



# David Oyelowo

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**David Oyetokunbo Oyelowo**, OBE (/oʊˈjɛloʊwoʊ/ *oh-YEL-oh-woh*<sup>[1]</sup> born 1 April 1976)<sup>[2]</sup> is a British-Nigerian actor and producer.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

Perhaps his highest-profile role to date was as Martin Luther King Jr. in the American biographical drama film *Selma* (2014). He also took the lead role in *A United Kingdom* (2016) as well as playing the role of a chess coach in *Queen of Katwe* (2016). He has played supporting roles in the films *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), *Middle of Nowhere* (2012), *Lincoln* (2012), and garnered praise for portraying Louis Gaines in *The Butler* (2013). On television, he played MI5 officer Danny Hunter on the British drama series *Spooks* (2002–04).

## Early life

Oyelowo was born in Oxford, England,<sup>[5]</sup> to Nigerian parents<sup>[6]</sup> of Yoruba ethnicity.<sup>[7]</sup> He was brought up as a Baptist.<sup>[8]</sup> He grew up in Tooting Bec until he was six, when his family moved to Lagos,<sup>[9]</sup> Nigeria, where his father Stephen<sup>[8]</sup> worked for the national airline and mother for a railway company. David attended a "'military-style' boarding school".<sup>[8]</sup> They returned to London when Oyelowo was fourteen,<sup>[10][11]</sup> settling in Islington.<sup>[8]</sup>

While enrolled in theatre studies at City and Islington College, his teacher suggested that he become an actor. Oyelowo enrolled for a year in an art foundation course, at the London Academy of Music

### David Oyelowo

OBE



Oyelowo in January 2015

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Born</b>                      | <span>David Oyetokunbo Oyelowo</span> <div><span></span></div> 1 April 1976 <div><span></span></div> <span>Oxford, <span>Oxfordshire</span>, <span>England</span></span> |
| <b>Nationality</b>               | <span>British</span> / <span>Nigerian</span>   |
| <b>Education</b>                 | <span>City and Islington College</span>  |
| <b>Alma<span> </span>mater</b>   | <span>London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art</span>  |
| <b>Occupation(s)</b>             | Actor, producer  |
| <b>Years<span> </span>active</b> | 1998–present   |
| <b>Spouse</b>                    | <span><span>Jessica Watson</span> (<span>m.</span><span> </span>1998)</span>   |
| <b>Children</b>                  | 4  |

and Dramatic Art (LAMDA).<sup>[11]</sup> He finished his three-year training in 1998.<sup>[12]</sup> He also spent time with the National Youth Theatre.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Career

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### Stage

He began his stage career in 1999 when he was offered a season with the Royal Shakespeare Company playing roles in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, as the title character in *Oroonoko* (which he also performed in the BBC radio adaptation) and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1999) alongside Guy Henry, Frances de la Tour and Alan Bates. However, he is best known for his next stage performance as King Henry VI<sup>[9]</sup> in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2001 productions of Shakespeare's trilogy of plays about the king as a part of its season *This England: The Histories*. In a major landmark for colour-blind casting, Oyelowo was the first black actor to play an English king in a major production of Shakespeare, and although this casting choice was initially criticised by some in the media, Oyelowo's performance was critically acclaimed and later won the 2001 Ian Charleson Award for best performance by an actor under 30 in a classical play.

In 2005, he appeared in a production of *Prometheus Bound*, which was revived in New York City in 2007. In 2006, he made his directorial debut on a production of *The White Devil*, produced by Inservice, his theatre company in Brighton which is co-run with fellow Brighton-based actors Priyanga Burford, Israel Aduramo, Penelope Cobbud, and his wife, Jessica.<sup>[14]</sup> He played the title role in *Othello* in 2016 at the New York Theatre Workshop with Daniel Craig as Iago, directed by Sam Gold.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Television

Oyelowo is best known for playing MI5 officer Danny Hunter on the British drama series *Spooks* (known in North America as *MI-5*) from 2002 to 2004. He had before that appeared in *Tomorrow La Scala* (2002), *Maisie Raine* (1998) and *Brothers and Sisters* (1998). Soon after the end of his time on *Spooks* Oyelowo made a cameo appearance in the Christmas special of *As Time Goes By* (2005). In 2006, he appeared in the television film *Born Equal* alongside Nikki Amuka-Bird as a couple fleeing persecution in Nigeria – they also both appeared in *Shoot the Messenger* (2006), and in *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (2008) as a husband and wife. Other cameos have included *Mayo* (guest-starring on 30 April 2006) and the television film *Sweet Nothing in My Ear* (2008, as defence attorney Leonard Grisham), while he has played recurring or main characters on *Five Days* (2007) and *The Passion* (2008, as Joseph of Arimathea).

In December 2009, he played the leading role of Gilbert in the BBC TV adaptation of Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island*.<sup>[16]</sup> In March 2010, he played the role of Keme Tobodo in the BBC's drama series *Blood and Oil*.<sup>[17]</sup>

He starred in the HBO original film *Nightingale* (2014).

