

Spike Lee on the Need for 'Gatekeepers'

Written by Robert ID813

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Black representation is stronger than ever on screens, big and small, but the true power in entertainment lies behind the camera, filmmaker Spike Lee said Tuesday.

"We have to get in gatekeeper positions," he said. "We have to get those dual law and MBA degrees and work up the corporate ladder because everybody can't be an actor, everybody can't make a record."

Joining a discussion panel at his alma mater, Morehouse College, Lee led a retrospective of his films and shared his thoughts on the challenges facing blacks in the entertainment industry today.

Acting is not where the power is, Lee said. "Even Denzel (Washington), he's getting \$20 million a movie. But when it comes time to do a movie, he has to go to one of those gatekeepers."

Lee also told aspiring young filmmakers in the audience not to ignore nontraditional routes to getting a film made, including raising funds independently and releasing movies straight to DVD.

"It's a huge market. It's not something that should be looked upon as a stepchild," Lee said of the DVD industry.

Also on the panel with Lee was Beverly Sheftall, director of the Women's Research and Resource Center at Spelman College, and Herbert Eichelberger, associate professor of film at Clark Atlanta University.

Tuesday's event coincided with the DVD release of Lee's latest film "She Hate Me," as well as the release of a special collector's edition DVD of his 1988 comedy "School Daze," which was based on life at Atlanta's historically black colleges.

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The provocative director, who's also responsible for "Jungle Fever," "Malcolm X," "Do The Right Thing" and "Bamboozled," said he's currently working on a sequel to "School Daze" as an update to issues facing black college students almost two decades later.

In the sequel, Lee said he hoped to examine gangsta rap's negative impact on black culture, adding that he was inspired by Spelman students' recent stand against hip-hop rap artist Nelly's "Tip Drill" video.

The rapper angered students of the nation's most famous black women's college when he appeared in a video showing an image of him swiping a credit card through a woman's backside. Many gathered last April to protest Nelly's appearance at an Atlanta charity event, prompting him to cancel.

"I really like hip-hop, but this gangsta rap stuff has really gotten ridiculous," he said.

Artists should be free to express themselves, but consumers also must have their voice heard, Lee added. "Far too often, the black consumer lets African American artists do whatever they want, and they buy their records and go to their movies without any repercussions."

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