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"A People Without A Voice Cannot Be Heard"

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FUBU co-founder Daymond John.

SHARING THE POWER: FUBU visionary Daymond John tells his rags-to-riches story

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In the era of Sean John and Roc-A-Wear, it's easy to forget that FUBU was among the early pioneers of the urban clothing trend. While FUBU wasn't the one to initiate the movement, it did blow it up. Who could forget that fateful day seeing LL Cool J on a Gap commercial rocking a FUBU hat? That was 1996. But the Fur Us, By Us empire began before then and FUBU visionary Daymond John has captured that struggle in "Display of Power: How FUBU Changed A World of Fashion, Branding and Lifestyle" (Nobles Ark, 2007).

John is candid in the book, discussing his various illegitimate and legitimate hustles before he happened upon FUBU. Throughout the work, he contextualizes his life and that of his FUBU partners, Keith Parris, Carl Brown and J. Alexander Martin within the Hip-Hop culture, tying FUBU's

rise directly with the lifestyle. "Display of Power" is a slice of Hip-Hop history. John discusses the early years of New York artists, making it clear that gab were a major incentive for him and his crew to hit the spots initially. Along the way, he observed firsthand the rest of the nation's hunger for that New York flavor of dress, and began to act on it.

Seizing that opportunity, John built a team and began FUBU in earnest in 1992, working from the house his mom gave him in Queens, the home of hip-hop superstars LL Cool J and Run-DMC. From 1996 to 1999, FUBU was unstoppable in the urban community and beyond. Major retail stores picked up the line at the same time, many independent urban clothing stores were emerging throughout the nation. John and his team also began to branch out internationally. But John hasn't written this book to congratulate himself and his partner who run an apparel empire that includes 60 interna-

tional FUBU stores and several other brands, including Gogo, the creator of those sweaters Bill Cosby made popular during his reign on The Cosby Show. Instead, John feels a responsibility to the youth and recognizes some of the pitfalls they face.

In "Display of Power", John underscores how almost everything he did in his life prior to FUBU had a lot to do with his success overall. This is an important point for him because he realizes that kids look at people like himself and the Sean "Diddy" Combs of the world and only see the "bling and not the work." Unfortunately, he says, "they're being hypnotized by the world of video that there are shortcuts in life and that they don't need to do anything. That's the basic reason I wrote the book," he elaborates. "I wanted to show them that they need discipline, but they need to get strategic about their way of life. There are no shortcuts, there just ain't."

For him, the book is an attempt to teach more kids than he's able to in his every day walk

of life. He does admit that trying to reach today's youth is frustrating. "I've had hundreds of young kids come through this [FUBU] office," he shares. "Meanwhile 50 percent of them understand how they should change and they move on. The other 50 percent — they just don't get it after a while. How am I going to change 20 years of programming in their life? I don't know why they act like that. Was it their upbringing? What made them like that? Was it their environment? Was it their parents? I don't know I try my best."

Part of his best is sharing that he was certainly a saint and that he wasn't always on the straight and narrow. Such candor is a departure for John. "I've been very private in regards to my life," he admits, "and I think there are a lot of people who need to understand me and that I've been through just as many issues as they have so they can wrap themselves around me and then I can teach them whatever lessons I need to teach them."

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