Watkins was a reporter at The Dayton (Ohio) Herald and Journal and The (Baltimore) Sun.

Watkins' second wife died in 1989. Survivors include three children and a stepdaughter.

A memorial service is planned for Sept. 14 at Grace Church in Providence.

WWF challenges Gore, Bush to step into ring

STAMFORD, Conn. (AP) — The World Wrestling Federation is proposing a matchup in the ring between the presidential opponents, Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush.

The Stamford-based WWF is offering each candidate five minutes to address the 12- to 34-year-old men who make up the majority of the audience of "Smackdown," the Thursday night wrestling program seen in about 5 million homes each week.

Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, a former WWF wrestler, has been asked to moderate the discussion.

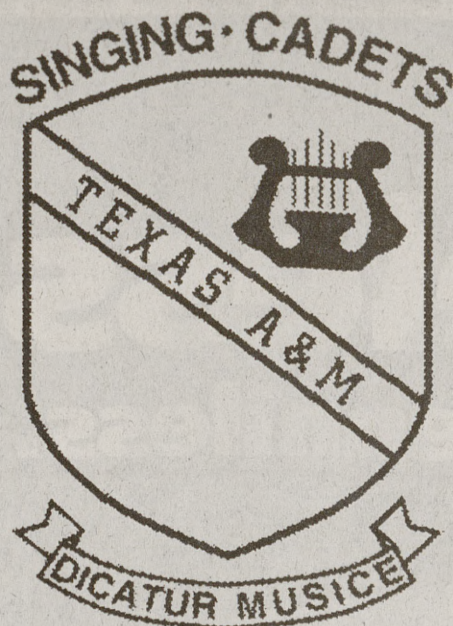
"We have such a strong presence in that demographic that both parties have indicated are difficult to reach," WWF Chief Executive Officer Linda McMahon said Wednesday. "We are a public company and this is an opportunity for us to give back, to contribute as good corporate citizens."

Neither presidential campaign nor Ventura has responded to the offer, said WWF spokesman Gary Davis. Neither campaign returned calls for comment.

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C&W I	TBA*	TBA*
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JITTERBUG I	SUN	7-8:30
JITTERBUG I	SUN	5:30-7
C&W II	SUN	7:30-9

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