

# Not a ...

## Lee defends free speech in Venezuela

**CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)** - Filmmaker Spike Lee championed a free press Friday during a visit to Venezuela, where broadcasters are under pressure to avoid criticizing President Hugo Chavez's leftist government.

The director didn't directly refer to the dispute in Venezuela, but he said there are "no circumstances" under which news media should be silenced.

Visiting to screen his 1989 film "Do The Right Thing" and meet with fans to discuss race relations, his career and the late Michael Jackson, Lee said he is "a firm believer in freedom of speech."

"It's my opinion that there are no circumstances where the media should be shut down," he said to loud applause. "I'm not talking about any country specifically, but globally."

Many of his films make bold statements about race relations in the United States, and 20 years after the release of "Do The Right Thing," a film about a race riot in Brooklyn, the message still rings strong.

"The United States has made great leaps in race relations - the biggest one being the election of President Barack Obama," Lee said.

But there is still a way to go, he added, citing shootings by New York City police officers involving blacks, including the May death of a black undercover cop killed by a white officer.

Lee also reminisced about making the music video "They Don't Care About Us" with Michael Jackson in Brazil. In the video, the "King of Pop" performs in a Rio de Janeiro shantytown as the Brazilian group Olodum beats drums in the background.

"I'm one of the billions of people who miss him dearly," Lee said.



Lee

## Apartments accused of racial bias

**CLANTON, Ala. (AP)** - The Justice Department is suing the owner and two employees of a 72-unit apartment complex in Clanton for allegedly discriminating against blacks when renting apartments.

The lawsuit announced claims Kenneth R. "Ken" Scott and Frankie L. Roberson told white individuals posing as renters that a major selling point of Rolling Oaks Apartments was the lack of black tenants and that the apartments had adopted policies intended to discourage blacks from applying. Owner Chandu Biswas is also named in the suit.

An attorney for Biswas, Anthony Bush, said Thursday his client strongly denies the accusations. He said that 10 percent of the tenants are African-American.

The complaint is based on evidence collected during the Justice Department's Fair Housing Testing Program, where people acting as renters gather information about discriminatory practices.

## BET co-founder backs a Republican

**RICHMOND, Va. (AP)** - A billionaire co-founder of the Black Entertainment Television network and an influential Democratic donor endorsed Republican Bob McDonnell for governor.

Sheila Johnson, of The Plains, Va., was the second-largest individual donor to Gov. Timothy M. Kaine and a benefactor of prominent Democrats, including Sens. Mark Warner and Jim Webb, appeared with McDonnell in Richmond.

"I have been a lifelong Democrat and I'm still a Democrat," she said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Johnson, who lives in Virginia, said she favors McDonnell over his Democratic opponent, R. Creigh Deeds, because she thinks the Republicans can turn around the state's ailing economy.

"From the beginning, Bob McDonnell has been very concerned about the economy," she said. "He has really laid out a roadmap for solving these problems."

Johnson and her ex-husband, Robert Johnson, founded BET and sold it in 2000 to Viacom for \$3 billion. She was a supporter last year of Barack Obama in the presidential race, as was Kaine.

## Writer Harris dies

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** - E. Lynn Harris, a pioneer of gay black fiction and a literary entrepreneur who rose from self-publishing to best-selling status, has died, his publicist said last Friday. He was 54.

Publicist Laura Gilmore said Harris died last Thursday night after being stricken at the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills. A cause of death had not been determined, but some reports suggest he had a heart attack. Gilmore said Harris, who lived in Atlanta, fell ill on a train to Los Angeles a few days ago and blacked out for a few minutes, but seemed fine after that. An autopsy was to be performed this week.

An improbable and inspirational success story, Harris worked for a decade as an IBM executive before taking up writing, selling the novel "Invisible Life" from his car as he visited salons and beauty parlors around Atlanta. He had unprecedented success for an openly gay black author and his strength as a romance writer led some to call him the "male Terry McMillan."

He went on to mainstream success with works such as the novel "Love of My Own" and the memoir "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted." Harris published 11 novels, 10 of which were on The New York Times best-seller list. There are over four million copies of his books in print, according to his publisher, Doubleday.



Harris

# Local man's play about Nina Simone is reborn

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem native Cheyenne Covington believes in second chances.

Covington, a 1993 alumnus of Carver High School, produced his first play, "The High Priestess," a tribute to the late songstress and activist Nina Simone, five years ago.

"I've always loved Nina Simone. I wanted to share that - I wanted to share my knowledge of her and her music," Covington said.

"The High Priestess," a one-woman show, which Covington wrote, directed and produced, provides an introspective look into the life and legacy of Simone.

"We see her as an aged jazz artist, reminiscing on her life," he explained. "It's all in voice over; we hear her thoughts as she's going around the stage looking back on her life."

