

Corporate influence sullies NAACP Image Awards

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

When the NAACP Image Awards were held at Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles Saturday, it appeared, superficially at least, that the big winners were "The Bernie Mac Show" (3), Alicia Keys (3) and "Crash" (2) since they took home a total of eight trophies among them. But the more discerning observer might notice that the evening primarily belonged to Fox, the network which hosted the program.

For not only does the mega-media giant own the Bernie Mac series, but it has acquired the rights to run a spin-off of "Crash" on its FX Network.

Just as curiously, recording artist Keys released all three of her CDs with J-Records, the same record label which signed Fox's "American Idol" winners Fantasia and Ruben Studdard to lucrative contracts. J-Records is a division of Sony/BMG, the music conglomerate which has enjoyed a cozy, cross-promoting relationship with Fox since one of its executives, Simon Cowell became a judge on "American Idol."

This might help explain why Carlos Santana was picked as this year's inductee into the NAACP Hall of Fame, even though he isn't Black. After all, he is with Arista, another division of Sony/BMG, and the honor afforded him a chance to perform on the program.

Suspiciously, the questionable corporate ethics even extended to another presumably prestigious honor, namely, the NAACP's President's Award, which went to Susan L. Taylor. Taylor, the long-time editor of *Essence* magazine, also just

happens to be an author who has written two books for HarperCollins, a wholly-owned subsidiary of, you guessed it, 20th Century Fox.

Jada Pinkett-Smith prevailed in the Outstanding Children's Literary Work category for her book, "Girls Hold Up the World," but one can't wonder whether the accolade is tainted, too, since its publisher, Scholastic/Cartwheel, is a division of Harper Collins.

In the field of music, other Sony/BMG winners included Jamie Foxx (Outstanding Male Artist), Destiny's Child (Outstanding Group), Chris Brown (Outstanding New Artist). In total, Fox artists took about a third of the 44 awards handed out that night.

Although the show aired on Fox, a co-sponsor was Blockbuster Video, which is a division of Viacom, the parent company of BET, Paramount, Nickelodeon, CBS, Showtime and Simon & Schuster Publishing. So, it comes as no surprise that Viacom did just as well, prevailing in 14 categories.

Maybe the letter 'C' in NAACP should stand for Corporate. After all, its new President, Bruce Gordon, has a background in business, not civil rights. His résumé reveals an impressive, 35-year career in the telecommunication industry with Verizon, Bell Atlantic and Tyco, on top of credentials which include a master's degree from MIT.

Don't blame Bruce entirely in this regard, since he just assumed the reigns of power last summer, and this is not the first year that the NAACP stamp of approval has seemed to be up for sale. Nor is it fair to denigrate any of the recipients, as they are each extremely talented in

their own right. But are we to believe that almost all of the gifted African-Americans work for one of two companies?

The problem, here, is that the NAACP appears to be drifting far afield from its legacy of lobbying on behalf of an oppressed people when it lets corporate interests play such a significant role in determining which African-Americans are to be commended for presenting positive images. By design, profits will always be more important than humanistic concerns to a multi-national enterprise. Thus, if they haven't already, business execs can't help but turn the NAACP Image Awards into a shallow platform to sell consumer products rather than as a program to promote those exhibiting a continuing commitment to the betterment of Black people.



Host Cuba Gooding Jr., center, mugs with NAACP President and CEO Bruce Gordon, left, and NAACP Chairman Julian Bond during the 37th NAACP Image Awards in Los Angeles.

Complete List of Winners:

Outstanding Comedy Series - "Everybody Hates Chris" (UPN)

Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series - Bernie Mac, "The Bernie Mac Show" (FOX)

Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series - Tichina Arnold, "Everybody Hates Chris" (UPN)

Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series - Reggie Hayes, "Girlfriends" (UPN)

Outstanding Supporting Actress in Comedy Series - Camille Winbush, "The Bernie Mac Show" (FOX)

Outstanding Drama Series - "Grey's Anatomy" (ABC)

Outstanding Actor in a Drama Series - Isaiah Washington, "Grey's Anatomy" (ABC)

Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series - Vivica A. Fox, "Missing" (Lifetime)

Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series -

Gary Dourdan, "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" (CBS)

Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series - S. Epatha Merkerson, "Law & Order" (NBC)

Outstanding TV Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special - "Lackawanna Blues" (HBO)

