

HAMILTON

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Processing I got into the whole digital thing because I didn't have a dark room to print in. Chemicals for the types of processes I use are limited and hard to find. So I went digital. I figured out ways to get the same effects of the dark room on my laptop at home. The more I got into digital the more expressive I became. It's like painting without making a mess.

MC: Okay, What do you do in Dallas?

AH: I am a photographer and graphic designer for a local magazine called *Streets Magazine*, it will be launching on Sept. 1, 2008.

MC: Why did you move?

AH: Well I moved because the dollars were not circulating fast enough for me to pay the rent. The economy was really bad and

I needed to go where I could make money doing what I loved to do. I do miss my city and plan to move back there once my business is a well-oiled machine.

MC: What do you think about the art scene in Detroit?

AH: There are a lot of amazingly talented artists in Detroit but...we need more workshops, studio spaces, more funding and grants for our artists...I see Detroit budding in these areas but not as fast as the artists are leaving the city. Detroit needs to be more accepting and supportive of the arts. It's going to take a village to raise that child!

MC: Where is your work available?

AH: I am doing a photography exhibition in Detroit August 23, 2008 entitled "AFRO GYPSY": A celebration of African American Women.

For more info visit www.myspace.com/nozomilive and www.nozomilive.com.

Hancock

FILMREVIEW

By Dwight Brown

NPRFilm critic

Sometimes playing against type is a smart thing.

Will Smith has built a solid career around a "good guy" persona. He has charm to spare as an actor and person, based on his performances and appearances on TV talk shows where his perky personality sparkles and his bright white teeth glisten. "Men In Black," "Independence Day," "The Pursuit of Happyness," "I, Robot," Smith comes to the rescue more times than an ambulance driver and that predictability was starting to pigeonhole him. Until now...

Hancock (Smith) is a clueless, sardonic, sullen, high-fiving super hero. Sure he uses his powers to save people, but he's crime-fighter

with a bitter aftertaste. He can't rescue a pigeon without destroying a building. After each debacle, he chugs a bottle of booze and retreats into his numbing angst. He could care less, but his antics have frustrated the common man. Even little kids have taken to calling him "A**hole" — to his face!

One day a public relations guy, Ray (Jason Bateman), who's having trouble selling a world peace project to a group of cynical executives, gets stuck in his car on a railroad track. A locomotive approaches. In typical form, at the last second, Hancock saves the day by tossing Ray's late model BMW to safety. It lands on other autos as he stands in front of the train, causing it to crash and leave behind a trail of jumbled railway cars strewn across the landscape.

If there was ever a man in need of a spin-doctor publicist, it's Hancock. And Ray, let's just say grooming this anti-hero would be the apex of his career. When Ray

takes Hancock home to his lovely spouse Mary (Charlize Theron), she is not impressed. But oddly, there's sexual tension between the wife and the interloper. Why? Part of Hancock's image rehabilitation means he has to accept responsibility for his deeds and commit to a jail sentence. Can life behind bars change him?

The film's premise is a stroke of creative genius by screenwriters Vy Vincent Ngo and Vince Gilligan who have concocted a peculiar, engaging love/hate protagonist.

In one telling scene, Hancock is in a bar drinking an innocent woman approaches him with adulation. His response? "I will break my foot off in your a**!" The dark humor, abundance of shockingly funny mishaps and perfectly placed swear words will make you chuckle. Scenes with Hancock inadvertently tearing up the side of a house, crashing cars and tossing a beached whale into the air are brutally sardonic

and depraved, yet you laugh. Just as you settle into the odd blend of humor; pathos takes over. Hancock, a man unable to face his demons, needs fixing. Uncovering his murky past and watching him take control of his life gives the film forward momentum.

Credit Smith for forming a character that seems outside his comfort zone. You believe him when he curses at kids. You laugh when he is in a prison yard facing down hulking inmates who threaten him; he warns two that he will stuff one's head up the other's backside if they don't back down. And when they don't, he follows through, nonchalantly. You will roar with laughter. After the second act, when the film takes a serious turn, Smith pours on the inner drama like a champ.

Hancock is fresh, funny, and innovative. Will Smith has stepped into the darkness and the summer movie season is the beneficiary. Knock 'em dead, Will!

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songs, including "Mississippi Goddam" and "To Be Young Gifted and Black," the latter written in memory of her late friend playwright Lorraine Hansberry.

■ Venerable Detroit Garveyite Henry (Papa) Wells, also known as Anwar Pasha, who was a student of Master W. D. Fard, the mystical founder of the Nation of Islam (NOI) (see gallery).

