HE'S GOTTA HAVE IT ALL:

THE COMMERCIAL IMPULSE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY SPIKE LEE JOINT

by

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For Roger Ebert, who “saw it all.”

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ABSTRACT

The 2008 publication of Paula J. Massood's *The Spike Lee Reader* by Temple University Press legitimized Spike Lee as a focus for academic study. A writer, director, and actor, Lee produced the first of his twenty-eight feature films, *She's Gotta Have It*, in 1986, and in the last twenty-seven years, countless interviews, movie reviews, children's books, and unauthorized biographies about the filmmaker have entered the marketplace. Although there are several book-length studies on the Spike Lee Joint, Massood's is the first to contextualize the filmmaker's entire oeuvre within the framework of cinema studies.

My study builds on Massood's work by naming the documentary, teaching, and American strains in the Spike Lee joint "impulses," putting them in tension with what I am calling the Spike Lee persona[1], and arguing that a fourth impulse emerges in the 21st-century Spike Lee Joints—the commercial impulse. In Part I, Chapters 1 through 4, I outline four stages of Lee's career: *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), *School Daze* to *Malcolm X* (1988—1992), *Crooklyn* to *He Got Game* (1994—1998), and *Summer of Sam* to *Miracle at St. Anna* (1999—2008). I argue that the critical reception of his films has largely been determined by personal responses to the often in-your-face politics of the Spike Lee persona as well as to the ubiquity of that persona in American popular culture. I criticize the critical misidentification and mischaracterization of Lee—based on its failure to discern the Spike Lee persona as such and to separate that persona from the Spike Lee joint—and argue that it results in the marginalization of his films. In Part II, Chapters 5 through 8, I focus my attention on four of Lee's 21st-century joints: *Summer*

of Sam, *25th Hour*, *Inside Man,* and *Miracle at St. Anna*. I argue that beginning in *Summer of Sam*, the influence of the documentary and teaching impulses remains the same while the American impulse intensifies. The intensifying American impulse then results in the emergence of the commercial impulse manifest as an intense critical focus on sexuality, class, and capitalism. Ultimately, I am calling for more nuanced readings of all the Spike Lee joints, thereby establishing Lee not simply as the most accomplished African American filmmaker to date, but as one of the most preeminent *American* filmmakers.

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Introduction: What's the "It" Everybody's Gotta Have?

Upon the release of the first-ever Spike Lee Joint, *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), numerous articles profiling the young director played on the title of the movie. An October 1986 *Associated Press* item was titled "Spike Lee's Gotta Have Honest, Independent Film"; a *New York Times* article called "Spike Lee's Gotta Have It" appeared in August of 1987; a May 1988 *Black Enterprise* report on the box-office performance of the second Spike Lee Joint, *School Daze* (1988), proclaimed "'School Daze' Didn't Have It"; and *Time* magazine published an article entitled "He's Got to Have It His Way" in July 1989. *She's Gotta Have It* centers on a young, professional, independent, and sexually-liberated woman and her unapologetic juggling of three lovers, each of whom she informs about the others while refusing to commit to any of them. The "it," then, in *She's Gotta Have It* is sex; however, each of the aforementioned items only intimates what the "it" is according to Spike Lee. The most informative source is not even among them; this distinction belongs to Lee himself, whose journal, *Spike Lee's Gotta Have It: Inside Guerilla Filmmaking*—a meticulous chronicle of his *She's Gotta Have It* experience from script to production to screen—"became a best-selling handbook on independent filmmaking" (Aftab 28).[2]

An examination of the early career of Spike Lee, however, yields the *it he's gotta have*. Arising out of his displeasure with the African American image projected by Hollywood, *it* refers to an increase of cinematic portrayals of black identity and the various ways of black folk. In order to achieve such diversity, Lee himself felt as though African Americans would have to attain the power to tell their own stories; therefore,

another *it he's gotta have* is a filmmaking career. Unfortunately for the young director, Hollywood in the mid-1980s was only interested in black-themed stories that did *not* challenge racial/racist stereotypes of blackness and the black experience. Lee devised a two-pronged response to circumvent the Hollywood establishment. First, he developed an aesthetic that merges his perception of the diversity of African American experience with cinematic high art in order to gain a foothold with a cinephilic audience. *She's Gotta Have It* is the result. Second, to ensure that his debut feature would reach a mass audience, Lee created a persona which chastised Hollywood's entrusting and empowering of nonblacks to tell African American stories. This persona, then, would become another *it he's gotta have*. The critical and commercial success of the three *its* in shepherding *She's Gotta Have It* to commercial success begat yet another *it* for the young filmmaker: power. Coming in the form of creative freedom, this power enabled Lee to further engage the first two *its*, resulting in his building a catalog of films, each of which investigates varied aspects of the black experience.

In "We've Gotta Have It," the introduction to her edited collection *The Spike Lee Reader* (2008), Paula J. Massood tells us in her subtitle what *it* is. To her, *it* is "Spike Lee, African American Film, and Cinema Studies." By naming Spike Lee and *it we've gotta have*, Massood actually claims that we need his career, without which, one could argue, African American film would not exist. At least not as we know it. Therefore, Spike Lee and African American film are two inexorably-linked *its.* I submit that the third *it*, cinema studies, represents Massood's proclamation of Lee's earning—through his career and its initiation of African American film as a genre in itself—a seat at the

table of influential American filmmakers whose catalog is worthy of academic study.[3] Massood does so by identifying three paradigms for interpreting the films of Spike Lee, simultaneously revealing who the "we" in "we've gotta have it" is—Massood and her colleagues in the academe. Published by Temple University Press, *The Spike Lee Reader* combines foundational essays on the Spike Lee Joint with current critical perspectives to produce the first academic work to fully contextualize and analyze the Spike Lee Joint from its inception to its present incarnation. Massood's introduction of the analysis of Spike Lee's entire filmography to the academe yielded two other academic readers which explore the breadth of Spike Lee's films: *Fight the Power!: The Spike Lee Reader* (2009), edited by Janice D. Hamlet & Robin R. Means Coleman for Peter Lang, and *The Philosophy of Spike Lee* (2011), edited by Mark T. Conard for the University of Kentucky Press. Spike Lee's execution of the three impulses Paula Massood identifies, coupled with his maintaining the four *its*, resulted in the young filmmaker's status as an influential figure in both American cinema and popular culture.

My study builds on Massood's work. In Part I, "Will the Real Spike Lee Please Stand Up?" I chronicle the filmmaker's career and critical reception. Chapter 1, "Doin' the Spike Thing," further examines the *its he's gotta have* by focusing on his debut feature, *She's Gotta Have It* (1986). Chapter 2, "They Hate Him," discusses the films from 1988 to 1992 and introduces additional *its*, one of which is most likely indicative of his actual self: not only does Lee *gotta have* a filmmaking career, but he also has to have other African Americans with careers in the motion picture industry. A champion for integration in every aspect of the moviemaking business, Lee preached black self-reliance

and black entrepreneurship while employing those ideals in the service of his own attempt at building a legacy of African American film. This focus on black ownership reveals another *it*: Lee had to have money. Because of the filmmaker's aptitude for exploiting the system of capitalism while simultaneously calling (often publicly) for black solidarity, the perception of him as a spokesman began to develop. Ultimately, this led to a backlash against him, which the predominantly white critical community and black audience enacted through their reception of his movies. Chapter 3, "He Had Game," examines the damage the backlash against the Spike Lee persona wrought on the filmmaker's career in terms of critical and commercial acclaim through the prism of Spike Lee Joints released between 1994 and 1998. Ironically, Lee's waning influence in American pop culture was due to the amalgamation of the *its* he had to have: pro-black persona, outside endeavors which reflect a commitment to acquiring capital, and the rise of a stratified black cinema by black filmmakers that he inspired with his own filmmaking career. The last *it* explored in this chapter is the more seasoned filmmaker's penchant for experimentation, which begat a change in perception of him as a filmmaker. Part I ends with Chapter 4, "21st-century Inside Man," which focuses on the rebirth of the Spike Lee Joint as a pop culture event. The hoopla had little to do with his persona or any of the *its he's gotta have*. The picture, *Summer of Sam*—itself an investigation of backlash—is responsible for the renewed interest. Lee's execution of the film not only reveals the final *it*; it also suggests a new paradigm for interpreting the Spike Lee Joint.

Part II of my study, "He Gots ta' Get Paid," examines four of Spike Lee's 21st-century Joints—*Summer of Sam*, *25th Hour* (2002), *Inside Man* (2006), and *Miracle at St.*

Anna (2008)—using a paradigm that I am calling the commercial impulse. I argue that the characters of the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint embody Robin Wood's repression/oppression binary as it relates to Otherness. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour* respectively. Both movies star predominantly white casts whose negotiation of New York City at a historical moment of great strife converges with the protagonists' internal conflict regarding their own bi-homosexuality and/or homophobia. Chapters 7 and 8 explore Lee's navigation of the Hollywood genre film in *Inside Man* and *Miracle at St. Anna*. The first picture delves into the protagonist's and antagonist's willingness to adopt alternative ideologies in order to avoid joining the ranks of the proletariat. The second portrays a collection of characters willing to reject alternative ideologies or political systems in favor of protecting Other groups from oppressions enacted by those alternative ideologies—Nazism in the case of *Inside Man* and Nazism and Fascism in *Miracle at St. Anna*. I argue that the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint's focus on Otherness in multiple contexts besides race indicates the presence of the commercial impulse.

[1] Lee himself refers to a "so-called persona of Spike Lee" during a 2001 interview with Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas (215); however, I have yet to locate a source that names Lee's media act a persona. See Crowdus and Georgakas, "Thinking About the Power of Images: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 26.2 (Jan. 2001): 4-9, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cythia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2002, 202-17.

[2] Kaleem Aftab (26-49) also provides a condensed version of *She's Gotta Have It*'s odyssey to the multiplex in his chapter on Lee's debut feature in *That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It* as told to Kaleem Aftab. A reconstruction of Lee's career featuring testimony from Lee himself, his family members, his collaborators, and his critics, the book also chronicles the cultural impact of hip-hop and serves as the definitive text on Spike Lee. Also, John Pierson (45-78) painstakingly chronicles *She's Gotta Have It*'s journey from indie sensation to Hollywood moneymaker in *Spike, Mike, Slackers, and Dykes: A Guided Tour Across a Decade of American Independent Cinema*. Pierson contributed $10,000 to *She's Gotta Have It*'s budget, thus becoming the film's "largest individual investor" (49).

[3] There are two previous academic works on Spike Lee; however, together they cover only three Spike Lee Joints: *Spike Lee's* Do the Right Thing (1997), edited by Mark A. Reid for Cambridge University Press, and *A Rhetoric of Symbolic Identity: An Analysis of Spike Lee's* X *and* Bamboozled (2004), by Gerald A. Powell, Jr. for University Press of America.

Part I: Will the Real Spike Lee Please Stand Up?

Chapter 1: Doin' the Spike Thing: 1986 – 1987

After the release of *She's Gotta Have It*, Spike Lee rode a wave of unprecedented critical and commercial acclaim for an African American filmmaker en route to becoming an influential figure in American cinema and pop culture. His stature was largely the by-product of an unorthodox entrée into Hollywood during the mid-1980s. Lee had acquired representation by the William Morris Agency after his M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts) thesis film, *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop* (1983), won a student Academy Award. However, the young filmmaker soon rejected the time-honored practice of the artist's dependence on representation, thus clearing the way for his unconventional Hollywood entrance, an arrival guided by his dissatisfaction with the Hollywood establishment and ultimately determined by its slavish devotion to the status quo (Aftab 21). To Lee, the status quo in Hollywood reflected the racial hierarchy embedded within the institutions of mainstream America. The young filmmaker correctly perceived Hollywood's failure to promote black stories unless they were related by whites as evidence of institutional racism, the lack of African American control over narratives dramatizing the black experience often resulting in the monolithic, stereotypical, even caricatured depictions of African Americans and their lives. Indeed, multifarious representations of the black experience were scarce in mid-'80s Hollywood, which purported an "African American cinema" that did *not* reflect black filmmaking. John Pierson notes that with the exception of director-producer Michael Schultz,[1] African American cinema during this time was characterized by holdovers from the 1970s Blaxploitation cycle and prestige projects adapted from celebrated, black-authored works

in other mediums, namely playwright Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play* (1981) and novelist Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) (47).[2] The aforementioned films examine African American themes and feature predominantly black casts but are helmed by white filmmakers—acclaimed directors in the case of the rechristened *A Soldier's Story* (1984) and *The Color Purple* (1985), overseen by Norman Jewison and Steven Spielberg respectively.

This practice of entrusting and empowering nonblack filmmakers with telling African American stories was uncommon for mid-1980s Hollywood. Nelson George[3] confirms that in the mid-'80s "nothing was really happening. Hollywood was not interested in black subject matter for the most part[,] certainly not black directors" (39). And for the African American stories that did interest mainstream Hollywood in addition to *A Soldier's Story* and *The Color Purple*, Lee observed that those which became films "overstated the contribution of sympathetic whites in changing social attitudes toward blacks" (qtd. in Aftab 102). Lee is referring to Sir Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* (1987) and Sir Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988), dramatizations of the local and global struggle for civil rights faced by people of African descent told from the perspective of whites.[4] Lee's displeasure with the African American image on celluloid—the lack of diversity in its presentation throughout cinematic history especially—was a major impetus behind his pursuing a filmmaking career. [5] Challenging these images, as well as the assumptions that accompany them, would become Lee's cinematic preoccupation, a mode of addressing blackness in a way that was diametrically opposed to Hollywood's mid-'80s vision of the African American. Lee's aim was, as Janice Mosier Richolson would later define it, "to hold his cinematic mirror up to reflect

African-American reality as experienced by his generation" (25). In order to realize this goal, Lee sought to embed in his films what Paula Massood identifies as a

> cultural critique ... geared toward making cinematic and televisual representations of black life more complex by showing its varied looks, sounds, and textures. In this way, the director's films … suggest to audiences unfamiliar with black life that African American experiences are heterogeneous and complex. ("We've Gotta Have It" xvi)

This critique would become the foundation for *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), African American cinema's most successful attempt at exploding the time-honored Hollywood tradition of promulgating a monolithic black experience.

A young, professional, independent, sexually-liberated, and politically-engaged African American woman named Nola Darling (Tracy Camila Johns) embodies Spike Lee's stereotype-exploding intentions in *She's Gotta Have It*. Her three suitors also represent equally-diverse conceptions of black masculinity*:* Jamie Overstreet (Tommy Redmond Hicks), Greer Childs (John Canada Terrell), and Mars Blackmon (Lee himself). *She's Gotta Have It* is indeed, as Aftab proclaims, "notable for its treatment of black characters" (38). Nola, Jamie, Greer, and Mars reflect disparate backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, embodying certain identities that African Americans were cultivating in the 1980s: the boho, buppie, bap, and b-boy (Aftab 29). Nelson George defines these emerging archetypes:

> There is the Buppie [Jamie], ambitious and acquisitive, determined to savor the fruits of integration by any means necessary; the B-boy [Mars], molded by hip hop aesthetics and the tragedies of underclass life; the

> Black American Princess or Prince a/k/a/ BAP [Greer], who, whether by family heritage or personal will, enjoys an expectation of mainstream success and acceptance that borders on arrogance; and the Boho [Nola], a thoughtful, self-conscious figure … whose range of interest and taste challenges both black and white stereotypes of African American behavior. (*Buppies, B-Boys, Baps, and Bohos* 2)

George celebrates *She's Gotta Have It*'s challenging of the prevailing notions of blackness, musing about his experience of first watching Spike Lee's debut feature: "[i]t was like young, black, hip New York had a film to call their own, a film that on some level represented their reality: the buppie, the b-boy, the boho girl, all that stuff. I was so struck by it. [Lee] had awakened me,[6] and I'm sure a lot of people, particularly African-Americans, had that realization about themselves" (qtd. in Aftab 43). *She's Gotta Have It* production assistant Lisa Jones[7]—daughter of noted Black Arts poet and playwright Amiri Baraka (nè LeRoi Jones)—voices a similar fondness about her *She's Gotta Have It* viewing experience: "I was watching the same conversations about race that we were having in real life and seeing our sense of New York and African-American culture" (qtd. in Aftab 38).

Spike Lee's structuring a narrative focused on a protagonist such as Nola also upset the motion picture industry's treatment of gender, as she does not lead the "proper" existence of a woman in mid-1980s America. That she emerged from the imagination of a male creator further complicated the responses she elicited. According to Aftab, this fact led Lee to anticipate a strong audience reaction, especially from women. Despite the young filmmaker's extensive research—including his commission of a no-holds-barred,

female-authored, female-answered questionnaire on relationships and sex—he maintains that he was unable to "wholly capture a feminine perspective in his writing" (Lee qtd. in Aftab 29). Lee acknowledges that his debut feature "is still told from a male perspective, and it's about these men's perspectives on this woman who is leading her life *as* a man as far as her sexuality is concerned. We are really just showing the hypocrisy of men as to what they do, rather than Nola" (qtd. in Aftab 29). Unfortunately for the young filmmaker, his critique of gender-based double standards in *She's Gotta Have It* was overshadowed by the perceived one-dimensionality of his female characters and skewed sexual politics, charges that have dogged the filmmaker throughout his career.[8] Ever the contrarian, columnist-social commentator-(frequent Lee) critic Stanley Crouch simultaneously acknowledges and celebrates Nola's lack of depth:

> [t]he thing I found most interesting was that the woman was so boring. I said that to Spike once: "There is nothing interesting about Nola. She looked nice but she was totally soulless, really shallow." I thought that was profound. It creates a double-level pathos, because you feel sad for her. She's nowhere near what the guys make of her, and you feel sorry for the guys because they can't see that she has nothing to do with the fantasy that they have. (qtd. in Aftab 44)

Other readings of *She's Gotta Have It*, initiated by bell hooks's landmark essay,[9] do not interpret Nola's supposed one-dimensionality as a positive.

bell hooks simultaneously affirms and opposes Stanley Crouch's position. Like Crouch, hooks perceives *She's Gotta Have It* as an exploration of the "black male psyche" (4-5). Although she credits Lee with successfully critiquing "black male

sexism," hooks laments his execution of that critique, which he achieves via the guise of Nola's sexual autonomy. hooks attests that the young filmmaker's execution also affirms the patriarchal notion of "female sexual passivity," through Nola's rape and resulting decision to take her violator (Jamie) as a monogamous partner (choosing him over Greer and Mars) (3-7).[10] Furthermore, hooks contests the presentation of supporting character Opal Gilstrap (Raye Dowell), a lesbian the scholar considers "predatory … [and] as much a 'dog' as any of the men," thus constituting the masculinist/sexist/misogynist/homophobe criticism with which Lee has contended throughout his career (8).[11] From the outset, though, Lee preached proper contextualization concerning the women of *She's Gotta Have It*, reminding his detractors that

> [i]t came out in 1986. There might have been one other picture in the whole of the United States where there was a leading part for an African-American woman. When you have those types of numbers, you have unrealistic expectations about those characters: that they need to represent all African-American women. There was no way that Nola Darling was meant to represent every black woman in America. This is just one particular woman. (qtd. in Aftab 44)

Context is indeed paramount regarding Lee's debut feature. The cultural milieu of the 1980s was unfamiliar with depictions of a woman expressing sexual attitudes and practices similar to that of many men. By subverting the Hollywood approach to ethnic characterization through an equally transgressive depiction of gender, Lee circumvented the traditional route of crashing the Hollywood party.

The content of *She's Gotta Have It*, its atypical presentation of African Americans and the 1980s woman, constitutes only the first half of the Spike Lee aesthetic. A significant component, it allowed the young filmmaker to "require … audiences to question conventional structures of feeling, the normative approaches to life as lived in the United States, and to rethink national mythology" (Massood "We've Gotta Have It" xvi). Unfortunately, this iconoclasm also resulted in the cruel reality that funding for such a subversive project would only be available outside the traditional Hollywood apparatus. Because of *She's Gotta Have It*'s multifarious treatment of the black experience, the Hollywood establishment regarded such a positive response from a wider viewership as a risky proposition. John Pierson, however, considered such doubt much ado about nothing, certain that it was just Hollywood's ignorance of the black audience's desire and willingness to support a silver-screen project which presents them in their full humanity (67). While revisiting Lee's struggles in acquiring financing for *She's Gotta Have It*, Barry Alexander Brown[12] perceives the blatant disregard of the African American moviegoing audience as the manifestation of Hollywood's ignorance:

> Spike was going to sell percentage points in the film for $1,000 apiece. We didn't raise it. People at this point were saying to me, "There's a *reason* why there aren't a lot of films about blacks: there isn't a market for it. And Hollywood's not stupid; if there was a market they would have exploited it already." But in reality they [Hollywood] knew the audience was there – Spike would round up statistics to show how much of the audience was black – they just didn't *want* to exploit it, even though they knew it would be a success. (qtd. in Aftab 39)

In the estimation of Pierson, Brown, and others who accompanied Spike Lee on *She's Gotta Have It*'s journey to the big screen, the motion picture industry of the mid-1980s was indeed a major (if not the primary) impediment to the projection of diverse African American images from the perspective of actual African Americans.

Unready, unwilling, and unable to accept black-controlled stories and characters, the Hollywood establishment ensured that Lee would have to enter its ranks through the proverbial back door. According to Aftab, Lee's personal solicitation of independent financing proved that, "[a]s Melvin Van Peebles had demonstrated with *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, there was really no viable alternative … for a black man in search of film finance" (31).[13] Pierson confirms this reality of the American motion picture industry: "there was *no* interest in Spike. It was a different world then" (59). To the surprise of Hollywood insiders, Lee guerilla-shot *She's Gotta Have It* in twelve days on an independently-financed budget of $175,000 and shepherded it to an eventual theatrical release, resulting in the mythology advanced by *Spike Lee's Gotta Have It* and Pierson's *Spike, Mike, Slackers, and Dykes*.[14] This mythology elevated Spike Lee, along with fellow NYU alum Jim Jarmusch and John Sayles,[15] as a progenitor of modern American independent cinema—the "indie cred" aiding the young filmmaker in garnering a forum on which to showcase a movement away from stereotypical Hollywood depictions of blackness.

The second half of Spike Lee's aesthetic in *She's Gotta Have It* is perhaps most responsible for the picture's eventual success, the young filmmaker's technical execution shrewdly enveloping his iconoclastic portrayal of ethnicity and sex with another, more familiar movement recognizable to ultra-literate cinephiles. Lisa Jones identifies this

homage in her recollection of viewing the dailies on set: "[w]atching the film without the sound and seeing shots like the slow-mo of Mars Blackmon going from the top of the screen and kissing Nola's breast – for me, that perspective was straight out of a loopy sixties movie" (qtd. in Aftab 38).[16] Shot in black-and-white and depicting characters that "break the fourth wall" by addressing the audience, each offering a different perspective of the same event, *She's Gotta Have It* evokes the French "New Wave"—particularly Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960)—and Japanese cinema legend Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and *The Seven Samurai* (1954).[17] The film does include one colorized sequence, a vibrant dance scene in the middle of the narrative, an homage to the musical sequences of Vincente Minnelli as well as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Like the French New Wave filmmakers, Spike Lee's technical choices—on-location shooting, black and white film, still photography, and characters addressing the audience—were largely determined by budget, or lack thereof. These choices challenge conventional structures of feeling in terms of narrative, character, and audience. Lee's application of French New Wave technique enabled him to exploit audience familiarity with the movement, thus gaining critical acclaim.

