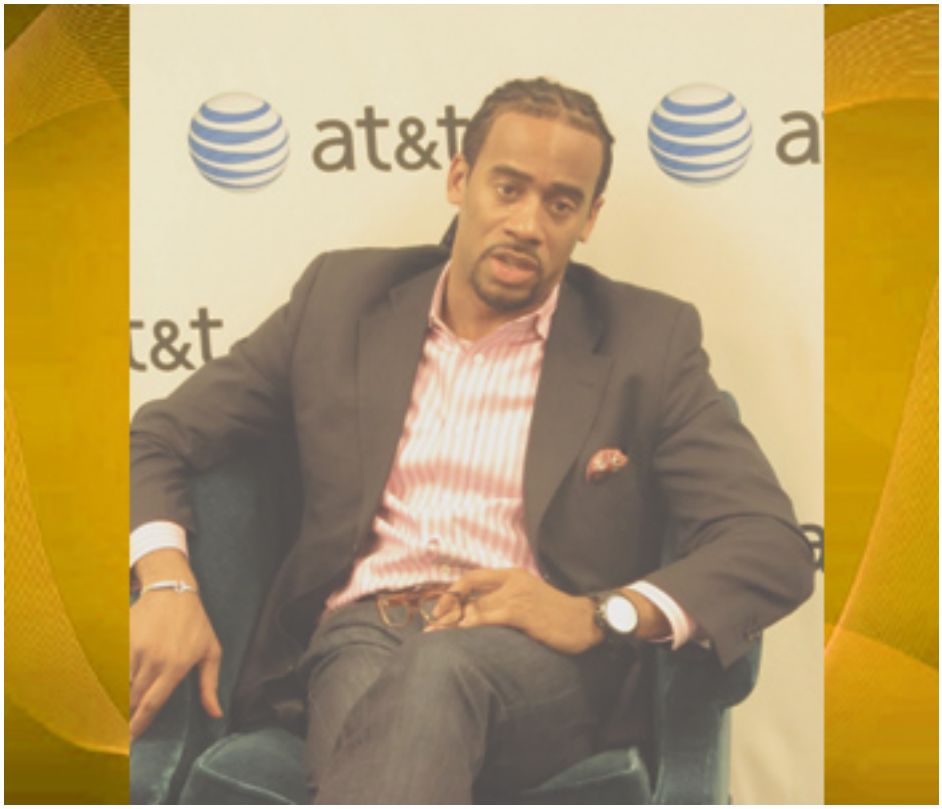

Johnson said that more devoted leaders are needed within schools, churches and community service projects.

By JOEY POMPIGNANO

Contributing Writer

An initial reaction of grunts sounded the audience in the Ohio Theatre last Monday, expressing frustration after finding out hip-hop artist Common did not take the flight to Cleveland and would not be performing at the AT&T 28 Days Black History Month event.

But after a brief message from Common via Skype on the large projector, grunts soon turned to cheers when native Clevelander, Jeff Johnson, graced the stage. Johnson, an international journalist and social/political activist, delivered an hour-long speech that captivated listeners greater than any form of musical entertainment.

“Are you angry enough, Cleveland, to create a new environment,” Johnson asked the crowd of more than 300 people, which included his own family in the front row. “I’m tired of us coming together in these kinds of socially conscious atmospheres of entertainment where we just come to see somebody perform and speak.”

AT&T 28 Days, a Black History Month tour of motivational speakers, started in 2009 and expanded to seven markets this year. Its purpose is to empower African Americans to not only look to past events for knowledge in advancement, but to understand that current events shape new history for tomorrows African-American community.

In 1927, author and historian Carter G. Woodson created Negro History Week, which later expanded to a month. It was designed to be a moment in time when African history was celebrated, Johnson said.

“But that shouldn’t be the only time to talk about it at our dinner table and in our classrooms,” Johnson said. “And the moment that we remember, that is when our kids will have a sense of history beyond pop culture. And they will understand…that there are people from as early as five years ago to fifty years ago that have done amazing things in Cleveland and abroad…and they won’t look at themselves as, ‘oh, I’m just from Cleveland.’”

Johnson described a short timeline of knowledge for many people in regards to African history.

“We’ve created this sense of history that’s only about slavery and civil rights,” Johnson said. He explained how Black history did not start with slavery, but with an ancient civilization where Africans were kings and queens.

Johnson then listed names of important historical figures and events decade by decade, starting

with the present. He said not to just look at the contributions of Obama, but of the nameless and faceless men and women behind the scenes campaigning for his election.

During a question and answer session an audience member asked Johnson about reaching out to young people in the schools.

Johnson said that more devoted leaders are needed within schools, churches and community service projects.

“We need to change what our definition of leadership is,” he said. “Our leadership definition is about who’s in front of a crowd giving a speech. And that’s not leadership, and it never was.”