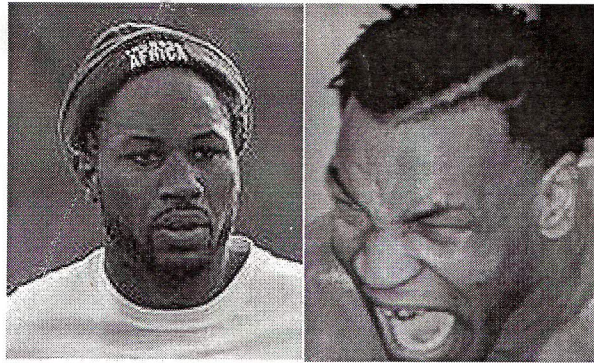


Black Memphis readies for Tyson-Lewis fight

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By Regina Burns
BlackAmericaWeb.com

MEMPHIS - The Mike Tyson-Lennox Lewis fight may be nearly three weeks away, and the city's African American residents say they are pulling out all the stops in advance of the thousands of residents - and millions of dollars - expected to pour into the city.

The June 8 fight set for The Pyramid is the talk of Memphis. Many African American restaurant owners, hair designers and politicians are making plans to either attend the big event or cash in, whether it's renting out their home or hiring more staff at their business.

"I'm getting my rest," laughed Dollar Rent A Car Bus Driver Elderedge Hudson, as he shuttled passengers from the Memphis International Airport.

"We're getting in at least 600 additional cars and they're hiring more bus drivers and guys to prep the cars," said Hudson, whose been working for the company 11 years.

Smiles could also be seen on De'Andre Green's face. That's because De'Andre Green's Beauty Salon is located about two miles from The Pyramid in Downtown Memphis.

"I know it's going to be plenty of business and I do black and white hair," said Green, who is starting his eighth year at the salon, located at Front and Union.

"I'm normally open Wednesday through Saturday, but I'll be open seven days that week. I feel like Sam Cooke - 'it's been a long time coming,'" he said.

Green, who lives and works Downtown, added: "With all the building up going on Downtown, the fight couldn't have come at a better time."

He's referring to the new Peabody Place complex that houses a cinema, shops, arcades, and the new Isaac Hayes eatery. Nearby is the new \$90 million minor league baseball park for the Memphis Redbirds. Then there's historic Beale Street, where blues, jazz and barbecue are alive and well. In

fact, numerous celebrities are reportedly renting out Beale Street nightclubs during the week of the fight. Unconfirmed rumors are flying all over Memphis that Denzel Washington, Michael Jordan and Halle Berry, among others, will be in the River City for the fight.

George Jones, one of two African American McDonald's operators in Memphis, will also hire more staff for his seven restaurants, including two at the Memphis International Airport.

"I'm planning to be at the airport myself - the three days before the fight, the day of the fight and after the fight," said Jones, who has been in Food Service for more than 20 years.

At the National Civil Rights Museum, Beverly Robertson is also busy making plans for more staff in conjunction with the fight and as part of the museum's expansion.

"It's not so much about the fight for me, as it is Memphis being propelled in an international limelight," said Robertson, executive director of the downtown museum, formerly the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin L. King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

"Many people won't get a seat, but they'll be here to take advantage of the wealth of attractions," Robertson said. Regarding the controversial boxer, Mike Tyson, she added: "I'm not sure I would invite him to my house, but we've all made mistakes. For those against the fight, I say it's about creating prosperity, jobs and tourism. I can't legislate or change his morals."

The National Civil Rights Museum, coincidentally, is hosting a 160-photograph-exhibition featuring the work of famed photographer Howard Bingham. "Main Event: The Ali/Foreman Extravaganza, Through the Lens of Howard L. Bingham," opened April 20 and continues through Sept. 15, 2002. It captures the 1974 boxing match of Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Promoters hope Ali shows up to support his daughter, Laila Ali, who is set to fight June 7 against an as-yet-unknown-opponent. That match will be held in the DeSoto Civic Center, just six miles south of Memphis in Southaven, Miss.

Memphis has gotten lots of attention as of late. The NBA's Grizzlies played its first season in Memphis this year after leaving Vancouver. A \$250 million arena is being built for the team, which hired NBA Legend Jerry West as president of basketball of operations.

For longtime Memphis City Councilman Myron Lowery, the Tyson-Lewis fight supercedes snagging a NBA team.

"I think it's going to be one of the largest sporting events of this decade; If the price is right, I may rent out my Riverfront home, which is two blocks away from The Pyramid."

Barbara Green Pierson, De'Andre's mother, says if guests want to travel to the Whitehaven area, her home is available.

"I had heard someone talking about the celebrities who were coming here looking for a place to rent for a week. And they will pay as much as \$3,000 a week because all the downtown hotels are filled," she said.