The young filmmaker's nods to acknowledged cinematic high art such as the French New Wave and Kurosawa, as well as classic Hollywood favorites Minnelli and *The Wizard of Oz*, account for *She's Gotta Have It*'s acceptance into the 1986 San Francisco International Film Festival (SFIFF) and Cannes International Film Festival (CIFF).[18] Playing at such renowned gatherings exposed the picture to nationally-lauded movie critics. Aftab reports that their reviews were generally positive and almost uniformly acknowledged both Spike Lee's boldness in presenting such subversive

characters and his tenacity in raising his debut feature's budget through non-Hollywood channels. Aftab surmises that such a focus on Lee's nerve resulted in many critics "gloss[ing] over what they saw as the film's faults" (44). Pierson provides accounts of those critics who did bemoan the picture's technical crudeness, their reviews nonetheless asserting the artistic merit of *She's Gotta Have It* and its value to contemporary American cinema (55-69). Although earning Lee a measure of recognition, the notices Aftab and Pierson report also foreshadow an uneven critical reception that would eventually become the standard for subsequent Spike Lee Joints: the simultaneous lamentation of his aesthetic and celebration of him as an original cinematic voice offering what Marlaine Glicksman considers "a black insider's perspective on the contradictions and celebrations of African-American life" ("Lee Way" 15). Most significantly, the mixed reviews for *She's Gotta Have It*—like the Hollywood apparatus—largely amounted to critical discomfort with the black image, in this case Lee's. Ironically, unlike Hollywood, the critical discomfort was in response to a real-world stereotype ascribed to black men, not the cinematic stereotypes that Lee explodes in *She's Gotta Have It*.

By the SFIFF-premiere of *She's Gotta Have It*, Spike Lee had adopted the "angry black man" public persona. Mike Ellis[19] confirms that projecting such an image was a conscious decision on the part of the young filmmaker. However, Ellis's citing of the parallel between Lee's persona and *personality*—"upfront and confrontational and direct … he's direct as fuck. And that's good"—simultaneously suggests that the young filmmaker was not immune to the racist double standard ascribed to outspoken African American men (qtd. in Aftab 184). According to this notion, black men who articulate their thoughts clearly, succinctly, and with conviction are vilified as angry instead of

celebrated as "straight-shooters" like their white counterparts. In a roundabout way, Barry Brown agrees with Ellis, at the same time implying that the young filmmaker's frankness was at least in part a defense mechanism against the ego-inflating trappings of Hollywood success. A Best Documentary Feature Oscar co-nominee for *The War at Home* (1979), an examination of the anti-war resistance in Madison, Wisconsin, Brown marvels at Spike Lee's ability to compartmentalize:

> There is a moment when everything changes. I had that too, and I went nuts, beating myself up, going off the rails. And it's easy to do; you have to fight it. Spike had the moment with *She's Gotta Have It*. Eddie Murphy called up and said, "Spike, we have to make a movie together," and Spike says, "Eddie, what movie are you and I going to make together?" If that had been me at that point, I would have made the film with Eddie Murphy. […] Also Spike got a call from L.A. from an executive at a studio. Spike didn't know who he was, but he wanted Spike to get on a plane and meet him in L.A. Spike was furious. He said, "I didn't call you, you called me. I don't know who you are. If you want to see me, you get on a plane and come here and I will meet with you in Brooklyn – and don't even talk to me about Manhattan, I mean *Brooklyn*."[20] Holy Moses, I didn't know how he could talk to people like that. But he was fighting not to let it go to his head, not to lose it. (qtd. in Aftab 48)

This combativeness was on full display during SFIFF, resulting in "the media interest in Spike [being] enormous, but his quiet demeanor, interspersed with bitter outcries, left many journalists aggrieved" (42).[21] Himself a columnist, Nelson George recalls

colleagues airing their grievances about the young filmmaker to him: "[a] lot of reporters would call me up, because Spike would be totally quiet and give monosyllabic answers, but when you hit the right subject, he just rallied. It would go from zero to ten. And if you talked about white directors directing 'black films,' such as Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple*, he exploded" (qtd. in Aftab 42). Indeed, implicit in the Spike Lee persona is a critique of the Hollywood (and all of American media) reality of a select few wielding the power to disseminate images.

Throughout his early career, Lee often took a stance against white directors examining the black experience on film, most notably Steven Spielberg for *The Color Purple*[22] and Norman Jewison for *A Soldier's Story*. This call for black control of distinctly African American stories culminated six years later, when Lee engaged in race-based media warfare that resulted in his wresting control of the *Malcolm X* project from Jewison (Aftab 142). Lee also critiqued white directors who made a practice of not hiring African Americans. Pierson recounts the young filmmaker's appearance on the ill-fated *David Brenner Show* during the promotional blitz for *She's Gotta Have It*, where Lee castigated Woody Allen for "having no blacks in his New York movies" (73). The militant sensibility in the Spike Lee persona functioned as an ideal accompaniment to the artist's possibly chauvinistic interrogation of conventional structures of feeling, normative approaches to life as lived in the U.S., and national mythology. Together, the persona and the artist exploited the dichotomy between white, liberal Hollywood's response to non-stereotypical images of blackness on film and real-world stereotypes of African American men. Although this played a part in *She's Gotta Have It*'s becoming available to audiences, the ultimate credit belongs to the film's content.

In *She's Gotta Have It*, its writer-director-producer-star's marrying of the transgressive and traditional resulted in its acceptance to major film festivals, subsequent critical acclaim, and eventual distribution into American multiplexes by Island Pictures. Nelson George's recollection of the climate in the motion picture industry at the time attests to the path that Lee was forging:

> [t]here was no precedent for a black sex comedy.[23] … *Everything* was against this thing working. But when Spike screened the film, there was a magic that people hadn't seen before. There's nothing better – or more threatening – than that kind of art. People did say, "Shoot in color!" … [N]ot everyone liked it. But there was something going on in that film that was undeniable. (qtd. in Aftab 39)

The menacing nature ascribed to the unfamiliar freshness of Lee's debut feature was indeed palpable to those entrenched in the young filmmaker's camp, Barry Brown arguing that it was manifest in the form of the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) ratings board. Unlike the feminist objection to its sexual politics, *She's Gotta Have It* became an MPAA target due to its portrayal of sexuality itself, especially that of African Americans. Brown argues that the MPAA was intent on levying an X rating (restricting the admittance of anyone under the age of seventeen),[24] thereby endangering *She's Gotta Have It*'s theatrical release in major theaters due to theater chains' policies of not showing X-rated movies:

> The MPAA is made up of white middle-class people out of L.A., and L.A. is the most segregated place I have ever been[.] … Segregated beyond race: segregated in terms of class, money, position, and what your

> profession is. I think they had a hard time with black people just being people – and especially a sexually active young black woman. It flipped them out. They could not come back to us and say, "We are going to give you the harshest rating we can because the people in the film are black." The only thing they could focus on was this fast-action sex scene. They said, "No doggy style." They also said, "There is one spot where you can see a penis." We said, "OK, tell us where, we'll cut it." We recut it three times, and on the third time they rejected it we then asked them to give us specific frames that they had a problem with. … It was a month before the film came out, and Spike was confident that they would give the film an R [which requires seventeen-year-olds to be accompanied by a parent or guardian]. The MPAA took their time over seeing it again, and by the day of release they still hadn't seen it. The film came out and it had still not been officially given an R rating.[25] (qtd. in Aftab 44-5)

Aftab reports that the MPAA threatened a "breach of copyright" suit against Island Pictures for the unapproved use of its trademarked R symbol on the promotional poster for *She's Gotta Have It*, resulting in the ratings board's identification of the scene requiring editing (the same sex scene), the extent to be cut (one-half of it), and Brown's editing of that scene in the projection room at Cinema Studio (45).[26] Brown recalls watching moviegoers exit the theater playing *She's Gotta Have It*, and—unexpectedly to him—their faces physically expressed the feeling that George and Lisa Jones verbalized upon first seeing the movie: the audience was "*aglow* – especially the young women" (qtd. in Aftab 45). George and Jones's sentiments about Spike Lee's debut feature would

in fact reverberate throughout the black audience, simultaneously affirming Pierson's, Brown's, and Spike Lee's assertions of the viability of African American moviegoers.

The message "THIS FILM CONTAINS NO JERRI CURLS!!! AND NO DRUGS!!!" appears during the scrolling end credits of *She's Gotta Have It,* firmly establishing its opposition to the Hollywood formula that had dictated portrayals of blackness and the African American experience. According to Pierson, "Spike always said you never get to see black people kissing. He gave them [the African American audience] a lot more. Even the 40 Acres logo got a rise out of black viewers" (71). One would imagine that so, too, did the scrolling credits message, for the subsequent reaction from black moviegoers helped carry the picture to its now-legendary $7.5 million domestic gross (Pierson 75).[27] Pierson reports that although "[t]he official company line always described the *She's Gotta Have It* audience as 50 percent black/50 percent white, … crowd composition throughout the [theatrical] run was more than 75 percent black and the degree of celebration, identification, and pride was really palpable."[28] Lee would insist to Aftab that he expected the African American audience's overwhelmingly positive response to *She's Gotta Have It*: "I really believed there was an audience for the type of films that I wanted to make, dealing specifically with the African-American experience in America" (46). An audience-pleaser, Spike Lee's debut feature satisfied black people's yearning for a democratic portrayal of their experience on the silver screen. The mythology behind Lee's shattering of the Hollywood glass ceiling served to inspire and empower black filmmakers. This was especially on display during the opening weekend reunion of Lee, his cast, crew, and producers, and Island Pictures representatives at The Royal Theater in Santa Monica, California. A teenager approached

Lee and proclaimed that he would make movies, too (Pierson 71).[29] That high-school senior was John Singleton, who six years later would become—at the age of 24—the first African American to receive an Oscar nomination for Best Director for his debut feature, *Boyz N the Hood*.[30]

A transformational figure, Spike Lee's fusing of the subversive (diverse images of blackness and a sexually-autonomous woman) with the standard (cinematic high-art in the vein of the French New Wave) laid the foundation of a "New Black Aesthetic." Combined with *She's Gotta Have It*'s black audience-driven, approximately $7 million box-office profit, the new black aesthetic afforded unprecedented opportunities for African American filmmakers such as John Singleton, begetting what Paula Massood terms the "New Black Cinema movement" ("We've Gotta Have It" xviii). The year after the triumph of Spike Lee and *She's Gotta Have It*, Robert Townsend, a supporting player in *A Soldier's Story*, broke through with *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987). The account of his personal struggle to make an atypical black film in Hollywood (he had financed it by maxing out all of his credit cards) echoed the mythology of Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*. *Hollywood Shuffle*,

> penned by Townsend and Keenan [sic] Ivory Wayans, was a semi-autobiographical account of a black actor struggling to get a role that is not that of a gangster, slave, or Eddie Murphy–type clown. … [T]he film constituted another attempt to show that there were numerous stories that black people wanted to tell on film. Its box-office success proved that the black audience who attended *She's Gotta Have It* was still out there in substantial numbers. (Aftab 51)

Massood informs us that at the onset of the 1990s, in addition to Singleton, Reginald Hudlin, Mario Van Peebles (Melvin's son), and the Hughes Brothers (twins Allen and Albert) all situated themselves within the newly-established tradition by releasing *House Party* (1990), *New Jack City* (1991), and *Menace II Society* (1993) respectively ("We've Gotta Have It" xviii).[31] Spike Lee himself continued going on strong into the '90s with *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Jungle Fever* (1991), and *Malcolm X* (1992), his aptitude in exploiting the bottom line-machinery of the Hollywood apparatus enabling him to build an enviable body of work within only six years.

The improbable commercial success of *She's Gotta Have It* allowed Lee, ever the student of capitalism, to maintain independence in the face of the Hollywood establishment—essentially another glorified, albeit in a different way, good ole boy network. In an achievement worthy of acclaim itself, Lee was granted final cut privilege (a filmmaker's contractually-negotiated authority over how a film is ultimately released for public viewing) starting with *School Daze*. Smarting from the success of smaller, upstart independent movie studios Island Pictures (*She's Gotta Have It*) and the Samuel Goldwyn Company (*Hollywood Shuffle*) gaining a foothold with the black audience, Columbia Pictures was the first studio "to concede final cut to Spike, a demand he insists on putting into every contract" (Aftab 55-6). Indeed, Lee asserts, "The precedent was set with *She's Gotta Have It*. And I have always been able to keep my final cut because my films haven't really cost that much" (qtd. in Aftab 56). Ossie Davis's observation upon arriving on the *School Daze* set affirms why Lee's movies don't cost very much: "I was impressed when I got to Atlanta, because I was met by Grace Black, a production

executive whom I had worked with before, and she said Spike was ahead of schedule and under budget. And I sort of like that: the way he works, organizes things" (qtd. in Aftab 69). To this day, Lee is one of the few directors in Hollywood with final cut privilege, a freedom enjoyed only by filmmakers with proven box-office bankability[32] or who merge significant critical acclaim with generally cost-effective projects.[33] The creative control associated with final cut enabled Lee to serve African American moviegoers by presenting them with varying filmic images consistent with their experiences.

The result of the artistic freedom granted by final cut privilege allowed Lee to indulge in more probing explorations of the black experience on film. As a result, much more is expected of African American moviegoers in the post-*She's Gotta Have It* Spike Lee Joints, which Paula Massood asserts "often ask African American audience members to consider the ways in which internalized racism can fragment—or unite—a community" ("We've Gotta Have It" xvi). In *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Malcolm X*, Lee develops a personal aesthetic which builds on what he establishes in *She's Gotta Have It*, evolving from simple negotiation of the black Hollywood image to more complex investigations of black *self*-image. Assessing the essays that comprise her edited collection, Massood locates the filmmaker's cinematic project within a larger African American tradition:

> [b]ecause Lee's films raise questions that have been central to African American life and letters for more than a century, many of the articles, both old and new, return to seminal cultural and political figures, including W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, to remind readers that the desire to author an African

> American identity has long been bound up in an attempt to define an African American aesthetic; ... black identity often has been connected directly to what is on the page or the screen. ("We've Gotta Have It" xxii)

Functioning within this allusion to the historical quandary W.E.B. DuBois terms double consciousness, Massood illustrates the predicament of Lee's filmic project: "to introduce a distinct, historicized, African American point of view into a medium that is often solely associated with entertainment ... [by] return[ing] us to decisive moments in history, often announcing [his films'] pedagogical intentions" while at the same time "adapt[ing] American aesthetics for an African American context and vice versa, in the process creating a mode of address that acknowledges black subjectivity as part of a national point of view" (xxiii, xvii). These three, what I call, impulses—documentary, teaching, and American—emerge in the films of Spike Lee, resulting in the Joints' classification as, according to Jen Chaney, "a genre unto themselves" (T29).

School Daze represents the first instance of Lee's conscious shift in focus from the cinematic African American image to real-world examinations of African American self-image. In order to accomplish this in *School Daze*, Lee first establishes a historical context that the audience would recognize as a partial cause of current inter- and intraracial issues facing black America. Commencing with still photography of slave vessels, coffles, and slave quarters and progressing to transformational African American leaders and intellectuals and ultimately to young, black students, Lee dramatizes these contemporary matters, reminding Kaleem Aftab that

> [s]lavery was the reason why there are schools for blacks. Historically, blacks were unable to enroll in white institutions – that is their heritage.

> What we did was use a historically black college as a microcosm of America, hoping to highlight the so-called differences that I feel are petty, that keep blacks from being a unified people – class, skin color, hair type, that type of stuff. (57)

School Daze director of photography Ernest Dickerson concurs, his notice of the movie's polemical execution—which would become one of Lee's directorial signatures—testifying to Lee's audacity. In the picture, Lee sheds light on the real-world issue of the sensitive, long-suppressed, and self-maintained *intra*racial color hierarchy amongst African Americans as a way of illuminating the *inter*racial color hierarchy of South African Apartheid (Aftab 58).

Massood would perceive his documentary impulse in Lee's approach in *School Daze*. She traces this documentary impulse throughout Lee's post-*She's Gotta Have It* oeuvre, attesting that

> [w]hile most of his theatrical releases have been fiction films, many refer to actual historical or contemporary events from large-scale global disasters, such as slavery [in *School Daze*] … to more localized events (Malcolm X's assassination … [and] the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles [in *Malcolm X*] … [and] the deaths of Eleanor Bumpers, Michael Stewart,[34] and Yusef Hawkins[35] in New York City [in *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever* respectively] …) with national repercussions. ("We've Gotta Have It" xxiii)

"In many cases, such as *Malcolm X* …[,]" Massood continues, "real-world actualities structure a narrative in which fact is skillfully blended with fiction" ("We've Gotta Have

It" xxiii). Again displaying a tendency of (and adeptness at) mythmaking and exploiting mythologies, Lee employs "historical moments and myths [as] inspirations for the narrative" in pictures such as *Jungle Fever* ("We've Gotta Have It" xxiii). R. Barton Palmer expands on this notion, concluding that the Spike Lee documentary impulse functions to "explain key aspects of the national experience [and] ... offers, at least in part, a collective approach to historical memorialization and analysis," thus yielding the teaching impulse (56). The need to disseminate information via entertainment—"infotainment" as pioneer rapper-actor-writer-director-producer Ice Cube famously characterized hip-hop music during the 1990s—distinguishes the Spike Lee project after *She's Gotta Have It*.

A great deal of the criticism Lee has received as a filmmaker is a result of the development and expression of the teaching impulse in his work. Audrey Thomas McCluskey critiques the very existence of a teaching impulse in the Spike Lee Joint, attributing it to the young filmmaker's "lineage … and nurturance in a culture of black middle class responsibility" (xii). This is a familiar refrain voiced by much of the black academe throughout Lee's career. Likewise, the common criticisms of the Spike Lee Joint arise out of Lee's authorial signatures, themselves by-products of the teaching impulse. Chief among those fingerprints, Kent Jones charges, is a "block-by-block, hard plastic clarity" in which "tempo and nuance are always sacrificed" along with "personal concerns in favor of political directness" (42, 43, 45). More often than not, this fidelity to salience, geared towards simplifying the moviegoing experience, actually disorients audiences. Nelson George affectionately deems Lee's flourishes "Spikeisms—devices sprinkled throughout the feature that stop the narrative yet reinforce the film's theme"

("Film and Fury" 80). At times Spikeisms are manifest through Lee's "liberal application of pop songs ladled over large portions of his films," of which the opening still photography sequence of *School Daze*—set to the Morehouse College Glee Club's rendition of the Negro spiritual "I'm Building Me a Home"—is a prime example (Jones 43). The son of a jazz bassist, Lee's fascination with music indeed plays a significant role in the creation of a Spike Lee Joint. One could argue that music is paramount, for the foundation of a Spike Lee movie (any movie, really)—the screenplay—often resembles a musical composition.

The consummate writer-director, Lee often composes his scripts and shoots them in accordance with musical principals instead of cinematic conventions. Carrie Rickey perfectly captures this practice in her review of *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), observing that if the picture "were a symphony, you'd think, three sublime movements, a fourth that's turgid, and what's with the wacky coda?" (W22). Lee's execution of his cinematic vision in musical terms usually results in his films projecting an uneven tone, inducing further opposing progressions of moods. Frequently the contradictions inherent in these divergent tones advance towards "wacky" resolutions that subvert the typical "Hollywood ending" by, ironically, eschewing clarity in favor of ambiguity and non-statement, posing one or more questions instead. This leads George to conclude that "Lee doesn't devote himself fully to plot" and his movies "have an experimental, nonmainstream quality" as a result ("Film and Fury" 80).[36] This in part accounts for the mainstream critical zeal of bemoaning the Spike Lee Joint by way of reducing its architect to a "propagandist" and not a filmmaker, which Jones argues "grows out of what can only be understood as fear of encroachment on the sacred territory of American

cinema and its myths" (44). Ironically, Lee's subversive means of traversing Hollywood terrain results in his own mythmaking, which is expressed in a New York City Stephen Holden characterizes "as a jungle ruled by feuding warlords with a zest for violence" operating under a "tentative peace" while "variations of the same rivalries and hatreds continue to percolate" ("Post-9/11 and Pre-" 13). To Spike Lee, this mythologized Big Apple functions as a microcosm of America.

The Spike Lee Joint's portrayal of this historicized New York City to satisfy the pedagogical aim of interpreting American culture at a particular time indicates an American impulse. Perhaps (unfairly) ignored by critics, scholars, and audiences, the Spike Lee Joint after *She's Gotta Have It* bears a "broadly *American* [my emphasis]" underpinning that compliments the African American focus of the new black aesthetic (Massood "We've Gotta Have It" xvi). Kent Jones expands on Massood's notion, as well as Holden's characterization of Lee's New York, locating the young filmmaker's artistic double consciousness as

> firmly positioned … midway between didacticism and dialectics. The didactic side is his tireless effort to keep the desires, frustrations, looming terrors, and class diversity among African-American men visible and viable within mainstream, i.e. white, i.e. racist American culture.[37] The dialectical side is the rigorous manner in which he breaks down and presents the warring components of American society, a pot in which nothing melts and everything congeals.[38] The ensuing tension, which catches characters in a grid between the personal and the societal, is palpable in every one of his films. (43)

This binary often manifests in “social difference,” which Sharon Willis argues “becomes the site of verbal, physical, and psychic violence” (182). Often liminal figures, the verbal and physical violence inflicted and endured by Lee’s characters are the tangible manifestation of their psychological struggle with processing social difference. Life indeed imitated art in the career of Spike Lee, as the (predominantly white) critical reception of his movies fueled a misunderstanding of the films themselves based on a mischaracterization of Lee himself. The subsequent conflict, along with the actual content of the pictures themselves, resulted in the theatrical release of a Spike Lee Joint becoming an event in American popular culture.

[1] Schultz helmed coming-of-age comedy-drama *Cooley High* (1975), Richard Pryor comedies *Car Wash* (1976) and *Which Way Is Up?* (1977), martial-arts comedy (and Blaxploitation parody) *The Last Dragon* (1985), and hip-hop comedy-drama (the first of its kind) *Krush Groove* (1985). The operative word concerning the cinema of Schultz is "comedy."

[2] Both Fuller's play and Walker's novel were awarded the Pulitzer Prize in their respective genres.

[3] Aftab (19-20) notes that George—then managing editor of *Billboard* magazine—took an interest in Lee after catching an airing of *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop* on PBS (Public Broadcasting System). George's interview with Lee appears in *He's Gotta Have It* (19-64), a conversation that provides much of what we now know about Lee's early life. Pierson (49) reports that George, too, invested in *She's Gotta Have It*.

[4] *Cry Freedom* explores apartheid and the life of South African anti-apartheid activist Steven Biko (Denzel Washington) through the eyes of white journalist Donald Woods (Kevin Kline). *Mississippi Burning* revisits the American Civil Rights Movement, centering on the white FBI agents called in to investigate the disappearance of three Civil Rights workers in rural Mississippi. Only John Sayles escaped Lee's critical eye, likely due to the content of *Brother from Another Planet* (1984), which critiques American racism through science-fiction conventions coloring the African American protagonist (Joe Morton) as an escaped alien slave from another planet. Aftab (28) notes that the unexpected commercial success and achievement of cult status that the independently-financed, black-and-white *Brother* garnered was a conscious model for Lee and *Brother*'s director of photography Ernest Dickerson, Lee's NYU classmate and DP on *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads*, *She's Gotta Have It*, and subsequent Spike Lee Joints *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Malcolm X*.

