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EXCLUSIVE
PRAH
TYLER
WHY
THEY
LEAN ON
EACH
OTHER

TURN
OUR
LUTTER
INTO
CASH

DREAM BIG

UNLEASH YOUR POWER & CLAIM YOUR BLESSING

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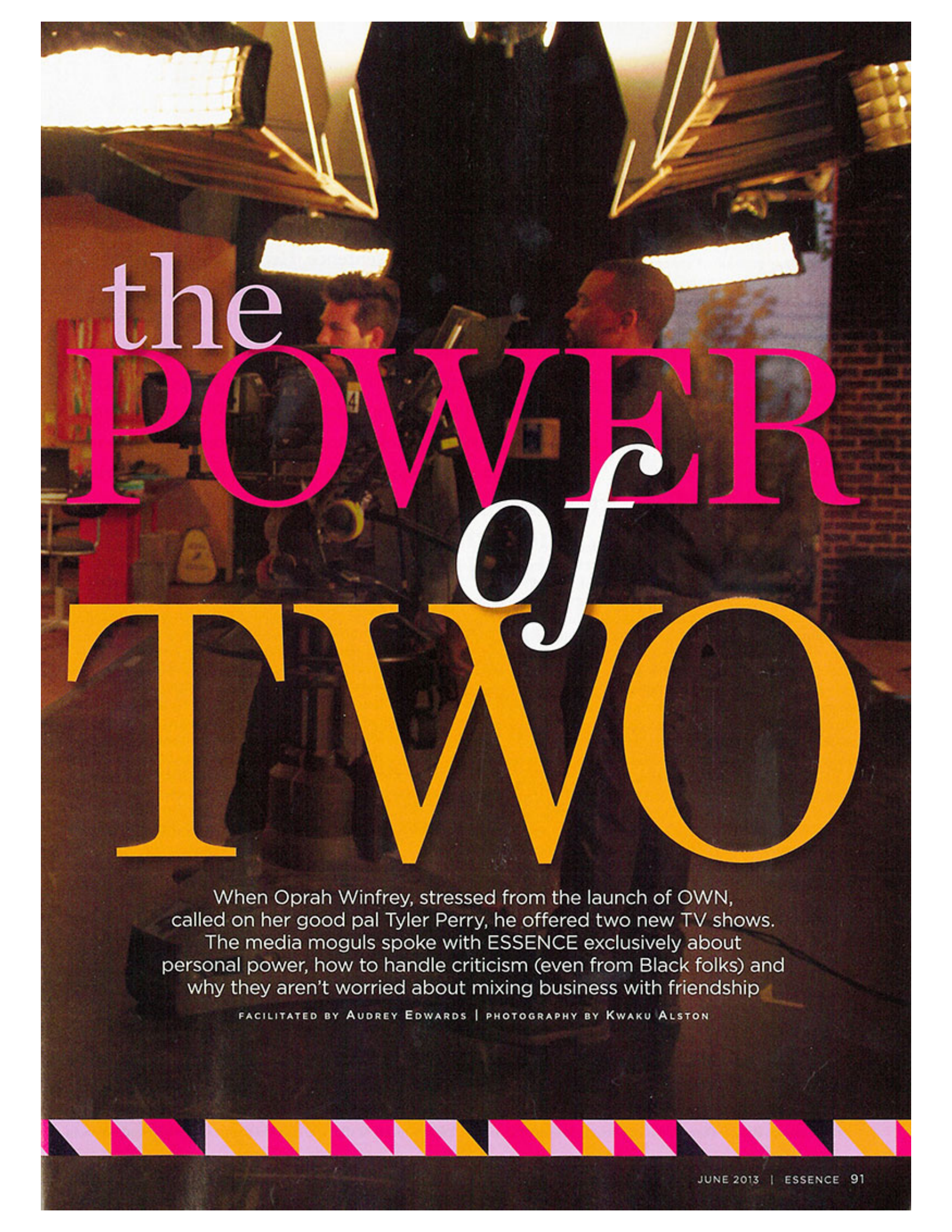
SEXY
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JUNE 2011
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ESSENCE
EXCLUSIVE

