

TONY BROWN'S COMMENTS

'Malcolm X' Flops at Box Office

by TONY BROWN

Never has the U.S. media so energetically promoted a commercial movie. Literally, the cover of every general market magazine hawked "Malcolm X" for the moguls at Warner Bros. and director Spike Lee.

And, to my knowledge, never has a director been so Machiavellian in the promotion of a Hollywood product. To be sure, Lee has succeeded where many of us have commercially failed. But Lee's desperation to cash in on "X" and with the legacy of a Black icon has revealed his inner motives in a way his greatest enemy never could have.

Spike Lee, on salary to Warner Bros., and not the independent he claims to be, went so far as to ask Black children, who need education more than they need their mother's milk, to skip school and bring Warner Bros. \$5 at the nearest theatre — all in the name of educating them. Leave school to be educated by a movie director who can hardly complete a sentence?

"Shorty The Hustler," as critic Amiri Baraka calls the self-promoting Lee, then tried to sell Malcolm as a racial integrationist,

in a failed attempt to get Whites to buy some Warner Bros. tickets. In addition to getting a piece of the action, a huge box office would have made the diminutive hawker a higher paid director the next time.

Assuming all along that he had Blacks in his hip pocket, the tee-shirt, cap, and sweater salesman then tried to bolster Warner Bros. sales by suggesting racism and conspiracy, claiming that ticket sales were being diverted from "X" to movies made by Whites. White people hired Lee to make "X," financed it, promoted it like they have never before promoted any movie — and he calls them racist because the public stays away?

You can't say that Lee didn't try to exploit "Malcolm."

But you can say that the White people who run Warner Bros. and put up \$28 million to make the movie told the director that \$28 million was all they were going to risk on him. So Lee went to a few rich Blacks for the additional \$6 million or so if his final \$34 million.

To break even, a movie has to gross three times its production budget. In Lee's case, that's \$102

million — and he's about \$64 million short. That's because in addition to the \$28 million spent for production, Warner Bros. had to surrender one third of the gate to theatre owners and probably spent an additional one third of the production budget, \$20 to \$30 million, on advertising.

Although Blacks bought 80 percent of the tickets, at least at one theatre chain in California, and 80 percent of \$38 million is \$30,000,000, the White media and White people got the lion's share of the advertising dollars and only 20 markets targeting the Black Press and Black people.

Moreover, when you insult Black radio station owners and Black publishers, you have insulted the most powerful people in the Black community.

"You can't call 20 markets the Black press," said Robert Bogle, president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). Bogle called it "an insult." It was Lee's intention, expressed at the NNPA's June convention, to use

Black Press "to get out the message," Bogle stated.

Perhaps Lee should have been honest and admitted to the publishers that he is just a hired hand — not this "independent" moviemaker he pretends to be. However, "Malcolm's Revenge" settled the score. Although Warner Bros. and Lee disappointed the Black publishers and exploited the Black community once again, the public sent "Malcolm" into intensive care.

As of last week, the 3-hour, 20-minute film had only grossed \$38 million — and the big opening weeks are gone forever. "Home Alone II," with hardly any free media support, did that well the first week; it's already over \$100 million.

Not only did Black youths not skip school to see Lee's treasure hunt, but they stayed away from the congratulatory "Malcolm" after school also.

Whites stuck to their tradition of ignoring serious Black people and not falling for Lee's let's-all-love-each-other "Malcolm" promotional

facade. If Lee wants Whites to come back, he will have to return to his themes of sex-starved Black women and Black men hoodlum stereotypes. Even dwelling on Malcolm's salacious "pimp" days didn't do it for Whites — or Lee's box office.

A spokesman for Pacific Theaters, a California chain with 300 screens, said over-25-year-old Blacks bought about 80 percent of the tickets, White didn't like the pain enough to pay \$7 a ticket for it.

Don't worry about Lee, he's made millions from his Warner Bros. salary and the sale of tee-shirts, caps and books. And he and the White studios will be back next summer with a new hype and another "epic."

You can hear Tony Brown's weekly commentaries on the Buy Freedom 900 Network by calling 1-900-454-0411 (\$1.99 first minute/99 cents each additional minute).

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CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Hopes, Aspirations and Struggles for 1993

by BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS, JR.

For the vast majority of the more than thirty million African Americans who live in the United States, 1993 represents more than just a "new" year. For many in the African American community this is the "year of relief" from twelve consecutive years of racially motivated economic exploitation, brutality, and disillusionment in the national context, of an Administration in Washington that just did not genuinely care about the socioeconomic condition of the community.

This is not intended to lay blame on Presidents Reagan and Bush for all of the ills and problems resident in people of color communities in the nation. It is important, however, to candidly say that the failure of the White House to set a clear moral tone against the steady rise in overt racist behavior in most of the major institutions of this society during the last twelve years, is an abhorrent reality that should be challenged by the incoming Clinton Administration.

Thus, we begin this year with a sense of renewed hope. It is a hope that our nation will accelerate

toward becoming and welcoming the transition into a truly multiracial and multicultural society where justice, prosperity, and happiness are no longer mitigated by race and skin color. But we know this hope will only become realized when the destructive forces of racism are exposed and eradicated.

One thing is absolutely clear: "We must continue to struggle for justice on all fronts simultaneously with relentless vigor and steadfastness of faith." 1993 is the year of renewed struggle for economic justice, racial justice, social justice, and environmental justice.

Our hopes and aspirations must be articulated in a manner that gives voice to those who are most oppressed in this nation and throughout the world. The immorality of human exploitation and degradation requires a stronger challenge and bolder national effort than the challenges and efforts made during the 1960's. The disparities and inequities of this society demand an urgent revitalized "Civil Rights Movement."

We have to move beyond just describing the problems. We have to

even move beyond just analyzing the problems that beset our communities. 1993 has to be a year of effective action in terms of the formulation of public policies and the building of sound economic development programs at the community level. A priority has to be placed on youth leadership development in all academic disciplines and vocations.

The national call to invest in America must be re-translated to investing in communities in ways that help communities become self-empowered with a sustainable economic base. Job training must be toward business ownership with the ultimate goal of overall community development. Thus, public education must receive renewed support by all levels of government as well as support from the private sector.

The bottom line is that the hopes, aspirations and struggles for 1993 are similar in content to the immediate past years, but the real difference is there now appears to be a new opportunity to express our hopes and dreams with a sense that there will be more receptive ears in Washington with the Clinton Administration. Yes, expectations are high. Some will argue that expectations are too high to possibly have a chance of being fulfilled.

We say, "We will make our demands known, we will share our dreams and hopes, and we will fight with renewed determination to achieve racial and economic justice by all means necessary!"



A presidential custom was started at the opening of the 1910 major league season when William Howard Taft threw out the first ball in a game between the Washington Senators and the Philadelphia Athletics.

Words of Life

We learn from experience. A man never wakes up his second baby just to see it smile.

—Grace Williams

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