[5] Aftab (103) reports that Lee also harbored "a long-standing aversion to Hollywood's stock depiction of the black jazz musician," either "a sideshow in so-called jazz films" such as *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *St. Louis Blues* (1958) or a flawed genius "beset by personal problems and social tensions" in *Paris Blues* (1961), *A Man Called Adam* (1966), and *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972). *Mo' Better Blues* addresses the black jazzman character, Lee explicitly deeming it his response to two contemporary jazz films, Bernard Tavernier's *'Round Midnight* (1986) and Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988). Lee shares with Aftab (103-4) his observations about *'Round Midnight* and *Bird* (a biopic of jazz great Charlie Parker [Forest Whitaker]): "[I]f you look at both of those films together, there's really no joy, no warmth. In every scene it's raining … *Bird* is one of the darkest films that ever had a theatrical release. You can hardly see an image on the celluloid. It's like, 'Oh, these jazz musicians are so tormented, they never laughed, they never had joy in their life, they're all tragic and torn and twisted.' Of course, that might have been a small part of it. But at the same time I was thinking about the musicians I grew up with, of my generation – Branford and Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, Donald Harrison. These guys weren't rich, but they were making good money. And they played basketball, football, they loved sports, they had family, they had girlfriends, had a good time going out, living – they're not simply moping around lamenting the misery of their lives."

[6] George's phrasing is significant, considering that "Wake up!" is the last line of dialogue in *School Daze* and the first words we hear in *Do the Right Thing*.

[7] Lisa Jones would go on to serve as second unit director on *School Daze* and co-author (with Lee) the companion books to *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Mo' Better Blues*: *Uplift the Race: The Construction of* School Daze, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Mo' Better Blues*.

[8] Even Lee's wife, Tonya Lewis Lee, takes issue with his underdeveloped female characters, especially LaLa (Rosario Dawson) in *He Got Game*. See Aftab 241.

[9] hooks's "whose pussy is this?: a feminist comment" is a foundational text for Spike Lee studies and is often cited by individuals contemplating the intersection of feminism and film studies, feminism and African American studies, and African American and film studies.

[10] Lee is on record multiple times, including to Aftab (47-8), expressing regret over the rape scene in *She's Gotta Have It*: "that is the one scene in all my films that I would redo. I think the rape and especially its aftermath were too flippant. I didn't really show the violation that it is. It was ill conceived – all the ills that you can get. It just made light of rape, and it really comes down to immaturity on my part."

[11] Pierson (73) acknowledges this criticism, even sampling hooks's phrasing. Lee would often reduce concerns surrounding the sexual politics in his movies to the feminist desire for a purely lesbian film, a story he was adamant about *not* telling. Until *She Hate Me*. See Aftab 67.

[12] Brown served as Lee's editor on *School Daze*; *Do the Right Thing*; *Malcolm X*; *He Got Game*; *Freak*, a filmed live performance of John Leguizamo's one-man show; *Summer of Sam*; *The Original Kings of Comedy*, a filmed live stand-up comedy performance of comics Steve Harvey, D.L. Hughley, Cedric the Entertainer, and Bernie Mac; *A Huey P. Newton Story*, a filmed live performance of Roger Guenveur Smith's one-man show; *25th Hour*; *She Hate Me*; *Sucker Free City*, Lee's first foray into made-for-TV features; *Inside Man*; *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, a documentary miniseries on Hurricane Katrina for Home Box Office (HBO); *Miracle at St. Anna*; "Passing Strange" episode of *Great Performances*, a filmed performance of the stageplay *Passing Strange* for PBS; *Kobe Doin' Work*, a documentary on NBA player Kobe Bryant for ESPN Films; *Bad 25*, a documentary commemorating the 25th anniversary of Michael Jackson's *Bad* album; and *Oldboy*, Lee's remake of the 2003, international, award-winning sensation from South Korea.

[13] It is especially ironic that Van Peebles's movie kickstarted the black film movement that Hollywood eventually coopted and repackaged as Blaxploitation, which of course stifled the development of African American cinema.

[14] Pierson (45, 78) declares Lee his hero in the first and last sentence of his chapter on *She's Gotta Have It* in *Spike, Mike, Slackers, and Dykes* but has since evolved in his perception of Lee as an independent filmmaker. Aftab (147) reports that Lee's directing *Malcolm X* for Warner Brothers Studios changed Pierson's thinking: "What Spike had set up at Universal, I thought that was a model for how an independent-minded person could work with studio money. Universal would ask, 'How much do you need? Here is how much we'll give you, we'll read the script, who's in it?' And that was that, and he went off and made the movie. …

If you were to ask me if I would put Spike in that same exalted position at the heart of independent film now, the answer would be no."

[15] Aftab (22, 28, 35) and Pierson (50, 65-6) each report that Lee held Sayles and Jarmusch in high esteem, modeling his career on theirs.

[16] The example that first comes to mind is Woody Allen's 1972 farce, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask*. Lee has resisted the "black Woody Allen" label since it was imposed on him by Hollywood and media types upon the release of *She's Gotta Have It*. This espousal is so widespread that a specific reference is unnecessary.

[17] Lee admits to Aftab (35) that he relied on Godard's *Breathless* and Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* during the shooting of *She's Gotta Have It*. Pierson (64, 53) also acknowledges the French New Wave influence on Lee. 1990s indie auteur Kevin Smith recognizes the influence of Kurosawa's *Rashomon* on Lee's debut feature during an interview with Pierson (32).

[18] Premiering at SFIFF, *She's Gotta Have It* afforded Lee the opportunity to meet Kurosawa, who was honored with a lifetime achievement award. The screening of *She's Gotta Have It* during the Directors' Fortnight at CIFF also earned Lee the festival's prestigious Prix de la Jeunesse (Price of Youth) prize. Upset at not winning the Camera d'Or (Gold Camera) for best first feature, Lee renamed his Prix de la

Jeunesse the "booby prize." See Pierson 53-66 and Aftab 40-3.

[19] Ellis worked as Lee's first assistant director on *Crooklyn*; *Clockers*; *Girl 6*; *Get on the Bus*; *He Got Game*; *Freak*; *Summer of Sam*; *The Original Kings of Comedy*; *Bamboozled*; *A Huey P. Newton Story*; *25th Hour*; *She Hate Me*; *Sucker Free City*; *Miracle's Boys*, Lee's introduction to the TV miniseries; *Inside Man*; "Pilot" episode for *Shark*, an episodic television star vehicle for James Woods; *Miracle at St. Anna*; "Passing Strange"; *Red Hook Summer*; and *Oldboy*.

[20] Lee has since moved to Manhattan because of—according to Tonya—the filmmaker's status as a neighborhood institution: "People were ringing our doorbell every hour of the night … asking for a job, a hook-up, anything. … It was an issue of quality of life, in particular for me and my children. I couldn't live in a place where the neighborhood felt they could ring our doorbell. The last straw came for me when I was at home by myself, four in the morning, Satchel [the couple's daughter and first-born] is six months old, and a man rings the doorbell and says, 'Someone is stealing the flowers from your window box.' I said, 'OK, thanks for letting me know.' He then rings the bell again. 'Well, you need to come out here.' And he kept ringing the bell, trying to get me to come outside. I felt really vulnerable. So I gave Spike the ultimatum." See Aftab 240.

[21] Aftab (43) further reports similar critical sentiments about Lee.

[22] Lee confesses to Aftab (43) that his issue with Spielberg's adaptation of Alice Walker's epistolary novel was rooted in the novel itself, which he argued led the way for a cycle of books "that were coming down hard on the black male. It seemed to me then that if you had a manuscript with that kind of slant, you were given a book deal."

[23] Aftab (38) notes that *She's Gotta Have It* "is not quite the raucous sexual comedy it professes to be on its poster"—one would assume due to the rape scene.

[24] The X rating has since been replaced by NC-17, which prohibits the admittance of anyone under the age of seventeen.

[25] Released on August 15, 1986 at the Cinema Studio theater in Manhattan, *She's Gotta Have It* conformed to the counterprogramming release strategy Island had successfully enacted the previous year with eventual Oscar nominee (Best Picture, Director [Hector Babenco], and Adapted Screenplay [Leonard Schrader]) and winner (Best Actor William Hurt), *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. See Aftab 43 and Pierson 66. Lee would be subject to the counterprogramming release strategy for much of his career.

[26] Pierson (68, 70) seconds Brown's account of the MPAA issue, opposing the editor on one point: in the sex scene in question, Pierson confirms that Terrell's erection was visible and suggests that Lee's failure to edit out all of it was in protest of the MPAA. Lee admits to Aftab (45) that he "always had a checkered relationship with the MPAA. What has been really difficult for me to understand is how they distinguish between whether sex or violence is more detrimental to young minds. I think that they've been too lenient on violence and that they're too controlling of sex. What you have to realize about the sex thing is that there are no guidelines. They tell you something is an R on one film, and the next year you do the same thing and they give you an X rating."

[27] Aftab (46) lists the domestic gross for *She's Gotta Have It* as $8 million. The many unauthorized biographies of Spike Lee and critical summaries/analyses of his movies report various box-office figures between $7 and $8 million.

[28] Aftab (38) also reports the positive response of African American moviegoers: "[b]lack members of the audience were beside themselves that a film was finally dealing with their lives … in a manner that more closely resembled their sense of their own experience than the stereotypes being offered by Hollywood."

Additionally, Pierson (75) identifies a strategy which he reports would become industry practice for movies such as *School Daze*, *House Party*, and *Menace II Society*, noting that "the vast majority of the box office gross for a specialized film, especially one that attracts a primarily black audience, comes from a finite number of markets. I sent a chart to Spike and Island showing that an amazing 87 percent of the first $6 million gross on *She's Gotta Have It* came from only twenty markets, half from the Northeast Amtrak corridor [from Washington, DC to Boston], and a full third from the New York metropolitan area. Even more remarkably, half the total gross was generated by just twenty individual theaters. Several of those venues—like the Sunrise in Valley Stream [NY], the Grand Lake in Oakland, and the Baldwin Hills in L.A.—drew almost exclusively from the African-American community."

[29] Aftab (140) also relates a variation of this mythology.

[30] Singleton's screenplay, his final project in the University of Southern California's (USC) Filmic Writing Program, was also nominated for Best Original Screenplay.

[31] Massood ("We've Gotta Have It" xviii-xix) discerns Lee's international influence as well, noting the "cinematic explorations of the politics of race, economics, and postcolonial tensions in their specific national contexts" in Cameroon filmmaker Jean-Paul Bekolo's *Quartier Mozart* (1992) and French helmer Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995). Massood also perceives Lee's influence in the "urban settings, youth communities, pop-culture references, and reflective aesthetics" in Mexican auteur Alejandro Gonzàlez Inàrritu's *Amores Perros* (2000) and Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles's *City of God* (2002).

[32] This list includes Martin Scorsese (*The Departed*, *Shutter Island*, *Hugo*), George Lucas (the *Star Wars* sequence), Steven Spielberg (the *Indiana Jones* sequence, *E.T.*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Lincoln*), Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*, *Alien* and its sort-of prequel *Prometheus*, *Gladiator*), James Cameron (*The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Aliens*, *Titanic*, *Avatar*), Robert Zemeckis (the *Back to the Future* trilogy, *Forrest Gump*, *Flight*), and Peter Jackson (the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*, *King Kong*).

[33] Among this group are Woody Allen (*Match Point*, *VickyChristinaBarcelona*, *Midnight in Paris*), Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather* trilogy, *Apocalypse Now*), Terrence Malick (*Badlands*, *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The Tree of Life*), Joel and Ethan Coen (*Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, *No Country for Old Men*, *True Grit*), David Fincher (*Se7en*, *Fight Club*, *The Social Network*), Quentin Tarantino (*Pulp Fiction*, *Inglorious Basterds*, *Django Unchained*), and Alexander Payne (*About Schmidt*, *Sideways*, *The Descendants*).

[34] Aftab (75-6) chronicles the racial tension in New York City that Lee dramatizes in *Do the Right Thing*: "On December 20, 1986, a few months after *She's Gotta Have It* established Spike as a local celebrity, a twenty-three-year-old African-American construction worker named Michael Griffith was killed after being chased by an Italian-American mob in Howards Beach, Queens. Griffith was with two black friends, Cedric Saniford and Timothy Grimes, when their car broke down in front of a pizza parlour. They wandered inside, hoping to call for help, and when they were refused the use of the phone they sat down to eat. Soon after, two police officers answering a call citing 'three suspicious black males' walked in, but left as soon as they realized the calls were unwarranted. Thereafter, a group of white men – among them John Lester, Scott Kern, and Jason Landone – chased the black youths out of the pizzeria toward a gang of accomplices waiting with baseball bats. Grimes escaped after he pulled a knife; Saniford was knocked unconscious and, as a severely beaten Griffith tried to stagger away from his pursuers, he wandered onto the busy Belt Parkway, where he was hit and killed by a passing automobile. New York erupted, witnessing its largest black protest rallies since the civil-rights movement. … A similar fate befell Eleanor Bumpers in 1984, when the police were called in to evict this sixty-seven-year-old arthritic woman with psychiatric problems from her Bronx home. Bumpers answered the door holding a kitchen knife for protection against her 'enemies,' as was her wont: the policemen on the scene blew her hands off and then, as if to make sure, shot her dead. … [G]raffiti artist Michael Stewart was apprehended by eleven policemen in a white transit van and choked to death – the evidence of Stewart being strangled by the police was 'lost.' … [Lee] …

borrowed details from the true-life accounts: from Howard Beach, the baseball bat, the pizzeria, conflict between blacks and Italian-Americans, and a call issued by blacks to boycott pizzerias for one day in protest of the Griffith death. From the case of Michael Stewart, he [Lee] took the lethal chokehold."

[35] Aftab (123) also provides Lee's account of his real-life inspiration behind *Jungle Fever*: "The germ … was the Yusef Hawkins incident. A young Brooklyn African-American kid goes to Bensonhurst to look at a used car to buy. At the same time, a girl, to spite her boyfriend, is telling him for whatever reason, 'I'm leaving you and my black boyfriend is going to come and visit me.' So this gang of young Italian-Americans are waiting to pounce on the first black face they see, and it happens to be Yusef Hawkins and he gets shot dead by Joey Fama. So that was really the spark for the idea that I thought of for the diametrically opposed neighborhoods of Harlem and Bensonhurst. And I don't care what people say, the year *Jungle Fever* was made, 1990 – some Italian girl brings a black guy home? Maybe you can do that *now* in Bensonhurst. But back then? Hell, fucking no. *Now* these white kids are into rap, hip-hop, and black culture. They weren't into it that much back then."

[36] Kent Jones (46) perceives Lee's transgression of Hollywood narrative formula as a positive, declaring that "the more linear and streamlined his films are, the duller they get and the more they flounder." Melvin Donalson (110), on the other hand, suggests that Lee's technical proficiency would be best utilized in the service of a screenplay penned by another writer. See "Spike Lee: The Independent Auteur," *Black Directors in Hollywood*, Austin: U of Texas P, 2003, 95-123.

[37] While agreeing with the common criticism of Lee's masculine focus, Kent Jones (43) does credit the filmmaker for his "willing[ness] to keep his films democratically open to [women's] viewpoints."

[38] Kent Jones (44) reminds us that Lee's quarrel has always been with *caricatured* images of African Americans, not "the currently fashionable Hollywood idea of 'positive images of black people.'" See also Aftab 43.

Chapter 2: They Hate Him: 1988 – 1992

While the struggle between didactics and dialectics characterizes the Spike Lee Joint, it also occurs within Lee himself. His Black Nationalist persona is the battlefield. During the run-up to *School Daze* (1988), the young filmmaker continued his public expressions of disdain towards black-themed, white-directed movies such as Dennis Hopper's L.A. gangland opus *Colors* (1988) and influential hip-hop music producer Rick Rubin's low-budget urban crime actioner *Tougher than Leather* (1988),[1] a star vehicle for rap superstars Run-DMC (Aftab 102). Kaleem Aftab proclaims that even heads of major Hollywood studios experienced Lee's wrath, the young filmmaker unleashing his fury towards new Columbia Pictures head Dawn Steel. The executive had made the mistake of "suggest[ing] that *School Daze* shift its release so as not to clash with *Action Jackson* [1988], a beat 'em up starring Carl Weathers and Vanity[,] … the implication [being] that the black audience would be split between two such wildly disparate offerings" (70).[2] Lee did not absolve fellow African American filmmakers for projecting limiting images of blackness, particularly Keenen Ivory Wayans for the "lowbrow" Blaxploitation parody *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (1988) (Aftab 102). Prominent African American stars were also not immune to Lee's often public, usually harsh critical eye, Aftab reporting the young filmmaker's rebuke of *The Color Purple* (1985) star Whoopi Goldberg for wearing blue contact lenses (57-8).[3] John Pierson also recounts Lee's exploits, particularly the young filmmaker's chastisement of *The Color Purple* costar Rae Dawn Chong for starring in *Soul Man* (1986) (55). Lee's harshest criticism, though, targeted Eddie Murphy, who the young filmmaker castigated for refusing to flex his muscle as Hollywood's preeminent box-office draw to ensure the hiring of black workers on movie

crews (Aftab 59). Unlike Murphy, Lee "was determined to lead by example in promoting African-American talent. Whenever he found a talented African-American whom he felt was the best person for the job, he would appoint them, whether or not they had the right union credentials" (59). Lee's instinct for uplifting the race surfaced during the run-up to *She's Gotta Have It*'s theatrical release, Pierson recalling the young filmmaker's insistence that Island Pictures hire African American publicists in both New York and Los Angeles (68). This focus on black uplift would become a key component of the Spike Lee persona, representing what is likely closest to the actual man.

School Daze challenges Hollywood's notion of the black image by focusing on black self-image. The film also represents the genesis of Spike Lee's assumption of duties beyond his expected tasks as director. Dissatisfied with Island Pictures' decision to market *She's Gotta Have It* with "what was his third choice for the poster," Lee contracted Art Sims's 11/24 advertising agency, telling Columbia Pictures that his word on the subject would be final (Aftab 69).[4] Also with *School Daze*, the young filmmaker embarked upon realizing his goal of promoting black talent, featuring the production design gifts of Wynn Thomas, casting abilities of Robi Reed, costume design skills of Ruth E. Carter, and acting expertise of theatre actors Larry (nè Laurence) Fishburne, Giancarlo Esposito, Samuel L. Jackson, and Bill Nunn as well as newcomers Tisha Campbell, Roger Guenveur Smith, Kadeem Hardison, Jasmine Guy, Tyra Ferrell, and Kasi Lemmons (Aftab 59-61).[5] For *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Lee cut a deal with the National Association of Broadcast Entertainers (NABET) for the union to bring in fifteen members for the shoot, in the process illuminating its glaring lack of African American membership (Aftab 70). Aftab notes that "[i]n positions where NABET had no black

members – such as the hairstylist, stills photographer, and second assistant director – Spike was granted permission to use non-union crew" (80). As a result, the filmmaker's younger brother David (the Spike Lee Joint's regular still photographer) and a neighborhood resident (an unemployed construction worker who was hired by the production designer) attained membership in NABET (80, 85).[6] The filming of *Malcolm X* (1992), though, would be Spike Lee's greatest victory over the forces of good-ole-boy, Hollywood cronyism.

The challenges to ethnic inequality reflected in the shooting of *Do the Right Thing* as well as the movie itself successfully enabled Spike Lee to do what he wanted Eddie Murphy to do: exercise his muscle as a Hollywood player. This led the filmmaker to take on the Teamsters (Aftab 154). Lee informed the union that he would not use them for *Malcolm X* unless some African Americans were permitted to join their ranks, asking rhetorically, "How can you shoot *Malcolm X* and not have one black Teamster?" (qtd. in Aftab 154).[7] The notion of uplifting the race would surface again during the controversy surrounding now-defunct completion-bond company Century City California, which had bonded several of Lee's early films. On the brink of financial ruin, Century City enacted money-saving procedures, first trying to convince the director to film on the Jersey Shore instead of in Mecca for the restaging of Malcolm X's pilgrimage. When that failed and production had successfully concluded, Century City sent a bondsman to interrupt a closed editing mix and present Barry Brown with a "cease and desist" letter, effectively closing down post-production and endangering *Malcolm X*'s completion and theatrical release. Due to Warner Brothers' cessation of funding the project, Lee funneled $2 million of his $3 million salary back into the production but still lacked $1.3 million. As

he was often wont to do,[8] Lee sought answers from those who helped uplift the race before him. After consulting *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the filmmaker took heed of X's message of self-reliance and solicited donations from influential African Americans such as Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Magic Johnson, Prince, Michael Jordan, and Janet Jackson (Aftab 159-61, 163-5).[9]

Lee had acquired this impulse to uplift the race honestly. According to Lisa Jones, even though

> [o]ther people were pulling Spike and getting his attention[,] he was doing the commercials and stuff. His mega-operation had begun, but he still had a very clear sense of the brotherhood. One thing that he always mentioned to me was that a great influence on him was that his great-grandfather founded Snow Hill Institute in Alabama. It was through this autonomous black institution that there was this idea to uplift the race. It always stuck in his mind, and training people and furthering their opportunities really connected him to his great-grandfather. (qtd. in Aftab 80)[10]

After purchasing "an old renovated firehouse at 124 DeKalb Avenue" in Brooklyn, a location he "had openly coveted when he was merely a struggling filmmaker," Lee designated it the home office of 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks (Aftab 50-1). Jones suggests that the notion of laying a foundation upon which to build a tradition was manifest in this purchase, evidence of the young director's own inheritance from his great-grandfather: "he wanted to create an institution[.] … He wanted there to be a legacy. He didn't just get jobs for himself. He allowed a whole generation of young people access to the industry. From early conversations he was telling me about [Oscar]

Micheaux and how the history had been lost, and *he* wasn't going to be lost like that" (qtd. in Aftab 51).

Ironically, Lee's construction of an African American cinematic institution, combined with his awareness of the power of images as it relates to racial matters (and his eloquence in discussing that subject), resulted in the filmmaker's loss of autonomy in speaking for himself. Jones concludes that a perception of the young filmmaker as a spokesperson for both black Hollywood and black America was developing,[11]one which was met with antagonism (Aftab 71). Garnering such a status fostered a negative critical reaction to Spike Lee the man that resulted in the critical propensity to conflate the *man* with his *persona*, perceive the presence of that persona woven into the fabric of the man's movies, and negatively review the pictures themselves as a result. This circular critical reception would dog Lee throughout his career. Commencing with his positive review of *She's Gotta Have It*, legendary film critic Roger Ebert[12] has been the only major reviewer to consistently avoid the pitfall of deducing a Spike Lee Joint as reflective of Spike Lee the man and thereby criticizing him by criticizing his movies.

