

Diversions

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INSIDE DIVE

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MAKING NOISE

A four-part series exploring black culture in entertainment

film

do the right thing



DTH FILE PHOTO

Accomplished director Spike Lee, praised for his piercing vision and political voice, reads before giving a speech at the Smith Center in September of 1992.

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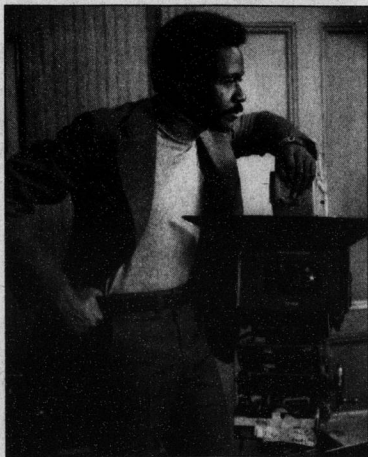
On Sept. 18, 1992, two months before the release of his film "Malcolm X," Spike Lee delivered a brief speech in the Smith Center about the importance of constructing a free-standing Black Cultural Center on campus.

"There's going to come a time when you're going to have to make a move," Lee said to the crowd of almost 5,000. "When that date

approaches and no action is taken, you're going to have to take some drastic action."

That Lee's voice carries so much weight in popular culture today is a testament not only to the groundbreaking films he's made, but also of the long path black filmmaking has traveled.

"He's a public intellectual, quite outspoken, and most people would say he's a bit arrogant," said William L. Van Deburg, a professor of Afro-American studies at the University of



COURTESY OF MGM FILMS
Richard Roundtree starred as John Shaft in the epitome of blaxploitation film, 1971's "Shaft."

Wisconsin-Madison.

"All of this is unusual for a black filmmaker, not like a black athlete. But he pretty much cuts a wide swath in Hollywood, and people



COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

The movie chronicle of the Million Man March, "Get on the Bus" was directed by Lee, who crafted the film as a reflection on the moral status of black America.

have to take notice of him."

Lee's emergence as an important, first-tier movie director comes after decades of the black voice in film being underrepresented or misinterpreted — a trend that sprouted from U.S. cinema's beginnings.

D.W. Griffith's controversial 1915 film "The Birth of a Nation" is regarded today in some circles as a classic, but for many at the time, it stood as a racist statement that mocked black traditions, a recurring theme that plagued most mainstream movies.

"There weren't too many social problems explored, and not too many black institutions treated in a sensitive fashion," Van Deburg said.

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