### Voice acting

He appeared as Olaudah Equiano in *Grace Unshackled – The Olaudah Equiano Story*, a radio play adapting Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. This was first broadcast on BBC 7 on 8 April 2007, with his wife Jessica Oyelowo as Mrs. Equiano.

In 2007, Oyelowo was the reader for John le Carré's *The Mission Song*. AudioFile magazine stated: "Think of David Oyelowo as a single musician playing all the instruments in a symphony. That is essentially what he manages in this inspired performance of John le Carré's suspense novel.... Can it really have been only one man in the narrator's recording booth? This virtuoso performance makes that seem impossible."<sup>[18]</sup> In 2015, he was selected to portray James Bond in *Trigger Mortis*, written by Anthony Horowitz.<sup>[19]</sup>

As of 2014, he provides the voice of Imperial Security Bureau agent Alexsandr Kallus on the animated series *Star Wars Rebels*.<sup>[20]</sup>

As of 2017, Oyelowo voices the spirit of Scar, the main antagonist in season 2 of *The Lion Guard*.

## Film

In 2012, Oyelowo appeared in *Middle of Nowhere*. Writer-director Ava DuVernay had been a fan of his work and had considered asking him to take the role, however before she could, Oyelowo received the script coincidentally from a friend of a friend of DuVernay's who happened to be sitting next to him on the plane and was considering investing in the project.<sup>[21]</sup> The film premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival to critical raves. That same year Oyelowo appeared in Lee Daniels' *The Paperboy*, which competed for the Palme d'Or at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.<sup>[22]</sup> Oyelowo reunited with Daniels the following year in *The Butler*.<sup>[23]</sup>

In 2014, Oyelowo formed his own independent production company, Yoruba Saxon Productions which has co-produced movies that featured him including, *Nightingale*, *Captive*, *Five Nights in Maine*, and most recently, *A United Kingdom*.<sup>[24]</sup>

He worked with his *Middle of Nowhere* director Ava DuVernay again for *Selma* (2014), playing civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. The film, based on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches, had originally been set to be directed by Lee Daniels, but the project was dropped by Daniels so he could focus on *The Butler*.

He is slated to star with Lupita Nyong'o in *Americanah*, a film to be adapted from the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie novel. The story follows a pair of young Nigerian immigrants who face a lifetime of struggle while their relationship endures.

## Awards and honors

For his portrayal of Martin Luther King Jr. in *Selma*, Oyelowo received in 2014 the Critics' Choice Movie Award for Best Actor and the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture. He received his first Golden Globe Award nomination for Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Drama.<sup>[25]</sup>

Also in 2014, for his performance in *Nightingale*, he won the Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Actor in a Movie/Miniseries and was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series or Movie, Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Miniseries or Television Film, NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special and a Satellite Award for Best Actor – Miniseries or Television Film.

File:David Oyelowo and Oprah.jpg

Event: 30th Annual Independent Spirit Awards

Oyelowo was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to drama.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Personal life

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He is married to actress Jessica Oyelowo,<sup>[7]</sup> with whom he has four children. They live in Los Angeles, California.<sup>[9]</sup>

A devout Christian,<sup>[9]</sup> Oyelowo has stated that he believes God called him to play Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Reflecting on his portrayal of King in the film Selma, Oyelowo has asserted that "I always knew that in



Jessica Oyelowo

order to play Dr. King, I had to have God flow through me because when you see Dr. King giving those speeches, you see that he is moving in his anointing."<sup>[27]</sup>

## Filmography

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| Film |  |                                |   |
|------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Year | Title  | Role                           | Notes   |
| 2001 | <u><i>Dog Eat Dog</i></u>                    | CJ                             |   |
| 2005 | <u><i>A Sound of Thunder</i></u>             | Payne                          |   |
|      | <u><i>The Best Man</i></u>                   | Graham                         |   |
|      | <u><i>Derailed</i></u>                       | Patrol Officer                 |   |
| 2006 | <u><i>As You Like It</i></u>                 | Orlando De Boys                |   |
|      | <u><i>The Last King of Scotland</i></u>      | Dr. Junju                      |   |
| 2008 | <u><i>Who Do You Love?</i></u>               | <u>Muddy Waters</u>            |   |
|      | <u><i>A Raisin in the Sun</i></u>            | Joseph Asagai                  |   |
| 2009 | <u><i>Rage</i></u>                           | Homer                          |   |
| 2011 | <u><i>Rise of the Planet of the Apes</i></u> | Steven Jacobs                  |   |
|      | <u><i>The Help</i></u>                       | Preacher Green                 |   |
|      | <u><i>96 Minutes</i></u>                     | Duane                          |   |
| 2012 | <u><i>Red Tails</i></u>                      | 1st Lt. Joe "Lightning" Little |   |
|      | <u><i>The Paperboy</i></u>                   | Yardley Acheman                |   |
|      | <u><i>Middle of Nowhere</i></u>              | Brian                          | Nominated – <u>NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture</u><br>Nominated – <u>Black Reel Award for Best Supporting Actor</u><br>Nominated – <u>Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Male</u>  |
|      | <u><i>Lincoln</i></u>                        | Ira Clark                      |   |
|      | <u><i>Jack Reacher</i></u>                   | Emerson                        |   |
| 2013 | <u><i>The Butler</i></u>                     | Louis Gaines                   | <u>NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture</u><br><u>Nominated – Black Reel Award for Best Supporting Actor</u><br><u>Nominated – Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture</u>  |
| 2014 | <u><i>Nightingale</i></u>                    | Peter Snowden                  | <u>Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Actor in a Movie/Miniseries</u><br><u>Black Reel Awards for Outstanding Actor, TV Movie or Limited Series</u><br><u>Nominated – Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Miniseries or Television Film</u><br><u>Nominated – Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Miniseries or Movie</u><br><u>Nominated – NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Television Movie, Mini-Series, or Dramatic Special</u> |

