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Second International 'AfroGEEKS' Conference to Examine Technological Innovation in Africa and the African Diaspora

Because many black communities throughout the world are denied full access to the power of new technologies by poverty, politics, poor education, and other barriers, it is easy to assume that most of the world's black peoples are on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Easy, perhaps, but also incorrect, said Anna Everett, director of UC Santa Barbara's Center for Black Studies and organizer of AfroGEEKS 2005: Global Blackness and the Digital Public Sphere, an international conference to examine the wide array of black innovation and artistry on the cutting edge of new technology.

Everett, who is also a professor of film studies at UCSB, acknowledges that the problems that keep some black communities technologically disadvantaged must be kept in the public eye to make sure that solutions will be found. But attention should also be focused on black people who already have bridged the divide in important ways and are leaders in various technology fields.

"We know there are problems," Everett said. "There is no getting around it. But what we are saying is there is a parallel reality of high achievement and that parallel

reality has to be brought into the picture."

Hence, AfroGEEKS, whose artists, musicians, scholars and engineers will tell their tales of excellence Thursday May 19 through Saturday May 21 in UCSB's Corwin Pavilion.

The public is invited. Admission is free, and pre-registration is recommended, though not required. Registration information, as well as a complete schedule, can be found on the conference Web site, www.afrogeeks.com.

AfroGEEKS, organized by UCSB's Center for Black Studies, made a highly successful debut last year.

Everett said this year's program is even more impressive, thanks in large part to a grant from the Ford Foundation.

The Center also received major support from media co-sponsor KPFK radio in Los Angeles as well as UCSB offices and departments.

The conference begins at 2 p.m. Thursday, May 19 with a panel discussion of "E-Rastas: AfroGEEKS and the Afro-Latin Diaspora." It resumes at 9 a.m. on Friday and Saturday and concludes at 4:30 p.m. Saturday with Everett moderating a panel discussion of "Digitizing the Motherland #2."

In between will be a variety of panels, performances, and displays of art and technology.

"There is something for everybody at this conference," Everett said. "They can expect to see a spectacular array of sensory experiences, including electronic music, spoken word, and art, but also some serious scholarship on the intersection of technology, society, and culture."

Among the speakers will be Patrick Awuah, founder of a computer sciences university in Ghana; Llynn Taylor, owner of a South African recording company referred to as the African Motown; George Lewis, a trombonist, composer and computer installation artist, and winner of a 2002 MacArthur "genius" Fellowship; artists Mendi and Keith Obadike, and Skip Ellis, whose Ph.D in 1969 from the University of Illinois is believed to be the first ever awarded an African-American in computer science.

Panel titles include "Decolonizing Black Cyerbodies,"

"Emerging Cyber Nationalisms," "Rural Connectives: Networking the African Village," "Performing Digital Blackness," "Digital Art at the AfroGEEK Interface," and "Geek Speak: Decipherin' Digital Hieroglyphs."

"We want to encourage people to attend this groundbreaking event because here is some good news coming out of Africa, for a change," Everett said. " This is a place to see Africa as a part of the information economy, the information society, and as a leader in information adoption and innovation. It's going to be fabulous."

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