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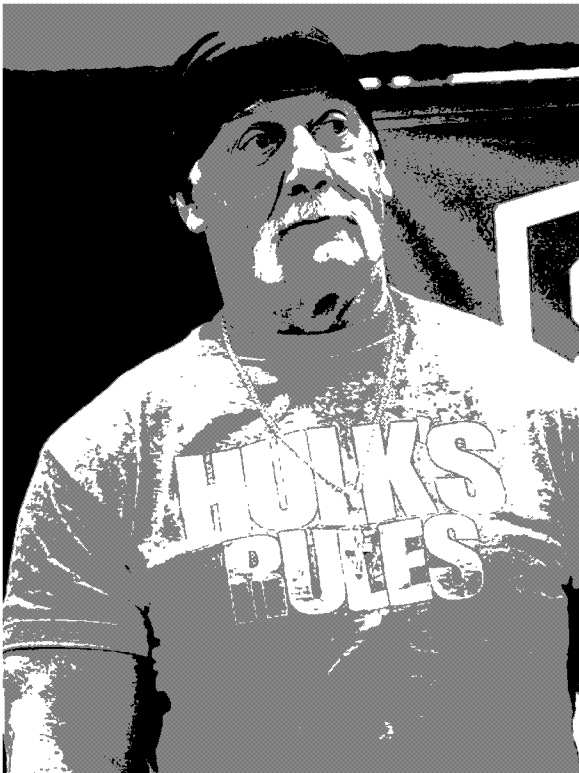
People Exclusive

Hulk Hogan Apologizes for 'Unacceptable' Racist Rant as He Is Scrubbed from WWE Hall of Fame



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Hulk Hogan
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BY LINDSAY KIMBLE @lekimble 07/24/2015 AT 11:10 AM EDT

Hulk Hogan is speaking out about a just-released audio transcript that features him making racist slurs about his daughter Brooke's love life.

"Eight years ago I used offensive language during a conversation. It was unacceptable for me to have used that

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offensive language; there is no excuse for it; and I apologize for having done it," Hogan said in a statement exclusively to PEOPLE. The transcript featuring that conversation was published online by the *National Enquirer*.

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"This is not who I am. I believe very strongly that every person in the world is important and should not be treated differently based on race, gender, orientation, religious beliefs or otherwise," Hogan told PEOPLE. "I am disappointed with myself that I used language that is offensive and inconsistent with my own beliefs."

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Hogan was scrubbed from the WWE's website on Friday morning, with no videos or photos of the famed wrestler remaining. He was also removed from the online Hall of Fame. His lawyer David Houston confirmed to PEOPLE that he's officially resigned from the organization.

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"He decided to resign from WWE because he didn't want to put them or his family through this," Houston told PEOPLE.

WWE, however, maintains that Hogan was fired: "WWE terminated its contract with Terry Bollea (a.k.a. Hulk Hogan). WWE is committed to embracing and celebrating individuals from all backgrounds as demonstrated by the diversity of our employees, performers and fans worldwide."

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Hogan told PEOPLE he will use the situation to "improve as a person" and that he takes the matter as an "important learning experience."

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A transcript of the audio shows the wrestler repeatedly using the n-word in reference to his daughter Brooke Hogan's dating life.

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Hogan was already enmeshed in legal drama when news of the transcript leaked. The Florida trial for his high-profile lawsuit against gossip site Gawker was recently delayed until at least the fall. The star's legal team filed a \$100 million lawsuit against the site after its 2012 posting of video from a sex tape, made in 2008, featuring Hogan. The video was later removed from the site.

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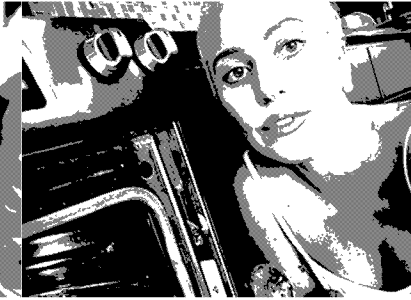
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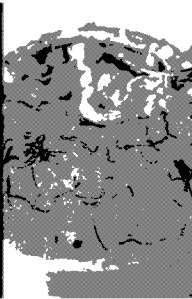
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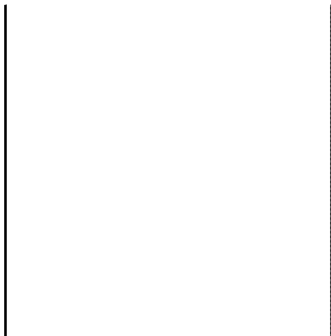
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