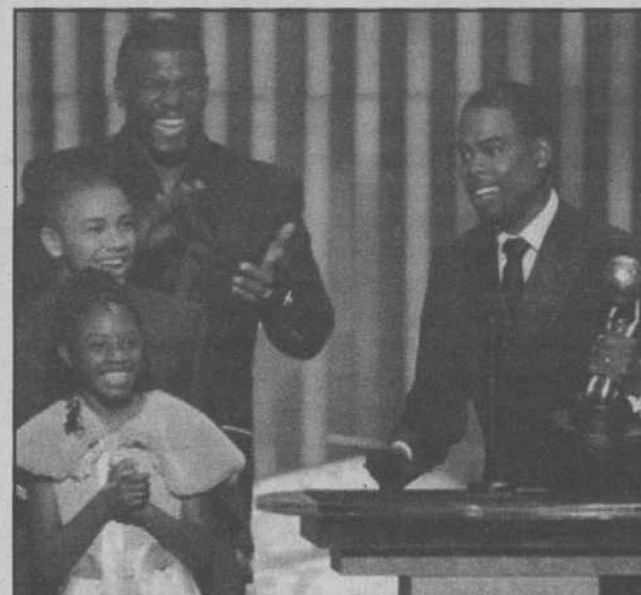
Outstanding Actor in a TV Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special - Terrence Howard, "Lackawanna Blues" (HBO)

Outstanding Actress in a TV Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special - S. Epatha Merkerson, "Lackawanna Blues" (HBO)

Outstanding Actor in a Daytime Drama Series - Shemar Moore, "The Young and the Restless" (CBS)

Outstanding Actress in a Daytime Drama Series - Victoria Rowell, "The Young and the Restless" (CBS)

Outstanding TV News,



Actor/comic Chris Rock, right, executive producer of the TV show "Everybody Hates Chris," accepts the award for Outstanding Comedy Series. Pictured: Cast members Terry Crews, top, Tequan Richmond, middle, and Imani Hakim.

Outstanding Motion Picture - "Crash" (Lionsgate Films)

Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture - Samuel L. Jackson, "Coach Carter" (Paramount Pictures)

Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture - Kimberly Elise, "Diary of a Mad Black Woman" (Lionsgate Films)

Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture - Terrence Howard, "Crash" (Lionsgate Films)

Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture - Cicely Tyson, "Diary of a Mad Black Woman" (Lionsgate Films)

Outstanding Literary Work - Fiction - "Breaking the Cycle," Zane (Strebtor Books International/Simon and Schuster)

Outstanding Literary Work - Non-Fiction - "Is Bill Cosby Right?: Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind," Michael Eric Dyson (Basic Civitas Books)

Outstanding Literary Work - Children's - "Girls Hold Up This World," Jada Pinkett Smith (Scholastic/Cartwheel)

Outstanding New Artist - Chris Brown (Jive)

Outstanding Male Artist - Jamie Foxx (J Records)

Outstanding Female Artist - Alicia Keys (J Records)

Outstanding Duo or Group - Destiny's Child (Sony Urban Music)

Outstanding Jazz Artist - Najee (Heads Up Intl)

Outstanding Gospel Artist (Traditional or Contemporary) - Yolanda Adams (Atlantic/WEA)

Outstanding Music Video - "Unbreakable," Alicia Keys (J Records)

Outstanding Song - "Unbreakable," Alicia Keys (J Records)

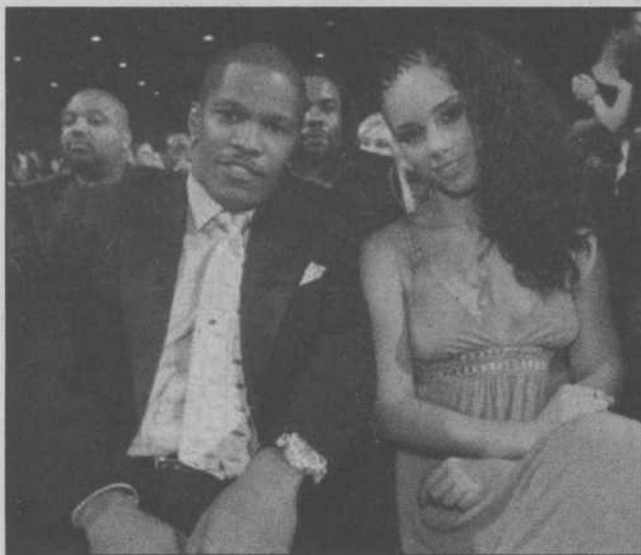
Outstanding Album - "Emancipation of Mimi," Mariah Carey (Island Def Jam)

Outstanding Independent or Foreign Film - "The Boys of Baraka" (THINKFilm)

Outstanding Directing in a Dramatic Series - Paris Barclay, "Cold Case" (CBS)

Outstanding Directing in a Comedy Series - Millicent Shelton, "The Bernie Mac Show" (FOX)

Outstanding Directing in a Feature Film/Television Movie - John Singleton, "Four Brothers" (Paramount Pictures)



Academy Award winning actor Jamie Foxx (left) and Grammy-winning singer Alicia Keys pose at the 37th annual NAACP Image Awards at the Shrine auditorium in Los Angeles last Saturday. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Image Awards honor outstanding achievements and performances of people of color as well as those individuals who promote social justice.



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