| Year | Title                           | Role                          | Notes  |
|------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
|      |                                 |                               | <u>Nominated – Satellite Award for Best Actor – Miniseries or Television Film</u>  |
|      | <u>Interstellar</u>             | School Principal              |  |
|      | <u>Default</u>                  | Atlas                         |  |
|      | <u>Selma</u>                    | <u>Martin Luther King Jr.</u> | <u>Black Reel Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>African-American Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Kermode Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture</u><br><u>Palm Springs International Film Festival Breakthrough Performance Award</u><br><u>Nominated – Awards Circuit Community Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated – Chicago Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated – Critics' Choice Movie Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated – Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture Drama</u><br><u>Nominated – Independent Spirit Award for Best Male Lead</u><br><u>Nominated – Satellite Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture</u><br><u>Nominated – Village Voice Film Poll Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated – Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor</u> |
|      | <u>A Most Violent Year</u>      | Lawrence                      | <u>Nominated – Black Reel Award for Best Supporting Actor</u>  |
|      |                                 |                               |  |
| 2015 | <u>Captive</u>                  | <u>Brian Nichols</u>          |  |
|      | <u>Five Nights in Maine</u>     | Sherwin                       | [28]   |
| 2016 | <u>Nina</u>                     | Clifton Henderson             | [28]   |
|      | <u>Queen of Katwe</u>           | Robert Katende                | <u>Nominated—Evening Standard British Film Awards for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated—London Film Critics' Circle Award for Best Actor</u><br><u>Nominated—NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor</u>  |
|      | <u>A United Kingdom</u>         | <u>Seretse Khama</u>          |  |
| 2018 | <u>God Particle</u>             |                               | <i>Post-production</i>   |
|      | <u>Gringo</u>                   | Harold Soyinka                | <i>Post-production</i>   |
|      | <u>Only You</u> <sup>[29]</sup> |                               | <i>Post-production</i>   |
| 2019 | <u>Chaos Walking</u>            | Aaron                         | <i>Filming</i>   |

Television

| Year         | Title                                     | Role                       | Notes   |
|--------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| 1998         | <i>Maisie Raine</i>                       | Sonny McDonald             | Episode: "Food of Love"                       |
|              | <i>Brothers and Sisters</i>               | Lester Peters              |   |
| 2002–2004    | <i>Spooks</i>                             | Danny Hunter               |   |
| 2005         | <i>As Time Goes By</i>                    | Patrick                    | 2 episodes                                    |
| 2006         | <i>Shoot the Messenger</i>                | Joseph Pascale             | TV movie                                      |
|              | <i>The Gil Mayo Mysteries</i>             | Eddie Barton, "Sexy" M.P.  | Episode: "Episode #1.8"                       |
| 2007         | <i>Five Days</i>                          | Matt Wellings              | 4 episodes                                    |
| 2008         | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>                | Joseph Asagai              | TV movie                                      |
|              | <i>The Passion</i>                        | Joseph of Arimathea        | TV miniseries (1 episode)                     |
|              | <i>The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency</i> | Kremlin Busang             | Episode: "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency" |
| 2009         | <i>Small Island</i>                       | Gilbert                    | TV movie                                      |
| 2010         | <i>Blood and Oil</i>                      | Keme Tobodo                | TV movie                                      |
| 2011         | <i>The Good Wife</i>                      | Judge Edward Weldon        | Episode: "Two Courts"                         |
| 2010–2011    | <i>Glenn Martin, DDS</i>                  | Teacher / Clarence (voice) | 2 episodes                                    |
| 2013         | <i>Complicit</i>                          | Edward Ekubo               | TV movie                                      |
| 2014–present | <i>Star Wars Rebels</i>                   | Alexsandr Kallus (voice)   | [5][20]                                       |
| 2014         | <i>Robot Chicken</i>                      | Sebastian (voice)          | 1 episode                                     |
| 2017         | <i>The Lion Guard: The Rise of Scar</i>   | Scar (voice)               | TV movie                                      |
|              | <i>The Lion Guard</i>                     | Scar (voice)               | 5 episodes                                    |

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