



30 March 2007

07/11

## 100 Black Screen Icons: Who is the greatest?

Who are the leading personalities who have shaped the world of black film? Which black directors, actors, writers, and technical innovators have been most influential in shaping film and television? **100 Black Screen Icons** is a unique website that sheds light on 100 of the most significant black personalities in film and television and asks visitors to vote on their favourite in four different categories.

Launched today by Every Generation Media and the BFI, and sponsored by the UK Film Council and the BBC, 100 Black Screen Icons promotes and celebrates black creative screen talent from the African Diaspora and aims to educate and engage audiences from all backgrounds and ethnicities.

In the first-ever online poll of its kind, 100 Black Screen Icons features international personalities ranging from bankable stars such as **Denzel Washington** and **Halle Berry** to the critically heralded, like **Ousmane Sembene** and **Oscar Micheaux**, as well as developing talent exemplified by British actors **Ashley Walters**, **Sophie Okonedo**, **Marianne Jean-Baptiste** and **Adrian Lester**. Recognising those who have broken ground in terms of innovation, craftsmanship and style, the website is interactive, highly educational and entertaining.

Every Generation Media has an impressive track record in putting similar online polls together, including 100 Great Black Britons – launched in response to a poll of 100 Great Britons which failed to include a single black nominee. The poll is a continuation of the BFI's earlier and tremendously influential Black World project that organised over 40 national projects and events such as local and national film seasons, film and DVD releases, education projects, workshops, and mixed-media music and film events.

Amanda Nevill, BFI Director, said: 'We believe the 100 Black Screen Icons website will not only promote the cultural and creative importance of black professionals in film and television, but will also inspire young people globally in the future to pursue a career in film and television.'

'It is our hope that the website will become a definitive guide to black film, as well as an educational learning resource and entertaining medium which can reach a huge range of audiences all over the world.'

The nominations list has been compiled with the help of an expert panel of film practitioners, and includes directors, actors, writers and technical innovators, and covers film and television genres and eras from the past 100 years. The nominees come from UK, Europe, North America, Africa and the Caribbean.

Over a three-month voting period, the public will be asked to choose their favourite Black Screen Icon, as well as other categories including Best All Time Film and Best Black British Talent. There will also be a category for People's Choice where icons outside the main 100 list can be nominated by members of the public.

Patrick Vernon, Publisher of Every Generation Media, said: 'Black actors and directors have contributed enormously to film and television in the UK and globally. We are proud to have a significant number of elder statespeople from the world of film, such as **Hattie McDaniel**, **Angela Bassett** and **Paul Robeson** as well as representation from the increasing number of black British actors who are now breaking through in Hollywood, and directors and actors who have made a significant mark in the UK, such as **John Akomfrah**, **Cathy Tyson** and **Lennie James**.

'Recognising those who have broken ground in terms of innovation, craftsmanship and style, 100 Black Screen Icons is a landmark in celebrating the achievements of this important and culturally significant group of nominees.'

**[www.100blackscreenicons.com](http://www.100blackscreenicons.com)**  
**[www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)**  
**[www.everygeneration.co.uk](http://www.everygeneration.co.uk)**

**- ends -**

For more information please contact:

Richard Adershiyan

07956 106627

[richard.adershiyan@lineone.net](mailto:richard.adershiyan@lineone.net)

Claire O'Brien

020 7957 8993

[claire.obrien@bfi.org.uk](mailto:claire.obrien@bfi.org.uk)

### **Notes to Editors**

#### **Comment from 100 BSI nominee and director Euzhan Palcy**

Martinique-born Euzhan Palcy was the first black woman to direct a major Hollywood film – *A Dry White Season* – in 1989. During a recent trip to London as part of her film retrospective at the National Maritime Museum, she made the following observations on film-making, Hollywood and 100 Black Screen Icons.

*On the challenges facing black film-makers today:*

When they called me [to Hollywood], I went there saying to myself that I am who I am and didn't want to compromise. I had the most fantastic experience there because I worked with six studios and they did not disrespect me, I always made my point and they were receptive to what I

had to say. I worked with Disney, Paramount, Fox Studio and MGM and was always included in decisions on the final cut. I always had good relationships with the heads of studio and the executives.

*On what happens when Hollywood comes calling:*

We are working hard to tell the story we want to tell, but the studio – being the studio – it is not that easy. We are still struggling to get the money to make those films. If you work with Hollywood you can't tell your story, you tell their story. When you bring your story to them, they take it and turn it into their story. It is very hard, but the way I was able to go through it was because I was Caribbean European. I was able to be very vocal and negotiate because I was an outsider.

*On directing Marlon Brando, Donald Sutherland, Susan Sarandon and Janet Suzman in A Dry White Season:*

Working with them was a big challenge for me because I had just come from an independent film (*Sugar Cane Alley*). It was great working with them and I treated people equally whether they were big stars or small. That's been the same for every movie I have ever made. Brando always had a reputation of being difficult man to work with, but we had a great experience.

*Her own Black Icon?*

Paul Robeson, because he was a complete artist. He was an actor, director and as person he was a militant, he fought so hard for the black man for his image on screen and theatres, and he suffered so much. It is difficult to have just one, as I also respect the work of Gordon Parks, Oscar Micheaux, Ousmane Sembane and Spencer Williams.

*And her advice to young film-makers?*

Be strong and fight for what you believe is right. Don't let anybody side-track you from your focus. Always remember that as a black film-maker you have a mission, like it or not. There will be thousands of black kids looking for your movies and wanting to see themselves in your films.

## **BFI**

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archive, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

## **Every Generation Media**

An online community resource for empowering and influencing the black community through history, family genealogy and heritage.

## **Acknowledgements**

With special thanks to the BBC and the UK Film Council for their support.

