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Documentary on Advertising Giant Tom Burrell Airs on PBS



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Posted June

26, 2018



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A new documentary, “Burrell Advertising Revolution,” premieres on PBS this week. The film tells the story of an advertising agency that forged the way for young, Black hopefuls to make their mark in the ad business.

In 1960, Tom Burrell broke Chicago advertising’s color barrier by becoming the first Black person to land a job at one of the city’s top advertising firms—in the mailroom. He soon became a copywriter helping solve some of the agencies creative problems. In 1966 there was a protest march in Mississippi. Out of that march came a voice that shouted, “Black Power!” The “Black Power” movement highlighted the fact that Black people had a fundamentally unique perspective on the “American” experience.

By the 1970’s, the movement had inspired Burrell to make a bold move. He decided to open a Black advertising agency. He was ready to use his skills and training to step out on his own. He sought out the few Black ad experts in Chicago, all of whom were working at

White agencies. Once he convinced them of the possibilities of a Black target-market agency, they joined Burrell and set about the task of founding a Black-owned advertising agency. They knew that White corporations had begun to understand the “Black Power of Profitability.”

The Burrell Advertising Agency, under Burrell’s leadership, approached targeted marketing from the standpoint that their creative work had to reflect authentic Black lifestyle and culture in a real and positive way. Burrell coined a term to fit this approach, “Positive Realism.” The message was “Black people are not dark-skinned White people.”

The agency also understood that music had always played an important role in the Black “American” experience. Burrell enlisted a group of young, gifted, Black producer/composers to make sure the music behind their advertising messaging was authentic to the culture. Many award-winning TV and radio commercials came out of the Burrell Agency. All of them had scores that had been written by the hottest Black music producer/composers in Chicago. The tracks were infused with the sounds of the latest R & B/Soul chart-toppers of the day. Through the collaboration of Burrell and their music producers, the award-winning hits kept coming.

Check listings on PBS to view the documentary.

AD , ADVERTISING , BURRELL , DOCUMENTARY

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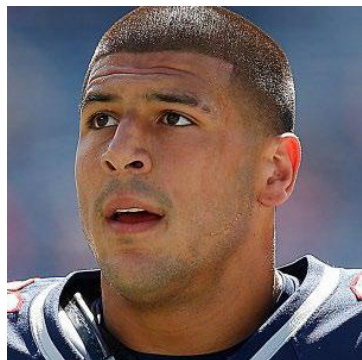
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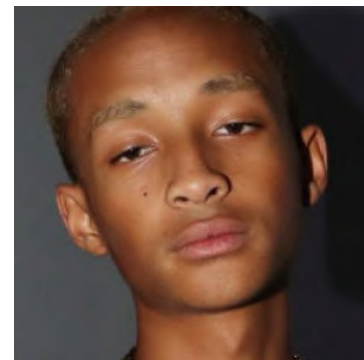
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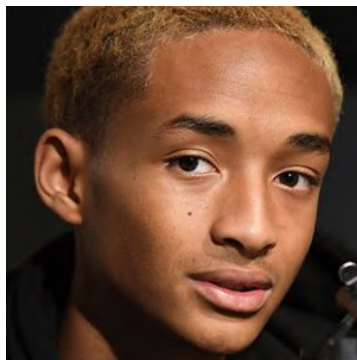


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