

Spike Lee or Mars Blackmon?

By JAMES BENTON
Omnibus Editor

For many members of the crowd that packed Memorial Hall Monday night who thought they would see Mars Blackmon instead of Spike Lee, the filmmaker, actor and producer of "She's Gotta Have It" and "School Daze," the night began interestingly enough. Following a series of Nike commercials starring Mars and Michael Jordan, a video clip from Washington, D.C., go-go band Experience Unlimited and a film clip of his upcoming movie "Do the Right Thing," it seemed the audience was in for an enjoyable evening.

And, finally, there he was. But Spike Lee is not Mars Blackmon.

Monty Ross, Lee's assistant of 11 years, and Lee, dressed in his usual sneakers, jeans, T-shirt and New York Mets baseball cap, took to a pair of armchairs on the stage to talk about filmmaking and various points of view on being black in a predominately white profession.

"Where's Dean Smith? That's what I want to know," Lee quipped, and for a while it seemed he was at ease with the audience.

And he was off. For the next hour and 45 minutes, Lee was... well, himself. He talked about "Do the Right Thing," which will star Lee, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis and Lee's sister Joie. The movie, which is scheduled to be released June 30, was shot on one block in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, N.Y. Its storyline shows how many racial groups can clash in one hot summer day and how the day's heat can intensify those clashes.

The movie set was on a block that included three crack houses, Lee said, and during filming, Lee hired the Fruit of Islam — a "police force" for the Nation of Islam — to guard the set from vandalism and theft.

"They told all the crack dealers and all the crackheads to leave and they left," Lee said.

He talked about aspects of "guerrilla filmmaking" — how he shot "She's Gotta Have It" in 12 days by literally shooting footage in the streets of Brooklyn and fleeing the improvised set. It is illegal to film on the streets of New York without a permit that required insurance he could not then afford.

"The way 'She's Gotta Have It' was constructed, I didn't have s--- to shoot. There's not a whole lot you can do in 12 days," Lee said.

The difficulty of raising the \$175,000 for producing "She's Gotta Have It" (from donations and grants) was not as hard as getting the \$6.5 million he spent for producing both "School Daze" and "Do The Right Thing." But the average Hollywood production costs between \$18 million and \$19 million, he said.

The success of "She's Gotta Have It," a movie about a woman who tries to find her identity through sexual relations with three men, had its darker sides. For instance, he was unsuccessfully approached by a television network, which wanted to make a television series of the movie.

The commercialism of television is evident on the wide screen, Lee said. Hollywood changes its attitudes toward the artist when he or she stops producing, without regard to that person's former success, because of the movie industry's businesslike manner. "No matter how successful you are... you have to realize that Hollywood is not in love with you. Burt Reynolds, for four or five years running, was box office. Now he can't get arrested."

Lee talked about many of the events that developed with "School Daze," like the battle between him and actress Tisha Campbell, who sued him over royalties from two songs she sang in the movie with other actresses. The case was settled out of court, with Lee paying Campbell \$25,000.

The movie, which Lee said intended to break down stereotypes, created more instead: "When dark-skinned blacks appeared on the screen, people (in the audiences) booed and hissed. When light-skinned blacks came on the screen like Jasmine (Guy, of NBC's "A Different World") and Tisha, they were awed... it was heartbreaking."

