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# LA WEEKLY

FILM

## NEVER FORGET

*Rwanda revisited, Leimert Park mourned at PAFF 2007*

BY ERNEST HARDY

Wednesday, February 7, 2007 - 6:00 pm



African voices: *A Sunday in Kigali*

As it has for the past few years, the 1994 Rwandan genocide casts a shadow over the programming in this year's Pan African Film Festival. The opening-night film, *Rwanda Rising*, discretely keeps the blood and gore of that tragedy limited to the spoken reminiscences of its interview subjects. Gone are the graphic photos and news footage that have been employed by other documentaries and fiction films on the subject. That choice seems to have less to do with the filmmakers' concern that those images might have lost some of their power through repetition than with their reluctance to mar a sales pitch. Andrew Young, civil rights icon and elder statesman of American politics, produced the film (he'll also be present on opening night to receive a lifetime achievement award), and though it's easy enough to believe him when he says he loves Rwanda and its people, *Rwanda Rising* has more than a slight air of hucksterism to it. It plays like an infomercial in which the proof that the country has

rebounded from its nightmare lies not just in the acts of grace and forgiveness between former victims and villains, but in the heavily touted fact that Rwanda is now an economic climate as fertile as the rich soil.

*Rwanda Rising* has the hypercrisp look and feel of those old late-night TV ads featuring Cher and friends touting hair-care products. Replace Cher's buddies with some of Young's high-powered pals—former President Clinton and Quincy Jones among them, both shot as though director C.B. Hackworth had carefully studied the manual *Vaseline & Gauze: How to Film Aging Divas* and add in some tourist ad imagery (Young speaking on a hotel terrace, lush, rolling hills behind him) and you just about have this film. To top it all off, lob some appallingly softball questions at Clinton, who claims his ignoring of the genocide when it was happening is his single greatest regret about his presidency, and a Rwandan businessman who, when asked to assess his country now, points to a bustling marketplace and beams, "People are buying stuff. I think it's fantastic."

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by Christopher O' Riley

WORLD PREMIERE

UCLA Live Fri, Feb 16 at 8pm • Royce Hall

The flip side to the idea of capitalism as curative is found in Jeannette Lindsay's *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South-Central*. Offering a brief but informative overview of how the park—once an all-white neighborhood—evolved into one of L.A.'s most vibrant black neighborhoods and internationally known arts enclaves, Lindsay's film, like its subject, starts as one thing and ends up something else altogether. For the first third or so, it's filled with wonderful locals whose commentary and warm personalities pull you in. Then, the film starts to meander a bit, and it's only at the end, when Lindsay lets her camera linger on

abandoned shops and For Rent signs, that you understand why she hasn't been more judicious in her editing. We see how the area has become a victim of its own grass-roots success, having attracted the attention of short-sighted politicians and businessmen who raise rents, redesign the park without input from residences, and dream of turning the area into another Third Street Promenade. And thus a film that begins as a love letter ends as a eulogy.

Fleshing out the highlights of this first week's programming is the wonderful *Live and Become*, the story of a young Christian Ethiopian boy who pretends to be a Falasha (Ethiopian Jew) in order to be airlifted from a Sudanese refugee camp to live in Israel. Tormented from childhood through adulthood by the fear that his secret will be discovered, he becomes more Jewish than his adoptive family, while battling racism and a crushing depression over leaving his birth mother behind. It's a moving film, wise to both intimate family dynamics and the large-scale conflicts that roil the world.



*Rwanda Rising*

The PAFF also highlights films from last year that were already released theatrically (including Phillip Noyces *Catch a Fire* and Rachid Boucharebs *Days of Glory*), as well as audience favorites from past festivals (including Djibril Diop Mambety's *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* and Peter Chappell and Catherine Peix's *The Origin of AIDS*).

#### **Also Recommended:**

*A Sunday in Kigali*, in which a white Frenchman returns to post-genocide Rwanda to look for the black waitress with whom he fell in love, and who was mistaken for being a Tutsi. Fantastic acting and smart writing overcome flashbacks and flash-forwards that are, initially, a little confusing.

*Wu: The Story of the Wu-Tang Clan*, directed by Gerald K. Barclay, who has been down with Wu since the start of their career (having shot their earliest music videos). His camaraderie with the group (as well as some great rare archival footage) makes this look at one of hip-hop's most influential and revered groups a must-see for fans and a great introduction for the merely curious.

*The DL Chronicles*, a selection of episodes from the cult TV series, which despite its lamentably dated name and over-mined subject matter, presents a fairly engrossing look at the romance between a closet case and his openly gay lover. Though not as caffeinated as the similar *Noahs Arc*, *DL* has stronger writing and stronger acting from its leads.

**THE 15TH ANNUAL PAN AFRICAN FILM FESTIVAL** | AMC Magic Johnson Theatres and other local venues | Through February 19 | [www.paff.org](http://www.paff.org)