

= Nate Parker =

Nate Parker (born November 18 , 1979) is an American actor , director , producer , writer and musical performer who has appeared in Beyond the Lights , Red Tails , The Secret Life of Bees , The Great Debaters , Arbitrage , Non @-@ Stop , Felon and Pride . He was an All @-@ American wrestler at both Great Bridge High School and the University of Oklahoma . Parker has been active in charitable work , donating his time both as a volunteer wrestling coach and a political activist .

= = Background = =

Parker was born in Norfolk , Virginia , to Carolyn , a 17 @-@ year @-@ old mother at the time . His mother never married his biological father , but did wed the man who gave Parker his last name . Parker has four younger sisters . According to a DNA analysis , some of his ancestry is from the Tikar people of modern @-@ day Cameroon . During Parker 's time in middle school , his mother fell in love with Walter Whitfield , who was stationed in Bath , Maine , in the United States Air Force . Although his mother married Whitfield and moved to Maine , Parker , despite the physical distance after the move , remained close to his biological father emotionally . His father died when Parker was eleven , however . Parker became involved in classroom fights and home power struggles with his stepfather , Whitfield . Parker moved to Virginia Beach , Virginia to stay with his maternal uncle , Jay Combs , a former wrestler , at age 14 . Nate 's great @-@ grandmother got sick and his mother moved back to Hampton Roads , Virginia and lived in the Churchland High School zone , where Nate joined her . Sharing a three @-@ bedroom apartment with four uncles , his mom , aunt , and grandmother , Parker said " we didn 't have many material things but we loved each other unconditionally . "

Parker was accused of rape while a sophomore at Pennsylvania State University in 1999 and was cleared of those charges in 2001 . Parker married Sarah DiSanto ? a native of Erie , Pennsylvania whom he met while they were attending Penn State ? in Erie 's Frontier Park during the summer of 2007 . He is a University of Oklahoma alumnus .

= = Athletic career = =

Because Parker looked up to Combs , Combs was able to get Parker started in Wrestling at Princess Anne High School . Parker placed third in the Virginia High School League state wrestling championships as a junior while attending Churchland after reuniting with his mother . Carolyn Whitfield moved to the Great Bridge High School district so Parker could participate in its powerhouse wrestling program . He was a member of the 1997 ? 98 state champion Great Bridge wrestling team and was a state champion 135 @-@ pound (61 kg) wrestler who placed third in the High School National Wrestling Championships , while becoming a high school All @-@ American . He earned a full scholarship to wrestle at Penn State University .

At Penn State , Parker was nationally ranked as a freshman . After transferring he continued to be ranked as a redshirt junior 141 @-@ pound (64 kg) wrestler . In 2002 , he placed fifth at the National Collegiate Athletic Association wrestling championships and became an All @-@ American at Oklahoma . Following his fifth @-@ place finish , he was ranked second nationally as a redshirt senior . In 2003 , he earned an undergraduate degree in computer programming from Oklahoma . After graduating from Oklahoma , he worked as a computer programmer until he was noticed at a modeling convention in Dallas , Texas , while accompanying a model friend .

= = Acting career = =

Parker 's first profession was as a computer programmer , which he described as being " in a cubicle writing code " . Then , he attended an event in Dallas with a model he was in a relationship with . Los Angeles talent manager Jon Simmons noticed Parker at the convention and talent search while Parker was waiting for his friend to finish her audition . Simmons felt Parker had " the look "

and inquired about whether Parker was an actor or a model . After Parker denied both , he asked Parker to read a monologue from The Fast and The Furious . He then asked Parker to videotape himself doing lines from Antwone Fisher and Parker delivered a video within a week . Simmons told him to move to Los Angeles , California right away . Parker packed his clothes and computer and moved to sleep on another aspiring actor 's couch . He quickly landed a part in a television commercial . Bit parts and guest appearances followed . He has been working with acting coach Cary Anderson since arriving in Los Angeles . As of early 2008 , Parker continued to live in North Hollywood , California with his wife , mother and three of his sisters in a 650 @-@ square @-@ foot (60 m2) one @-@ bedroom apartment .

Parker played the male lead in Rome & Jewel , a hip @-@ hop take on Romeo and Juliet in 2006 . He had a smaller role in Pride , about an African American swim team , but one that allowed him to display his athletic physique .

Denzel Washington directed The Great Debaters and selected Parker for the role of Henry Lowe . Parker heard Washington requires biographies of the characters that he directs . He wrote a 100 @-@ page biography of the Henry Lowe character . To prepare for his role and write a character biography , he read the works of James Joyce , D.H. Lawrence , W.B. Yeats , Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes . The character was based on the real @-@ life debater , Henry Heights . Parker 's character is the love interest of Jurnee Smollett 's character and has a bad @-@ boy streak . Parker also performed on the soundtrack . Parker , and co @-@ stars Forest Whitaker , and Denzel Washington were nominated for the 2008 NAACP Image Awards in the best supporting actor category , which Denzel Washington won .

In The Secret Life of Bees he played the love interest of Alicia Keys ' character . The movie co @-@ starred Queen Latifah , Dakota Fanning , Jennifer Hudson , Alicia Keys , and Sophie Okonedo and was written and directed by Gina Prince @-@ Bythewood based on the book of the same name by Sue Monk Kidd .

In 2014 he reunited with his The Secret Life of Bees director Gina Prince @-@ Bythewood playing the male lead in her film Beyond the Lights . His performance was nominated for a Black Reel Award for Best Actor and a Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture .

= = Directing = =

For years Parker was interested in making a film based on the life of Nat Turner . In 2014 he announced that he had funding and was working on assembling his team , and that the film would be called The Birth of a Nation in an ironic tribute to the famously racist 1915 film of the same name . In addition to writing and directing Parker cast himself as Turner . Aja Naomi King , Armie Hammer and Gabrielle Union were also cast in key roles . Fox Searchlight Pictures acquired the distribution rights to the film for \$ 17 @-@ 5 million at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival , which broke the record for the most paid for a Sundance Film Festival production surpassing Little Miss Sunshine , which had been acquired by Searchlight for \$ 10 million ten years earlier .

= = Public charity = =

Parker aspires to provide scholarships to youth between the ages of 17 and 25 at Wiley College through the 100 Men of Excellence Initiative . He has been a supporter of Boys & Girls Clubs of America as well as a program called Peace4Kids , which is a program for foster youths and underprivileged youth in South Los Angeles , California where kids are involved in daily activities that stimulate and nurture creativity and intellect . Parker also coaches a wrestling team of 10- , 11- and 12 @-@ year @-@ olds at Rosemead High School and he assists in coaching wrestling at Rio Hondo College . Parker was an active supporter of and volunteer for the 2008 Barack Obama presidential campaign .

= = Filmography = =

= = Awards and nominations = =