Beginning with *She's Gotta Have It,* Lee has waged a career-long battle against reviews which attack him for harboring objectionable beliefs about certain groups of people. Lee would be labeled anti-white racist, anti-miscegenationist, anti-Semite, homophobe, and sexist largely because of his persona and the critical perception of that persona at work in his films. It became standard practice for the overwhelmingly white critical establishment to either initiate or promulgate the notion that the themes of the Spike Lee Joint and/or beliefs and behaviors of its characters are consistent with the filmmaker himself: *Do the Right Thing*'s black power politics and climactic uprising

inciting nationwide race riots;[13] cries of "Hypocrite!" for Lee hiring the security wing of the Nation of Islam, an organization headed by perceived anti-Semite and black separatist Minister Louis Farrakhan, to patrol the set of *Do the Right Thing*; his anti-white liberal portrayal of an interracial relationship in *Jungle Fever* (1991); accusations of "Anti-Semite!" from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith for the perceived Jewish caricature represented by the Flatbush brothers, Mo and Josh (John Turturro and Nicholas Turturro), in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990);[14] indictments of homophobia based on Opal Gilstrap in *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) and treatment of gay characters in *School Daze*;[15] or allegations of masculinism and misogyny due to the largely underdeveloped female image throughout his entire filmography[16] (Aftab 96, 85, 139, 117-8, 98, 90-1). Among Lee's defenders is John Turturro.[17] Addressing the anti-Semite charges levied against Lee for the Flatbush Brothers, the character actor assesses the Spike Lee criticism as lacking in both Hollywood and sociohistorical context, alluding to the Black Arts Movement of the African American literary tradition from which Spike Lee arose:

> I think that a lot of critics didn't review him in a social context; they held him to other kinds of criteria. They didn't really understand that he was one of these guys getting a chance to do something, and they critiqued him as if there were twenty other black filmmakers at the time. They held him up to a different kind of critique that maybe they would not do with a white director. …
>
> I think a lot of stuff written about Spike's movies in those days was from all these white writers, writing about a culture that they didn't grow up in. … I think a lot of journalists are white and they want to put an angle

> on the story. And it gave them a story to write about. … The accusations were really out of context, and it was bad. First I had to defend Spike that he's not a racist, then I have to defend him that he's not an anti-Semite. (qtd. in Aftab 98-9, 118)

Though loud and clear—and true—Turturro's criticism of the critics in defense of Spike Lee would fall on deaf ears.

Ultimately, the quarrel was on the part of the critical establishment, which largely accepted non-uniform, politically aware images of African Americans in cinema but felt equally threatened by (and, interestingly, resigned to) the militant expression of black masculinity in the real world. This custom reached its zenith in the infamous November 8, 1992 *Esquire* cover story, "Spike Lee Hates Your Cracker Ass," by Barbara G. Harrison. Commencing with the magazine's cover, which displayed Lee "with his arms crossed and body blacked out in a classic skull-and-crossbones pose," Harrison's purpose was "to expose Spike as a racist" (Aftab 165). Aftab reports, however, that the careful reader

> might take away the impression that … Harrison was personally offended by Spike's standoffish attitude to her, seeming to believe that her liberal attitude as well as her friendship with the novelist James Baldwin would immediately make Spike like her. When Spike fails to respond as she had expected, Harrison concludes that it is because he hates all "crackers." (165)[18]

Turturro does concede that the filmmaker's candid nature "gave [columnists such as Harrison] plenty of fodder. … I think if he looks at it now, he'd say, 'You know what?'

I'll say what I have to say at the right time. Let them hang themselves and see what happens'" (qtd. in Aftab 118).[19] "The right time" is the operative phrase in Turturro's assessment of Lee's interaction with the media, for negative critical reactions such as Harrison's often seemed to enter the popular lexicon at the precise moment a Spike Lee Joint debuted.

Keenly aware of the critical sensitivity to the angry black man stereotype, Spike Lee exploited it in order to provoke interest in his movies. Provocative enterprises themselves, Spike Lee Joints serve to foster debate about issues important to their director: "[y]ou are always going to find things in my films that are personal[.] … A lot of my films have political content, so I can't complain about being drawn into that stuff" (qtd. in Aftab 37, 120). Lee in fact cannot grouse, for it was always "part of the agenda that I stir up controversy" (qtd. in "For Immediate Release"). By the release of *Jungle Fever*, the filmmaker even situated himself beside another pop culture fixture, "saying that, along with Madonna, he was the best person in the world at marketing his own image" (Aftab 139). Annabella Sciorra, the Spike Lee Joint's first white leading lady, testifies to the filmmaker's seeming adherence to the adage "Any publicity is good publicity." "Devastated" by New York media reports of her and Lee's purportedly "rocky" relationship during the *Jungle Fever* shoot, Sciorra recalls the filmmaker's dismissive reaction to the reports: "He just kept saying, 'Oh, come on, don't believe the hype, it's just press'" (qtd. in Aftab 139). The controversy surrounding Spike Lee—often stirred by the filmmaker himself—engendered curiosity on the part of the ticket-buying, moviegoing audience, just as he intended.

Despite the unwillingness or inability of some audiences (and too many critics) to discern that the persona Spike Lee projected in the media was an act, the young filmmaker became famous because of the conflation. Ironically, this act was based on another act, Mars Blackmon, the *She's Gotta Have It* character that most endeared Lee to audiences and critics alike. Nelson George does perceive the resemblance between creator and creation, surmising to Aftab that the character "is probably one of the first hip-hop figures on film," the actor who plays him "ma[king] it cool for nerdy black guys, for the first time ever, perhaps" (47). While contending that budgetary concerns initially forced him into action as Mars, Lee would eventually acknowledge that he was ultimately the right man for the job despite his suspect acting chops: "I just felt that I knew who Mars was and what he could be" (qtd. in Aftab 34). Giancarlo Esposito[20] goes a step further, suggesting that Mars is in fact Lee's doppelganger: "he *was* Mars Blackmon. Mars Blackmon, to me, is a character that came right out of who Spike is" (qtd. in Aftab 34). The consummate b-boy, Mars exhibited an

> outlook and tastes [that] were a hodgepodge of oversimplified black politics and male libido, dressed up with hip-hop aesthetics. … [He] loves basketball, hip-hop, and urban clothing; finds Nola's sexual habits most disturbing; has an affiliation with the politics of black nationalism but neither the facilities nor the wherewithal to adequately express these views. (Aftab 29-30, 34)

Perhaps this inarticulateness accounts for Mars Blackmon's popularity and the backlash against Spike Lee. Roger Guenveur Smith[21] argues such a point, identifying the negative critical reaction to the Spike Lee persona as

> not simply true of Spike Lee, it is true of *any* man who chooses to be *articulate* [my emphasis] about the great dilemma of America, which is race. We suffer from a tremendous historical amnesia, and that is played out every day in this country. Americans don't want to be reminded of this great tragedy. It's something that we would much rather ignore. I think that what is particularly disturbing about Spike is that he achieved an obvious economic stronghold – he's not a pauper, he lives well and unapologetically so – but he is still engaged in popular American culture, and in this American forum that kind of economic achievement is then supposed to translate into silence on matters of race and class. (qtd. in Aftab 98)

Indeed, while the more eloquent side of the Spike Lee persona served to uplift the race within the motion picture industry, Mars Blackmon afforded Lee substantial opportunities to ascend the economic ladder.

On the strength of the *She's Gotta Have It* mythology and the character it introduced to American pop culture, Lee garnered a fame unprecedented for a black filmmaker and nearly unprecedented for *any* filmmaker. Lee was subsequently approached by the makers of *Saturday Night Live*, resulting in his writing and directing sketches starring Run-DMC, a short film featuring Branford Marsalis, and even appearing on the show as himself and as Mars Blackmon (Aftab 52, 54). Most significantly, Lee caught the attention of young NBA superstar Michael Jordan who, after viewing *She's Gotta Have It*, suggested to Nike's advertising team that Lee helm and costar (as Mars) in the new Air Jordan sneaker campaign (Aftab 52-4). The now-iconic,

"It must be the shoes" commercials, Lee recalls, are "what really got my face known – not *She's Gotta Have It*" (qtd. in Aftab 52). Because of his newfound notoriety, Lee became

> conscious of the need to protect his personal image. A business proposal from California Wine Cooler, enamored by Mars Blackmon's urban outreach was politely declined; so was Janet Jackson's idea for a rap record based on "Please, baby, please, baby, baby, baby, please." As a director Spike resisted making TV shows or commercials because it would entail giving away final cut and becoming one more black artist subservient to the whims of the white "gatekeepers" in charge of the networks and agencies. (Aftab 52)

Aftab concludes that this began Lee's career-long conundrum, a tension resulting from the necessities of earning a living and creating filmic art while simultaneously satisfying moviegoers without "selling out" (108).[22] This awareness of the power of images as it relates to race matters elicited the antagonistic response to Spike Lee which eluded Mars Blackmon. I would argue that this strain is evident not only in the Spike Lee persona, but also in the Spike Lee Joint, perhaps explaining the critical conflation between the persona and the man, the filmmaker and his films.

In addition to his desire to uplift the race, Lee often demonstrated an aptitude for marketing and promotion. The young filmmaker put those talents to use during production on *She's Gotta Have It*, customizing t-shirts for the crew and ultimately selling them (Aftab 45).[23] According to Lee, "We had to be entrepreneurs, we had to be innovative. Millions of dollars weren't being spent on print or TV ads" (qtd. in Aftab 45).

The famous trailer for the young filmmaker's debut feature reflects his gumption and innovation. Posing in front of a mural on East 7th Street in New York City, Lee implores audiences to see *She's Gotta Have It* so that he would not have to return to selling tube socks at the rate of three pairs for $5 (Pierson 67). Earl Smith, Lee's high-school classmate, friend, and original investor in *She's Gotta Have It*, also attests to the young filmmaker's ability as a salesman:

> We ... went to the Labor Day West Indian Parade and set up a booth. We had a big advantage over other vendors, because if you came to our booth you could meet Spike Lee. We made $15,000 that day. We set up street teams at all the cinemas, and if shirts weren't selling, we would tell the vendors to say, "Spike Lee is going to be here after the show! Get your T-shirts now and he'll sign them after." We'd promise to give them their money back if he didn't show. He was probably getting writer's cramp from signing his name so many times. We then started selling postcards to people who didn't have $10 for a shirt. (qtd. in Aftab 46)

Lee's predilection for customizing t-shirts resulted in the young filmmaker's opening a t-shirt business in the garage of the old firehouse that is the home office of 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks (Aftab 110). To Nelson George, this distinguishes Lee as a trailblazer in another context: "There was a period up until *Malcolm X* that Spike was able to tap into the new thing going on, either through the commercials, the movies, the videos, T-shirts. […] The whole idea of having a T-shirt line, having clothing stores, predates Fubu, Sean John, Phat Farm, and all of that stuff. Spike had this ability to be a heat-seeker" (qtd. in Aftab 145). Like the firehouse did for Spike Lee's building a cinematic tradition, the t-

shirt business in its garage laid the groundwork for the young filmmaker's opening up revenue streams in addition to his directorial pursuits.

The word "unapologetic" is frequently used as an adjective for Spike Lee. Roger Guenveur Smith uses the term to describe Lee's enjoyment of the lifestyle afforded by success in the motion picture industry. Aftab uses the word to characterize the filmmaker's emphasis on succeeding as a businessman, which is often subject to the laws of supply and demand (173). Earl Smith suggests that this is the case for Lee's purchase of a building at the intersection of South Elliott Place and DeKalb Avenue in Fort Greene, Brooklyn: at the firehouse "[p]eople were ringing the bell for a 40 Acres baseball cap, and it got to the point where we couldn't do everyday 40 Acres business. We had people from Japan coming over, wanting to buy ten, fifteen thousand dollars' worth of merchandise" (qtd. in Aftab 101). The new building would be christened Spike's Joint, and it married Lee's instincts for capitalism and nationalism. Located in a black neighborhood, the retail store was owned by a black man who hired a black-owned construction firm to perform the remodel and local, predominantly black youths to sell 40 Acres, Nike, Gap, and Levi-Strauss merchandise (Aftab 116). In a *Village Voice* article commemorating the July 22, 1990 opening of Spike's Joint, Nelson George celebrates Lee's exploiting the relationships he had developed with Nike, Gap, and Levi-Strauss via his previous direction of commercials for each respective brand. Anticipating a backlash against the filmmaker's seemingly contradictory merging of entrepreneurship and uplift, George charges that anyone who would deem Lee a hypocrite had his/her

> head stuck in the sixties. In the face of modern corporate infotainment monoliths, the most realpolitik counterstrategy is to be in business with as

> many as possible. Diversifying protects you against cooptation by any single corporate entity or industry. With revenue flowing in from commercials, books, music videos, and merchandising, Spike had some major cushion should Hollywood get tired of his methods or his mouth. (qtd. in Aftab 117)

George's words were indeed prophetic in more ways than one, although it would take two-plus years of major shifts in African American culture leading up to the release of *Malcolm X* and its aftermath for the columnist's vision to come to fruition.

In the interim between the grand opening of Spike's Joint and the release of the sixth Spike Lee Joint, *Malcolm X*, the filmmaker enjoyed a level of unprecedented influence for a motion picture director. Aftab considers these two as signposts representative of the filmmaker's power. According to Aftab, Spike's Joint had become so profitable[24] that Lee planned to expand to Los Angeles (eventually resulting in Spike's Joint West) and to create a subsidiary (40 Acres and a Mule Musicworks) based on the success of the *School Daze* and *Do the Right Thing* soundtracks (101). Likewise, Lee's seizure of the *Malcolm X* project from Norman Jewison on the basis of ethnic identification,[25] the ultimate powerplay, was indicative of the filmmaker's Hollywood sway (146). However, by the June 7, 1991 release of *Jungle Fever*, a perception of the filmmaker's misidentification of African American culture began to emerge. John Turturro testifies that:

> [a] lot of people were fed up with him. He would do all these interviews, be on the cover of magazines. When you shop in stores, a lot of black people would come up and say, "You're in a Spike Lee movie. Tell him he

> doesn't know shit about black people. He can't speak for me." ... By the end of *Jungle Fever*, Spike got a lot of labels. But that's just part of Spike. I think he likes controversy. He knows that controversy is good for business. But in the end, people can get tired of controversy too. (qtd. in Aftab 139-40)

Aftab attributes the sentiment related by Turturro to the rising influence of West-Coast "gangsta rap" on African American cinema during "the so-called Year of the Black Film,"[26] when pictures "documenting the violent undertow of black urban America" succeeded at the box office and crossed over into mainstream popular culture (139-40). According to Aftab, "Spike had been caught out by the change in direction of black urban culture toward the more localized theme of the ghetto" depicted in movies such as Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City*, Matty Rich's[27] *Straight Out of Brooklyn,* and John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (139). What I argue, however, is that this backlash ultimately arose from the discomfort with Spike Lee's simultaneous adherence to capitalism (the commercial impulse) and nationalism.

Lee's aspirations of entrepreneurship and African American uplift are expressed in his persona through the correlating (and competing) aesthetics of a Southern middle-class responsibility evocative of Martin Luther King, Jr. and a Northern underclass, inner-city militancy reminiscent of Malcolm X. The conflicting impulses embedded in the Spike Lee persona distinguish him as a liminal figure, the doppelganger for the liminal character which often populates his fiction films. Nelson George substantiates such a conclusion, observing that the filmmaker is an "exemplar of that middle generation between the civil-rights movement and the hip-hop generation" (qtd. in Aftab

99). Indicative of the Southern, middle-class notion of uplift as entrepreneurship and the Northern, underclass aim to tear down the barriers imposed by capitalism, the discomfort with Lee's harboring such contradictions began with his association with Nike. Aftab reports that the largely black, inner-city "aura of fetishism around … Nike shoes prompted an accusation that Spike … was indirectly responsible for a contemporary crime wave that saw people being mugged or even killed for their Air Jordans" (97). The filmmaker, seemingly toeing the company line, would defend his affiliation with Nike as well as his and the company's implication in the black-on-black crime which sometimes resulted from their promotion of the overpriced shoes (Aftab 97).[28] The aforementioned reaction augmented the perception of Lee's misidentification with African Americans. The filmmaker's business endeavors such as the 40 Acres record label and the Spike's Joint stores (which existed as the fountainhead of Malcolm X merchandise) further promulgated the notion. A production assistant on *Malcolm X*, the filmmaker's cousin, Malcolm D. Lee, recalls the pervading sentiment that "Spike is bastardizing the memory of Malcolm X by commercializing him" (qtd. in Aftab 147).[29] This posture would be voiced, in a very public fashion, by the progenitor of the Black Arts Movement Spike Lee's persona frequently references.

As Lee prepared to film his epic, *Malcolm X*, he faced opposition from the United Front to Preserve the Memory of Malcolm X and the Cultural Revolution. Led by Amiri Baraka, "father of Spike's collaborator and sometime girlfriend Lisa Jones," the focus group had "sent an open letter in protest" to the filmmaker's helming a picture based on the life of the slain Civil Rights icon (Aftab 143). An excerpt reproduced by Kaleem Aftab cites the content of the Spike Lee Joint as the genesis of the collective's discontent:

"Our distress about Spike's making a film on Malcolm is based on our analysis of the films he has already made, their caricature of Black people's lives, their dismissal of our struggle and the implication of their description of the Black nation as a few besieged Buppies surrounded by irresponsible repressive lumpen" (Aftab 142-3).[30] The displeasure exhibited by the United Front to Preserve the Memory of Malcolm X and the Cultural Revolution culminated with "protests at the five offices of 40 Acres and a Mule that had popped up all in close vicinity of the firehouse" (Aftab 153). The charge levied against Spike Lee by these Baraka-led protests—that the filmmaker was participating in a "great government conspiracy to pin blame for the murder of Malcolm X on black people"[31]—further demonstrated the Black Arts poet's faulty argument (Aftab 153). Indeed, Amiri Baraka's United Front to Preserve the Memory of Malcolm X and the Cultural Revolution proved to have originated from his personal disapproval of Spike Lee's successful merging of capitalism and nationalism.

On the occasion of *Jungle Fever*'s theatrical release, as was tradition for each debuting Spike Lee Joint, the filmmaker sought to publish an accompanying book. Having co-written the books on *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Mo' Better Blues* with Lisa Jones, the filmmaker requested her father's contribution of an original essay for *Five for Five: The Films of Spike Lee*, which Baraka accepted. Aftab reports that the Black Arts harbinger "took the commission as an opportunity to vent his frustrations at what he saw as Spike's failure to promote the (socialist) community aspects of black nationalism in favor of a (capitalist) outlook that saw salvation through personal financial gain" (143). Likewise, Aftab continues, "Baraka also observed in the films a worldview that was suitable only for a black middle class, to the detriment of the black working

class" (143).[32] Proclaiming that "Malcolm X belongs to everybody," Lee's rejoinder characterized the former LeRoi Jones as a hypocrite, citing his tenure at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and his first marriage:

> What bothered me about Baraka's argument was that he was saying that the reason why this film would not be good was that I was middle class. I don't know what's more middle class than being a college professor. And I think that my first five films cover a lot of aspects of African-American society. … He wasn't always Amiri Baraka – there was a man named LeRoi Jones who married a white woman and had two daughters. (qtd. in Aftab 143, 145)

After previewing Baraka's essay ("Spike Lee at the Movies") and determining that the elder man's criticisms—like those of the predominantly white movie reviewers from major newspapers and journals—amounted to personal grievances, Lee remitted a $500 kill fee (mutually-agreed payment for non-publication) to Baraka.[33] Eventually published in editor Manthia Diawara's *Black American Cinema* two years after *Five for Five*, "Spike Lee at the Movies" made "it easy to see why [the filmmaker] took offense," Aftab concluding that Baraka's argument devolved into a manifesto of his own authenticity, a 'la Matty Rich (145). Lee's summation of his row with Amiri Baraka encapsulates the competing forces of capitalism and nationalism that both the filmmaker himself and his persona are subject to.

Spike Lee has made a career from memorializing the past from whence he came. Not only is this evident in a broader African American context through the three impulses (documentary, teaching, American) present in his pictures, but also in the more personal,

localized framework of his own experiences. Lee's refusal to leave Brooklyn for Hollywood and the establishment of his filmmaking headquarters in an old firehouse in Fort Greene, Brooklyn are prime examples (Aftab 50-1). So, too, is his remembrance of his childhood, particularly his father's stubbornness in remaining a jazz purist to the detriment of his career (Aftab 111-3). The firehouse represents a tradition and the uplifting of black people—Lee's nationalism. His father, on the other hand, embodies the filmmaker's desire to make money. Ultimately, these two competing desires form the prism through which Lee perceives his conflict with Baraka, concluding that

> Baraka represents probably a *segment* of the black nationalist movement. … Because Amiri Baraka is forever going to go down in history as being a proponent of the black arts movement – but we evolved. What is always upsetting to me is when people do stuff and then they don't want the generation behind them to advance it. What *we* were able to do – we were able to make money. Some people have this idea that to be a true artist you have to be a starving artist, and I saw that from my father firsthand and that's not something that I wanted. I always felt that you can be an artist and still make money. Why should the record company, the movie studios, the owner of the sports team, the publisher, make all the money off your creativity? That doesn't make sense. (qtd. in Aftab 144)

By noting the various entities (often power-wielding whites) seeking to profit from black artistry, Spike Lee brings us full circle in this final thought, reminding us of the major impetus behind the first Spike Lee Joint.

[1] Lee has often expressed an especial disdain towards the Blaxpolitation subgenre, which accounts for his turning down an offer to direct *Tougher than Leather*: "the script was a reworking of the blaxploitation genre – Run, D, and Jam Master Jay spend the entire film running around shooting people – I never went to see those films. I didn't like them." See Aftab 73.

[2] Lee's argument was substantiated when "*School Daze* did unexpectedly good business[,] … Columbia's most profitable film of the year. The infinitely more expensive *Action Jackson* grossed $20 million, a disappointing return given its higher budget and marketing push." See Aftab 72.

[3] Pierson (55) reports that Lee's "first dig at a black celebrity (Bay Area native Whoopi Goldberg) trying to be white (by wearing blue contact lenses)" took place during a (San Francisco Film Festival (SFIFF) black filmmaker panel with Danny Glover—Goldberg's costar in *The Color Purple*.

[4] Sims recalls to Aftab (69) that "[a]t that time African-Americans had no jobs in Hollywood[.] ... Spike fought a lot of battles that opened doors – that are *still* opening doors. Hollywood is still a good-ole-boys network in many ways. All the other directors just wanted to make their movie and get paid, but Spike refused to give in. ... There was one executive on *School Daze* who still tried to get the studio's view implemented. She said, 'I want you to do Spike's face with his eyes bugging out, with a slaphappy expression on his face.' I told her that Spike wouldn't like it. But the executive insisted, 'This is going to be the one-sheet and he's going to like it.' When Spike saw that image, all hell broke loose. I saw that lady packing her bags the next day."

[5] Lee's longtime friend and collaborator Branford Marsalis observes to Aftab (106) that "[t]here's a little bit of Cecil B. DeMille in Spike. He liked discovering new talent." Martin Lawrence made his feature film debut in *Do the Right Thing*. *Jungle Fever* is the motion picture debut of future leading lady, sex symbol, and Oscar winner Halle Berry as well as future Oscar nominee Queen Latifah. In *School Daze*, Lee would reintroduce legendary actor and filmmaker Ossie Davis to a new generation of moviegoers and would do the same with his longtime companion Ruby Dee in *Do the Right Thing* and with Al Freeman, Jr. in *Malcolm X*. And in *Mo' Better Blues*, Lee would cast newly-minted Best Supporting Actor Oscar winner and future Hollywood heartthrob and leading man Denzel Washington in his first starring role, following it up with *Jungle Fever*: the first starring role for future big-budget action star Wesley Snipes.

[6] According to Lee, the agreement with NABET on *Do the Right Thing* allowed 40 Acres "to establish a traineeship intern program, which led to membership for probably another five to ten people each film." See Aftab 79-80.