Nana Akpan had a large three-foot by four-foot photograph on Detroit's famed "Wall of Dignity," a montage of black heroines and heroes on an exterior wall of Grace Episcopal Church on Rosa Parks Boulevard (formerly 12th Street) at Virginia Park.

Filmmaker

In 1969, Detroit activist, actor and black film archivist James E. Wheeler and a friend sold Nana Akpan a rare French Beaulieu 16mm motion picture camera.

"The most important thing for Black people is to develop means to communicate effectively with each other," Nana Akpan wrote in "Exposures In Black." "It is essential that our efforts become as deliberate as possible, and I think that film is one of the most effective means we have to communicate."

In 1972, it appears that Nana Akpan again memorialized Jaramogi Agyeman and the Shrines of the Black Madonna, this time on film.

He is credited, along with James Jewell, with filming an in-depth profile on "Black Christian Nationalism" for "Black Journal," the pioneering PBS black affairs series hosted by former Detroitite Tony Brown, which was broadcast on Nov. 28, 1972.

James Wheeler thinks that Nana Akpan might have used the movie camera that he sold him to film "Kwacha," Nana Akpan's pioneering 1975 documentary on the guerilla struggle to liberate the south-central African nation of Angola from five centuries of colonial domination by Portugal.

The film graphically exposed Portuguese atrocities committed against black Angolans. In highlighting the liberation struggle, the documentary united Nana Akpan's belief in cameras and bullets.

"At that time," says Wheeler, the founder-director of Concept East II and the Black Cinema Gallery, "black filmmakers really weren't doing films like the ones that he did on Africa, which I think were very important," particularly in terms of the "revolutionary struggles."

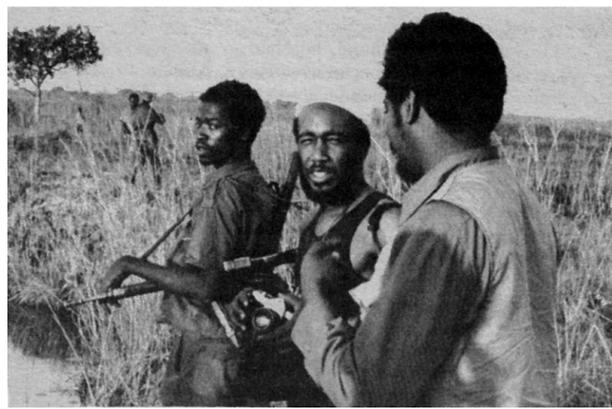
Recalls Vaughn: "He was in the bush" with the guerilla fighters. "It didn't even faze him that he was in danger."

Angolan chameleon

However, Nana Akpan's support of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, or UNITA), one of three ideologically and ethnically diverse Angolan guerilla movements, would create enduring suspicions.

UNITA, which was originally supported by the People's Republic of China, was led by the charismatic Jonas Savimbi.

Charles Simmons, who visited UNITA guerilla camps in 1973 as a reporter for *Muhammad Speaks* observes, "Savimbi was a chameleon of a character who would say different things to different audiences and was able



WEAPONS: Nana Akpan (center) wields his camera while UNITA guerillas (left) brandish their rifles, Bié Province, central Angola, 1973. At right is *Muhammad Speaks* correspondent Charles Simmons. *MUHAMMAD SPEAKS* PHOTO/COURTESY JAMES E. WHEELER

to capture lots of support within the African American community [among those] who did not have access to international perspectives."

For example, Simmons notes, "Savimbi was sophisticated enough to understand what African Americans wanted to hear.

"He was friends with Ché, he was friends with Malcolm," the Angolan leader claimed in exaggeration.

Savimbi was referring to Ernesto (Ché) Guevara, the legendary Argentine-Cuban guerilla leader, who Savimbi met during Guevara's 1964-65 African tour; and Malcolm X, who Savimbi might have met when both attended an Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Cairo, Egypt, in July 1964.

"That was heaven" to some U. S. pan-Africanists, Simmons noted. Many of them "were intelligent and committed and thought that [Savimbi] was clean."

Ed Vaughn, who also supported Savimbi, recalls: "We were convinced that any Africa leader who exposed the concept of pan-Africanism was our friend."

Cloud

However, some of Savimbi's Western admirers felt compelled to reevaluate their race-biased enthusiasm for him after evidence emerged that he had begun to receive financial and military backing from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the then white-minority-ruled government of apartheid South Africa.

Tanzanian President Julius K. Nyerere and Zanzibari revolutionary leader Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu (who had actually been a close friend of Malcolm X) told Simmons that they were "certain that Savimbi was getting support from South African apartheid and U. S. intelligence agencies."

