

ENTERTAINMENT

Black

film

studio

opens



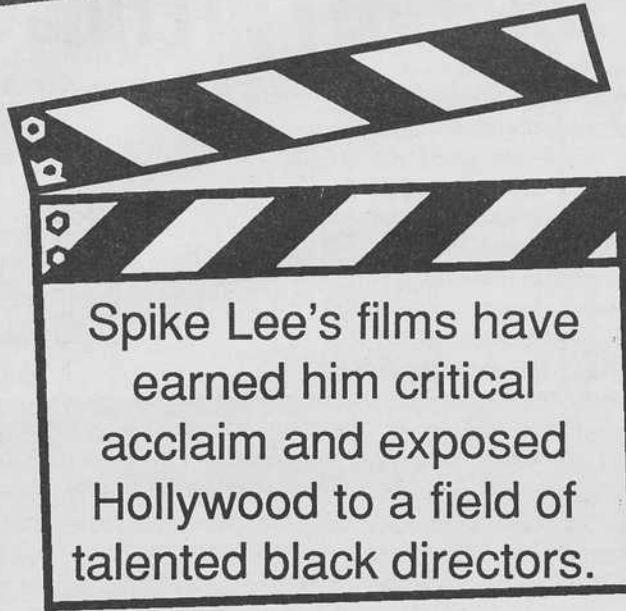
By John Templeton
Special to Sentinel-Voice
SAN FRANCISCO

African-Americans have now jumped into the movie-making business, thanks to a collaborative effort between technology pioneers and community and political leaders.

The result is Digital Universe.

Headed by Myra Peterson, Digital Universe takes advantage of the technical breakthroughs of Dr. Mark Hannah, inventor of the integrated circuit that made the Silicon Graphics workstation the standard for movie special effects.

Hannah, honored several times as Black Scientist of the



Spike Lee's films have earned him critical acclaim and exposed Hollywood to a field of talented black directors.

Year by different groups, left his job as Silicon Graphics chief scientist to join the venture.

Former Virginia Governor,

L. Douglas Wilder helped obtain land and development assistance to build the Virginia facility. And "black Hollywood" is enthusiastically

supporting the venture.

Two years ago, a *People* magazine story hit on the shortage of blacks in every phase of the movie industry, despite the fact that they make up 26 percent of the industry's consumer market.

Through their work, two notable black producers are credited with helping bring the studio to fruition.

Spike Lee's films have earned him critical acclaim and exposed Hollywood to a field of talented black directors. A perfectionist, Lee demands that he retain artistic control over his movies.

Lee's work has spawned a new generation of movie stars like Wesley Snipes, Samuel L. Jackson and Giancarlo

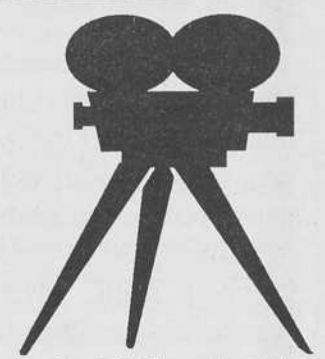
Esposito. In addition, legions of technical talent have arisen thanks to Lee, such as that of cinematographer Ernest Dickerson.

His "Get on the Bus" film proved that blacks have the financial wherewithal to put out major films. And with sports stars like Magic Johnson reviving the inner city movie theater, Lee's impact is sure to be felt for a long time.

By making Sankofa and distributing it directly to the black community, Haile Gerima is fast earning respect in movie-making circles.

Gerima and other black film instructors have also produced hundreds of well-trained directors like John Singleton.

But Lee, Gerima and others



can thank Micheaux for getting them this far.

When demonstrations raged about the racist, early 19th century film "Birth of a Nation" (originally called the Klansman), Micheaux started making his own movies, filling black-owned theaters with everything from romance to westerns.

BOOK REVIEW

Book testifies to fathers' strong influence

By Sandra L. West
Special to Sentinel-Voice
Fathers! Their influence is tremendous. As they teach, or fail to teach, so do we live and pass down for generations their impressions on us.

Father Songs: Testimonies by African-American Sons and Daughters, a new collection edited by Gloria Wade-Gayles a professor at Spelman College speaks to the powers of fathers. Published by Beacon Press, it officially debuted on Father's Day, 1997.

Today, fatherhood is in a feast or famine predicament. You either have a father like Earl Woods, who taught his son Tiger how to be a graceful gentleman on the golf courses of life, whether in winning or heartbreaking situations. Then, you may have a father whose mug shot sneers at you from the very public post office wall: "Wanted. \$42,000 in back support payments for 2 children."

Wade-Gayles affirms that there is no one way to sing our father's songs. Therefore, in the 62 contributions to this new anthology, every type of father is laid out by a wide range of writers. From legendary writer Langston Hughes to contemporary novelist Bebe Moore Campbell, each bears their soul so that we may realize and experience love yet somehow learn, as Wade-Gayles appears to suggest, to judge not.

One especially moving work in *Father Songs* is "Plaiting Now My Daddy's Hair." The essay, written by Georgene Bess, an English Professor at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, relates a tale of shame and ultimately love. It explores the shame and love a daughter comes to experience as an adult, when she finally realizes that her father gave his all to his thankless children.

Georgene's daddy was a farmer. He wore brogan boots and had callused hands that she told him were "ugly." Every night he asked one of his children to plait (braid up or corn row) his hair. They did so with resentful anger. They rather be playing.

Then, daddy got sick. Cancer struck, covering his

hands with pus-filled sores. His beloved brogan boots — a symbol of the back breaking work he lovingly and dutifully performed for his family — soon became too heavy for him to wear. Georgene missed her healthy father. She missed the sweets he often brought for her. Because she could not bear to see him suffer, she wished him dead. Her misguided wish was granted. She did not grieve, but merely pushed his brogan boots in the closet and out of the way.

Seventeen years later, Georgene found herself teaching "Those Winter Sundays" by poet Robert Hayden at Georgia Southern University. As she read Hayden's piece about a quiet warrior and provider, Bess remembered her dad and

started crying in front of her 23 students. She remembered and appreciated how hard he had worked; how he wanted to farm even when the cancer invaded his body. She recalled how he stumbled toward his brogan boots, as if they were his lifeline; to a degree they were.

She further remembered how he had asked for so very little for himself and how she had "spoken indifferently to

him, who had driven out the cold," as Hayden's poem laments.

Georgene grieved that day. But she found comfort when her sole black student, a young man, said steadily as she wept in front of the class, "Take your time, Miss Bess, take your time."

The experience left her spent and ashamed. But she "resolved to be a better

daughter" to her surviving mother than she had been to her father.

This essay and all of *Father Songs* is a priceless gift. Wade-Gayles, author of *Rooted in the Mind, My Soul is a Witness* and other titles, is a master essayist and editor who challenges our collective consciousness.

Sandra L. West is a Richmond, Virginia-based writer.



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