Tyler Perry wears an
Ermenegildo Zegna
blazer, Charvet shirt,
Armani Collezioni
trousers, Emilio
Pucci pocket square
and Cartier watch.
On Oprah Winfrey:
Stevie Mac dress,
Mattia Cielo bracelet,
David Yurman ring
and her own earrings.
For clothing details,
see Where to Buy.



the
POWER
of
TWO

When Oprah Winfrey, stressed from the launch of OWN, called on her good pal Tyler Perry, he offered two new TV shows. The media moguls spoke with ESSENCE exclusively about personal power, how to handle criticism (even from Black folks) and why they aren't worried about mixing business with friendship

FACILITATED BY AUDREY EDWARDS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KWAKU ALSTON

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HE IS THE UNDISPUTED QUEEN OF TALK-SHOW TELEVISION. He is the conquering king of stage-play comedy. But right now, media titans Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry are in Atlanta, just playing around, acting up, carrying on in the way good friends do. She starts a sentence. He finishes it. She gets up in his face. He pretends to pout. She gushes about the robe he gave her. He remembers the moment she changed his life. We are sitting in the tricked-out living room of Tyler's humongous, custom-fitted tour bus—a white-and-copper stretched-out vision parked on the back lot of the 200,000-square-foot Tyler Perry Studios. Oprah, seated next to Tyler on a plush sofa, is resplendent in the magenta dress she wore for the ESSENCE cover photo shoot, which we have just left.

Tyler, casually elegant in a jacket, tieless striped shirt and khaki trousers, had graciously insisted we retreat to the bus for the interview, one that marks the first time Oprah Winfrey is sharing press with someone else. Both are rulers in their respective media worlds: she as the founder and editorial director of *O, The Oprah Magazine* and the owner of a cable network; he as the best-selling author, playwright, screenwriter, actor, director and producer who also heads a sprawling, state-of-the-art production studio. Now the media moguls are taking the game of thrones to a brand-new realm. In a joint venture that's sure to be a game changer for how Blacks in entertainment do business together, the two struck a deal last fall that gives Winfrey exclusive rights to broadcast all the original TV shows written, directed and produced by Perry this year and ever after. Perry's Atlanta-based Tyler Perry Studios is equipped to create the programming. Winfrey's Los Angeles-based OWN network is equipped to broadcast it. This makes their partnership something of a royal marriage in which kingdoms have been united, friendships solidified and empires enhanced.

To be sure, the stakes are extremely high. Winfrey's OWN cable channel has been struggling to find its niche and its audience since debuting in 2011. She's relying on Perry to infuse OWN with original scripted TV fare similar to *House of Payne* and *Meet the Browns*, programs that made TBS a ratings winner. While show business can be tricky, even for those with proven track records, huge followings and their own signature brand, Oprah and Tyler have always stood in the light of their own truth, which may be the key to making their partnership work. Still, they aren't kidding themselves. There will be challenges. There may be setbacks. When two of the most powerful people in the entertainment business—a Black woman and a Black man, no less—come together to share resources and a creative vision, that alone is enough to stir the pot.

It certainly helps that the two have been fast friends for years—friends whose shared experiences of childhood abuse and grown-up wealth make for a kinship both rare and binding. Oprah, 59, has been the mentor-mama to Tyler, the protégé she met in 2001 when he appeared on her television talk show for the first time. Tyler, 43, handsome and graceful at a strapping 6 feet 6 inches tall, is a literal big brother to Oprah, giving advice and counsel that is supportive and loving. But can friends do business and keep their personal bond intact? Can two controlling type A personalities learn to compromise, ease up and give each other creative space? Will revenues from their historic venture be greater than the sum of their individual net worth, estimated to be nearly \$3 billion for Oprah and \$105 million for Tyler? In a first-ever joint magazine conversation, Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry talked with ESSENCE about what it means to be friends and now partners.

TYLER PERRY: [*Speaking to the interviewer*] You may want to think about taking off those bracelets. They're probably going to make noise on the tape recorder.

OPRAH WINFREY: Would you just let the woman do the interview? Put your director-Tyler self away just for a few minutes. He always does that.

TYLER: Okay, fine. Go ahead.

OPRAH: No, you go ahead and tell her how we met. Listen, I stayed at his house last night, and I'm in my pajamas, and he was telling me about when he was 16 and was watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and knew we were going to be friends.

