

# and the politics of

Spike is telling little black kids all across America to drop out of school forever and that was not what I said," Lee says. "I think that this is a very important film and that it would be great if we could be mobilized that day."

The filmmaker says there's more fear of blacks unifying than anything else.

"I think that anytime that somebody tries to organize black people it's seen as a threat. You know that's too horrible," Lee says.

"So, I mean, what's happening really here? Who says that learning, education only takes place within the four walls of a school? I had to go see *Gone With the Wind* when I was in fourth grade and I had to write a report about it, and that's one of the most racist films ever made."

Lee, who hopes to get a PG rating for *X*, thinks learning more about Malcolm X should be part of the education of all young people.

"I just think they should come attentive, prepared to be entertained and also to learn something and hopefully by them seeing this film it will make them want to pick up *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—another book that they haven't read—and just really further their knowledge of Malcolm X."

Regardless of the rating, rumors about possible violence may keep viewers at home.

Some theaters reportedly have decided to double their security at the film because of a fear of riots.

"That's bullshit. Anytime you get more than two black people on the corner it's a potential riot," Lee says.

Theater owners have nothing to fear and people are feeding on ignorance rather than reality, he says.

"It's the same type of mentality where if you're black and you walk into a department store all the sudden security starts to follow you. 'Well if they're black they must be getting ready to steal.' Well, we have all these black folks at a movie theater; they're gonna riot."

Lee is worried that a pattern is developing where people prefer to see his films on video at home because they are afraid to go to the theater.

"They keep playing on white hysteria, white fears. It's the same old ignorance, again and again and again," he says.

"They did the same thing with *Do The Right Thing*, where a lot of white movie-goers were scared to see the film because they read in the papers that there's gonna be riots. The same pattern is starting to come out again with *Malcolm X*."

Lee cannot deny that public enthusiasm for the film and for celebrating the life of the militant leader has been growing. For months he has been selling T-shirts, baseball caps and pins with an "X" printed on them at Spike's Joint, his store in Brooklyn, N.Y., which sells merchandise related to his films.

Two Spike's Joint stores have opened in Tokyo and his fourth store was scheduled to open in Los Angeles by the end of October.

What does he think when he sees people walking around the streets with "X" paraphernalia?

"It doesn't bother me. But I do realize that it's

Co., which insures studios from cost overruns, cut its funding.

In a May news conference, Lee charged that Warner Bros. would not increase funds for the film and allow it to be at least three hours long because of racism and discrimination against black filmmakers. Lee cited Oliver Stone's 3-hour, 8-minute film *JFK*, and argued that if a slain white hero gets three hours of footage then so should a slain black hero.

After hitting a brick wall with the studio, Lee turned to black celebrities for help. Prince, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan and Magic

Johnson among others helped to fund his film. Warner Bros. and the bond company eventually gave in two days after the conference and absorbed the extra costs. The film was finished for \$34 million, and the studio agreed to let the film run more than three hours. He had won the battle.

After winning this and other fights, Lee has proven to his critics that he can take the pressure of making a commercially and artistically successful movie. His final ascension to ranks of the big-budget boys has been achieved.

But silencing the critics may not be as difficult for Lee as coping with his newfound status as a black leader with nearly as much influence of Malcolm X. Sometimes being the spokesman for all



**"Other people have a perception of me. There was a time where I cared, but now I don't care anymore."**

black Americans can be tiresome, he says.

"The funny thing is— who are these people to select? I don't feel that I'm a spokesperson. I have a responsibility and at the same time I'm an artist, so I try to incorporate both," Lee says.

"Being a role model—that's a whole tricky thing. I just think that... the standards I set for myself are higher than anybody else's anyway, so that role model stuff really doesn't bother me," he says.

For a while, Lee plans to stay out of the spotlight. He says he doesn't have any future projects planned yet. After the release of *Malcolm X*, he's going to rest, kick back and revel.

"The greatest challenge in doing this film was to make sure that it's not fucked up, that we had to make a great movie," Lee says.

going to take more than wearing that 'X' hat or 'X' T-shirt sometimes, not all the time; you know these people who are wearing these things know very little about Malcolm X," says Lee.

"Hopefully they will know some more, know a lot more about the man and that knowledge won't be superficial," he says.

While Lee had no problem merchandising *Malcolm X* goods, selling the need for a large budget for the film proved nearly impossible.

Warner Bros. originally allotted Lee \$20 million for *Malcolm X*. Lee raised another \$8.5 million by selling the foreign rights to the film, but costs increased another \$5 million over budget, and he refused to limit the length of the film to 2 hours and 15 minutes. Because of this, the Completion Bond