

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVII, Number 53, 15 April 1993 — So, what exactly was Spike's point last night?  
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

## So, what exactly *was* Spike's point last night?

**Amanda Kahn**

**I**t was remarkable, if only for the sheer absence of hype. *Only* for the sheer lack of hype.

On Tuesday night in Butler, I saw the first posters announcing that Spike Lee would be speaking in Wollman. Although I was formally on duty at *Spec*, I took a few hours off to attend the speech, in hopes that I could craft a juicy column out of the incendiary events taking place.

There were very few posters around campus, but word got around. There was a certain air of mystery, of intrigue ... or was it collective campus anxiety concerning the three papers and two exams everyone has next week? Well, at any rate, the hush-hush atmosphere had the campus wondering just what would happen in Wollman last night.

Also intriguing was the fact that the box office opened at 7 p.m., only an hour before the performance. I mean, Helmet tickets went on sale Monday, and they don't play until Saturday. Last year, Ramones tix were available a few days in advance. As for political speakers, I believe that tickets generally go on sale at least a few hours before the

performance.

Problem is, Spike did not play the role of political speaker. He didn't really perform the role of *auteur*, either. The audience had no way of discerning what he would discuss beforehand, since there was no subject matter on the posters.

Judging from the content of his speech (well, not really a speech; more like a stream-of-consciousness, stiltedly-delivered monologue on how he rose through the ranks of the film industry), Spike did not have an agenda, either. Scan through any of the books published as part of the massive merchandising blitz accompanying each of his films to learn far more about the creative process leading up to each work than he told the crowd last night.

I suspect that the audience expected more from the man who holds the torch of being the premier African American director in the United States, and possibly in the entire world.

He whet our political appetites with several remarks during his speech; targets included the "culturally biased" GREs and "New York's finest." Nothing revolutionary there.

Before Spike began his speech, he had warned us not to ask, "how to stop racism, AIDS, homelessness, and poverty," keeping in mind that



he is “just a filmmaker. I don’t have an answer to these problems that plague us all,” he said.

During the questions and answers period, he sure didn’t. Most questions were low-key, dealing with the problems of starting out in the industry (including whether it would be better to begin one’s career in LA or New York). His answers were curt, deadpan, minimal. Political problems—particularly the impending verdict in the case against the police officers accused of using excessive force when arresting Rodney King—were afforded some more energy. We learned that Spike has “no confidence in the American judicial system. No confidence at all,” and that he suspects that the verdict may have been delayed until today because “the police and the national guard need another 24 hours to get in place.” We laughed, nervously. The Audubon Ballroom was mentioned, twice, and Spike emphasized,

twice, that he did not support the project, contrary to Columbia's claim (and Barnard-Columbia Save the Audubon Coalition's) ["B-C STAC: a response," Jan. 20, *Spectrum*].

At least he thinks the Knicks will go "all the way" this year. Damn straight!

The net effect on most people I spoke to—be they interested in the political hyperbole he (usually) feeds the press or in the film maker's craft—was disappointment. Beyond the screen of intrigue was a man who may be an extremely talented film maker, but hardly worth the status of cultural icon, judging from last night's disillusioning performance.

It was far more interesting when we met in the lobby of Havemeyer while I was retrieving a chemistry problem set last spring, when he said "Yo, what's up."

In essence, he didn't say much more last night.

## *The Wrath of Kahn* introSpection

Editorial Page Editor Amanda Kahn, CC '95, occasionally contributes to this page, especially when she's cranky.

