

RIVERRUN FESTIVAL

Leaders of L.A. Rebellion talk about black independence at film festival

BY TEVIN STINSON
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Leaders of the L.A. Rebellion, Charles Burnett and Haile Gerima, spoke on Tuesday, April 21, to a diverse crowd inside the Diggs Art Gallery on the campus of Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) as part of the RiverRun International Film Festival.

The film directors spoke on the topic "Everything but the Burden: Black Film and the Politics of Representation" as part of the spotlight program on Black American Cinema in collaboration with WSSU.

The L.A. Rebellion was a film movement from the late 1960s until the late 1980s. The black film directors told what it was like to be in Los Angeles during the historic riots in the 1960s that helped shape black culture in America for years to come.

"Hollywood just keeps shifting; you think you got it, then you don't."

— Charles Burnett

"We were tired of the way we were being depicted in these films," Gerima said. "The movement for us was our way of saying they must accept us for us."

Born on the campus of UCLA, the rebellion was geared toward producing films as an alternative to classical Hollywood cinema. Some recognizable films that came out of this movement are "Emma Mae," "Killer of Sheep," and "Compensation," which was released as late as 2000.

The panelists also discussed making films to educate the black community and why a lot of films directed by African-Americans don't get the support from Hollywood they deserve.

Every year a number of films directed by African-Americans go unseen because they are limited to film festivals or small viewings because of lack of a big-name distributor or actor seen in the box office hits.

Burnett and Gerima both agree they would love the support of a big-name distribution company or actor but they don't have a problem doing it themselves because it

gives them more creative freedom with their films.

"When I talk about Hollywood, its like talking about a woman I've never been with," Gerima laughed.

Although they both have been in the film industry for over 30 years, neither has ever had a major distribution deal, but are confident in their own abilities and still believe the African-American community wants to see the type of movies they are creating.

"Hollywood just keeps shifting; you think you got it,

then you don't," said Burnett

Artist-educator Endia Beal, director of the Diggs Art Gallery at WSSU, said at the end of the panel discussion that she believes it is the duty of African-Americans to ensure that positive images of the community continue using different platforms, both in film, education and everyday life.

"We all see the world through our own little spectrum; the world is bigger than just our little world," Beal said.

Before closing, Gerima had some advice to young African-Americans looking to change the politics of representation.

"There are too much blues and not enough action," Gerima said. "If we want to see change, we have to change it; nobody is going to just give it to us."



Photo by Erin Mizelle for The Chronicle

Film directors Haile Gerima, left, and Charles Burnett talk with people who attended the panel discussion on the topic "Everything but the Burden: Black Film and the Politics of Representation" as part of RiverRun's spotlight program on Black American Cinema in collaboration with WSSU.

Groundbreaking film director Nelson receives Master of Cinema award

BY TEVIN STINSON
FOR THE CHRONICLE

On Friday April 24, groundbreaking film director Stanley Nelson Jr., added another award to his collection when he took home the RiverRun International Film Festival's Master of Cinema award for his new film "the Black Panthers: Vanguard of a Nation."

The handmade trophy was given to Nelson during an open conversation moderated by Wake Forest University Professor Peter Gilbert.

The film documents the rise and eventual fall of the Black Panther Party and shows how they were not the rebels media and government made them out to be. The movie portrays them as fighting for justice.

"This country was not going to change; they changed the country," Nelson said.

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale started the Black Panther Party in 1966 in California. The Panthers fought to establish revolutionary socialism through community-based

programs.

With films such as "Freedom Bags" (1990), "The Murder of Emmett Till" (2003), "Freedom Riders" (2010) and "Freedom Summer" (2014), Nelson has dedicated his career to telling the story of African-Americans who may have otherwise been forgotten.

"I wanted to get into filmmaking to tell the story of the people I knew, the people who I could relate to, who were going through the things I was going through," Nelson said.

Nelson then explained making documentaries of this magnitude can bring on a number of burdens; not only do you have to tell the story to a new generation, but you also have to make sure all of the facts are correct.

"I feel a burden all the time, trying to tell the story as accurately and entertaining as possible," Nelson said. "Sometimes those two can clash."

The "Black Panthers" film was viewed during the RiverRun Festival for only days, but drew a packed house both times. During

Photos by Erin Mizelle for the Winston-Salem Chronicle
Stanley Nelson is named the 2015 RiverRun International Film Festival Master of Cinema on Friday, April 24, 2015.

the first viewing, a number of members from the Winston-Salem chapter of the Black Panther Party lined the back of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art auditorium.