[7] Lee recounts to Aftab (154) that his efforts to gain motion picture industry access for African Americans were met with "complaint[s] that I do not hire white people. That is ridiculous – everything that I have ever done has a multicultural crew. We reflect the diversity of New York City." John Turturro, too, considers the charges against Lee inaccurate, simultaneously critiquing the lack of diversity amongst most Hollywood movie sets: "From my experience, if you go on most productions it is predominantly white. It's not that Spike's production sets are all black – but you are going to find more black people on his production than you will on almost any other film or TV production. So what is wrong with that? That is the way it should be." See Aftab 154.

[8] Lee maintains that his inspiration for filmmaking is broader than just other movies and directors, his proclamation to Aftab (57) suggesting a model for his own persona: "it [Lee's inspiration] is athletes, musicians, so many people – Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Willie Mays, Muhammad Ali, Walt Frazier, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson. […] [L]egends, very strong African-American men who took no shit from anyone, who were also top of their field, geniuses, visionaries, at a time when you could get smacked down for taking a stance. But their convictions were never in doubt. They knew they were right and they weren't going to compromise."

[9] Lee confides in Aftab (164-5) that he took Malcolm X's lessons to heart: "Malcolm always talked about self-determination and self-reliance, and in doing this film I became a student of Malcolm. I knew Warner Bros. wasn't going to give me any money, so who was I going to turn to? It had to be prominent black people with disposable incomes who knew what the film was about and what I was trying to do, and who wouldn't miss writing that check. But I had to really deliberate on it for a while after I had the idea – I didn't call them up right away. I prayed on it for a week or so. Those were very hard calls. It wasn't chump change, either. … I don't like asking people for money. I don't like people asking *me* for money. And also I know how burdensome it is, when you're in a position like that – everybody starts asking you for money. They leech off you. This was serious business. But those giving individuals made it possible for the film to reach the theaters around the world in the way that it was intended to be played, not the truncated form that Warner Bros. and the bond company wanted. That would have been a bastardized version of the film. Then, even after we got this money, I didn't tell anybody, even Warner Bros. They probably thought that I was putting in my own money, but my money had run out. We had the idea of holding a press conference on Malcolm's birthday at the Schomburg Library in Harlem, and it was at this conference that we announced to the world where we got the money. Warner Bros. weren't happy about it because, PR-wise, they didn't look good. The next day they started to fund the movie again."

[10] Aftab (111-2) revisits a section in Lee and Lisa Jones's companion book to *Mo' Better Blues*, which the journalist reports functions as the filmmaker's tribute to his father, Bill Lee. It is in this chapter—"Eight Bars In"—that we learn that Bill Lee's grandfather authored *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*, an account of the founding of the Snow Hill Institute ("a normal and industrial school for 'colored boys and girls'") in Alabama.

[11] Aftab (51) reports that although Lee's words and actions—albeit through the guise of his persona—suggest otherwise, the young filmmaker was cognizant of his increasingly lofty status amongst young, African American New Yorkers, writing in 1988 that "I'm determined to not let Spike Lee and 40 Acres and a Mule be seen as the saviors of black people like Richard Pryor's Indigo [F]ilms. I'm not trying to right everything that's been wrong with black film and black people over the last hundred years."

[12] In 1975, Ebert became the first film critic to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for criticism. The immense success of his syndicated movie review show with *Chicago Tribune* film critic Gene Siskel, *Siskel and Ebert At the Movies* (1986-99), resulted in their trademark rating system ("Thumbs up," "Thumbs down, "Two thumbs up," and "Two thumbs down") entering the popular lexicon.

[13] Crouch spectacularly deconstructs the prevailing critical notion of *Do the Right Thing*'s "incendiary" nature to Aftab (96): "Most serious black gang crime is black-on-black. Movies do not pose a threat to society in this way. The only kind of threat you could pose today would be if you could convince all these black men to avoid spending $100 on tennis shoes – *that* would be a threat. But if somebody puts out a film where the message is maybe a little too heavy for the mainstream? First, the powers-that-be know that people will not go to see it. And secondly, they know how to smother it, just in case. All they do is put out a movie against the one they're scared of, one that opens with all these athletic bodies in the showers with their breasts out. … The political movie will soon be forgotten. Having a Negro as a threat, that is just over. It wasn't so much that white people were threatened by Spike; they just liked to *think* that they were. So the Negro kind of functions like an offshoot of the old horror-film characters: it's like what Dracula and the werewolf are all about. People get frightened, then they leave the theater and they know that it's only a film, there's no Dracula. And they know there's no black revolution out there either." Despite Crouch's spot-on characterization (and unfortunate use of the outdated "negro"), Lee estimates to Aftab (99) that *Do the Right Thing*'s box-office numbers were "damaged by all the negative publicity. It scared white audiences away from the film."

[14] According to Lee, the critical charges of anti-Semitism as well as those coming from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith based on his creation of the Flatbush brothers were "bullshit, but at the same time, they were some very serious charges, because my lawyer at the time, Arthur Klein, a Jewish

lawyer, said, 'Spike, this could be very detrimental to your career.' And he urged me to write a letter for the op-ed section of the *New York Times* saying 'Why I am not anti-Semitic.' I just found it foolish – and funny – the idea that somehow, in the history of America and of popular music, no Jewish people ever exploited black musicians. … [A]utomatically those groups, the Jewish Defense League and the Anti-Defamation League, think that all Muslims are in the Nation of Islam and everybody under Farrakhan is anti-Semitic; and therefore, since I employed the Fruit of Islam, it means I'm anti-Semitic. It's really crazy. … But it's very tricky: if you say, 'Spike, 85 percent of the players in the National Basketball Association are African-American,' it's OK. However, if you say, 'A large part of the entertainment industry is populated by people of the Jewish persuasion,' you're called 'anti-Semitic.' To me – I'm not complaining, it's a fact. I've been making films for almost twenty years, and when I have to do a studio film I have to say that the majority of people that I have dealt with and have worked with have been Jewish. My former lawyer, Arthur Klein, my agent at William Morris, Dave Wirtschafter, Jon Kilik, the producer of my films over the years, are all Jewish. … [H]ow this fuss started with people saying that I was anti-Semitic because of the Flatbush brothers … that was really stretching it. … They talk about stereotypes, but the least seen stereotype in Hollywood is that of Jewish people. Do you know how many commercials there are on television depicting Italian-Americans as the Mafia? ... The thing that gets me is that there is this unwritten law that you cannot be critical of Jewish people – that if you speak against a Jewish person or an institution that means you are anti-Semitic" See Aftab 118-21.

[15] On the charge of homophobia, Lee reminds Aftab (98) of the "black Woody Allen" comparison he has vehemently rejected throughout his career: "[t]hey don't do that shit with Woody Allen. I remember having an argument with some critic from the gay magazine *The Advocate*, who accused me of being homophobic because I had one of my characters call another a faggot. I was accused of being homophobic for just depicting homophobia – I don't understand that thinking." The interview in question is Alan Frutkin's "Spike Speaks," *The Advocate* 693 (Oct. 31, 1995): 49-50, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2002, 112-15. In this interview, Lee takes issue with the LBGT community for singling him out as a homophobe based on his depictions of homosexual characters or characters who themselves display homophobia but not deeming white directors who present negative portrayals of blacks or characters who exude racism as racists.

[16] This perception is so widespread that a particular source reference would be superfluous. However, Aftab (90) provides Lisa Jones's particularly telling account of distancing herself from Lee and 40 Acres during the *Do the Right Thing* shoot, which is noteworthy because of who she is. According to Jones, "at the time I was really questioning hip-hop politics and removing myself from the 40 Acres scene. Spike was down with [pioneering political hip-hop group] Public Enemy, and I wasn't necessarily feeling all that enamored by it. There were a bunch of us [ladies] who didn't like it, because the sexism was coexisting with all the right-on politics. And what was the message of all that politics anyway? That you should walk around wearing an X [in honor of Malcolm] on your shirt? What was beyond that? It ain't even defined *now*. 'Fight the Power'? It was more like 'Create your own power.' And after growing up in the black nationalist world, with its own contradictions and sexism, for me it was like, 'I'm not buying *another* sexist ideology.'" Aftab (90-1) concurs, pinpointing "[a] problem faced by black nationalism, by political hip-hop, and ultimately *Do the Right Thing* was the degree to which African-Americans were forced to see themselves as mere reflections of how they were perceived by the dominant white culture, wherein all too often dark skin was decreed as ugly (a topic Spike touched on in *School Daze*) and males dominant over females. The problem for Lisa Jones was that Spike, in common with various rappers and black nationalists who could identify prejudice and oppression when it came in the guise of race or class, either did not want to deal with – or completely overlooked – the tendency of mainstream culture to encourage males of *whatever* color to believe that they enjoyed a rightful position of dominance over the female of the species. This unreconstructed male chauvinism would pepper characters in Spike's movies: eventually the director would hold his hand up and admit, 'I need to work on the depiction of females in my pictures.'" Rosie Perez, though, positions herself, sort of, against Jones, Aftab, and ultimately Lee, arguing to Aftab (90) that "[o]utside of whether you feel the portrayal of women is positive or negative, there's so much more that he's [Lee] saying outside of that that it's *unbelievable*."

[17] Turturro costars in *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, *Clockers*, *Girl 6*, *He Got Game*, *Summer of Sam* (playing the voice of a jet-black Labrador retriever), *She Hate Me*, and *Miracle at St. Anna*. On his collaborative relationship with Lee, Turturro muses to Aftab (81), "I had a very specific position within his movies – I'm like his Caucasian thread."

[18] According to Aftab (165), Lee considered Harrison's article "defamation of character. If you defame somebody's character, then what you are doing is rendered meaningless. If I do a film about racism, how do you dismiss the film? By calling me a racist. It's simple."

[19] Lisa Jones expresses similar sentiments about Lee to Aftab (71), surmising that "[h]e did things and made choices that I bet he wouldn't make today."

[20] Esposito costars in *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Malcolm X*.

[21] Smith is a member of Lee's troupe of regular actors, appearing in *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X*, *Get on the Bus*, *He Got Game*, *Summer of Sam*, *A Huey P. Newton Story*, and *Tales from the Hood* (a hip-hop horror-comedy executive produced by Lee).

[22] Lee expresses his dilemma to Aftab (108) in this way: "I always felt that if you're a filmmaker and you tell a good story, you might not make a hundred million dollars but you're not going to go broke. You can always make films. I've always tried to make thought-provoking entertainment and that's always been my goal – and there are some that are more successful than others. I've never wanted to make a pure popcorn movie. There's nothing wrong with that … but it's not something that I want at this point – though I try to stay away from saying 'Never.'" Lee indeed reached that point the very next year with *Inside Man*, a consummate "popcorn movie."

[23] Lee revisits his childhood to Aftab (45), recalling that "I'd always made and sold T-shirts when I was growing up – I had a ton of them." Lee even responded to the death threats he received for shooting parts of *Jungle Fever* in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn by making t-shirts bearing a reproduction of the subsequent *New York Daily News* cover page, "COPS PROTECT SPIKE LEE." Dickerson recalls that the threats were much ado about nothing, to the chagrin of the New York media. See Aftab 130.

[24] Earl Smith attributes the retail store's success to its clientele, telling Aftab (145) that during the first year of Spike's Joint's existence "[m]usicians would come in, athletes, everybody. Somebody sent us a picture from a magazine in Japan and somebody was trying to set up a Spike's Joint there." Michael Jordan was one such patron. During a postgame interview after the 1991 NBA All-Star Game, Jordan donned an "X" baseball cap that Lee had designed to aid in promoting *Malcolm X*, which resulted in even more business for Spike's Joint because initially the "X" baseball caps were only available for purchase there.

[25] Lee would impress upon Aftab (142) that "I didn't feel that I was the *only* director qualified to do *Malcolm X*. I just felt that it would be very hard for a white director to get the nuances of the subject. And I still think that it is very few and far between that a white director is able to get it right when they are doing African-American film." The director also justified his campaigning for a black *Malcolm X* director with an African American's ability to gain "[a]ccess to the Nation of Islam." See Aftab 151.

[26] Aftab (135) reports that "[a]lmost as many films helmed by African-Americans were released within those twelve months [of 1991] as had been in all of the previous decade." Aftab (135-6) highlights that 1991 also saw prestige dramas such as Robert Townsend's *The Five Heartbeats* and the Chester B. Himes adaptation *A Rage in Harlem*, the feature debut of character actor and episodic television director Bill Duke, languish at the box office alongside comedies *True Identity* and *Hangin' with the Homeboys*. The latter starred a young John Leguizamo, who would become the lead in Lee's *Summer of Sam*.

[27] Aftab (136-7) chronicles Rich's fifteen minutes of fame, which he advanced by proclaiming his

authenticity as a black man by way of attacking Lee's middle-class upbringing and formal education. With the benefit of hindsight, Lee puts his beef with the then-nineteen-year-old in perspective: "He was just very young and ignorant about the stuff he was saying at the time. This is one of the things that is messed up now – that if black people are educated and speak correct English, they get accused of 'trying to be white,' selling out. A lot of the devaluation of education has been fueled by this hip-hop shit, where our whole value system has been twisted – up is down, down is up – so a lot of these young kids, they equate ignorance with 'being black,' 'keeping it real.' Motherfuckers are proud to be ignorant, wear it like a badge of courage. Those comments of Matty's are that type of sick, demented, backward thinking in a nutshell. Where is Matty Rich now? Every filmmaker is going to have one film that will be from their own experience, but what happened after that? He made *Inkwell* [1994]. The young brother never honed his skills. But, as you can see from his comments, that made sense. To me, he was saying, 'Why should I learn my craft? Why should I read? I'm from the streets, I'm real.' It turned out to be artistic suicide."

[28] The overseas production of Nike products, specifically the question of labor rights, has also resulted in harsh criticisms (from some segments of the black community *and* white community) for the company and those affiliated with it (e.g. Lee and Jordan).

[29] Lee maintains that the X baseball cap's popularity was a happy accident, contending to Aftab (147) that "[w]e had made a lot of hats before, but I can't really tell you why that one took off. I think it helped create awareness of the film. You have to realize that Warner Bros. was not spending millions and millions of dollars to advertise the film."

[30] Lisa Jones sums up her father and her friend's feud to Aftab (144), observing that "[f]or Spike to have one of the arbiters of a certain school of black politics calling him out on whether he would be doing the right thing […] I don't think that Spike is one who likes to be called out. … My father represents a notion of a political activist that some people of our generation have respect for. We wanted an approval from that generation and it was hard to stomach not getting it, even if we knew that we were right. I guess Spike feared that it would turn the black community against him. There was also a concern with 'authenticity' at that point, and representing truly being black. Maybe, as Spike got further into the commercial marketplace, he thought that he would be perceived as a sellout, and he had clearly begun his career not wanting to be that."

[31] Lee emphasizes to Aftab (153) that "[w]e did not rewrite history. It is well documented that the assassins came from a mosque in Newark. We even put their names in the end credits. The FBI did exacerbate the situation; the job of the FBI is to go and wreak havoc, have people at each other's throats, infiltrate, to have this guy from the Black Panthers fight with the Nation of Islam."

[32] Lee's middle-class sensibilities reside at the center of many a well-worn critique of his work, from his hypermasculine notion of black manhood to the ideal black family as representative of the heteronormative, 1950s nuclear paradigm. I would argue, however, that a middle-class vision of African American life is still underrepresented in American pop culture due to the mainstream's continued promotion of modernized versions of the same black caricatures in which they have trafficked since the 19th century as well as the voicing and glamorization of black under-class life promulgated by African Americans themselves via rap music and culture. Lee's *Bamboozled* makes precisely such an argument.

[33] According to Aftab (143), Baraka defended his essay by noting that the articles by other *Five for Five* contributors contained criticisms of Lee's pictures. Lee, though, would hear none of it: "If someone asks you to write something for their book and what you turn in is highly critical of them, you cannot be surprised if they don't want to publish it." See Aftab 143.

Chapter 3: He Had Game: 1994 – 1998

After releasing six films in six years, Spike Lee took a well-deserved break. The critical and commercial acclaim Lee had earned, unprecedented for a black filmmaker, afforded him the opportunity to open doors for emerging filmmakers. Having forged a working relationship with Universal Pictures' Sam Kitt, Lee "started to executive produce other people's films" (Aftab 173). Lee would confess to Kaleem Aftab that

> I wanted to do it for a long time. It's just a matter of me coming across some property that I like, filmmakers I like, and also whether studios are receptive to it. The aim was to get stuff made. There are a lot of good things to get made, I can't direct them all […] and it's very important, because it's a chance to develop young talent, give young writers and directors a shot, whoever has a good script. (qtd. in Aftab 173)[1]

Unfortunately, Lee's efforts resulted in the lamentable trifecta of *Drop Squad* (1994), *New Jersey Drive* (1995), and *Tales from the Hood* (1995) from writer-directors of color David C. Johnson, Nick Gomez, and Rusty Cundieff respectively. Additionally, Lee continued his career-long aim of "demystifying" the art of filmmaking and providing African Americans and those belonging to other under-represented groups access to the motion picture industry by establishing the 40 Acres Institute, "a film program to be taught at the Long Island University campus in Fort Greene" (Aftab 102).[2] Lee impressed upon students that, just as he had cautioned Matty Rich, "[y]ou don't need to go to film school to be a director. It's enough to get a camera, or work on a set, and learn the craft" (qtd. in Aftab 102). After the short-lived 40 Acres Institute, the filmmaker joined Amiri Baraka in academia, first at Harvard—at the behest of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.[3]—and then

at his alma mater, New York University (Aftab 174-5, 213-4).[4] Sandwiched between teaching assignments was the Spike Lee Joint, which was increasingly appearing in mediums other than feature-length motion pictures.

Lee kept busy by helming music videos for Stevie Wonder, Prince, Arrested Development, and Naughty by Nature. The filmmaker also made what was the first of several attempts at breaking into television, developing *Slim's Table*, an adaptation of Mitchell Duneier's sociological ethnography of the same name, with Barry Brown and legendary NBC executive Brandon Tartikoff (Aftab 173).[5] Finally, Lee upped his advertising production, directing commercials for Levi-Strauss, Diet Coke, AT&T, and ESPN as well as starring in a Pizza Hut spot which aired in Japan (Aftab 173). Aftab reports that Lee's escalating involvement in the arena of advertising allowed him to cultivate business relationships that culminated in the establishment of his own advertising agency, SpikeDDB, a joint venture with DDB Needham (Aftab 228). Aftab identifies the purpose of the enterprise:

> to tap into the "urban" market. Hip-hop was now America's best-selling music genre, and corporations were seeing inner-city youths as fashion leaders and a lucrative market. Spike had demonstrated with his Nike and Levi's spots that he was adept at exploiting the market, and the venture would allow him to take more artistic control of his work[.] … Spike would own 51 percent of the company to boot and it would provide a lucrative additional revenue stream. (qtd. in Aftab 228)[6]

An extra source of income was a welcome development for Lee. Spread thin by the commercial, music video, and teaching assignments (as well as marriage and fatherhood),

he had closed both Spike's Joint stores in addition to the 40 Acres Institute before SpikeDDB even came into being.[7] The critical and commercial apathy towards his first three efforts as a producer not only halted 40 Acres and a Mule's production aspirations, but it also prevailed during the release of the next three Spike Lee Joints.

After the epic *Malcolm X* (1992), Spike Lee consciously sought a return to the smaller, more intimate, character-driven canvas of a *She's Gotta Have It* (1986). Lee expressed that desire during an interview with Charlie Rose, telling the broadcaster that "I just felt that as far as my career goes and the types of films I want to make, that it was important to do something different, and not duplicate what we did with *Malcolm X*[.] … I just felt that it was time for a change of pace, and I think it just really shows the versatility that I have and the types of films I want to make" (90).[8] Indeed, the equity Lee built up with his filmography to *X* allowed him to experiment when he returned to the director's chair. Having taken Martin Scorsese's use of a teetering handheld camera to create "the disorienting feel of Harvey Keitel's drunken stupor in *Mean Streets* [1973]" as a point of reference,[9] Lee had already developed a signature shot, which he debuted in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) (Aftab 131). The Spike Lee dolly-shot, Melvin Donalson informs us, "is an expressionistic technique where [Lee] places a character or characters at the center of the frame in a medium shot, and then, the characters are 'pulled' forward toward the camera on a moving dolly" (100). Noting that the technique functions both narratively and editorially, Donalson continues: "to highlight the introspective nature of the single character … or to emphasize the significant dialogue between two characters[,] … the shot … forces viewers to be conscious of the technique, impressing on them the importance of that moment in the story" (100). Kent Jones notes that after *X*, Lee would

intensify his practice of "throwing aesthetic blankets over large chunks of his movies" (42).

In addition to his signature dolly shot, Lee began experimenting with different film stocks to distinguish between changes in location or character states of mind in the mid-1990s filmography of *Crooklyn* (1994), *Clockers* (1995), and *Girl 6* (1996). Jones laments Lee's use of anamorphic widescreen (the result of a concave lens which squeezes the image and creates a funhouse effect) section of *Crooklyn*, the shifting between 35mm (the motion picture industry standard) and 16mm (a less expensive alternative for independent filmmakers and documentarians) film stocks in *Clockers*, and the hi-def video (a then-emerging technology available to consumers in the form of camcorders) sequences in *Girl 6* (42-3). Sam Pollard[10] confesses to Aftab that he considered Lee's experimentation as evidence of him "trying to overcompensate for the loss of [Ernest] Dickerson and prove himself as a visionary filmmaker to be ranked with the likes of Oliver Stone" (195). Lee's classmate in the graduate program at NYU, Ernest Dickerson was director of photography for the first six Spike Lee Joints and was often credited with their unique visual style, critics often suggesting that Dickerson's cinematography elevated Lee's narratives. Lee, too, had always acknowledged Dickerson's importance to the Spike Lee Joint, but at the same time he had to "start planning for the day when Ernest … would go off to make his own films" (Aftab 158). Before returning to shoot *Malcolm X*, Dickerson did in fact make his directorial debut, helming urban actioner *Juice* (1992)—starring Omar Epps and Tupac Shakur in their debut roles. The working relationship deteriorated on the set of *X*, as Lee would bypass Dickerson and set up his own shots, justifying those instances by citing the need for self-improvement: "I knew

that I had to have a greater impact on the photography of my films. Ernest wasn't going to be a crutch for me forever. This was part of my game as a director that had to be worked on" (qtd. in Aftab 158). Lee's working this out in *Crooklyn*, *Clockers*, and *Girl 6*, however, proved too much for the audience.

Released to largely mixed and negative reviews, these three movies were met with markedly less enthusiasm than Lee's pre-*X* catalog, as the domestic box office totals attest: approximately $13,640,000 gross for *Crooklyn* ($360,000 loss), $13,040,603 gross for *Clockers* ($11,959,397 loss), and $4,903,000 gross for *Girl 6* (7,097,000 loss).[11] Nelson George breaks down Lee's career into "three distinct periods: you have the films to *Malcolm X*, and then there is the middle period of *Crooklyn*, *Clockers*, and *Girl 6* which is sort of dodgy – with *Girl 6* being the dodgiest" (qtd. in Aftab 211). On *Girl 6* Pierson concurs: "There is only one Spike Lee film that is a complete letdown, even though it has its moments: *Girl 6* is the only one of Spike's films that I think the world could live without" (qtd. in Aftab 211). *Girl 6* encapsulates this sort-of movie mid-life crisis and is, as George observes, the result of Lee's devotion to his Spikeisms and technical flourishes. According to George, "you could go see *Boyz N the Hood* and it is much easier to understand what is going on at all levels, even though John Singleton was influenced by Spike" (qtd. in Aftab 166). George perceives the other two films as symbols for Lee's role in his own waning influence and relevance.