He had high hopes for the production when it first debuted, but life got in the way. Covington, who suffers from the gastrointestinal illness Crohn's disease, fell ill not long after the play was first staged. The curtain has been down on the show since then.

Now, Covington, 35, says his illness is under control, and he's ready for a "do-over." Covington will take "The High Priestess" back to its original venue, The Warehouse, on Aug. 7. Local songbird Melva Houston will reprise her role as Simone.

Covington was working as an actor when he credits Nathan Ross Freeman, an award winning local script writer, filmmaker and spoken word educator, with getting him interested in writing plays.

Freeman, who regards himself as more of a colleague than a mentor to Covington, praised the budding playwright for his linguistic prowess.

"(Covington has an) extraordinary work ethic, an extremely dedicated brother," Freeman said. "He always has



Melva Houston

an idea; he always has a vision... he's a visionary; people are born visionaries - that's not something that's acquired."

Houston, a Mt. Airy resident, was the inspiration for the play, Covington says.

The two met at a local jazz cafe where Houston was performing a Nina Simone piece.

"Melva sang 'My Baby Just Cares for Me,'" Covington related. "And that whole concept (of writing the play) just flooded me right there."

Covington approached Houston after the set, and learned that she too had an affinity for Simone, a North Carolina native who died in France in 2003 at age 70.

"She was just as much of a fan of Nina as I was," he said. "We both had a passion for the music and what Nina did. It was just a perfect match."

Simone's music, which often had a message of social change, is featured

prominently in the show, which Covington says has an uplifting message.

"I think it's going to give people a sense of accomplishment. They're going to see the journey that Nina took ... and the difference that she made back then, to where we are today," he remarked.

"That gives me joy, knowing that people are going to rejoice in that accomplishment as a people."

The play was intentionally scheduled during the National Black Theatre Festival, Covington says, because the festival afforded a prime opportunity to reach a broad cross-section of theater buffs, but it is in no way meant to be competition for the festival, which he has wholeheartedly supported as a fan and a volunteer.

Freeman, who saw the play's debut, says he is excited to see how it has evolved over time.

"It's an important show because it celebrates one of our jazz vocalists and a national landmark," he commented. "...This project has been an emotional tie that grounds (Covington); no matter where he goes, he has this as a center-piece... I'm just anxious to see how it has grown."

Covington hopes to schedule performances at other local venues in the near future.

"The High Priestess" will open Friday, Aug. 7 at 9 p.m. at the Warehouse, 211 E. Third St. For more information, call (336) 722-3016. Tickets are \$20 each.



Covington

## N.C. A&T eliminates six positions, suspends hiring

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

In response to a \$10.6 million budget shortfall for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 fiscal years, North Carolina A&T State University announced this week the elimination of 71.25 total positions this fiscal year, most them (65.25) are positions that are currently unoccupied. Six employees will be let go as a result of the reduction.

Supervisors talked one-on-one with employees affected and provided them with the state mandated 30-day notice prior to their Aug. 27 layoff. The Division of Human Resources also counseled employees and explained how A&T will work aggressively to re-deploy affected employees into comparable positions within the University.

The intended outcome of this internal matching of comparable positions (similar jobs/similar salaries) is to identify and offer available job openings in areas of the campus experiencing growth due to grants and research. A&T's Division of Human Resources is offering various resources for those affected, such as redeployment support, health insurance, and other support resources.

All hiring for A&T has been suspended except for positions that provide direct classroom instruction as well as positions critical to law enforcement, health care and public safety.



Three Golden Rings by Vandorn Hinnant

DELTA ARTS CENTER  
2611 New Walkertown Road, Winston-Salem, NC 27101

### Dining at the Delta Arts Center

Late Night Jazz Dinners  
with Vocalist Chris Murrell

Sophisticated Soul Food, Cash Bar and  
Free Transportation from Campbell Center, Route 1 Bus  
\$25.00

August 6 & 7, 10 p.m. - 1 a.m.  
Reservations: (336) 722-2625 or delta2611@bellsouth.net

The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Nubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co. Inc., 617 N. Liberty Street, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636  
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

MUSIC DOWNTOWN  
2009 SERIES WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

ALIVE AFTER FIVE CORPENDING PLAZA THURSDAY 5:30PM-8:30PM  
JULY 30 | SO GLAD  
\*Last Alive After Five of the season  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH ZAGS PRESENTS

DOWNTOWN JAZZ CORPENDING PLAZA FRIDAY 5:30PM-8:30PM  
AUGUST 14 | DRIVEN  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH POST ENTERTAINMENT

SUMMER ON GRADE SIXTH & TRADE ST. SATURDAY 7:00PM-10:00PM  
AUGUST 1 | GROOVE 8  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE GARAGE

www.dwsp.org