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Spike Lee and Roberta Flack Among Celebrities to be Featured at New York City African-American Children's Book Festival

(Thursday, February 20, 2003, Stamford, CT) -- Film producer Spike Lee and singer Roberta Flack are among the celebrities expected to participate in this year's African-American Children's Book Festival that will be held in New York City.

This one-day event features authors and illustrators signing their books, storytellers, and readings all day long. Produced by Kids Cultural Books, the New York festival is the first in a series of five Verizon-sponsored African-American children's book festivals to be held this year throughout the northeast.

Spike Lee will be joined at the New York festival by wife Tonya Lewis Lee to read from their new book for toddlers, *Please, Baby, Please*.

Other books will come alive during day-long readings and performances by storytellers Julie Pasqual and Joyce Parr. Soprano Alicia Hall will sing to accompany the readings of *When Marian Sang* (Marian Anderson) by Pam Munoz Ryan, and *Ella Fitzgerald* by Andrea Davis Pinkney. Both books will be read by Roberta Flack. A tap dancer will perform *Rap a Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles, Think of That!* by Leo and Diane Dillon; author Gavin Curtis will read his book *The Bat Boy and His Violin* and musical interludes will be played by William Ventura, a violin student at the Harlem School of the Arts.

Verizon Reads is the umbrella organization for the company's national literacy program. Verizon is leading America's campaign to raise literacy levels, and has recently partnered with Kids Cultural Books to support this effort.

Over 400 children's books for ages toddlers to teens will be available for sale—including a special selection of books celebrating Africa. Free posters and bookmarks will be distributed while supplies last. Partial proceeds of the book sales will benefit a local New York City literacy program.

The Festival will be held Saturday, April 12, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, 110th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in New York City. Admission is free and open to the public.

Kids Cultural Books of Stamford, CT, is the non-profit sister organization to Black Books Galore! In addition to the New York book festival, Kids Cultural Books has organized seven multicultural children's book festivals for the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. The founders of the book festival company are also the authors of the *Black Books Galore! Guide to Great African-American Children's Books* published by John Wiley & Sons in 1998. It is an annotated guide to over 500 African-American children's books and was nominated for the 1999 NAACP Image Award, Children's Literature. Three additional books, the *Black Books Galore! Guide to Great African-American Children's Books About Boys* and *About Girls*, and the *Guide to More Great African-American Children's Books* were published in 2001.

Authors and illustrators attending the book festival include:

Tonya Bolden – *Tell All the Children Our Story*

Colin Bootman – *In My Momma's Kitchen*

Bryan Collier- *Martin's Big Words*

Gavin Curtis – *Bat Boy and His Violin*

Joyce Hansen- *Which Way Freedom*

Alicia Henderson – *Call Me Black, Call Me Beautiful*

Patricia Hinds – *My Best Friend*

Wade & Cheryl Hudson – *Afro-Bets ABC*

E. B. Lewis – *Talkin' About Bessie*

Cedric Lucas – *What's in Aunt Mary's Room*

Jerdine Nolen – *Raising Dragons*

Charisse Richardson – *The Real Slam Dunk*

Nicole Tadgell – *Fatuma's New Cloth*

Wanda Thomas – *Handsome Me*

Eric Velasquez – *Piano Man*

Lynette Velasco – *Zinzy*

Several of the authors, as well as Toni Trent Parker, president-Kids Cultural Books, are available for interviews. Call Toni Parker at 203-359-6925 to arrange.