COLUMBUS OH -- It will be interesting to hear Tucker's take on President Obama and a multitude of other subjects that are grabbing headlines, from politics to race at his upcoming Columbus show.

By CHRIS BOURNEA

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Chris Tucker will bring his standup comedy tour to Veterans Memorial in Columbus on June 24 and to Cinci nnati, s Procter & Gamble Hall on July 8.

In recent years, Tucker has returned to his roots as a stand-up comedian after spending much of the late 1990s and 2000s as a movie star. He made a name for himself in comedies such as “House Party 3,” “Friday,” co-starring Ice Cube, and “Money Talks,” co-starring the now-infamous Charlie Sheen.

But Tucker really established himself as a box office powerhouse with the action/comedy series “Rush Hour,” starring alongside martial arts superstar Jackie Chan. After the first “Rush Hour” raked in more than $100 million at the box office in 1998, Tucker entered the “$20 million club,” receiving big paydays for the two “Rush Hour” sequels.

Tucker hasn’t been seen on the big screen since “Rush Hour 3” was released in 2007. But he’s continued to pick up the microphone and entertain audiences by doing what he does best – telling jokes.

The last time Tucker took the stage of Veterans Memorial in Columbus was August 2006. Much has changed since then – mainly, the nation has its first African-American president.

It will be interesting to hear Tucker’s take on President Obama and a multitude of other subjects that are grabbing headlines, from politics to race. When he was last out in the public eye promoting “Rush Hour 3,” Tucker indicated that he thinks race has become almost irrelevant in Hollywood
, that the only color that matters is “green.”

“Now it’s not about color anymore. It’s about who can make the movie open,” Tucker was quoted as saying in an interview with a London magazine. “It’s a business and it’s not about color. It might have been at one time.”

Tucker’s point of view is debatable. On the one hand, a lot of doors have opened since Tucker came onto the scene in the mid-1990s. Tucker and other African-American actors and comedians such as Martin Lawrence and Will Smith have shown that movies with Black main characters can appeal to a wide, international audience and rake in big bucks.

And then there's Tyler Perry. The multi-tasking tycoon has carved out his own niche in the cutthroat entertainment industry by writing, directing and starring in movies and plays tailor-made for underserved African-American audiences. Like Tucker, many of Perry's movies have been over-the-top comedies, but Perry also tried his hand at drama with his adaptation of the critically acclaimed "For Colored Girls."

However, no new African-American actor has emerged in the past decade who can command $20 million per movie like Tucker and Will Smith. In fact, the entire budget of most Tyler Perry movies is about $20 million – meaning the actors in movies such as "Why Did I Get Married?" work for far less.

Part of the reason for the lack of new African-American powerhouse stars may be that not as many action movies are being made these days. Superhero movies based on comic books have taken the place of the standard action movie. And, unfortunately, there aren't many Black superheroes.

Hollywood also isn't making as many buddy movies as they used to. "Rush Hour" and its sequels are buddy movies in the tradition of '80s blockbusters like "48 Hours" with Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte and "Lethal Weapon" with Mel Gibson and Danny Glover.

Despite the often inconsistent and slow progress when it comes to diversity in Hollywood, Tucker seems to think that there will continue to be opportunities for African Americans in front of the camera – especially those who can make people laugh.

"Now it's like, everybody is opening up movies, showing that it doesn't just have to be one. I don't think it will ever be one Black comic again," he said. "It's going to be a lot of good comics, a lot of Black comics, and that's good."

For tickets and more information about Tucker's upcoming shows in Columbus and Cincinnati, visit Ticketmaster.com.