

## FOLK

### skip mason jr. says, dig this!

Ever check out those old black-and-white photos your grandparents have and wonder who *are* those people? You may have moved right past them, but Herman "Skip" Mason Jr. didn't. He began a quest to trace his family lineage. And it's paying off.

In 1989, Mason, at 27, founded Digging It Up, an Atlanta, GA-based research and consulting firm specializing in genealogical research and Black memorabilia. If you've checked out Spike Lee's film *School Daze*—in particular, the montage of old photographs in the opening scene—then you've seen Mason's work.

"It was hard for me to believe that Spike wanted me to help with the film. I was awestruck," says Mason. But there's more. After quitting his full-time job of six years, Mason decided to put together his first book, *Going Against the Wind* (Longstreet Press, \$29.95), a collection of photographs and a chronology of Black Atlanta from antebellum days to the present. "I decided to step out on faith to pursue my dreams," he says. "Isn't that what life is all about?"

His scheduled second book, *They Shook, Rattled and Rolled*, is another historical document detailing the early days of Atlanta's entertainment industry.

"My interest in history began when I was 14. After having watched *Roots*, I became curious about my own family ancestry," says Mason. "Alex Haley became my unofficial mentor. I was able to trace my maternal lineage to my fifth great-grandmother. My third great-grandmother is pictured in my brochures. I have found that by offering a photograph, one

actually preserves a moment in time that would have otherwise been lost."

Further exploring his interest in African American genealogy, Skip began working as an archivist/researcher for the Atlanta Fulton County Public Library.

"The impact of *Roots* on Skip was profound," says Mrs. Jacquelyne Burke, Mason's 12th-grade teacher at Therrell High School in Atlanta. "He was like a phoenix rising from the ashes, using his time and energy to research his family and offering assistance to other students who wanted to trace their roots."

In addition to research, Digging It Up offers Shakari Greeting Cards, family reunion planning and tours of Black Atlanta.

"Within the next seven years, we plan to be a major national conglomerate [specializing] in African American research and preservation," says Mason.

A graduate of Morris Brown College in Atlanta, GA, Mason is



well on his way. He is currently working on a television miniseries with actor Ossie Davis and on a screenplay based on the life of the first Black middleweight boxing champion, Tiger Flowers. Digging It Up is also providing research and consultation for Southern Bell telephone company and Athlete's Attic, a clothing store chain.

Where does Mason, now 31, get the motivation to travel this road? "It all comes from within. I have a vision and a dream, and it's going to come to fruition."

—mike weaver

mason digs his past and makes plans for the future.

## culture corner

Out of the mouth of Mother Africa spilled stories that flowed musically into the ears of Her children. Our foremothers and fathers brought the oral tradition of storytelling to America and folks like Anita Jones are carrying on the tradition.

Today, storytelling reaches a new generation. With organizations such as the National Association for the Preservation of Storytelling (NAPS) and the National Association of Black Storytelling (NABS), and storytellers like Jones, the oral tradition is kept alive. Jones performs her works for children and adults using drama and afrocentric props.

"Other wealthier cultures handed down heirlooms, land and money," says Jones. "With storytelling, we were handed a way of surviving—a link back to Africa."

To contact Anita Jones, call 415-485-6994. NAPS: 1-800-525-4514. NABS: write to P.O. Box 67722, Baltimore, MD 21215.

—marcia caster



anita jones tells it like it was and teaches others how to as well.