

Spike Lee: Find your passion

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Filmmaker Spike Lee listens during an impromptu roundtable discussion with Tulane students during a reception on Monday night (March 16) in the 1834 Club in the Lavin-Bernick Center. Lee's TUCP-hosted campus lecture on the importance of education, as well as the complicated landscape of race relations in the modern era, was a culmination of the Tulane Black Arts Festival. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Famous for such critically acclaimed films as *Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X* and [*When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*](#), Academy Award-nominated Spike Lee also has gained notoriety throughout his career for being a volatile figure in the media. He's frequently made comments perceived as controversial, the

majority of which concern race and racial representation.

Hearing Lee speak in person on the Tulane University uptown campus on Monday (March 16), with his off-the-cuff style and candid humor, it was hard to believe his controversial remarks were anything more than misconstrued one-liners.

During his [lecture](#), Lee remarked on such problematic topics as white flight, gentrification and the phenomenon within some elements of the black community of equating good grammar and syntax with “acting white.”

His main message, however, was about the importance of education and finding one's passion. He illuminated these points with stories from his own upbringing in Brooklyn in the 1960s and '70s.

Of discovering his passion for both film and education, Lee said: “Freshman and sophomore year at Morehouse, I was a C+, D student. I was unmotivated because I didn't know what I wanted to do. Then in the summer of 1977, after my sophomore year, I went home expecting to work. New York was broke that summer though, and there were no jobs.

“One day I went to my friend Vietta Johnson's house, and in her bedroom I saw a box. I asked what was in it, and she said, “Somebody gave me a super 8 camera. You can have it. I'm going to be a doctor. I don't need it.”

“Now I had something to do. Looking back on that summer day in 1977, it was not an accident that something told me to go see Vietta. I was an A student for the rest of college.”

Benton Oliver is a senior at Tulane University majoring in music, communication and German.

“I was a C+, D student... I was unmotivated because I didn't know what I wanted to do.”—Spike Lee, film writer, director, producer