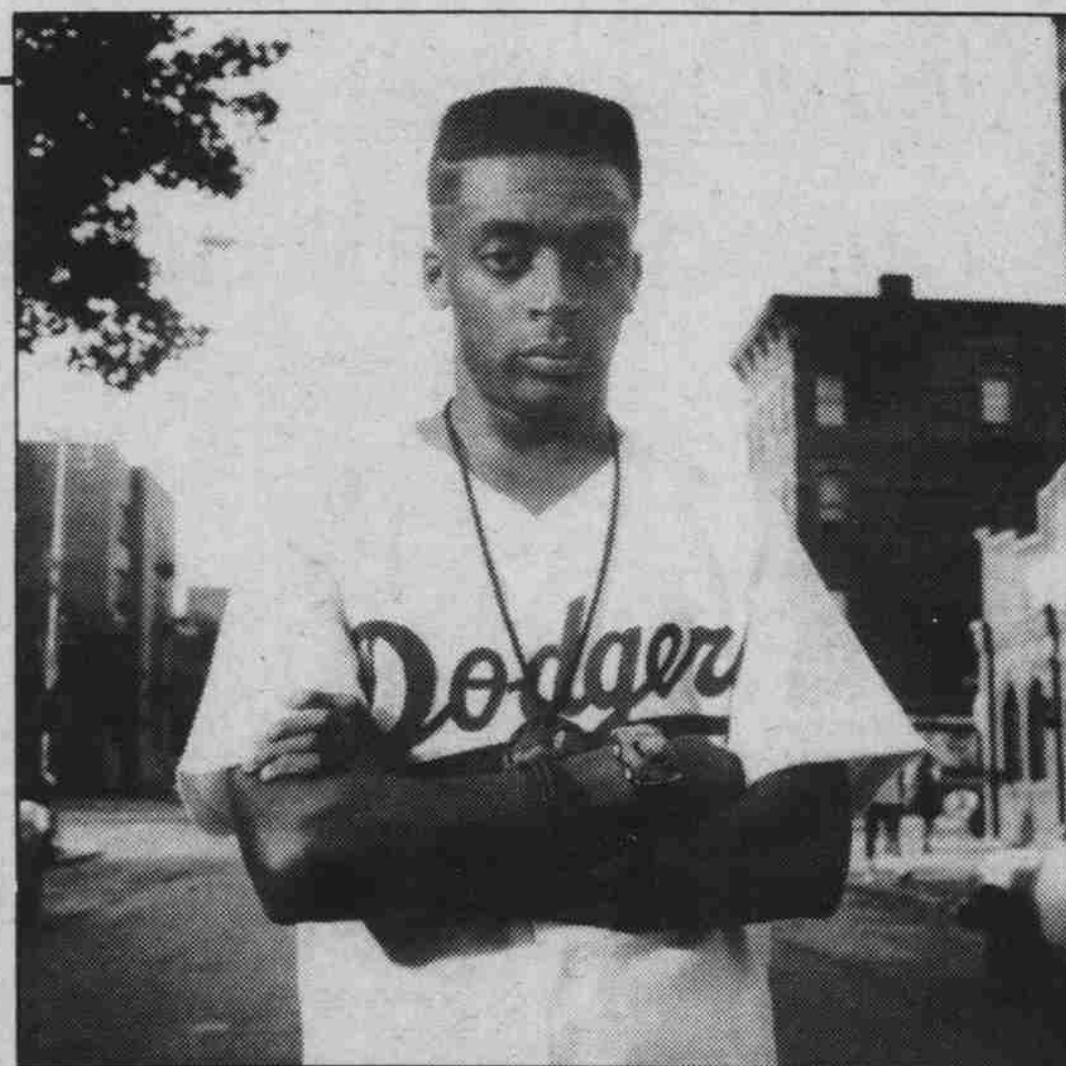
During filming, Lee was kicked off the campus of Morehouse College, his alma mater, by then-President Hugh Gossett. Tonight, Lee will finally be allowed to come to the Atlanta campus and speak for the first time since the movie.

Lee mentioned his plans to start filming the next "Spike Lee joint" — tentatively titled "Love Supreme." Lee said he hoped the film would star Denzel Washington; it should start production in September.

The discussion continued on, with Lee describing his development of the series of Nike Air Jordan commercials. After thinking he could pool his talents to help sell the shoes, "we went to Nike and they didn't even know who we were," he said. But after meeting with Michael Jordan, Lee and Jordan developed the series.

He answered questions in his upfront, outspoken style — and that may have been the turning point. About midway through his question-and-answer period, the audience started leaving the auditorium in small groups. This was about the time that the questions posed to Lee turned more toward blacks in other media and aspects other than the wide screen. Any questions about his film fell into basically one category: the discussion of black Greek organizations in "School Daze."

Lee came under attack from several members of the audience when he discussed how he came up with the movie's fictitious Gamma Phi Gamma fraternity. "School Daze" had a fraternity



Spike Lee is also known as Mars Blackmon, of Air Jordan fame

adviser, who was instructed to create an authentic black fraternity. Zelma Barfick, a classmate of Lee's at Morehouse who pledged the school's Omega Psi Phi chapter with about 20 other students, yet was the only one of that group to complete the initiation process, was the adviser to Lee. As fraternity adviser, Barfick came under fire for his contribution to the movie.

