Black lives celebrated and mourned at emotional BET Awards

By: Reuters
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Black power, suffering and the fight for justice took center stage at the BET awards on Sunday, the first Black celebrity event in the United States since nationwide mass protests broke out this month over systemic racism.

The show, which celebrates Black excellence in music, film, sports and philanthropy, was filled with speeches, songs, images of protests and the names of dozens of Black men and women who have died at the hands of police in recent years.

Beyonce, who was given a humanitarian award by former U.S. first lady Michelle Obama for her charitable initiatives, urged the Black community to use its vote in upcoming U.S. elections to dismantle “racist and unequal systems.”

“We have to vote like our life depends on it, because it does,” the singer said.

The awards show, broadcast live for the first time in its 20-year history on America’s mainstream CBS channel, featured commercials from the likes of Coca-Cola, Ford, Nissan, P&G, L’Oreal and Facebook that both celebrated the achievements of Black people and highlighted the challenges they face.

A remixed version of veteran New York rap group Public Enemy’s 1989 anthem “Fight the Power,” featuring photos of this month’s street protests, opened the show, whose slogan was “Our culture can’t be canceled.”

Da Baby’s performance of “Rockstar” began with the rapper singing while lying on the ground under the knee of a police officer, in a recreation of last month’s arrest and death of George Floyd in Minneapolis that sparked the protests.

Newcomer Roddy Ricch wore a “Black Lives Matter” shirt, John Legend played his ballad, “We Will Never Break,”

and Alicia Keys sang an emotional new song, “Perfect Way to Die,” about the black lives lost over the decades.

The show was a mix of pre-recorded performances and virtual appearances because of the coronavirus pandemic that shut down production of television shows in mid-March.

Awards went to Ricch’s “Please Excuse Me for Being Anti-Social,” which won album of the year, Megan Thee Stallion for best female hip-hop artist and Lizzo was named best female R&B/pop artist.

Gymnast Simone Biles and basketball star LeBron James were named sportswoman and man of the year respectively. Nigerian musician Burna Boy was named best international act.