

WHAT'S BLACK ABOUT IT?

Burrell:Advertising Revolution



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The Revolution will not be advertised.

LOGLINE

In the aftermath of Chicago's 1960s civil rights riots, as the Black Panthers were starting a revolution in the streets of Chicago, Tom Burrell's pioneering advertising agency was the first to feature Blacks in national network television commercials, ignites a Madison Avenue revolution - Madison Avenue finally Got Soul!!

SUMMARY

In the 1970s, amid the fervor of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements in Chicago, Tom Burrell, a young black advertising prodigy, sparked a revolution in an industry failing to portray positive images of Black culture. He introduced the concept of "Positive Realism," challenging the notion that "Black people are not dark-skinned white people," and required every campaign advertisement to demonstrate "What's Black About It," transforming the representation of Black culture in mainstream media.

"What's Black About It? Burrell: Advertising Revolution" is a dynamic documentary exploring Burrell Communications' groundbreaking impact on the advertising world. Facing racism as the status quo, Burrell championed authenticity, diversity, and inclusion on Madison Avenue, sparking discussions on the significance of the black consumer market.

HISTORY

In the 1960s, Tom Burrell became the first Black copywriter at a mainstream agency in Chicago. In 1971, after spending a decade moving through the ranks of several ad agencies, closely observing and learning the business, he opened his own agency, Burrell McBain, which was later renamed Burrell Advertising.

Burrell is singularly responsible for helping to get African Americans on TV. His method, "Positive Realism," involved presenting realistic and positive images of African Americans using products and brands. This approach made mainstream brands aware of the Black community as a viable consumer base and provided effective means to reach them.

His agency created many iconic ads for brands like McDonald's and Coca-Cola in the 1980s and 1990s. Thanks to Burrell's pioneering efforts, there is greater representation in advertising today. More Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, LGBTQ community members, and people with different physical abilities are included in current brand messaging than ever before. This shift results directly from Burrell's foundational work and his insistence on authentic representation.

HISTORY

Today, Tom Burrell is celebrated not only for his achievements but also for the doors he opened and the changes he inspired in the world of advertising. His legacy continues to influence how brands connect with their audiences, making him a true pioneer in the industry.

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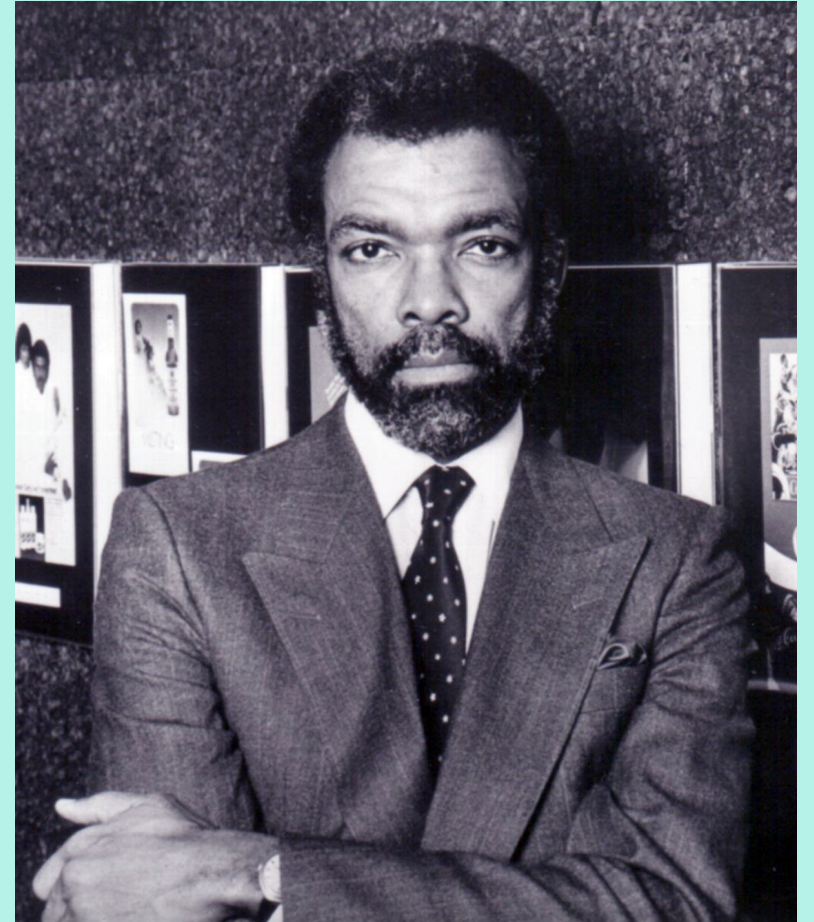
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CHARACTERS

TOM BURRELL

During a time when black fists were raised in the air symbolizing freedom and revolutionary independence during the Civil Rights era, Tom Burrell was thinking out of the box. His vision for understanding psyche of the Black consumer was a breath of fresh air during a time when general agencies did not include African American representation in television, print, and other media formats.

Burrell established Burrell Communications in 1971 and led the company through 2004. By recognizing the unique qualities of the African American consumer market, he spearheaded some of the most memorable campaigns in advertising history. From featuring prominent figures and newcomers—Black people felt a sense of pride capturing trends and raising awareness of our creativity throughout American culture.





BLACK ADVERTISING ARCHITECTS

Burrell's initial team of Advertising Architects in the '70s recognized the unique qualities of the African American consumer market; they spearheaded some of the most memorable campaigns in advertising history, establishing black advertising during that era. This creativity persisted through the decades, with the creative team continuing to innovate from the 1970s to the 2000s. Their work garnered numerous accolades, including the prestigious Clio Award, often regarded as the Oscars of the advertising world.



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