Despite this, Nana Akpan continued to support UNITA, perhaps, as Vaughn suggests, on the basis of British statesman Lord Palmerston's famous political dictum: "Nations [and peoples] have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. Only permanent interests."

During the Reagan administration in the 1980s, Nana Akpan headed the Angola Peace Fund, which, according to Vaughn, was a UNITA front.

Nana Akpan's steadfast, mostly uncritical — if entirely sincere — association with UNITA would strain and, in some cases, completely rupture old political

relationships and haunt his reputation for the balance of his life.

Nevertheless, he continued to be productive. He produced "Liberia—1980—After the Coup," a 30-minute documentary on the bloody overthrow of the corrupt traditional Americo-Liberian government. It was based on films made by Nana Akpan during a visit to the West African nation that was founded by former U. S. slaves.

In assessing Nana Akpan's contributions as a pan-Africanist filmmaker, James Wheeler says that it is significant that he "was working in the media to create positive images of black people" and made a "conscious effort" to refashion the bonds of brother- and sisterhood between peoples of African descent.

Activist

As an activist and community leader, Nana Akpan worked tirelessly for the advancement of Africans throughout the Diaspora. And he did so in style. "He was always neat to the bone," recalls Vaughn.

Nana Akpan was an original member of Forum 65 and Forum 66, a black nationalist discussion group that began at the famous Vaughn's Book Store at 12135 Dexter Ave. at Monterey in 1965. The forums later sponsored the historic first and second annual black arts conferences in 1966 and 1967.

These conclaves, held at Jaramogi Agyeman's Central United Church of Christ, later renamed the Shrine of the Black Madonna, featured a wide variety of local and national black artists and leaders.

These included Turé, his quotable successor as chairman of the militant Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), H. Rap Brown (later known as

Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin), and playwright LeRoi Jones (who would soon be known as Imamu Amiri Baraka).

Portraits of all three were later featured in "Exposures In Black" (see gallery for Brown and Jones photos).

Nana Akpan was also involved in local efforts to reform racist educational institutions. "Kwadwo was with us at Wayne State University during the struggle to develop Black Studies there," recalls friend Herb Boyd, managing editor of The Black World Today Web site.

Nana Akpan was the minister of communications for the Association of Black Students (ABS).

'Oh, my God!'

According to Vaughn, Nana Akpan's activism could be brave to the point of recklessness.

On Saturday, July 22, 1967, Nana Akpan, Vaughn, Kwame Atta (then known as Arthur Smith, or "Smitty," who worked at a Detroit post office branch with Vaughn) and Ken Hamlin (later a conservative radio talk show host who styles himself "The Black Avenger") were detained by police in a suburb outside of Newark, N. J.

They were on their way home from picking up a load of books for Vaughn's bookstore at "Professor" Louis H. Michaux's famous National Memorial African Book Store at black Harlem's most celebrated intersection, Seventh Avenue and 125th Street.

"Jersey City went up that same night," recalls Vaughn, referring to the uprising of that city's black community, "and we could see the smoke and flames rising over the hills."

This was only a week after the much larger rebellion in Newark, where African Americans finally rebelled against police brutality, political exclusion, urban renewal, inadequate housing and other injustices.

In fact, before stopping off in Harlem, Nana Akpan and the others had attended the First National Conference on Black Power, which was held in Newark from July 20-23.

(It was here that Nana Akpan met his first wife, Yoliswa, called "Yola." He featured her on the cover of "Exposures In Black" the following year.)

With Jersey City alight in the distance, the chief of a suburban police department, "with about 15 burly cops with riot guns trained on us," stopped the Detroit group, recalls Vaughn.

Searching the trunk, the chief pulled out the Yusuf Ali translation

of the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book. "Are you boys Muslims?" he asked.

"No, sir, I'm a Christian," Vaughn replied, conscious of the fact that encounters with the police often proved fatal to African Americans.

The chief was next intrigued by "Color Me Brown" by Lucille H. Giles, one of the first black children's coloring books, put out by Johnson Publications.

The chief said that he would like it for his daughter. "Naw, you're not either," Vaughn vividly recalls Nana Akpan replying. "You'll have to pay for it."

"Oh, my God!" Vaughn thought, but the chief dutifully returned it to the trunk. "Kwadwo was so stern when he told him," Vaughn recalls with an amazed chuckle.

The next day, a Sunday, Detroit erupted in a rebellion that dwarfed all others, and wouldn't be surpassed until African Americans in Los Angeles exploded a quarter-century later, in 1992.