Among the Panthers in attendance was Larry Little, one of the earliest members who became the leader of the Winston-Salem chapter. Under Little's leadership, the party reached the height of its success. Little was excited to see the film and even thanked Nelson for his work.

"I just want to thank Stanley Nelson, not for just telling our story, but for telling it so accurately," Little said. "I couldn't be more proud of the film."

Little still lives in Winston-Salem and works as an associate professor of political science at Winston-Salem State University.

After the viewing, Little presented Nelson with an official patch from



Photo by Erin Mizelle for the Winston-Salem Chronicle



2015 RiverRun Master of Cinema recipient, producer and director Stanley Nelson, talks about his latest groundbreaking documentary work, "The Black Panthers" Vanguard of the Revolution, during an intimate conversation and Q&A on Friday, April 24, 2015, at the Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts.

the Winston-Salem Chapter of the Black Panthers.

"This is the first time any member of any chapter has presented me with anything," said Nelson. "It gives me great pleasure to

know that I got it right."

Nelson is raising money for the film, which is scheduled to air on PBS in February 2016, through Kickstarter.com.

The site can be viewed

by typing in Panthers.

The fund has raised nearly \$50,000 and will go toward getting the film to theaters.

Unrest

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ered into the ground at Woodlawn, we were upside down. Not only was Freddie dead, but so, too, were hopes for the miracle of peace before justice. The prophetic words of so many speakers did come true, though for reasons unwanted.

"The eyes of this country are all upon us because they want to see whether we've got the stuff to make this right," Murphy said. "The whole world is watching," Jackson echoed.

Indeed Baltimore is in the spotlight, but because of mindless marauders who struck in the hours after Freddie Gray's funeral, diverting attention from what should be the focus. As Jackson said in calling a new generation to the way of nonviolence: "Violence distracts, divides and there is no remedy in violence." Rather than jobs and justice, he said, the focus becomes brick and window.

But those in the purging mood were obviously not in the pews of the New Shiloh Baptist Church, where the rich words of Bryant depicted a too-heroic Freddie Gray, unfortunately signaling that the real Freddie may be replaced by a more perfect Maumau warrior image.

We don't need to go that far in the service of a social justice movement. As Murphy said in his sermonette before the eulogy: "Most of us are not here because we knew Freddie Gray. But we all are here because we know lots of Freddie Grays."

We don't need a perfect Freddie Carlos Gray Jr. to sustain demands for answers in his case and so many others. We must not be distracted by attempts to drag up every unwise decision he made in his too-short life. Nor by the misdirected anger of the marauders.

While an immediate issue is reclaiming this city from the rioters and the cavalry sent in by Gov. [Larry] Hogan, early signs of cooperation among clergy of many faiths, politicians and even gang members is promising. And after that? What is the road ahead? Murphy has a list of reforms that include body cameras for police officers, the establishment of a permanent special prosecutor for police matters and recruitment of more Black and Brown police officers who live in the city.

Michael Eric Dyson, the Georgetown University professor and author, is among those who point to political involvement.

"This is not a passive act," he told Sean Yoes of WEAA-88.9 FM after the funeral. "Politics is an extremely and aggressively engaged performance of our citizenship identity. So folks have got to see: This ain't something we do every four years or every off year. This is something we've got to be involved in daily. If we do that, we can alter the trajectory of justice for us in the cities."

Being a man of the cloth, he would no doubt add prayer, as Murphy did.

Some nights before, at a gathering at the Sharon Baptist Church, not too far from where Freddie Gray spent his last moments of freedom, many prayers were lifted heavenward on the wings of a secular action plan in the

making. One not yet finalized but likely to include what Murphy and Dyson are saying. They had come "not to protest but to have prayer," as the Rev. Errol Gilliard said. But make no mistake: the anger and frustration in the church was no less palpable if more subtly conveyed than that being articulated by the marchers in the streets. In their prayers, however, they snuck in subtle digs at others not present who they thought were hogging the limelight.

Herding sixth-grade boys is probably easier than reining the egos of a city full of ministers of the gospel. But since the infrastructure for leadership among Black Baltimoreans lies in the gazillion houses of worship this city has, someone must at least try. And that sleeping giant — the faith community — must sync its efforts with secular players in politics, academe and the financial world, as well as with the legacy civil rights organizations and the relative newcomers whose fliers are popping up at prayer vigils and rallies.

After Monday's mayhem, there's a whole lot of talking going on.

"We will get through this mess," the dean of preachers in Baltimore, the Rev. A.C.D. Vaughn has assured.

But that was days before the rich words spoken over the casket of Freddie Gray at New Shiloh and before Baltimore turned upside down when kids began to "purge" us of our hopes for peace before justice.

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