When asked by a member of the audience why he had used symbols of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, Lee responded to a tensely hushed audience that he had received criticisms from black fraternities about their portrayal in the movie. The Alpha Phi Alpha and Groove Phi Groove fraternities complained about the choice of letters, Lee said.

"When we made 'School Daze,' we combined all the worst elements of all the fraternities and rolled them all into one," he said. "I feel that fraternities and sororities take an elitist attitude... that they are somewhat better than the rest of the student body."

"School Daze" was controversial because of the incidents with Morehouse and the fraternity issue, but was compounded by factionalism within the cast itself.

One of the movie's basic conflicts takes place between the Wannabes and the Jigaboos. The Jigaboos are darkly complected and wear their hair in natural styles. On the other hand, the Wannabes (for "wanna-be white") are a group of light-skinned black women with sandy-brown hair woven into their own. During filming of "School Daze," the groups actually became wary of each other and more conscious of their differences. As filming progressed, tensions between the two groups intensified, culminating in a fight between the groups during filming of a step show.

"The fight (at the step show) was not scripted," he said. It happened because the groups in the fight had been living together for 10 weeks and came to dislike each other.

See SPIKE page 10

Aggiefest, N.C. A&T set to celebrate the end of the year

By JAMES BENTON
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If an all-campus party is what you are looking for this weekend, you will have to travel west about 50 miles — but your travel will be worth the effort.

This weekend, N.C. A&T State University will host the sixth annual Aggie Superfest '89, which include three on-campus concerts and will kick off a weeklong, year-end celebration. The festivities begin Friday night with a pre-dawn party from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Saturday morning.

Saturday, the biggest event of the festival begins at noon on the Aggie football practice field — a concert featuring rap act Kid 'N' Play, go-go band Rare Essence, R&B acts Klara and Surface and Adeva,

a house music act. The concert will be hosted by the actor Sinbad of "A Different World" and is followed by another pre-dawn party from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Sunday morning.

Sunday brings a Minifest at 2 p.m. This festival is a concert showcasing campus groups and will be held at the Holland Bowl on campus.

The third and final concert will be Gospifest, which is scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday night at the Corbett Sports Center. Performing will be BeBe and CeCe Winans along with the A&T Fellowship Gospel Choir.

During the rest of the week, the festival will include a splash jam, a talent show and a student appreciation party.

The festival "is basically the

spring celebration at the end of the year. It's just a weekend to wind down before exams," said Darryl Towns, vice president of external affairs for A&T's Student Government Association.

Aggie Superfest '89 has become a big event for A&T, and over its history it has expanded each year. For instance, the Minifest and Gospifest concerts are being held this year for the first time, Towns said, and the festival has become popular among students at other black colleges, attracting students from as far away as Texas. Other black colleges, like N.C. Central and Johnson C. Smith universities, have begun to sponsor similar festivals of their own. "All the schools are starting to pick up on it," he said. "It's given A&T something to take pride in along with our academics

and athletic programs."

Towns said the festival is set up to include a wide range of sounds and give campus groups a chance at performing. "We weren't able to get students in on the festival. This was a way of getting them some exposure," he said.

Towns said 10,000 attended the festival last year, and if the weather cooperates, about 15,000 are expected to attend the concert.

Since its conception, the festival has grown from a one-day party to include a week of events, gained support from the school's administration and is a moneymaker for the school as well. Towns estimated this year's Superfest will generate about \$100,000 for the school.

Future possibilities for the fes-

tival include bringing a jazz act to offer an act for an audience that might not want to listen to R&B, rap, go-go or house, Towns said.

All events for Aggie Superfest '89 are free, except for Saturday's Aggiefest concert and Monday evening's Gospifest. Tickets for Saturday's concert are \$8 for students and \$10 for general public. All tickets will be \$12 on the day of the show. Tickets for Gospifest are \$3 in advance and \$5 on the day of the show.

To get to A&T, simply take Interstate 85/40 west to Greensboro and follow the signs to the campus. The campus is located on East Market Street and is not hard to find, so if you are looking to have one more party before settling in for final exams, A&T may just have the solution for you.