

Throwback: Soul Train

[youtube id="G8sJobVw5vc"]Don Cornelius started his career as a news and sports reporter for WCIV-TV in Chicago. *Soul Train* was a show he independently hosted as a series of concerts to promote local talent. In 1970, the station gave Cornelius the opportunity to put the show on television. The show debuted in August of 1970 and by 1971 it was nationally syndicated. *Soul Train* was like Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* but it featured African-American entertainers and audience members. Clark briefly tried to compete with *Soul Train* by creating the *Soul Unlimited* show but it was canceled after Jesse Jackson accused ABC of trying to undermine America's only Black-owned television show.

Soul Train was the first time Black popular culture had a national presence on TV. Contemporary fashion, dancers and soul artists were seen nationally years before Michael Jackson integrated MTV. Artists received increased exposure and were able to forge new bonds with their fans beyond print media. Rosie Perez, Fred "Rerun" Berry and Jermaine Stewart were some of the dancers to be recognized for their work on the show. Jody Watley and Jeffrey Daniels were *Soul Train* dancers before they became members of Shalamar. Hip-Hop was first broadcast on the show in the '80s with memorable appearances from Kurtis Blow and Run D.M.C.

Soul Train ran until 2006 but Cornelius stopped hosting the show in 1993. *The Soul Train Awards* launched in 1987 and *The Soul Train Lady Of Soul Awards* first aired in 1995. Cornelius sold the show's rights to a consortium led by Magic Johnson in 2011 and he died the following year in an act of suicide.

The Soul Train Awards continues to air and celebrate the achievements of [African-American](#) artists. Every modern media space dedicated to Black creatives has a debt to Don Cornelius and *Soul Train*.