TYLER: I always knew I was going to meet her. I felt that I always knew her. I told a friend a long time ago I knew what my life was going to be. Our lives were parallel in so many ways that I knew we would eventually meet. And here we are. What you don't know, Oprah, is that the first time we did meet on your show in

2001, there was so much I wanted to say to you. But I didn't. It wasn't time. The show was about people who follow their dreams.

OPRAH: Oh, yes, that's when I first heard the diary story. I had done a show in the early nineties on the importance of keeping a diary, and you started keeping a diary because I said it was cathartic to write things down.

TYLER: I didn't know what *cathartic* meant, so I had to go to the dictionary. Then I started writing and keeping a journal.

OPRAH: [Laughs] So let me tell my story about meeting Tyler. I'd heard about Tyler—obviously he'd been on *Oprah*, but I kept hearing about Tyler Perry, Tyler Perry, Tyler Perry and his shows. The very first one of his shows I went to see was *Madea Goes to Jail*. It was a theater play, and I remember thinking, *Oh, I get it. This is the new revival*. Back in the day we used to have revivals where all these great ministers would come

together. Tyler's plays were like that—a community gathering, not just for the purpose of seeing a play but for inspiration, for spiritual healing, for coming together in a way that unifies people the way revivals used to. At the last play I saw of his, an elderly woman was sitting behind me and I heard her say, "Did somebody tell him my story? 'Cause he's talking about my son." That's what his work does. It speaks to where you are in your life. That's art. And I said, *I want some of that*. I was in the struggling phase of OWN, and Tyler as a friend had heard every story. He has heard my sadness; he has heard my complaining.

TYLER: I wouldn't say she was complaining as much as feeling overwhelmed.

OPRAH: Okay, scratch complaining. He has heard my *overwhelming*.

TYLER: I was thinking about starting my own network and I thought I should at least have a conversation with Oprah.

OPRAH: I was 100 percent for him doing his own network, but I told him, "Honey child, it's rough out here for a network." I'm Harriet Tubman with no shoes on.

TYLER: Yes!

OPRAH: I was talking to him one morning, feeling so overwhelmed I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." He said, "Let me pray with you." He's so good at praying that I call him Moses. He started praying and we continued having conversations, and he said, "I think I can help you." That's when we started talking about working together. The truth is that he told me I didn't have anything fun and sexy on my station. "Where are the sexy people? Where's the fun?" he said. "You're so serious." That's how all of this really started. I wanted to get my fun and sexy on.

TYLER: Yeah, everything was very serious on OWN. But the most important thing about coming together was making sure we would not lose our friendship because of the business. We

had to establish ground rules. The main one: Both of us have to continue to live in our truth. If she doesn't like something, say it. If I don't like something, I'll say it. And we'll figure it out and keep moving on.

OPRAH: Once we got through that and the actual negotiations, which were the hardest part, Tyler said, "I'm going to get busy writing." Truthfully, in the beginning I didn't think I could afford him. It takes a lot of money to do scripted TV, though not as much on cable as it would be on a network station. The first time I saw Tyler's studio operation, it took my breath away. He can do multiple television shows and movies. He has soundstages, back lots and stage sets. He brings his strengths and I bring mine.

TYLER: We were talking last night, and for me it's wonderful to have somebody I can call on to ask questions. There's no preparation

for what happens with success and power, and watching Oprah and seeing how she handles it all so gracefully has taught me a lot. Nobody really prepares you, especially given where we come from in our history as a people.

OPRAH: We both know how rare this is. Where else in the history of our African-American culture have two really, really successful people who can do whatever they want said, "Let's come together and be even more powerful—let's take it to the tenth power?"

TYLER: Our other brothers and sisters do it all the time, but there is something about our culture that stays divided.

OPRAH: That's because if you've never seen success mirrored to you in any way in your family or your community, the first time you see it, you say, *What's wrong with me?* And that's just because you haven't been exposed to it.

TYLER: And there was usually just one of us allowed in at a time. So when you come from a culture in which only one is allowed, people think, *Well, if you have the shot, that means I can't*. But I never thought like that. I always thought, *If you did it, I can do it, too*. I just might have to knock on the window because it's

going to be difficult to open the door.

OPRAH: That's beautiful!


