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Loyola Lands Powerful Voice from the Film Industry for MLK Convocation

This coming January, Loyola students will have the chance to witness an appearance by one of the most famous speakers to speak at Loyola in the past few years. This man will be the speaker for the 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation, and his name is Spike Lee. Lee's career as a filmmaker began in 1983 with the completion of *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads*, which served as his master's degree thesis at NYU, and then in 1986 with the release of *She's Gotta Have It*, his first full-length feature. Lee is well regarded in the film industry as one of modern cinema's most unique directors. He is also one of the most, if not the most, prolific African-American directors of all time, and many of his films deal with African-American issues and characters. And he is also known as one of the most prominent celebrity sports fans. Loyola students from the New York area who are more sports fans than film buffs may recognize him more for his diehard support of the New York Knicks than any of his film work.

In anticipation of Lee's appearance at the convocation, Loyola is presently running a Spike Lee film series for the fall semester, sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs and Diversity, Black Faculty, Administrators and Staff Association, the Center for Innovation in Urban Education, the College Diversity Committee, and the Office of ALANA Services. The screening of each of the films is scheduled for 6-9 PM in the library auditorium. So far, *School Daze* and *She's Gotta Have It* have already been screened. In the next few weeks, the four remaining Spike Lee "joints"

will be shown: on October 28, the Hurricane Katrina documentary *When the Levees Broke*; on October 29, the World War II-set *Miracle at St. Anna*; on November 2, the Civil Rights-era documentary *4 Little Girls*; and on November 11, the Oscar-nominated *Do the Right Thing*. Faculty and special guests will be on hand at each of the screenings to moderate question and answer sessions. This is a perfect opportunity for members of the Loyola population to familiarize themselves with the work of Spike Lee in preparation for his appearance at Loyola.

What will be the student body's reaction to Lee's upcoming appearance? The roommates of this writer were notably excited upon hearing the news, happy to hear that a big name would be making an appearance at Loyola. [good spot for sound clip – Track 1002] On the other hand, it is possible that a good proportion of Loyola students are familiar with the name of Spike Lee, but not his work. It would not be surprising, as well, if a good amount of students are not even familiar with him at all.

It should not be that surprising, actually, that Lee's filmography is not that well known. Despite being a strong presence in today's film industry, only one of his films has ever grossed more than \$50 million at the box office, and despite his solid reputation, he has garnered only two Academy Award nominations during his career. Perhaps, though, those who have never seen a Spike Lee film are familiar with some of the other headlines he has created.

Lee has been known to make controversial, often racially charged statements. In 2002, he called Senator Trent Lott a "card-carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan." In 2004, he said that Larry Bird was the "most overrated [basketball]

player of all time,” because of his race. In 2005, responding to Hurricane Katrina, he stated that he did not “find it too far-fetched that [the United States government] tried to displace all the black people out of New Orleans.” Will Loyola be lucky enough to witness him sparking another controversy? In 2008, he criticized Clint Eastwood for not depicting black Marines in Eastwood’s World War II film, *Flags of Our Fathers*. Could Lee possibly bring attention to the fact that Loyola is a predominantly white college in a predominantly black city? With racial issues hardly a thing of the past in Baltimore, Lee would not be one to shy away from the discussion. Thus, the 2010 Loyola Martin Luther King Convocation promises to be memorable, perhaps the most memorable in the history of Loyola’s MLK Convocations.