Nelson George had perceived the lukewarm response to *Malcolm X* as a harbinger of things to come for Lee's career. George estimates that *X* 's inability to live up to the cultural project it was purported to be[12] was due to external forces associated with the immediate nature of pop culture itself, which in mediums besides cinema reflected a

revival of the historical Malcolm X:

> The biggest tragedy of *Malcolm X* was that it takes a long time to make a movie, and I think the movie came out a year too late. There was a time when interest in Malcolm was so prevalent. When Spike got *Malcolm X* off the ground a lot of that imagery had been so saturated. The hats, the T-shirts […] Malcolm had been sampled on a million records. That is the only thing about film as a pop-cultural enterprise: you have to be so fortunate to be ahead of the curve. I think that the movie as a pop event suffered because there was a little bit of exhaustion with the Malcolm X thing by the time [Lee] got the movie out. (qtd. in Aftab 166)[13]

In a way, George is subtly condemning and absolving Lee for the overexposure that contributed to *X*'s—and subsequently *Crooklyn*'s, *Clockers*', and *Girl 6*'s—disappointing showing at the box office. However, the columnist ultimately assigns culpability to Lee, acknowledging to Aftab that the filmmaker's "six-year run of … being at the cutting edge of culture … is a lot. Most people get a couple of years at best. So I think there was some exhaustion with his constant promoting, the commercials, a movie a year. There was not a lot of breathing space" (166). Perhaps it was not just the audience that was in need of breathing space, as the following Charlie Rose interview excerpt demonstrates:

> Rose: Did you feel like it was necessary for a change of pace after *Malcolm*? Because that was a long-time project.
>
> Lee: Two years.
>
> Rose: And you devoted night and day to it.
>
> Lee: Two years, night and day. And I really don't want to box myself into

> that corner. (90)

Observing the filmmaker on set of *Crooklyn*, Ruth Carter[14] saw this change of pace in Lee's directorial approach: "he backed off and let the film evolve. The passion wasn't necessarily as strong as it was for everything else" (qtd. in Aftab 179).[15] Lee also admitted to Rose that *Crooklyn* represented his break from making movies portraying interracial and intraracial dynamics, not only a possible explanation for the lack of passion Carter perceived in the filmmaker but also his potential acknowledgment of the audience fatigue to which George attests.[16]

The relative failure of Lee's post-*Malcolm X* oeuvre was the result of a simple numbers game. George aligns himself with Aftab, who had previously observed the convergence of black cinema and hip-hop music in the early-'90s, explicitly noting that

> [t]here were more black filmmakers. You had Singleton, Matty Rich, Mario Van Peebles, Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, the Hudlin brothers. Suddenly Spike is not the only game in town. The world of black film – which for a while had been centered around the yearly Spike movie: there would be a big Spike movie, a big Spike party, and a big Spike controversy – that changed. Now you had black people doing pop films, gangsta films, art films […] there were more people to pay attention to. Partly because of Spike, we no longer just had Eddie Murphy – we had Denzel Washington, Wesley Snipes, Halle Berry, Sam Jackson, Angela Bassett, Danny Glover. And it got bigger and bigger as time went on. You had a wider palette to deal with. … Because young filmmakers were dealing with more issues of street life and were a lot more accessible to a

> wider, younger audience, the hip-hop audience as a filmmaking audience became crystallized. You begin having stratifications of black audience in film, which had always existed: there had been jazz fans and pop. But now you had the films beginning to stratify along generational lines. Spike's audience became a more cinephile audience, black and white. He became less connected to a younger audience that was more hip-hop oriented. (166)

In a reversal of fortune, the mid-1990s saw Lee assume the position Baraka had occupied during their early-'90s falling out, now "being viewed as an elder statesman. Even as his box-office receipts shrank and he was beginning to struggle for the attention spans of youth culture, … [t]his was a man who had finally shaken off his Mars Blackmon image" (Aftab 228). During his interview with Charlie Rose, Lee himself concedes that, while African American filmmakers have achieved a measure of progress in Hollywood, it is often at the expense of diverse images of blackness: "I would say that there has never been a better time than now. But I want to preface that by saying the door is still not wide open, and the type of films that we are able to make are still limited. Either it's a comedy, or it's a hiphop [sic], gangsta 'hood, rap movie. So we are still not allowed the leeway. But I guess it's going to come" (94). The 'hood movie's depiction of a blackness which glorifies young African American men who terrorize their communities by trafficking illegal drugs and perpetrating gun violence perhaps reignited Lee's passion. His aim of critiquing such images in a way reconnected him to his *She's Gotta Have It* roots.

Clockers, Lee's follow-up to *Crooklyn*, represents the filmmaker's cinematic response to the state of black cinema he had bemoaned to Charlie Rose. Based on a

Richard Price novel of the same name, *Clockers* displays Lee's adeptness at fingerprinting a work. According to Sam Pollard,

> Spike turned it [Price's novel] around and made it from the point of view of Strike [played by newcomer Mekhi Phifer], which really makes the film fascinating if you think about films from an anthropological perspective. This is a very powerful film about the African-American experience in the inner city and how young men struggle to negotiate life. (qtd. in Aftab 188)[17]

Aftab intimates that Lee's decision to focus on Strike, which effectively reduced *Clockers* to another entry in the increasingly recognizable mainstream subgenre of the 'hood movie, constitutes the filmmaker's non-admission admission that he was out to reclaim his rapidly dwindling audience (189).[18] Lee maintained, though, that his purpose for making *Clockers* was to eradicate "hip-hop gangsta films" from American cineplexes (Aftab 189).[19] In order to successfully terminate the 'hood movie, Lee sought to provide a verisimilitude consistent "with this type [inner-city gangsta] of life," noting that

> [w]e took all the sheen off, all the gloss, the glamorization. We didn't make the guy [Strike] out to be a hero. So, because there is so much money invested in that lifestyle and gangsta rap is still selling and the whole mentality is still with us, we weren't given a chance. As I said before when I used the word naïve, we thought that it was going to be the final nail in the coffin for the genre. (qtd. in Aftab 199)

Sam Pollard shares the director's sentiments about *Clockers*, citing the gangster film tradition at large:

> *Clockers* didn't make any money because, in my opinion, it's a true depiction of what is going on in the 'hood. Everybody from Mario Van Peebles to the Hughes brothers – because of the tradition, they all glamorize it. If you watch *New Jack City* [1991] or *Menace II Society* [1993], all those films have a little glamour. This one doesn't. It *was* the nail in the coffin. But people didn't get it. They're starting to get it now. (qtd. in Aftab 199)

Unfortunately, the "now" Pollard speaks of is 2005; the 1995 audience for which *Clockers* was intended definitely did not "get it."

Although Lee would earn the ill-fitted moniker "The Comeback Kid" with his next three pictures, this nickname belied the fact because the filmmaker had never before received such near-unanimous praise from the critics. Resembling a breakthrough instead of a resurgence, *Get on the Bus* (1996), *4 Little Girls* (1997), and *He Got Game* (1998) comprise the longest sustained period of critical acclaim in Lee's career (Aftab 221, 226, 241). The increase in quality from *Crooklyn*, *Clockers*, and *Girl 6* to *Get on the Bus*, *4 Little Girls*, and *He Got Game* was palpable. Nelson George observed Lee's aptitude in elevating his game after first viewing *Do the Right Thing* (1989):

> Watch *School Daze* [1988] and *Do the Right Thing*, and you see an amazing thing: a guy who makes a film, learns from his mistakes and makes the next film better. Sometimes you have to fail to succeed. It's almost like he looked at the blueprint for *School Daze* and adjusted. In terms of the production, he made sure that the film took place on one block that he could control rather than be at the mercy of all those people

> down in Atlanta. Spike tried to do a three-day structure in *School Daze*, and you totally lose track of time in that film, you don't know what day of the weekend it is. So his next film took place on one day and was very tightly controlled structurally. Things that are all wrong with *School Daze* are all right with *Do the Right Thing*. (qtd. in Aftab 93)[20]

If the filmmaker's critique of Hollywood's conception of the young, African American male in *Clockers* did not reignite the dwindled passion Ruth Carter perceived on the set of *Crooklyn*, the subject matter of *Get on the Bus*, *4 Little Girls*, and *He Got Game* most likely did, as his successful negotiation of these topics suggests.

Get on the Bus, an exploration of the various shades of black masculinity set against the backdrop of the 1995 Million Man March, was released on Thursday, October 16, 1996 on the one-year anniversary of the march. Perhaps struck by Minister Louis Farrakhan's (the march organizer) call for a "distinctive vision of black self-improvement and entrepreneurial effort by which the prejudices of whites would be refuted," Lee revisited the method he used to acquire additional financing for *Malcolm X* and sought only black male investors (Aftab 215; 217).[21] Although the contributors enjoyed a return on their investment, the movie boasting a $3 million-plus profit, its paltry $5,731,103 gross[22] affirmed the notion that the Spike Lee Joint had induced audience fatigue. Lee, however, attributes the dismal box-office performance of *Get on the Bus* to the African American audience's evolving tastes:

> Maybe the black audience didn't want to see a movie like this. Not now, I mean. They want to see shoot 'em up stuff. I think it [*Get on the Bus*' box office failure] was a combination of things. Some missteps were taken in

the marketing.[23] But I'm not going to put everything on Columbia Pictures. … [A]t the end of the day the African-American moviegoing audience did not support the film. It's as simple as that. …

A lot of the actors and I did everything we were asked to promote (*Get on the Bus*). …

I think apathy has a lot to do with it. I was speaking to Branford Marsalis the other day, and he said that black folks think they know what they like, but they only like what they know. …

And why people thought it was a documentary, I still don't understand.[24] We took care to make sure with the TV commercials and radio spots that this was an entertaining picture and not some diatribe about "Let's uplift the black man!" and all that kind of stuff. You have to look at the numbers. We've been out since October 16th[, 1996], we've yet to crack $6 million. *Set It Off* [an urban crime thriller starring rapper Queen Latifah that was released on November 6th][25] is going to make $30 or $35 million. It's disturbing because studio heads are looking at these numbers, and the next time a black filmmaker tries to make a film with any substance, they'll say, "Well, the last time somebody tried a film like that was *Get on the Bus*, and nobody came. But you know, they sure did come to see *Set It Off*, so we've got to have more shoot 'em ups, more violent pieces." And those are the films that they'll continue to make. That's the sad part. But while all this is happening, black people will still be crying, "Oh, they never do us right in Hollywood, and we get hit with

> the same stereotypes again and again. Our image is not put on screen." If you want something, you gotta bring something. It's as simple as that. (qtd. in Harris 135-6)

The fact that the intended audience was uncertain as to whether or not *Get on the Bus* is a documentary is particularly noteworthy. Lee's regular, and sometimes financially necessary,[26] experimentation with the documentarian's tools—"digital video technology ... [and] consumer-grade digital videocameras"—heightened the likelihood of audience confusion (Massood "We've Gotta Have It" xxv). The filmmaker's next project, though, was slated for premium cable channel HBO (Home Box Office), thereby enabling him to circumvent what he would likely characterize as the fickle black audience. Ironically, this project actually *was* a documentary, the director's first.

4 Little Girls is the culmination of Lee's decade-plus ambition to relate the real-life story of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, which took the lives of four African American girls.[27] The documentary also represents one of the few times that Lee's canvas was not his beloved New York City as well as the first time since *Malcolm X* that the filmmaker underwent a transformative experience:

> That is the type of film that affected me just like *Malcolm X* did. When you get to meet the African-Americans from a much older generation, you would think that somehow they would be full of hatred and bitterness. But they weren't. These are people who lost their daughters. But they were very philosophical. Of course, they had many years to live with the pain, but it is something that never goes away. They are going to take that to

> their grave – and Alpha Robertson [Carole's mother] did when she passed away in 2002. (qtd. in Aftab 227)

Stanley Crouch, too, sees evidence of Lee's metamorphosis, perceiving its manifestation in the filmmaker's execution of the narrative itself and speculating that

> I think he was baptized by those parents when he made *4 Little Girls*. I thought that it woke him up as a man. I think then that he stopped being like a sullen adolescent college boy who made movies and had these trickle-down black nationalist ideas. I think that when you grow up in the environment that he grew up in in Brooklyn, where there is all of this crude hostility and third-rate black nationalist bullshit – and the most that has happened to the people there is that they might have been harassed by the police – and then to see the extraordinary humanity of these people who actually had their children blown up, it makes you seem small. It was their humility in saying, "I know that I was bitten but that is not a good enough excuse to get down on all fours and start barking like a dog." His work changes dramatically after that, so I think it had an effect on him, being around them. I think he started to go in the direction of becoming a major film director. (qtd. in Aftab 227-8)

The HBO executives concurred, unexpectedly making *4 Little Girls* a theatrical release. Thoroughly impressed with the documentary, the brass at HBO "decided to screen the film in a New York cinema on July 13, 1997, thus readying it for submission to be eligible for the Academy Awards in the Documentary Feature category" (Aftab 226). Although *4 Little Girls* did receive an Oscar nomination, the picture ultimately lost to

Mark Jonathan Harris's *The Long Way Home*, a documentary which chronicles "the struggles of European Jews to survive in the aftermath of World War II up to the advent of the state of Israel" (Aftab 227).[28] According to Aftab, "[u]ndoubtedly the Academy's voters had a recent history of responding strongly to films treating the Nazi genocide …," which Lee assures Aftab met his expectations: "I knew we were going to lose the same minute the nominations were announced[.] … The producer of the Holocaust film was a rabbi. Documentary films on the Holocaust are a cottage industry unto themselves" (227).[29] Lee maintains that his ambivalence towards the Academy Awards arose long before March 23, 1998, the night of *4 Little Girls*' Oscar defeat, telling *USA Today*'s Scott Bowles some six years later that "[a]fter going through the Academy thing with those two movies [*Do the Right Thing* and *Malcolm X* [30]], I realized that no awards -- not the Oscars, the Grammys, the Tonys -- can really validate your work. You have to do that for yourself" (8E). Although his outlook on awards recognition remained unchanged, the critical and commercial perception of Spike Lee as a filmmaker shifted.

4 Little Girls not only represents a personal metamorphosis of the filmmaker and his films but also of the audience's perception of them. More precisely, the technical and narrative brilliance of *4 Little Girls* and subsequent documentaries *Freak* (1998), *Pavarotti and Friends for the Children of Liberia* (1998), *Pavarotti and Friends 99 for Guatemala and Kosovo* (1999), *Jim Brown: All American* (2002), miniseries *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006) and *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise* (2010)[31], and *Bad 25* (2012) have resulted in Spike Lee's celebration as one of American cinema's greatest documentarians. Robin R. Means Coleman and Janice D. Hamlet argue that this perception developed because Lee is most effective as a filmmaker

"when the cultural moments he is introducing intersect with his nonfiction" (xxvi). Paula Massood agrees, observing that the reason for Lee's celebration as a documentarian is the typical content of his fictional narratives, which "upset the compact between Hollywood and spectators because they ask uncomfortable questions of their audiences (both black and white) rather than entertain them" ("We've Gotta Have It" xxvi). The resulting difficulty associated with the fictional Spike Lee Joint, Massood concludes, fosters his acclaim and success as a documentarian: "[h]is nonfiction films ... are *expected* [my emphasis] to be historical and informative" ("We've Gotta Have It" xxvi). In this respect, Spike Lee occupies the same space in 21st-century American cinema as James Baldwin inhabits in 20th-century American literature, for Lee's nonfiction works are praised, while his fictions remained underappreciated. This is a fact Massood substantiates in her assessment of the filmmaker's output: "*Jungle Fever* [1991], *Crooklyn* [1994], *Clockers* [1995], *Get on the Bus* [1996], *4 Little Girls* [1997], *He Got Game* [1998]…, and *Summer of Sam* [1999] are important, though critically underexamined, films," *4 Little Girls* being the only nonfiction work ("We've Gotta Have It" xix). I would state the case more strongly than Massood: from *Summer of Sam* onward, *all* of Spike Lee's fictional narratives—with the possible exception of *Bamboozled* (2000)[32]—deserve more critical attention.

Along with the emerging view of Spike Lee as a first-rate documentarian in the class of an Errol Morris or a Michael Moore, the evolution brought on by *4 Little Girls* is also evident in the filmmaker's subsequent works of fiction. The twelfth Spike Lee Joint in as many years, *He Got Game* is in a way a return to form for the director. After a seven-year run of shooting films he reworked from preexisting scripts by James Baldwin

and Arnold Perl (*Malcolm X*), his siblings Cinqùe and Joìe Lee (*Crooklyn*), and Richard Price (*Clockers*), as well as original pieces by Suzan-Lori Parks (*Girl 6*) and Reggie Rock Bythewood (*Get on the Bus*), Lee's *He Got Game* represents the director's first original, solo screenplay since *Jungle Fever*. And like most of his work, the setting is Brooklyn (Coney Island specifically), the narrative unfolding within "a five-block radius," thus mirroring his execution of *Do the Right Thing* and *Crooklyn*, which both take place on one block (Aftab 236). Then a four-and-a-half-year veteran of marriage, Lee credits the encouragement of his wife, Tonya, for *He Got Game* coming to fruition, his spouse revealing to Aftab her motivation for challenging her husband to compose another original, solo screenplay: "It felt like it was a long time from *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better*, and *Jungle Fever*, and I personally wanted to bear witness to that aesthetic again. I wanted to hear from him in his work, his own voice, and I kind of felt like I wasn't alone in that – that his audience too would really respond to it" (231). Mrs. Lee's inkling was confirmed after the first weekend in May 1998, when *He Got Game* led the domestic box office with $7,610,663 in receipts, giving Lee his first number one opening.[33] Unfortunately, the movie's $21,567,853 gross[34] ($5,977,592 less than *Do the Right Thing*, $10,914,829 less than *Jungle Fever*, and $26,602,057 less than *Malcolm X*) furthered the notion that the Spike Lee Joint was inaccessible to mainstream audiences.[35] Lee voiced his conception of the African American moviegoing audience in the media, likely indicating his dissatisfaction with the state of his once-relatively-profitable movie career: "I cannot tell you why a large segment of African-Americans would rather see 'Booty Call' than 'Rosewood' or 'He Got Game[.]' ... I don't know," (qtd. in Weinraub E1).[36] In this context, then, Lee's choice of material and star reflected a new motivation.

Essentially a sports movie starring now-bonafide, A-list, Hollywood movie star Denzel Washington, *He Got Game* tackles major college athletics, a largely nefarious, billion-dollar industry which profits from the hard labor of (predominantly black) male athletes in their late teens and very early twenties. According to Aftab, "*He Got Game* suggests that where there is business there is likely to be corruption," thereby establishing a recurring theme in the 21st-century work of Spike Lee (233). *He Got Game* and subsequent Spike Lee Joints (particularly *Bamboozled*, *25th Hour* [2002], *She Hate Me* [2004], and *Inside Man* [2006]) also present business as a prism through which to examine power relations. Aftab reports that Lee's decision to draft and ultimately shoot *He Got Game* was itself a response to power relations in his own career: "[f]or ten years Spike had dreamed of making a sports movie: realizing that he needed a box-office hit before he could find sufficient funds to make *Jackie Robinson*, he set about writing a contemporary basketball story" (231).[37] Although the resulting film did not garner Lee the box-office capital necessary for acquiring financing for his *Jackie Robinson* script, its execution and consideration of race in the larger, more universal context of power was a welcomed sight for Crouch:

> I thought it was a hell of a movie. The basic thing with Spike Lee is you've always got the ever-present potential for a kind of adolescent quality – the rock'n'roll position that is always available, the hostile entertainer: "Part of my entertaining you is I'm going to say 'Fuck you,'" so you actually come to be entertained by that. I think he largely suppressed that in *He Got Game*. He may have grown out of it. To a certain extent, the human reality is that you can't divide the world on the

> basis of ethnicity because it does not have anything to do with the souls of people: everybody has at some point to set aside their ethnicity to find out what their soul is. (qtd. in Aftab 241)

His views on race notwithstanding, Crouch encapsulates the artistic growth of Spike Lee. Unfortunately, only critics such as Crouch were on board, leaving Lee the task of either regaining his audience or winning another. This brings us to 1999, when the release of *Summer of Sam* resembled an early-'90s pop culture event.

[1] Earl Smith, however, identifies a more practical reason for Lee's foray into executive producing, estimating to Aftab (174) that "[i]n the beginning I think that Spike was trying to help people out, but then Spike worked out that he could make money being an 'executive producer' when he's not directing."

[2] Lee recalls the institute with fondness, relating to Aftab (102) that "[w]e have a class every Saturday morning, and each class would have a different guest. I remember Robert DeNiro came, Martin Scorsese, the Hughes brothers. They were all good guests."

[3] Gates celebrates Lee's acceptance of a teaching position at Harvard to Aftab (174), as the filmmaker was the scholar's first hire as Chair of Afro-American Studies. Gates further marvels at Lee's commitment, recounting to Aftab (175) that the filmmaker "used to fly up from New York every Friday during the semester, which he paid for himself; he wanted to. He never missed a class. I think he saw it as part of his mission."

[4] Mary Schmidt Campbell, Dean of the New York University Film School, is effusive in her praise of Lee as a teacher, her testimony to Aftab (214) expanding on Gates's observation: "He feels that part of what he is giving them is access. He is a very impressive teacher. I think there is something about the nature of teaching itself at its most fundamental level that appeals to him. I think it has to do with his sense that, in addition to the opportunity to do his work, he has a responsibility to the larger world toward the next generation and teaching is one of the tools that he can use to fulfill that responsibility." Through Campbell's words we can perceive the influence of his great-grandfather on Lee, the teaching impulse in his pictures, and his commitment to building a legacy.

[5] Lee confesses to Aftab (173) that "I've found television is just like film – when it comes down to it, you still have to deal with the gatekeepers, those one or two individuals who say we are making it or not making it."

[6] Ever-independent and -conscious of power relations, Lee cited a lack of control when relating the institution of SpikeDDB to Aftab (228): "When I do commercials, I know that it is the client's word that counts at the end: they present you with the idea, the storyboards are there, and you just execute it. I really wanted to have more of a hold on the creative thing. Keith Rhinehart, chairperson of DDB, approached me. They gave me the start-up money and they also gave me a foothold and connection to the clients already in their stable. I'm not there day-to-day, but as far as the work goes, I have to approve all of it. For the most part I've directed all the spots." One of which was for Pepsi and aired during Super Bowl XXXVIII on February 1, 2004. Titled "Diner" and starring future Academy Award-winner Mo'Nique, the ad "was the first commercial created by a multicultural agency to run on the Super Bowl." See "Spike DDB," *Advertising Age* 76.2 (Jan. 10, 2005): S12a.

[7] Lee concedes to Aftab (213) that "it was just a full-time thing, retail, and I wanted to concentrate on filmmaking. It was the same thing with the music label. The record industry is crazier than the film industry, so I had to let that go. The house was being torn in all directions. The rappers that started doing clothing lines, I say more power to them. They're doing a better job than I did. ... It's good to be recognized and have an iconic status, but it was never my intention to be in the public eye every minute, to have my face in the paper every day. In fact, I prefer not to be in the papers if it's not movie-related."

[8] Aftab (176-7) reiterates Lee's desire to scale back after *X* while simultaneously noting that "[i]n its own way, *Crooklyn* is just as politically vibrant as Spike's earlier films, but related with a lighthearted touch." Lee voices similar thoughts to Rose (90): "I think it's [*Crooklyn*] light, but I don't think it's the vast departure that some people said. Like all of a sudden, this is a warm and gentler Spike Lee, like I never had those qualities, or those qualities were never in any of my other films."