TYLER: I totally believe all things work together for the good. You say this all the time, Oprah—if I had been loved, who would I be? If I had been born, you know, to someone who wasn't abusive, who wasn't such a monster, who would I have been? Because I know it took all of that—all of that hell, all of that darkness—to become who I am now.

OPRAH: I'm echoing what you just said, Tyler, because being born in Mississippi, in the year I was born, was Providence. It was God's hand in my life. I tell my girls at my ▶

"I really don't think in terms of racial experiences anymore. Even though I'm a Black man writing plays and movies with Black people in them, the themes are universal."

—Tyler Perry



A full-page photograph of Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey walking through a soundstage. Tyler is on the left, wearing a blue blazer, a light pink shirt, and grey trousers, smiling and looking down. Oprah is on the right, wearing a bright pink, off-the-shoulder, long-sleeved dress and high-heeled shoes, looking up and smiling with her hands clasped. The background shows a studio setting with a brick wall, a desk with a red chair, and an 'EXIT' sign. A yellow starburst graphic is in the top right corner.

Tyler and Oprah walk through the Cicely Tyson soundstage at Tyler's Atlanta studio.

school in South Africa that when they go back to their villages, they will be the most successful one in their family, and people may try to tear them down instead of celebrating them. But no experience goes wasted, and the hardest ones are the ones that shape and strengthen you.

TYLER: I really don't think in terms of racial experiences anymore.

OPRAH: I don't either.

TYLER: Even though I'm a Black man writing plays and movies with Black people in them, the themes are universal. I realized very early on that the experiences I write about are human.

OPRAH: Yes, if you have a son on drugs, you feel the same no matter what color you are.

TYLER: Yeah, yeah.

OPRAH: Let me tell you this. I've always known it was more about the humanity of us all, and that's what I've tried to speak to. So in the early days of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* when Black people would criticize me and say I should do more Black shows, I would say no, you do more good for the world when you show we are all fully human. That is what we

were denied—our humanity. That's what Dr. King, along with everybody else whose name didn't get into a history book, was fighting for.... When you have a spiritual partnership as well as a business one between equals, for the purpose of spiritual growth, there is no power struggle. When you combine my ability to connect to an audience and Tyler's ability to connect to an audience...

TYLER: ...there's the power. At this point I still intend to write and direct my own work, not necessarily to control it but because I want to nurture it. I want to make sure it has everything it needs to grow and that I will be proud to deliver. I'm really excited about *Love Thy Neighbor* [a sitcom] and *The Haves and the Have Nots* [a drama], because they're both new and exciting. Because it's Oprah I'm working with, it challenged me to push myself in terms of my writing and level of thinking. I'm hoping that the energy of our coming together will go out to other people. □

Audrey Edwards is collaborating with Edward Lewis, cofounder and former publisher and CEO of *ESSENCE*, on his memoir, to be published by Simon & Schuster.

PERRY'S PROJECTS

The first two new television shows produced by the Tyler Perry Studios for the OWN cable network will debut in May. A third project is set to launch on OWN in the fall. It's too soon to tell what the ratings will bring, but what we know for sure is that the Oprah Winfrey/Tyler Perry juggernaut will be worth watching. Here's a preview:



THE HAVES AND THE HAVE NOTS
premieres Tuesday, May 28:

A drama about the dynamics between the affluent Cryers and the impoverished Youngs. Starring (from left) John Schneider, Jaclyn Betham, Renee Lawless, Aaron O'Connell, Tika Sumpter, Crystal Fox, Tyler Lopley, Angela Robinson, Peter Parros, Gavin Houston and Eva Tamargo.



LOVE THY NEIGHBOR
premieres Wednesday, May 29:

Set at Love Train Diner, this sitcom serves up good food, great laughs and life lessons for its zany customers. The cast includes Kendra C. Johnson, Patrice Lovely and Palmer Williams (pictured from left), as well as Darmirra Brunson, Andre Hall, Jonathan Chase and Zulay Henao.



FOR BETTER OR WORSE
premieres in the fall of 2013:

Moving from TBS, the series centering on the complicated but loving married couple Angela and Marcus (whom we first met in Tyler Perry's *Why Did I Get Married?*) gets new episodes. Original stars Tasha Smith and Michael Jai White return. —A. E.