Pan-Africanist

In the 1970s, Nana Akpan was a member of the central committee of the Detroit-based Pan African Congress, U. S. A. (PAC), which sought the unification of Africans worldwide.

The PAC was organized in 1969 by Vaughn and Kwame Atta in the original Inner City Sub Center on Mack Avenue on Detroit's east side. "[Nana Akpan] didn't join at first," recalls Vaughn. "He was always inquisitive about stuff" and only joined the PAC "after investigating it."

Nana Akpan edited many of the PAC's publications, including "The Pan African Congress U. S. A." pamphlet, which featured a Sankofa bird, an Akan symbol from Ghana, on its cover.

"He was always very technical and wanted to make sure that we didn't put out anything that wasn't first class," remembers Vaughn. Because of this, "we didn't put out anything that wasn't professional."

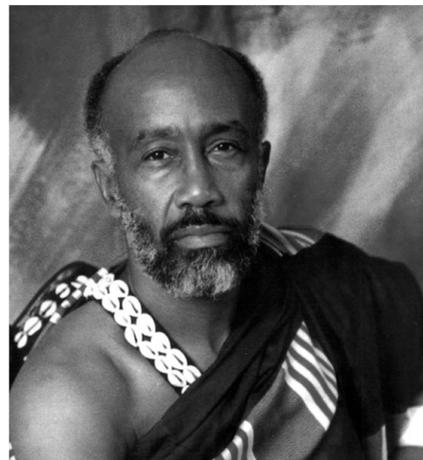
Nana Akpan was also well versed in the ideologies of pan-African thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, the visionary independence father and first president of the West African nation of Ghana; Ahmed

Sékou Touré, the regal trades-union-leader-turned-president of Guinea, also in West Africa; and Julius Nyerere.

"[Nana Akpan] was the guiding force in terms of the ideology" of the PAC, says Vaughn.

Homeland

In 1965, the pan-Africanist Nana Akpan resettled in Ghana, where he was a co-founder of Fihankra



Recent portrait. COURTESY SHARON SIMMONS

International, a community of African Americans who were granted land by the Ghanaian government.

Fihankra, located in eastern Ghana near the banks of the Volta River between Accra, the capital, and Tema, the main seaport, describes itself as a "Bridge to Land, Tradition and Opportunity." As a sign of respect, Nana Akpan was entooled as chief of Ye Fa Ogyamu, the historical township near Akosombo.

Vaughn credits him as the "prime mover" behind the Ghanaian government's granting of dual citizenship to African Americans.

Although the law felt short of some African American's hopes, granting limited rights instead of full citizenship, Nana Akpan hailed its potential.

"...each step forward moves us closer to our goal of re-integrating Africa with its Diaspora," he said. "Toward that objective, this law is a most significant step ahead while there will be continued dialogue to further improve relations between Diasporans and the government of Ghana."

He traveled often to the U. S. to promote better pan-African relations. In June of last year, he addressed the 1st Annual NAACP Alabama State Conference Economic Development Summit On Africa, arranged by Vaughn and Dr. John Alford in Montgomery and Dothan, Ala.

Burial will be in Akosombo. Nana Akpan leaves to mourn him his courageous wife, Majewa Akpan; eight children, Ewunike, Sanwimbila, Adwoa, Osakwe, Aziza, Afriyie, Osonose and Isiko Akpan; two foster sons, Richard and Narciss Miller; four grandchildren, Maia, Nkosi, Nala Akpan, and Anthony Flowers; two brothers, Phillip and Stephen Simmons; his loving parents, Gerald L. Simmons, Sr., and Theresa S. Simmons; two sisters, Sharon Simmons-Lofton and Valerie (Simmons) Tyler; many nieces and nephews; and a host of friends and admirers throughout the pan-African world.

Memorial service to be held at a later date

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TRI-X and BULLETS By Kwadwo Akpan

Black photographer -
Man, is that camera
loaded with Tri-X and bullets?
Can you press the shutter
release to cut crew cuts of
bastard cops that fall below
their necks?
F stops
Brother do you have F stops
that turn blindness
into perception
lies into Blackness?
Can I see challenge the beauty challenge
within my people, myself.
Can your camera mirror the agony mirror
the beauty mirror, of being Black?

Camera, weapon -
in my arsenal
let me advance the film
to shoot
to expose
to expose
that white motherfucker in his
cavited empty soul and make
him spit blood, out, blood out spill.
Double exposed -
Camera dig deep camera arsenal
into his slimy flesh
with poisoned darts
to kill.
And in reality.

— From "Exposures In Black" (1968)