

Jim Pines Author and lecturer

Black filmmakers in three continents paid tribute to Jim Pines upon hearing of his death on 2 March.

Jim, a dear friend and collaborator in the field of film and film studies, was known for championing Black and Third Cinema both at the British Film Institute where he worked since the mid 1970s, including a few years curating and staging a number of film festivals at the Commonwealth Institute. These included programmes such as the Ghana Film Week and the Nigeria Film Week, and where he co-organised the African American Film Festival in 1982 with Parminder Vir. Jim continued working between the two institutions for many years until he moved into academia at the University of Luton in 1994.

At the BFI, Jim was one of the stalwarts of film education providing solid educational publications, programming at the National Film Theatre and providing programming support for regional film theatres. His role and his knowledge was what the BFI called pan-institute, during the time of Anthony Smith.

But Jim's skills and passion was for teaching, sharing knowledge and providing support for those at the time determined to engage in Black film, African cinema and Third Cinema, that fitted very much the era of challenging conventions in and supporting and encouraging new approaches to film from sectors that he could see had so much to offer new and enriching voices in cinema – after all this was the 1980s and the Black Film workshops were determined to make their mark and Jim encouraged and supported many of them.

Together with his BFI colleague and collaborator in

film education, Paul Willemsen, Jim staged the major Third Cinema Conference in Edinburgh in 1986, an international event with key film scholars from a number of continents – which was the source of a range of publications that provided a bedrock of work for learning more and engaging with these film movements that encouraged exploration and supported new film languages born of experimental and convention-shifting approaches to filmmaking.

Jim, an African-American US citizen, was profoundly influenced by the black civil rights movement of the 1960s. Jim was born in 1945 in Boston Massachusetts. He spent his entire childhood in foster care, and in 1963 he heard Martin Luther King's speech, *I have a dream*, and was profoundly influenced by it. He read James Baldwin and books on the black civil rights leaders. Jim refused to accept what the racist American society expected for him. While at school he had won the National Science Foundation State Prize, and confounded others' low expectations of him by applying to do a degree. But when the college turned him down because of his "cultural background" he concluded that America had nothing to offer him. On 5 October 1965 before the age of 20 he bought a one-way ticket to London, England.

It was his award-winning science background that landed him his first job at the British Film Institute as technical officer, a job that enabled him to view huge numbers of films, develop his thinking on black film, and begin writing on the subject.

In June 1971 he wrote a 24-page essay called *Blacks in the Cinema: The changing image*, which accompanied the NFT film season of the same name. In his essay he



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wrote: "The black media-image serves a purpose; and once that purpose is understood, one can disrupt the system producing it."

His first book, in 1975, was *Blacks in Films: A survey of racial themes and images in the American film*. He discussed the ways in which films create racial images, and the various elements cinema employs to create racial myths and conceptions about black people.

Later that year the London School of Economics accepted his application to do a BSc (Hons) in Social Anthropology. He graduated in 1978. So having been turned down by an ordinary US college, he had gone on to graduate with a degree from one of the top universities in

the world.

For me, much of what Jim encouraged me to do in the field of black film and some of what Jim himself produced, can be found in the film and educational resource centres far and wide as many who have studied film can attest.

In the late '80s Jim commissioned me to produce at the BFI two editions of the *Black Film and Video List* – an aid to programmers who wanted to engage with black film, listing titles and indicating where they could be found – this was of course the pre-digital era. Jim himself produced teaching and study publications entitled *Blacks in British Cinema* and *Blacks in American cinema*. He

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Jim Pines (continued)

co-authored many seminal publications: these included editing *Questions of Third Cinema* with his great friend Paul Willemen which was named the outstanding academic book of 1990 by the Association of College and Research Libraries in the USA.

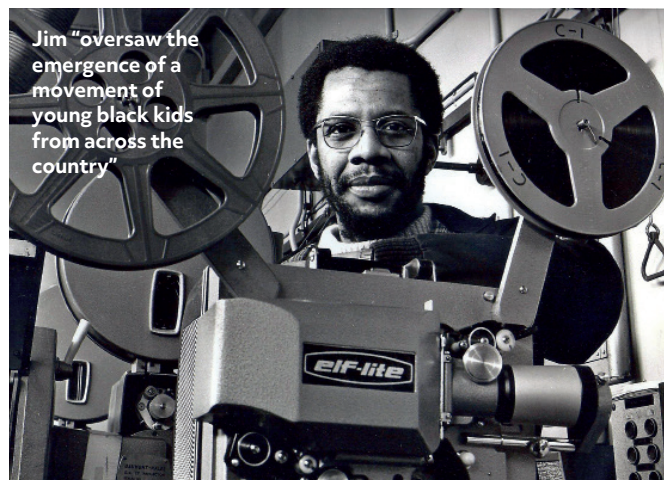
Also with Paul for several years he co-edited the independent British critical film journal *Framework*. He wrote *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* to accompany the television series. He appeared on BBC Radio 4 and the World Service. He presented a Channel 4 series called *Cinema from Three Continents* in 1989.

But his voice was also prominent at major cultural and educational events, one example where he chaired the film panel at the first and iconic Black and Third World

Book Fair, set up by Jessica and Eric Huntley who ran the Bogle Overture Bookshop with John La Rose and New Beacon Books. It was a major international gathering of cultural activists, all forms of artists in every sphere, writers and performers providing some of the richest gatherings of those decades. Jim eloquently chaired the panel which included Horace Ove, Yvonne Brewster, Lionel Ngakane, Chris Laird and Diane Abbot.

A couple of decades later he was to chair another film panel at the Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas conference, held at the NFT as part of a pan-institute initiative of the African Caribbean Unit's Africa '95 National Festival of African Art in the UK.

Sir John Akomfrah recalled that he first went to see Jim in 1982 after John and colleagues had formed the



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Black Audio Film Collective; they had been turned down for funding by the Arts Council and by the BFI and so they asked Jim what they should do.

John says: "That began a kind of dialogue with him that lasted I think about 12 years. And in that 12 years he oversaw the emergence of a movement of young black kids from across the country, all of whom could call him up, and say 'I'm in Huddersfield and I want to set up a black film group, what do you think I should do?' and he'd always have time for you. He'd always find the space for you." That

Jim had left America and come to London because of the racism he had faced "makes him feel even more significant, that he found a way of helping us, when he could have quite easily spent his time helping himself.

"He will be missed. His role in our evolution is immeasurable and incalculable and I'm very very grateful that I knew him."

Jim Pines died after 13 years of living with an aggressive form of MS, cared for at home by his loving wife Janice Turner and their son James.

June Givanni

At the BFI, Jim was one of the stalwarts of film education