[9] Like the "black Woody Allen" label, the comparison of Spike Lee to Martin Scorsese is so prevalent that a specific reference is superfluous. Lee, however, welcomes the comparison. Often effusive in his praise of

Scorsese, Lee regularly acknowledges his aspiring to achieve Scorsese's greatness, that pursuit sometimes manifesting itself in the Spike Lee Joint, thus inviting both positive and negative Scorsese comparisons.

[10] Pollard edited *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, *Clockers*, *Girl 6*, *4 Little Girls*, *Bamboozled*, *When the Levees Broke*, and its sort-of sequel *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise*.

[11] See "Crooklyn," "Clockers," and "Girl 6," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag. Each figure is found in the "Box Office" section of its film's corresponding imdb.com page.

[12] Aftab (147) cites Lee's appearance on *Saturday Night Live* with cast regular Chris Rock, during which the two mused about *Malcolm X*'s Oscar chances—before the movie had even gone into production—as a turnoff for a good part of the audience. Aftab (166) also recalls the firestorm that resulted from Lee's call for children to skip school on November 18, 1992—the day of *Malcolm X*'s theatrical release—which the filmmaker rationalizes by rhetorically asking, "Who said that the only place that you can learn is within the four walls of a school? I'm not saying that you shouldn't go to school, but there is a time and a need to leave those hallowed halls of academia and get out. Is it not true that people have class trips? You go to museums, the zoo, the park to learn about nature. Anybody who says that education only takes place within a school and not outside the walls is not very smart. In the fourth grade our teacher took us to see *Gone with the Wind* because we were studying the Civil War. So if I can go see *Gone with the Wind* in fourth grade, I definitely think that these kids today should go see *Malcolm X*. I wasn't telling people to skip school, because in actuality teachers took their classes that day when it first came out, as a class. And a lot of parents took their kids out of school and as families went to see the movie, so I don't think that it was an outlandish statement at all."

[13] Lee defends himself to Aftab (167), arguing that "[t]here was no way we could have got that film out quicker. It takes time to edit a three-hour-plus epic film. We were not going to rush that film. I personally thought Warner Bros. stopped pushing and promoting *Malcolm X* and instead went gung ho for Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, since Clint Eastwood had a long and successful relationship with the studio."

[14] Carter worked as the costume designer on *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, *Malcolm X*, *Clockers*, *Summer of Sam*, and *Bamboozled*.

[15] Carter intimates that Lee's upcoming nuptials were affecting his work.

[16] Aftab (181) suggests a mainstream aspect of *Crooklyn*, observing that it "has a feel-good factor about it, one that could appeal to an audience often alienated by Spike Lee."

[17] Lee seconds Pollard's emotion, maintaining that "I didn't want to do a film based on Rocco Klein, a cop in a middle-aged crisis. That would have been just another cop story to me." See Aftab 189.

[18] Aftab (189) explicitly states that "Spike had wanted to make a commercial film that also, and perhaps more pertinently, reacted against the misdirection into which the director felt black film had stumbled."

[19] Lee would later confess to Aftab (189) that "it was naïve on my part" to assume that one film could end another subgenre.

[20] Lee's recollection of his *She's Gotta Have It* preparation indicates the adaptive capabilities George perceives: "After the debacle of *The Messenger*, I made sure that my next film – if I ever got it made – would be something small, something that was constrained, something that I could *do*." See Aftab 27.

[21] Both Aftab (217-21) and Lee recount the financial particulars of *Get on the Bus* in painstaking detail. See Erich Leon Harris (135-7), "The Demystification of Spike Lee," *MovieMaker* 24 (Mar. 1997), rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2002, 127-38.

[22] "Get on the Bus," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[23] Lee offers a similar take on the marketing of *Get on the Bus* to Aftab (221).

[24] Roger Guenveur Smith (who plays Gary in *Get on the Bus*) perceives the film as "a sorely underrated piece … I think a lot of people thought it was a documentary." See Aftab 221.

[25] See "Set It Off," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[26] Suggesting their lack of marketability, Massood ("We've Gotta Have It" xxiv) attributes the content of Lee's "more 'politically sensitive' films" to the director's "experiment[ing] with cheaper technologies as a means of cutting production costs."

[27] Both Aftab and Lee detail the documentary's nexus and production, attributing its making to Lee's success as a fiction filmmaker. See Aftab 223-6.

[28] Pollard offers an account of Oscar night filled with such emotion that it borders on poignant. See Aftab 227.

[29] Lee offers a variation of this observation to Chris Nashawaty (144): "I think 15 or 16 Holocaust films have won the short and feature-length [Oscar] categories. I'd rather be the Knicks playing the [Chicago] Bulls at the United Center [the Bulls' home court] down by 20 with 10 minutes left—those odds are better than going against a Holocaust film." See Nashawaty, "Hoops to Conquer," *Entertainment Weekly* 433 (May 22, 1998): 46, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews* 144-5.

[30] *Do the Right Thing* was nominated for only two Academy Awards, Lee for Best Original Screenplay (losing to *Dead Poet's Society* scribe Tom Schulman) and Danny Aiello for Best Supporting Actor (losing to future Lee regular Denzel Washington for *Glory*). Lee was disappointed in the Academy's failure to nominate the film for Best Picture. Similarly, *Malcolm X* was nominated for two Oscars, Denzel Washington for Best Actor (losing to Al Pacino for *Scent of a Woman*) and Ruth Carter for Best Costume Design (losing to Eiko Ishioka for *Bram Stoker's Dracula*). See Aftab 115-6 and "Malcolm X," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[31] Lee directed only the first episode.

[32] The release of *Bamboozled* sparked a revival in Spike Lee scholarship led by two critical symposiums published within the pages of two divergent journals. The January 2001 issue of *Cineaste* contains "Race, Media, and Money: A Critical Symposium on Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*," introduced by Cynthia Lucia and comprised of short essays by documentary filmmaker Saul Landau; *New York Press* film critic Armond White; *Black Face, White Noise* author Michael Rogin; *Village Voice* staff writer Greg Tate; and independent filmmaker Zeinabu Irene Davis. Appearing in the Summer-Fall issue of *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire* is a transcript of "Minding the Messenger: A Symposium on *Bamboozled*," a November 2, 2000 panel discussion held at New York University and sponsored by NYU's Department of Africana Studies and Institute of African American Affairs. Panelists were Stanley Crouch; *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* author Eric Lott; Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Margo Jefferson; and *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* author Michele Wallace, whose short essay "*Bamboozled*: The Legacy" appears in *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire* after the symposium. Film Scholar Clyde Taylor, whose editorial "If You Want to be Free, Think About the Slave" introduces the symposium, served as moderator. Following these critical symposiums were a cycle of articles engaging with *Bamboozled* in much the same way, which is to say that much of the scholarly conversation on the first fictional Spike Lee Joint of the new millennium focused on the 19th-century phenomenon of minstrelsy and 20th-century fascination with black memorabilia.

[33] "He Got Game," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Aftab (241) notes that some critics, however, considered *He Got Game* Lee's most commercial picture.

[36] According to Aftab (242), "Something that at the time did capture the imagination of predominantly black audiences was Kevin Rodney Sullivan's black romantic comedy *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* [1998]. Starring Angela Bassett ["Betty Shabazz" in Lee's *Malcolm X*] as a forty-something woman who falls for the dashing Taye Diggs while on vacation in Jamaica, the film took a whopping $38 million at the box office following its summer 1998 release. Soon 40 Acres would take advantage of this new subgenre in movies – the black romantic comedy." This foreshadows Lee's return to the producer's chair four-plus years after the critical and commercial failure of *Tales from the Hood*, the last of the dreaded trio including *New Jersey Drive* and *Drop Squad*. This time the filmmaker introduced three films that achieved the critical and commercial acclaim which eluded *Drop Squad*, *New Jersey Drive*, and *Tales from the Hood*. First up was *The Best Man*, the directorial debut of Lee's cousin Malcolm, which was released on October 22, 1999 to largely glowing reviews—some even comparing it to Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983). According to David Germain ("I Do"), *The Best Man* shocked many exhibitors by opening number one at the weekend box office with $9.1 million in receipts on the strength of an audience that was approximately 80 to 85 percent black. Lee's success as a producer continued in the year 2000, when Sundance Film Festival (SFF) favorite *Love and Basketball* reached theaters on April 21st, Germain ("Sub Tale") reporting its second-place opening weekend with an $8.4 million gross. Bob Graham (68) chronicles the genesis of *Love and Basketball*, recounting a reading of Prince-Bythewood's script at the Sundance Institute where Spike Lee's producing partner (Sam Kitt) was in attendance. The reviews for the directorial debut of Gina Prince-Bythewood—whose husband (Reggie Rock Bythewood) Lee had worked with on *Get on the Bus*—were even more positive, resulting in protagonist Sanaa Lathan (a supporting player in *The Best Man*) garnering serious Best Actress Oscar buzz. Ultimately, Lathan did not receive an Academy Award nomination for *Love and Basketball*, but she was nominated as Best Actress for an Independent Spirit Award, losing to Hollywood legend Ellen Burstyn for *Requiem for a Dream*—directed by Darren Aronofsky, who regularly cites Lee as a filmmaking influence. Finally, Lee Davis's *3 A.M.* debuted at the 2001 SFF to generally positive reviews; however, the film did not acquire a theatrical release. Instead, it premiered on premium cable channel Showtime on July 1, 2001. Lee confesses to Aftab (255) that the quality and mainstream potential of the scripts by Malcolm, Prince-Bythewood, and Davis—all African American writer-directors—drew him back to the producer's chair, especially *The Best Man* and *Love and Basketball*, which the filmmaker praised for "the way that you saw these young black professionals in their world." Furthermore, Lee singled out his cousin's debut feature to Aftab (255), proclaiming that "[i]t begat a whole black romantic comedy genre." In a footnote, Aftab (255) breaks with Lee's declaration about *The Best Man*, characterizing *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* as "the first black rom-com to be a box-office hit" while simultaneously upholding Lee's estimation of Malcolm's debut feature: "Spike is right in the sense that *The Best Man* confirmed the genre's place in the market." Black cinema as a whole—the images it projected—became a topic of conversation during the year 2000. Both Denene Millner (4) and Desson Howe (N45) situate *Love and Basketball*, *The Best Man*, and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* within a larger, emerging trend of atypical black films which feature middle-class characters and explore universal themes. The critics locate the development of this movement towards anti-buffoonish filmic representations of African American life in 1997, Millner recognizing George Tillman, Jr.'s first feature *Soul Food* and Howe acknowledging actress [and *School Daze* discovery] Kasi Lemmons's directorial debut *Eve's Bayou*. *Soul Food* opened on September 26th, finishing the weekend in third place with $11,197,897 in receipts, charging toward a final gross of $43,700,855 and an approximately $36 million profit. An indie starring early Spike Lee Joint-fave Samuel L. Jackson, *Eve's Bayou* bowed in theaters on November 7th, grossing $3,287,846 en route to a $14,821,531 gross and approximately $9 million profit. See Germain, "Movie-goers Say 'I Do' for Wedding Comedy 'Best Man,'" *Associated Press* 24 Oct. 1999, Domestic News: n. pag. and "Sub Tale 'U-571' Floats to First Place at Movie Theaters," *Associated Press* 23 Apr. 2000, Domestic News: n. pag.; Graham, "Sundance's Brightest; Best of the Festival Included – Surprise! – Two

Women's Sports Films," *San Francisco Chronicle* 6 Feb. 2000: 68; "Sanaa Lathan," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; "3 a.m.," Movies, *New York Times*, New York Times Company, n.d.: n. pag.; "Soul Food," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d: n. pag.; and "Eve's Bayou," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[37] In a 1997 interview with Erich Leon Harris (137), Lee laments the status of his then-five-year quest to make *Jackie Robinson*, noting that—"to do it right"—he needed a $40 million budget. That number swells to $50 million in a subsequent interview with Chris Nashawaty (145). Lee seemingly abandoned hope for *Jackie Robinson* after the 2000 release of *Bamboozled*, focusing his energies on a Joe Louis-Max Schmeling project with *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) screenwriter Budd Schulberg and boxing historian Bert Sugar. See Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas (203-4), "Thinking About the Power of Images: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 26.2 (Jan. 2001): 4-9, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, 202-17. However, Lee maintains to Aftab (169) that his ultimate goal was to direct both *Jackie Robinson* and *The War to Come* (the Joe Louis story). Unfortunately for the filmmaker, he missed the boat on the cinematic presentation of Jackie Robinson's life: white screenwriter (Oscar winner for *L.A. Confidential* and nominee for *Mystic River*) Brian Helgeland's fourth directorial effort—*42*—dramatizes the life story of Jackie Robinson. A nationwide release on April 12, 2013, *42* stars box-office champion Harrison Ford as Branch Rickey. The trailers for the picture seemed to indicate a potential silver lining: the story appears to be told through the eyes of Robinson (Chadwick Boseman) and not Rickey—a marked departure of the black-themed films of the 1980s, particularly *Cry Freedom*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Glory*. Another indicator that *42* is Robinson's story was evidenced in the promotional materials, which display Boseman's top billing (his name listed above the title before Ford's). However, a viewing of *42* reveals that the picture ascribes to the formula established by *Cry Freedom*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Glory*, in which the black man's (Robinson's) story can only be related in terms of the white man's (Rickey's). Perhaps this accounts for *42*'s first-place, $27.5 million opening weekend at the domestic box office, "easily the best opening ever for a baseball movie … [and] second-highest opening for a sports drama." See Ray Subers, "Weekend Report: '42' Called Up to Box Office Big Leagues," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, 15 Apr. 2013: n. pag.

Chapter 4: 21st-century Inside Man: 1999 – 2008

Before *Summer of Sam* (1999), Spike Lee made noise by teaming with legendary opera performer Luciano Pavarotti, documenting two concerts for the Great Performances series on PBS (Public Broadcasting System): "Pavarotti and Friends for the Children of Liberia" (1998) and "Pavarotti and Friends '99 for Guatemala and Kosovo" (1999). Sandwiched between these two benefit concerts in Italy was Lee's filming two live performances of John Leguizamo's Tony Award-winning one-man show *Freak*. Lee combined the two performances into a concert movie for HBO, *Freak* (1998), the filmmaker's contribution to Leguizamo's performance largely in the editing. According to Aftab, at Lee's suggestion Barry Brown "cut the film so that each of the numerous characters that Leguizamo assumed throughout his show were viewed from a different perspective" (243). Lee was so impressed with Leguizamo that he offered him the lead role ("Vinny") in *Summer of Sam*,[1] the picture's rollout unlike any other for a Spike Lee Joint. The provocative content of the Spike Lee Joint to *Malcolm X* (1992) and its director's persona had resulted in box-office success, but the decidedly less controversial content of the movies starting with *Crooklyn* (1994) and ending with *He Got Game* (1998) warranted them little pop culture attention besides what Lee's divisive persona garnered. The contentious release of *Summer of Sam*, however, took place not because of Spike Lee, but by virtue of the film's very existence.

The film centers on the members of a seemingly close-knit neighborhood in the Bronx succumbing to the paranoia elicited by the murderous rampage of the .44-caliber Killer/Son of Sam, ultimately revealed to be David Berkowitz. The hubbub surrounding the film began long before its July 2, 1999 entrance into American multiplexes. In a July

1998 article, Karen W. Arenson describes a Bronx casting call for extras in the planned Spike Lee Joint, noting that the American Legion Post hosting the event is a scant one or two miles from the home of Berkowitz's first victim in July 1976 (31).[2] Twenty-two years later, Arenson reports, the victim's parents, Michael and Rose Lauria, led a protest against the planned filming of *Summer of Sam*, accusing everyone involved with the project of exploitation (31). This controversy, Lee tells Kaleem Aftab, "affected the film … because it put us in a defensive posture even before we began shooting" (245-6). A July 1999 *Newsweek* article commemorating the release of *Summer of Sam* substantiates the filmmaker's claim, relating Disney's (distributor of *Summer of Sam* through its Touchstone Pictures arm) relocation of the production to another neighborhood in the Bronx in response to the Laurias's protest (22).

This decision did little to assuage those most affected by the Berkowitz shootings, according to Blaine Harden, who quotes Michael Lauria and Neysa Moskowitz (the mother of Berkowitz's last victim[3]) in a June 1999 article in which both parents accuse Spike Lee of exploitation, insensitivity, and unnecessary historical revisiting (1). In an exercise just as distasteful as his article purports *Summer of Sam* to be, Harden cites Berkowitz himself, the now-lifetime prisoner who professed to be a born-again Christian no longer under the demonic possession that led him to kill six New Yorkers and wound seven more between the summers of 1976 and '77 (1). Additionally, Harden reports that Berkowitz claimed, in anticipation of *Summer of Sam*'s release, to follow "everything there is" about Spike Lee and his family, even naming the filmmaker's wife and two children (1). Seemingly guilty of the same glorification of Berkowitz that he implies exists in Lee's new film, Harden's article provoked similar finger-pointing. Several

reviews and articles released in conjunction with *Summer of Sam*'s entrance into American multiplexes note the absurdity of Harden's presentation of David Berkowitz. In her review of *Summer of Sam*, Janet Maslin bemoaned her *New York Times* colleague's somewhat favorable portrait of Berkowitz ("Red Hot Buttons" E1). Lee also considered Harden's article too sympathetic in its presentation of Berkowitz. During an interview with Bob Strauss, Lee expressed his fury at the convicted serial killer's naming his wife and two children ("Doing the Spike Thing").[4] Amidst his (mis)handling of the Berkowitz material, however, Harden does reproduce the sentiments Lee voiced during the 1999 Cannes Film Festival. The filmmaker had tried to assure his sympathy for the families of Berkowitz's victims and properly contextualize his upcoming picture: "I feel deeply for the parents of the victims of Son of Sam. At the same time[,] … [e]ven if I didn't make this film, that was not going to bring their daughters, their loved ones, back. They got buried by a psychopath. We do not feel that the film is a glorification of David Berkowitz" (1).

Lee seemingly became fed up with the controversy. The filmmaker's tone with Bob Strauss shifted from empathy to resignation and then to defiance:

> How can I get angry at anything the parents of these victims say? It's a no-win situation for a filmmaker in my position; there's nothing you can say that's going to soothe the pain which they've felt since David Berkowitz took their loved ones away. Despite that, … [a]m I the first filmmaker in the history of cinema who's done a story where there have been relatives of someone who's been killed? What about "The Boston Strangler"? That's really all I can say about that. ("Doing the Spike Thing")

The aforementioned assessment encompasses Lee's response to the controversy surrounding the release of *Summer of Sam*, the filmmaker telling Prairie Miller that he would keep "trying to … stress the fact that this is not a film about a serial killer. It's not a film about David Berkowitz. It's a film about what happened during that very strange and peculiar summer. And how a madman changed the lives of eight million people. You know, how they had to alter the way they lived" (183). To that end, in a simultaneous indulgence of his documentary and teaching impulses, Lee appropriately enlists the services of legendary *New York Daily News* columnist Jimmy Breslin for *Summer of Sam*'s framing device. Breslin, having been drawn into a lengthy correspondence by Berkowitz during his reign of terror, reinforces the historical actuality and significance of the times the movie dramatizes. The theatrical release of Lee's *Summer of Sam*, envisioned as a kaleidoscopic visual account of one of the most tumultuous seasons in the life of the greatest of American cities, subsequently quelled the accusations of exploitation.

Upon actually viewing the latest Spike Lee Joint, many critics[5] acknowledged that not only does *Summer of Sam not* glorify the ".44-caliber Killer"/"Son of Sam" David Berkowitz (Michael Badalucco), but that it is not about him at all—that he exists only within its margins. Janet Maslin, Bob Strauss, and Geoffrey Macnab go as far as to characterize the prerelease controversy that engulfed the picture as nothing more than media misrepresentation ("Red Hot Buttons" E3; "'Sam' Captures '77"; 58). Lee's report of the silence of the victims' families after the picture's release substantiated the critics' claims (Aftab 246). Simple analysis of the film's recreation of the murders affirms such a conclusion, for each of Berkowitz's killings is comprised of a succession of rapid cuts

with non-lingering, medium to long shots of the victims. The purpose of recreating the Berkowitz murders, Lee assures Blaine Harden, was the director's "attempting to put madness on film" (1). The unpredictable, homicidal insanity that Berkowitz exhibits evokes a similar mood within the diegesis of *Summer of Sam*, the real-life serial murderer functioning as "an evil presence. An evil cloud hovering over eight million New Yorkers" (Lee qtd. in Miller 182). The specter of another random Berkowitz killing exacerbates the already-present, though latent, madness harbored by the residents of the Bronx neighborhood where *Summer of Sam* unfolds. Indeed, the critical consensus regards Berkowitz as a causal influence on the plot, Roger Ebert deeming his random acts of murderous aggression "more punctuation than drama" ("Summer of Sam"). The drama instead arises from the way the Bronx denizens' relationships with each other deteriorate beneath the dark cloud of madness David Berkowitz conjures through his violent outbursts; therefore, the real-life murderer emerges as the agent of change in a fictional film.

Within the narrative of *Summer of Sam*, the erratic, maniacal nature of David Berkowitz's murderous actions imbue the inhabitants of the South Bronx enclave with a dread of potentially being victimized, the neighbors in turn lashing out at each other with the same unpredictable mania. Gary Thompson notices these "themes of change and backlash" at the heart of *Summer of Sam*, deeming 1977 New York City an ideal setting for an exploration of such topics ("Long, Heated 'Summer'" 52). Although his brief appearances—and the even shorter screen time allotted to his victims—distinguish Berkowitz as the catalyst for Lee's examination of the effect of massive change on lifelong relationships, some critics bemoaned the filmmaker's centering on the

interpersonal relationships of those affected by the slayings. Reviews that appeared in the *Associated Press*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Daily News* each argue that Lee should have exploited the more formulaic serial killer subgenre, focusing on the mind of Berkowitz and law enforcement's race to solve the killings.[6] This, the reviewers maintain, would have ensured a more enjoyable, and perhaps better, moviegoing experience. Such an approach, however, would have effectively ascribed *Summer of Sam* to the conventions of the serial killer subgenre and television police procedural, a fact that cowriters and -stars Victor Colicchio ("Chickie") and Michael Imperioli ("Midnite") both anticipated and subsequently steered clear of in their drafting of the screenplay. Instead, Colicchio and Imperioli developed a story capable of engaging the interest of Spike Lee, a memorialization of New York City at a certain moment in its history which provided the filmmaker the opportunity to pay tribute to the everyday New Yorker's negotiation of the hell that was the city during a period of swift transition, *not* to the serial killer who aided in the torment.

