

Biography

Van Hayden, has worked in film and television production for the past 35 years, primarily as a 1st Assistant Director, on shows including: *Genius MLK/X*; The upcoming series *Fight Night*; *The Piano Lesson*; The Whitney Houston biopic, *I Wanna Dance With Somebody*; The Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect*; *Hustle & Flow*; *Barbershop 3*; *Real Husbands of Hollywood*; *Kids*; *Oprah Winfrey Presents: Their Eyes Were Watching God*; *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*; *Let's Go to Prison*; *Stonewall*; *But, I'm A Cheerleader*; and *Project Greenlight*.

Hayden began his production career in the Fall of 1989, when he drove from his native Minneapolis to Brooklyn, New York, to intern on the set of Spike Lee's fourth feature film *Mo' Better Blues*. After production ended on the film, Lee hired Hayden to work at the filmmaker's Brooklyn-based production headquarters, 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks, where Hayden assisted with the sales and promotion of Lee's prodigious line of film merchandise, traveled with Lee to more than 20 college speaking engagements across North America and worked as a Production Assistant on Lee's fifth and sixth feature films *Jungle Fever* and *Malcolm X*, respectively. During the five years that followed, Hayden continued to gain invaluable experience, working as Lee's Assistant Director on commercials for national brands such as Nike, Diet Coke; Levi's Button-fly Jeans.

Before relocating from Brooklyn to Los Angeles at the end of 1995, Hayden worked as the 1st Assistant Director on Director Larry Clark's seminal film *KIDS* and British Director Nigel Finch's final film *Stonewall*, Produced by Killer Films' Christine Vachon, Lauren Zalaznick and Pam Koffler.

After arriving in Los Angeles, Hayden went on to work on more than 70 feature films, television shows, commercials and music videos, which included collaborations with Writer-Director-Actor Bob Odenkirk (*Melvin Goes to Dinner*, *Let's Go to Prison*, *The Brothers Solomon*, and pilot for *Let's Do This* for Adult Swim). Hayden also worked with veteran television Showrunner Ralph Farquar, Producer Jesse Collins, Directors Stan Lathan and Christopher Robinson, on more than 50 episodes, spanning all five seasons of Writer-Producer-Comedian Kevin Hart's faux-reality comedy series, *Real Husbands of Hollywood*. Hayden and Robinson continued their collaboration, on the Chicago-based social drama *Beats*, *The Climb*, and musical performances by Usher and Alicia Keys.

For more than two decades, Hayden has also partnered with Producer Effie Brown on more than a dozen productions including, *Dear White People*, *Rocket Science*, HBO's *Stranger Inside* and the fourth installment of the network's acclaimed, behind-the-scenes series *Project Greenlight*.

In 2000, Hayden joined the Directors Guild of America, where he was elected and re-elected to serve as a Co-Chair of The Guild's African American Steering Committee; The Guild's A.D./UPM Council; Became a founding member of The Guild's 1st A.D. Committee; And named three times to The Guild's National Negotiating Committee.

Hayden was part of the Director's Team, nominated for the prestigious Directors Guild of America's Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Television Drama. For *Oprah Winfrey Presents: Their Eyes Were Watching God*; And the biopic *Witney*, the latter Directed by Angela Bassett. In 2018 Hayden was honored with the Third Annual Baron Jay Foundation, Trailblazer Award, for his outreach, development of and commitment to supporting the next generation of filmmakers and storytellers from under-represented communities.

Prior to his career in film and television production, Hayden attended The University of Minnesota, majoring in Journalism and Political Science; Worked as a summer intern at *The Philadelphia Daily News*, *New York Newsday*, and *The Associated Press*. While attending The University of Minnesota, Hayden wrote for *The Minnesota Daily*, where he covered environmental issues and the Minneapolis City Council, before being named News Editor and Associate Managing Editor. While interning at *The Daily News* in 1985, Hayden won a Regional Spot News Reporting Award from Sigma Delta Chi, The Society of Professional Journalists, for his story chronicling the successful search for a Massachusetts man, in need of a life-saving kidney transplant, amid the crowd of 100,000 revelers, attending the legendary LIVE AID, Concert For African Famine Relief, at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia.

For the past decade, Hayden has served as a judge for the annual Pan-African Film Festival in Los Angeles. In 2018, He relocated from Los Angeles to Minneapolis, where for the past six years, he has served as Secretary and Co-Chair of the Minnesota Film & Television Board of Directors. In 2024, he was elected President of The Minnesota Film Alliance.