

Giving the Praise: Mega Turn-Out at Mega-Fest

By Sonsyrea Tate

By 9:20 a.m. Friday morning, the praise was on. Doors had opened at 9 for the “Morning Glory” worship session at Bishop T.D. Jake’s 2005 Mega-Fest in Atlanta, GA last week. More than 175,000 people had registered by then, according to organizers.

White guys from Kentucky, who had registered themselves and their classes of fifth-graders, would arrive soon. They had been excited about the Christian festivities, a revival of sorts, the night before.

“Awesome,” was all one of the guys could say when asked what he thought of Mega-Fest 2005. By 9:20 Friday morning, the hoop-and-holler was on inside the Atlanta Dome, where most of the main events were held.

“Satan! We curse your works,” a woman minister shouted from the stage-turned pulpit. “In the name of Jesus! Somebody look around at your neighbor and shake somebody’s hand and tell them, ‘God’s got a miracle for me’. Some people in here believe it. Hallelujah! Thanks you Jesus!” People shouted, cried, and rocked. Lips were quivering in the praise.

“God has so raised up Bishop T.D. Jakes for this day, and for this hour. I thank God and praise him,” she continued. “I can remember when the Lord raised up Dr. Martin Luther King...50 years ago in Atlanta Georgia, you couldn’t be in the Dome...50 years ago, you was on the back of the bus. So, I appreciate Bishop T.D. Jakes bringing all of us together in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Publicized in the “Gospel Today” magazine, an African American Christian publication, on White Christian radio, and Black radio stations of various format, Mega-Fest attracted Christians of various denominations to participate in a wide-range of activities. Opening Tuesday with a golf tournament, Mega-Fest included lectures by Bishop T.D. Jakes, founder of the Potter’s House in Texas, which has attracted media attention as a leader in the expansion of mega churches. Mega-Fest workshops included “Dating, Waiting and Recognizing Your Soul Mate”, “Sure Fire Ways to Buy Your Home Quickly with No Money Down”, and “How to Grow Your Small Business” for adults, “Finding Me” for Teens, and “Respect, Honesty and Kindness” for kids.

Mega-Fest offered comedy relief with a show hosted by Tom Joyner and J. Anthony Brown featuring Steve Harvey and Rickey Smiley. It featured concerts with Kirk Franklin, Mary Mary, J. Moss and Kierra Sheard one day and a “Women of Purpose” concert with Gladys Knight, Stephanie Mills, Vickie Winans, Dottie Peoples, Chaka Khan and the Clark Sisters honoring Corretta Scott King the next day.

???? White, ?????, called Jakes, “a man born out of his season like Paul.” He has revelation, wisdom, and knowledge, she added. “I love this man as my spiritual father, and his wife, Serita, as my spiritual mother.” She sold journals from the stage-turned-pulpit. A journal she copyrighted for teens, for women, for men – each with Biblical references throughout.

“Every sister here better get one of these for your man,” White said.

Fitness guru Donna Richardson Joyner had folks “Sweatin’ in the Spirit” at 7 Friday morning, but by 9:20, the worship hall was filling with people seeking a word and a

prayer. At 9:30, a woman in a yellow straw hat stood in front of her chair moved to tongues.

“Your victory is in your praise! Your victory is in your praise!” shouted Bishop Ernestine Rheems, of ????. “Open your mouths and give God the praise! He’s done great things for you! Hallelujah!. Help me praise him.”

“I came, first to get a blessing from God and to get delivered,” said a quiet-spoken Gwendolyn Carter, in an interview outside the worship hall. “Juanita Bynum spoke about having faith. Hebrews 11,” Carter added. “It let me know that no matter what my situation is, just believe and walk in my faith.” She hoped to be delivered from what she considers a bad attitude. “Sometimes I get mad real quick,” she said. “I want deliverance from my attitude.”

Paula White, co-pastor of ?????, spoke of a famine in the land and offered tips for coping. “Famine is when your company replaces you after you’ve been working 30 years, right before you retire,” White said. “Famine is when your child that you raised up in the church turns to you and says ‘I hate you and I hate your God.’ It’s when your son is acting like Freaky Freddie fooling around with Freda and you have to know God is bigger,” White told a cheering audience. “Ephesians 10 says you have to be strong in the Word.”