

Edward Smith - 1924-2005

Co-Founder of BSA Renowned Stuntman Dennis McLellan | Times Staff Writer - Edward "Eddie" Smith, who co-founded the Black Stuntmen's Assn. in 1967 and fought to generate jobs for African American stuntmen in Hollywood. Over the years, Smith worked as a stuntman or stunt coordinator on numerous television shows and films, including "MASH," "Dirty Harry," "Beneath the Planet of the Apes," "Blazing Saddles," "Earthquake," "Scarface," "The Nutty Professor" and the TV miniseries "Roots." He also took pride in being the only African American stunt coordinator on the 1973 James Bond movie "Live and Let Die."

But it was in his little-recognized role in launching the Black Stuntmen's Assn. and helping break through the color barrier in the stunt business that Smith had the most effect. Although it was his idea to start the organization, he was never interested in being president or holding any other office in the group "He just wanted to be the fighter" for jobs, stuntman Henry Kingi, one of the association's co-founders, told The Times. A native of St. Louis, Smith began working in Hollywood in 1955 as a film extra and freelance TV news cameraman covering breaking stories for local stations. The seed for creating a black stuntmen's group was planted when he was an extra on the star-filled 1963 comedy "It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World" and saw a white stuntman being made up to be the stunt double for black actor Eddie "Rochester" Anderson. Known as a "paint-down," it was a common practice for a white stuntman to be made up in the appropriate shade whenever an actor of color needed to be doubled. But the practice became even more controversial in the 1960s, when an increasing number of African American and other minority actors began to gain roles in films and on television. The "paint-down" practice, Smith believed, was not only insulting but also prevented nonwhites from tapping a potentially lucrative source of income as stuntmen. "A white stunt guy would say, 'I had a pretty good week. I guess I'll go down to Palm Springs,'" Smith recalled in a 2002 interview with The Times. "And I'd think, 'I ain't made enough money to take the Red Car to Watts.'" Smith, who had various illnesses, died June 24th 2005 at a nursing home in Culver City, said his wife, Denise Shaw Smith.