

Hollywood's NAACP, Hall At Odds Over Hiring Of Blacks

By SHEENA A. LESTER and GENE C. JOHNSON
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Arsenio Hall

The controversy that has local black entertainment figures running in circles came to a head this week amid allegations of extortion, name-calling and all-around chaos.

Actor-comedian Arsenio Hall, who had come under fire recently for allegedly failing to hire blacks in top positions for his new late-night television program, "The Arsenio Hall Show," said in an interview that those allegations were totally false, and deliberately spurred by Willis Edwards, president of the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP, who said he tried to extort \$40,000 from him.

"We're not dealing with an issue of hiring blacks, we dealing with two black men who have differences," Hall said in an interview last Thursday at the Paramount studio where his show is taped.

"What saddens me is that two black men are battling and airing their grievances in public when we have a larger picture that we're trying to draw," he said.

According to reports, members of the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP met with Hall and representatives from Paramount Television during the last week in November to discuss possible inequities in the number of blacks on the program's staff.

Sources from the branch told the Sentinel last week that Hall expressed in the meeting that there were "no qualified blacks" to fill key positions on the production staff of "The Arsenio Hall Show."

Hall said the charges were "appalling" and "insulting," but maintained that the civil rights association is not the source of his troubles, but its leader is.

"My battle is not with the NAACP. I think the NAACP is a great organization. I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for men like Benjamin Hooks," Hall said. "My battle is with an individual -- Willis Edwards."

That meeting -- which, Hall said, ended on a good note -- was followed by a conversation

his position to take advantage of a lot of people who are afraid of the pressure that he'll bring down," he said.

Edwards dismissed Hall's statements, calling them "ridiculous."

"He doesn't even have enough respect for the NAACP to pay for a \$10 membership and join it," he said. "How could I expect to get \$40,000 from him?"

Edwards said Hall did indeed assert at their meeting that there were "no qualified blacks" for key posts on his production staff.

"He made that statement, and he knows he made it," Edwards said. "Nobody black is getting any jobs down there. The show is aimed at the urban market -- why watch something on TV that you can't get a job at?"

But, Hall said, he is hiring blacks, at a rate unmatched by any other late-night host.

In fact, Hall read off a list of more than 20 blacks who work in key positions for "The Arsenio Hall Show."

People on that list include black talent coordinator Kim Swann, whom he recruited from Burt and Bert, an entertainment company run by Burt Reynolds and Bert Convy.

Hall's assistant lighting technician, chief prop master and announcer are all black, as well as some of the pages, the wardrobe director and his production manager, Corky Lee, he said.

"Nothing happens on Stage 29 (where the show is taped) without Corkey's permission," he said. Hall also hired black female drummer Terri Lynn.

His talent executive and his assistant are black, as are two of the four cameramen, he said.

"These aren't people that came here and applied," he said. "I went and found them."

"I have people who are mad at me (for example) at Entertainment Tonight and in the executive building on this Paramount lot because I've gone into places stealin' folk," he said.

"Not only do I have more than six blacks, but I have blacks in key positions. Not only do I have blacks in key positions, but the baddest (expletive deleted) in this building (show) is me."

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Soul Train Music Awards Comes to TV

Chicago - Renowned singer Dionne Warwick and television commentator Ahmad Rashad have been named to co-host the 1989 "Soul Train Music Awards," according to co-executive producer Don Cornelius.

The two-hour nationally syndicated television special moves into the Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium on Wednesday, April 12, 1989, and will be telecast live before a black tie audience.

The "Soul Train Music Awards" annually celebrates the best recorded performances in Rhythm & Blues, Urban Contemporary, Gospel, Jazz and Rap music; the top new artist and best music video are also honored, along with a special Heritage Award presented annually to a pioneer member of the R&B/Urban Contemporary music community.

"We're extremely delighted to have Dionne on board again this year," said Cornelius. She has been brilliant as host of our first two awards specials and deserves a great deal of credit for the show's continuing success."

Of Rashad's selection as a co-host Cornelius said, "Ahmad Rashad has become one of the most likable and articulate personalities on television, and we feel his overall charm and somewhat jocular style will complement both Dionne and our program perfectly."

Rashad, a former National Football League standout, appears regularly as a commenta-

tor on NBC Sports' "NFL Live" and NBC's "Sports World." Rashad also hosts special reports for "Entertainment Tonight." He will be making his debut as a host of a major music special.

All recording artists on R&B/Urban Contemporary, Rap, Jazz or Gospel recordings which charted in either or all of the leading music trade publica-

tions between January 1, 1988 and December 31, 1988 are eligible for a Soul Train Music Award. Nominees will be selected on voting ballots mailed to eligible recording artists, radio station music and program directors and managers or representatives of appropriate retail outlets. The top four nominees in each category will be announced early in 1989.

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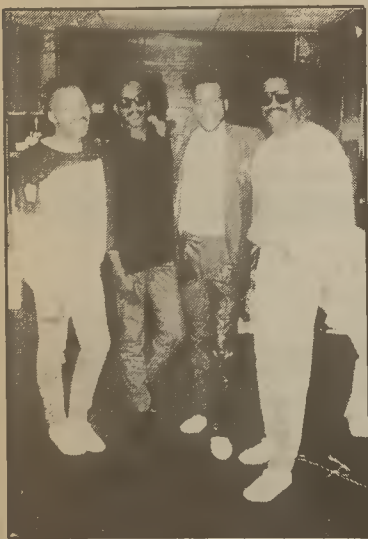
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