

BIOGRAPHY - "WATTSTAX" PRODUCER LARRY SHAW

Larry Shaw is one of those rare communications experts who has made an indelible mark on multicultural advertising and marketing in America. His creativity and insight has given a generation of Black consumers some of their first self-affirming, culturally relevant appeals. His breakthrough art direction and award winning concepts have helped major marketers reach this burgeoning ethnic market.

With a career spanning four decades, Shaw demonstrated how advertising could raise the social conscience of marketers and consumers alike. The African-American experience was uniquely interpreted in Shaw's historic creative campaigns for marketers like Johnson Products, Lorillard, Sears, Standard Oil, SCLC/PUSH, and the Urban League.

In Spike Lee's Crooklyn, the main character becomes enamored with one of Shaw's Afro Sheen TV commercials. The scene testified to the impact Shaw's "Beautiful People" campaign for the brand had on consumers who at the time rarely saw themselves in a positive light or on TV commercials.

As communications director for SCLC/Operation PUSH, his strategic thinking supported the economic development phase of the civil rights movement. Through his efforts the first Black Expo in Chicago and some of the first major corporate contracts with minority-owned ad agencies took place. As publicist for Jesse Jackson, Shaw met with Time magazine editors for the civil rights leader's first cover story.

He was recruited by Stax Records to head its advertising and marketing. It was there that Shaw developed the Stax brand internationally through logo development, album covers, advertising and marketing promotions that are still considered breakthrough. His work has been listed in Vanity Fair and UK's Q magazines' best album covers designs of all times. His strategic national marketing and music/film industry public relations efforts for the movie and soundtrack of SHAFT helped Stax garner unprecedented Oscar award and nominations, NAACP Image Awards, Addy's, Grammy's and Golden Globe recognition.

As head of the STAX's film division, Shaw, with Stax owner Al Bell, conceived and produced the movie WATTSTAX. They solicited Wolper Productions to co-produce the movie distributed by Columbia Pictures. It was Bell and Shaw that provided the movie's critically acclaimed insight in the African American experience. Shaw wrote the opening Richard Pryor sequence, conceptualized and guided the technical crew in getting the authentic feel and cultural perspectives. He also conceived the promotion "Living Word" tagline and directed the movie's and soundtrack's marketing. More than a concert movie, the WATTSTAX phenomenon raised money for the riot-ridden community of Watts. The concert drew over 100,000 people in the L. A. Coliseum and was simulcast in several urban markets across the country. The movie has been featured in film festivals all over the world including Cannes Film Festival and has garnered a Golden Globe nomination for Best Documentary. Thirty years later it was chosen for the 2003 Sundance Film Festival Collection.

After Stax, Shaw headed the South's first African American-owned, full-service advertising agency, The Shaw Group. Featured in Time and Adweek, Shaw went on to develop The Adolph Coors Company's Black community relations program. He has since developed "relationship marketing" efforts for McDonald's, Harrahs, NBC Bank, Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau, Xerox, WDIA Radio, COGIC and others.

The semiretired Shaw now provides marketing and communications consulting services through his firm, The Able Group, focusing on religious and inspirational oriented communications.