

Spike Lee to Host Inaugural Forum at Howard

Contributed by Angela P. Smith -- Black College Wire
Monday, 12 January 2009

Jan. 19 symposium "Refresh the World" will focus on social and cultural issues

Academy Award-nominated film director Spike Lee is noted for his films dealing with controversial social and political issues.

He created "4 Little Girls," a historical documentary about the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Ala. He also directed the highly praised "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," a documentary focusing on the suffering of those affected by Hurricane Katrina. So when presented with the idea of producing a symposium for the inauguration of the nation's first black president at Howard University, Lee decided to jump on board. "This is history we can all bear witness to here in the nation's capital also known as 'Chocolate City,'" Lee said. "Everybody's going to be here. We are going to have the most brilliant minds here at Howard University to argue and discourse on issues important to Americans."

Titled "Refresh the World," the symposium is a partnership between Howard and SpikeDDB, sponsored by PepsiCo. The day-long event will be held in Cramton Auditorium on Jan. 19, which marks the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday and the day before the 56th Presidential Inauguration.

The event will consist of five separate panels to discuss topics including education, the economy and the impact of Barack Obama on Black America. Gender issues and hip-hop also be tackled during the symposium.

Lee said his goal is to "refresh what gender means" by conversing about the roles of males and females in society as well as the relations between sexes.

Lee said it was only right to add hip-hop to the program considering Obama's huge influence on hip-hop culture, which is evident through fashion and a countless number of rap songs and music videos.

"Barack Obama has helped change the face of hip-hop," Lee said. "He's helped make hip-hop political again and has opened the eyes of the younger generation."

Prominent leaders and experts in the aforementioned topics will serve as moderators and panelists for the symposium such as Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Dr. Cornel West, Rev. Al Sharpton and Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr.

Additionally, Lee is involving the entire student body by including student filmmakers to help video record the event.

"When people have seen a really good film, they leave the theater and talk about what they have seen and how it impacted them long after the movie is over," Lee said. "I want this symposium to have the same effect. It should wake people up, make them want to put a stop to complacency and spur activism."

Tickets will be distributed to students and members of the Howard community by Howard University.

{moshaloscan}

Angela P. Smith writes for The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, which originally published this article.