David Berkowitz's emergence as a cinematic representation of New York's descent into madness owes much to the New Yorkers living in the city during the summer of 1977, who were the first to consider the serial killer as the embodiment of the massive transition taking place. Writing on New York as it was in the late-'70s, Sam Roberts paints a detailed portrait of unbridled chaos, commencing with, "In the summer of 1977, New York lost its mind" (E1). Roberts then catalogues the pervasive strife: George Willig's scaling of the World Trade Center; bombings of Manhattan office buildings and department stores subsequently claimed by Puerto Rican nationalists; temperatures rising to a near-record 104 degrees; Consolidated Edison's blackout, after

assuring customers that one would not take place, which resulted in widespread looting and over 3,000 arrests; the opening of Studio 54; the New York Yankees' returning to the World Series after a long absence; and the city's first layoffs since the Great Depression,[7] its dispatching of firemen to blazes in taxis to relieve coworkers in order to save in overtime costs, and its imposing tuition at the City University of New York—all exacerbated by the serial murder of young couples in their cars by an unknown assailant armed with a .44-caliber revolver (E1). In addition to the calamities that Roberts lists, Denis Hamill, Beth J. Harpaz, and a *New York Times* editorial entitled "The Summer of Evil" also recount the mass arson (perpetrated for hire) that devastated the South Bronx, the exact location where the narrative of *Summer of Sam* unfolds ("Living Dangerously" 4 and "H'wood Strikes Terror 38; "Unforgettable Summer"; A10). Each of these items, in addition to Todd McCarthy's *Variety* review, also reports the New York media's promulgation of the Son of Sam story in order to generate increased profit ("Summer of Sam" 36). Looking back, Roberts and "The Summer of Evil," along with Lewis Beale, recognize that the threat of Son of Sam only exacerbated the preexisting atmosphere of tension in the city (1; A10; "Uneasy Living" 52). According to both Roberts and "The Summer of Evil," amongst New Yorkers there was a prevailing notion that the city was a failure (1; A10). Longtime coanchor of the WABC/Channel 7 evening news Bill Beutel sums it up in gloomier terms: "There was the feeling that the city was dying, and Son of Sam was symbolic of that" (qtd. in Beale "Uneasy Living" 52). The genesis of the *Summer of Sam* project, too, was in many ways a metaphoric act.

In a response much more swift and direct than that of Spike Lee, *Summer of Sam* cowriter and -star Victor Colicchio had met with Michael and Rose Lauria shortly after

the parents' casting call protest to assure them that he meant no disrespect to their daughter's memory. According to Karen Arenson, Colicchio's initial drafting of the screenplay that would become *Summer of Sam* was "in part, an attempt to exorcise the past, when he and a group of friends tried to find the [Son of Sam] murderer and turn him in, but ended up beating up a man who turned out not to be the killer" (31). This revelation distinguishes *Summer of Sam* from other "inspired by a true story" fare, for Colicchio and Michael Imperioli's episodes in New York City during the summer of 1977 are carefully woven into the fabric of the screenplay, the duo's script equally as painstaking in its establishment of accuracy and feasibility of their historical memorialization as Spike Lee's direction. Elaborating on the genesis of the project to Aftab, Imperioli shares his account of the summer of '77, which bears a striking similarity to Colicchio's:

> My partner had a friend who was a punk rocker in 1977. Victor himself was in a punk band at the time and this guy he knew was pretty much beaten up by people in his neighborhood, who considered him a suspect for the Son of Sam murders. That was amazing to me, because a cousin of *mine* was almost beaten to death by people who were from his neighborhood who thought *he* was the killer. So Victor's acquaintance was the basis for the character of Richie, played by Adrien Brody [in the film]. (244)[8]

Spike Lee also holds the summer of '77 in high regard, proclaiming to Denis Hamill that it "changed my life" ("Living Dangerously" 4). Having buried his mother earlier that year, the twenty-year-old college sophomore returned home for the summer, no doubt

still grieving the massive loss. Unable to find a job, young Lee made use of a neglected Super 8 video camera he'd received as a Christmas gift and, unaffected by the Son of Sam's evil aura,[9] spent most of the summer filming looters, disco dance parties, and block parties. The footage he captured evolved into his first student film, *Last Hustle in Brooklyn*, and resulted in his decision to become a filmmaker (Aftab 246).[10] Sam Roberts notes that young Lee declared himself a mass communications major upon his fall 1977 return to Morehouse, thereby suggesting that his career choice marked the future filmmaker's crossing an important threshold (E1).[11] Smarting from the devastation of its post-World War II prosperity, New York City, too, was on the verge of dramatic change, the varying cultural divisions arising from the ashes prefiguring radical shifts in American culture.

Spike Lee, Michael Imperioli, and Victor Colicchio's references to punk rock music are especially noteworthy, for the volatile, violent, and sexual compulsions that characterize the musical genre evoke the murders perpetrated by the Son of Sam. Like the Son of Sam, punk rock emblematized the random ferociousness of change taking place in American culture during the late-1970s, which Lee acknowledges in his remembrance of the summer of '77:

> It was a summer of record heat, the blackout, the year Reggie Jackson became a Yankee. … It was a time of great excesses, the last at-bat in the game of unprotected, reckless sex[.] … [A] time of Studio 54, CBGBs; when Plato's Retreat was a daily orgy. An age when violent punk rock replaced the hippies. … [I]n a few years there would be this thing called AIDS that changed everything. Changed the way the world behaved. …

> Also, before Reagan came in and the whole country took a great swing to the right. (qtd. in Hamill, "Living Dangerously" 4)[12]

Indeed, during the summer of 1977 seismic shifts in American culture did occur. Elvis Presley passed away four days after the arrest of the Son of Sam. In a *New York Times* article commemorating the release of *Summer of Sam*, Kit R. Roane cites Jimmy Valentino, a teenager living in New York in 1977, to underscore the cultural significance of Presley's death: "[I]t was the only thing that ever pulled Son of Sam out of the headlines" (B2). Joseph A. Gambardello, a young reporter with United Press International in the New York Daily News Building in 1977, recognizes the death of Groucho Marx shortly after Presley's as another substantial loss (F05). The passing of Presley and Marx left a sizable void in American popular culture, exacerbating the already-fomenting transition away from the post-WWII, middle-class, rock 'n' roll influence of the baby boomers. Through the lens of hindsight we can now surmise that the ascent of Conservatism constituted a backlash against the alternative ideologies advocated by punk rock. Gambardello, Harpaz, and Elizabeth Snead also highlight the subsequent culture war between disco (the evolution of '50s, middle-class conformity) and punk (F05; "Unforgettable Summer"; 1D). According to Snead, central to late-1970s American culture was the sexual revolution and resulting conflict amongst proponents of the nuclear-family model of sexuality and followers of alternative expressions of sexuality (1D). This is the frame of reference for Spike Lee, who situates the dichotomy of traditionalism and subversivism within the context of the conflict between disco and punk, thus satiating his American impulse in *Summer of Sam*.

In the film, lifelong friends Vinny and Ritchie—together with their significant

others Dionna (Mira Sorvino) and Ruby (Jennifer Esposito)—embody the disco-punk binary. Lee associates these divergent models of heteronormative coupling with the opposing forms of musical expression. Newlywed disco duo Vinny and Dionna are in stasis, the institution of marriage simply a daily routine; however, Ritchie and Ruby—the unmarried, undefined couple personifying punk—are the picture of contentment. Ironically, the source of Vinny and Dionna's misery and Ritchie and Ruby's fulfillment is in both men's penchant for sexual experimentation, anal sex in particular, with Vinny engaging other women (including Dionna's cousin Chiara [Lucia Grillo]) and Ritchie other men (presumably patrons of his day job at Male World). Although Vinny attempts to shield his escapades from Dionna, they amount to the worst-kept secret in the neighborhood. Ritchie, on the other hand, shares his bisexuality with Ruby, inviting her to witness his striptease act at Male World. Her acceptance of his bisexuality reciprocates his acceptance of her despite her reputation as the neighborhood trollop. These two couples express the competing responses to the cultural question of the traditional and the alternative, which, still unanswered, has retained a significant space within the American consciousness.

Hurtling towards the dawn of a new millennium, 1990s-Hollywood, like Spike Lee, had developed a proclivity to revisit the past. In an article deconstructing Disney's 1993 adaptation of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Ellen J. Goldner locates the movie within an end-of-20th-century Hollywood tradition of producing "film adaptations of classic novels … that prompted celebrations and renewals of traditions" (7).[13] Lee's approach in *Summer of Sam*, however, is appropriately uncelebratory, participating in a mid-'90s cinematic subtradition which examines the recent past of the

1970s to shed light on the present. Identifying maverick directors Lee, Martin Scorsese (*Casino* [1995]), Paul Thomas Anderson (*Boogie Nights* [1997]), Ang Lee (*The Ice Storm* [1997]), Terry Gilliam (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* [1998]), and Sofia Coppola (*The Virgin Suicides* [1999]) as practitioners, R. Colin Tait outlines the development of the "1970s sequence." Tait argues that the '70s sequence functions as "a personalized rendition of the era[,] … possess[ing] a storytelling function independent of the plot-line, like a condensation of the movie's emotional spirit, which resembles the movie in miniature" ("That 70s Sequence" 18). An amalgamation of a 1970s cinematic aesthetic, '80s music video storytelling, and '90s auteur aspiration, Tait names the "Baba O' Riley" montage in *Summer of Sam* the '70s sequence standard bearer ("That 70s Sequence" 20).[14] The desire for auteurship behind the development of the '70s shot is itself rooted in a much stronger yearning.

The mid-1990s cinema which revisits the 1970s, according to R. Colin Tait, culminates with Lee's *Summer of Sam*. The picture's recreation of the many "scenes" of late-'70s New York City is a nod to the "wistfully remembered," post-1960s rise of urban Americana: "post-Stonewall" Greenwich Village, the Velvet Underground, Andy Warhol's factory, Studio 54, and CBGBs ("That 70s Sequence" 22). Elaborating, Tait perceives Lee and his fellow directors' "restaging [of] … these scenes and … neighborhoods with faithful verisimilitude" as indicative of "a lost desire for locality—the lost homeland … that has been erased from view" ("That 70s Sequence" 22). Deeming this project "cinematic nostalgia," Tait concludes that this longing is a major impetus behind the prevalence of the '70s shot. Grounding his assumption in Linda Hutcheon's etymological definition of nostalgia, "the pain of missing a homeland

experienced by people who had moved from it," Tait ascribes it to Lee's "longing for the poor, yet culturally distinctive spaces of New York City" before its turn-of-the-century, "Disneyfied, McDonaldized, and Starbucks-ridden mutations" ("That 70s Sequence" 21-2). The framing device starring Jimmy Breslin voices the yearning of which Tait speaks. In his opening monologue, Breslin addresses the audience from New York City circa 1999, the now-clean, Disneyfied Times Square his backdrop: "Business is booming up, up, and up. Crime is down, down, down. Homicides are the lowest it's been since 1961.[15] Well, it wasn't always like this. This film is about a different time. A different place. The good old days. The hot, blistering summer of 1977." Geoffrey Macnab identifies the subtext of Breslin's commentary as this: though "Mayor [Rudolph] Giuliani may have cleaned up crime … he has also taken the heart out of the city," hence *Summer of Sam*'s harkening back to the good old days of the summer of 1977 (58).[16] In this context, then, *Summer of Sam* represents Spike Lee's lament for the New York City of his youth.

The 1977 New York City of *Summer of Sam* has more to do with the United States of America in 1999, Lee's vision of the tumultuous past a means of interpreting the equally-transitory American experience at the end of the 20th century. Reeling from the 1998 murders of African American Texan James Byrd, Jr. (tied to a truck and dragged to death in Jasper, Texas) and gay, University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard (tied to a fence, tortured, and left for dead in Laramie, Wyoming), America was once again confronted with and affected by its own legacy of difference-based bigotry. The seemingly random, undoubtedly senseless violence of the mass shooting at Columbine High School in suburban Denver, Colorado in April 1999, however, resulted in a thorough examination of American culture. Unsurprisingly, the resulting social and

political fallout proved divisive. Responses to the anti-black racism and homophobia evinced by the Byrd and Shepard murders and the national conversation on the proliferation of guns in the wake of the Columbine massacre often differed on the basis of geographic region and political ideology.

All parties, though, did achieve consensus on a lone issue: the perceived influence of the American movie industry. In the aftermath of the Columbine shooting, Hollywood was subjected to intense media scrutiny for its filmic portrayals of gun violence. Spike Lee's reaction to this debate was characteristically perceptive. Citing the misplaced outrage directed towards shock-rock musician Marilyn Manson and filmmakers Oliver Stone (for 1994's *Natural Born Killers*) and Martin Scorsese (for 1976's *Taxi Driver*), Lee identifies the cyclical, time-honored practice of politicians and representatives of social institutions such as the church vilifying the entertainment world instead of addressing the real-world issues (e.g. racism, homophobia, and gun culture) that provoke such upheaval (Strauss, "Doing the Spike Thing").[17] Lee's situating *Summer of Sam* in the late-1970s context of rapid transition embodied by the conflict between the traditional and trangressive thus results in a late-'90s critique of political, social, and cultural institutions for their promotion of conformity and homogenization. These ideals comprise the substratum of a new dichotomy between divisive real-world actualities such as racism and homophobia and the concordant notions of commercialism and globalization. Ironically, Lee's appraisal of one satisfies his pursuit of another.

The parallel between Victor Colicchio's co-authoring of the screenplay and Spike Lee's direction of a story featuring such characters is notable given the script's investigation into the effect of change and backlash on the predominantly Italian

American residents of a seemingly close-knit though ultimately xenophobic neighborhood. Like Colicchio, *Summer of Sam* represents the filmmaker's attempt to exorcise some demons, namely the box-office failures of the post-*Malcolm X* Spike Lee Joint. The fact that *Summer of Sam* boasts a predominantly nonblack cast dominated the prerelease conversation, culminating in Lee's public musing as to whether or not its makeup would result in a larger slice of the box-office pie (Maslin "Fascinating Features" E3). Combined with the filmmaker's execution, hopping aboard the '70s sequence bandwagon that mourns the loss of urban America, his direction of a predominantly Italian American cast denotes his elegy for a relatively-profitable early career. In this context, the reason the commercial/mainstream notices some parties within the critical establishment bestowed upon *Crooklyn*, *Clockers* (1994), and *He Got Game* did not permeate the conversation surrounding those films becomes clear: they do not support such a conclusion—only a subtle acknowledgment of mainstream aspirations. I argue that, commencing with *Summer of Sam*, the Spike Lee Joint itself consciously addresses the filmmaker's status in terms of Hollywood influence through its focus on nonblack characters and more universal experiences within generically-common frameworks such as the heist film and period war epic. Lee achieves this mode of address by modifying his expression of the three impulses. Starting with *Summer of Sam*, and continuing in *25th Hour* (2002), *Inside Man* (2006), and *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), the documentary and teaching impulses remain in equal parts; the American impulse, however, intensifies, revealing the commercial impulse.

The 21st-century Spike Lee Joint is preoccupied with capturing national culture at a specific time in history, including the present day, recent past, and generations ago, and

exploring that culture's fears. This is manifest in the media-fueled paranoia in response to a serial killer on the loose in *Summer of Sam*, personal introspection in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in *25th Hour*, the legacy of World War II in terms of finance in *Inside Man*, and that legacy's construction by the hand of soldiers in *Miracle at St. Anna*. Paula Massood's conception of black subjectivity as American subjectivity, though, remains in the later Spike Lee Joints—especially in the case of *Miracle at St. Anna* via its focus on the all-black 92nd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army—but it functions within the margins of each film. Instead, the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint takes into account multiple subject positions via examinations of difference in ways other than just race, particularly bi-/homosexuality, socioeconomic status, and subscription to alternative ideologies or political systems. To further complicate matters, Lee's gaze is often turned *inward*, as the (typically repressed) fears of the culture at large manifest themselves in the psyches of the protagonists and pivotal characters, who then physically (usually violently) project those fears *outward* onto those around them, thus revealing their own self-loathing. The fear and self-loathing exhibited by the protagonists and major characters in the Spike Lee Joint from *Summer of Sam* onward reflect the psychological binary of repression/oppression and the concept of Otherness outlined by Robin Wood.

Although Spike Lee's 21st-century filmography ascribes to Robin Wood's assessment of 1970s horror movies in "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," the self-described critic states in the prologue to the expanded and revised edition of *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan … and Beyond* that he cannot write about Lee's output (xl-xlii). Quantifying his omission of Lee from the expanded study, Wood assures

his readers that every Spike Lee Joint is essential viewing for "anyone with a serious interest in film and/or American culture" (xl). Then, he explains the director's absence: "I suffer from a prototypical white person's inhibition: the black experience is so integral to Lee's work, and, although his films are by no means inaccessible to whites, I am not sure that a white person can write about them with the necessary inwardness, or without embarrassing blunders" (xl-xlii). Curiously, Wood's appraisal, written in 2003, does not take into account *Summer of Sam*, *Bamboozled* (2000), and *25th Hour*, later works that affirm the critic's 1970s estimation of the decade's horror movies. In other words, these films, as well as Lee's subsequent 21st-century oeuvre, explore Otherness through various prisms in addition to race, about which Wood, an openly gay-feminist-Marxist critic, could comfortably write *with* necessary inwardness and *sans* embarrassing blunders (xiv-xviii). After all, he does so in the chapter on 1970s horror movies.

In "The American Nightmare," Wood acknowledges his reliance on Gad Horowitz's *Repression*, a study voicing the theories of Marcuse which are themselves expressions of Freud, before distinguishing basic repression from surplus repression (63). To the critic, basic repression results from human nature; surplus repression, however, "is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture" (63-4). More pointedly, Wood illustrates how the two forms of repression function in Western society: "*basic* repression makes us ... capable of directing our own lives and coexisting with others; *surplus* repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois capitalists" (64). Wood categorizes Western society as surplus-repressive; therefore, surplus repression is ever-present whether or not it is successful. If surplus repression is

unsuccessful, this is to say that if it does not take hold within an individual's consciousness, one of two personalities emerges: the "neurotic" or the "revolutionary" (Wood 64). Finally, Wood details what is typically repressed in Western culture: "sexual energy itself ... bisexuality ... female sexuality/creativity ... the sexuality of children" (64-5), all of which (with the exception of children) are dramatized in the later films of Spike Lee.

Perhaps more significantly, the 21st-century Spike Lee Joints illustrate what occurs when surplus repression becomes physically evident—what Wood deems oppression, itself the result of the psychic phenomenon known as Otherness. To Wood, "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with ... by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself," its psychological purpose "not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (though never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned" (65-6). Wood concludes by noting that the monster in '70s horror movies is coded as at least one of eight types of Otherness: "[q]uite simply, other people ... [w]oman ... [t]he proletariat ... [o]ther cultures ... [e]thnic groups within the culture ... [a]lternative ideologies or political systems ... [d]eviations from ideological sexual norms ---- notably bisexuality and homosexuality ... [and c]hildren" (66-7).

Spike Lee's 21st-century protagonists exhibit all these forms of Otherness. Ritchie in *Summer of Sam*, Monty (Edward Norton) in *25th Hour*, Detective Keith Frazier (Denzel Washington) in *Inside Man*, and the four surviving American GIs stranded in an Italian village in *Miracle at St. Anna*—2nd Staff Sergeant Aubrey Stamps (Derek Luke),

Sergeant Bishop Cummings (Michael Ealy), Corporal Hector Negron (Laz Alonso), and Private First Class Sam Train (Omar Benson Miller)—are all Other figures of some sort at the commencement of their respective stories. More accurately, however, many of these protagonists, as well as the corresponding antagonists, display a pervasive fear of *becoming* an oppressed Other due to their own repressed Otherness. In the universe of the Spike Lee Joint during the 21st century, this dread of difference functions as the physical manifestation of the psychic trauma inflicted by society's fears.

[1] There was some trepidation on the part of cowriter and -star Michael Imperioli about Leguizamo, a Nuyorican, being cast as the Italian American protagonist. See Aftab 243.

[2] Donna Lauria, an eighteen-year-old emergency medical technician, was gunned down by Berkowitz in front of her family's house.

[3] In July 1977, twenty-year-old Stacy Moskowitz was murdered on her way home from a night class.

[4] Berkowitz would tell Larry King during a live interview from prison that he "was misquoted totally," insisting, "I don't monitor anything about his family, I pray for them, I have absolutely nothing against Mr. Lee, and I never said anything bad about him. I pray that God blesses him in every area of his life." See "Son of Sam Killer Says He Meant No Threat to Spike Lee," *Associated Press* 16 Aug. 1999, Domestic News: n. pag.

[5] The critics that recognize the Berkowitz material as tangential to the film include Maslin, "Film Review; Red Hot Buttons in Lee's Steaming 'Sam,'" *New York Times* 2 Jul. 1999, Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk: E1; Strauss, "Doing the Spike Thing; Often the Subject of Controversy, Director Lee Fields Plenty of It Over New 'Summer of Sam'" and "'Summer of Sam' Captures '77," *Los Angeles Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, L.A. Life: n. pag.; Roger Ebert, "Lee's 'Summer of Sam' a Sizzling Look at '70s N.Y.," "The Summer of Spike," and "Summer of Sam," *Rogerebert.com*, Chicago Sun-Times, 23 May 1999, 27 Jun. 1999, and 2 Jul. 1999: n. pag.; Todd McCarthy, "Summer of Sam," *Variety* 375.2 (May 24, 1999): 36; Laura Winters, "Pros and Cannes; American Filmmakers Bringing Their Well-Received Works Back Home," *Washington Post* 30 May 1999, Sunday Arts: G02; Dennis Hamill, "Summer of '77 Was About More Than Sam," *New York Daily News* 22 Jun. 1999, Suburban: 5 and "The Year of Living Dangerously; Spike Lee Explains Why His 'Summer of Sam' Is Less About Murder Than Late-'70s Mayhem," *New York Daily News* 27 Jun. 1999, Showtime: 4; Hillel Italie, "At the Movies: 'Summer of Sam,'" *Associated Press* 28 Jun. 1999, Entertainment News: n. pag.; Sam Roberts, "1977, Summer of Paranoia; Spike Lee's New Film Evokes Not Just the Son of Sam Killings, but the City's State of Mind," *New York Times* 1 Jul. 1999, The Arts/Cultural Desk: E1; Eleanor Ringel Gillespie, "Movies; Too Many Plot Lines Spoil Lee's Overheated 'Summer,'" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 2 Jul. 1999, Arts and Entertainment: 11; Jeff Millar, "Flashback to Summer of '77; Character Development Is a Failing in Lee's 'Sam,'" *Houston Chronicle* 2 Jul. 1999, Houston: 1; Jack Mathews, "High-Energy Flashback Nails the Headlines, but Spike Lee's Movie Is Too Unfocused," *New York Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, New York Now: 53; Mick LaSalle, "The Dog Days of Lee's 'Summer'; Director Captures Paranoia of Season When Son of Sam Went on Killing Spree," *San Francisco Chronicle* 2 Jul. 1999, Daily Datebook: C1; Joe Morgenstern, "Review/Film; shocking and Profane, 'Summer of Sam,' Is Also, Surprisingly, Pretty Funny --- But 'Wild Wild West' Sure Isn't; We Prefer the Foul-Mouthed Kids from Hilarious 'South Park,'" *Wall Street Journal* 2 Jul. 1999: W1; Michael O'Sullivan, "This 'Summer' Not So Hot," *Washington Post* 2 Jul. 1999, Weekend: N40; Beth J. Harpaz, "Spike Lee's Controversial Movie Depicts Unforgettable Summer," *Associated Press* 3 Jul. 1999, Domestic News: n. pag.; "One Crazy Summer," *Newsweek* 134.1 (Jul. 5, 1999): 22; Richard Corliss, "Bronx Bull," *Time* 154.1 (Jul. 5, 1999): 75; Jane Horwitz, "The Family Filmgoer," *Washington Post* 9 Jul. 1999, Weekend: N45; David Ansen, "Spike Stew," *Newsweek* 134.2 (Jul. 12, 1999): 65; David Hinckley, "Film Is a Four-Letter Word; Sex, Raunch, and Violence Are Spicy – and Best Used Sparingly," *New York Daily News* 18 Jul. 1999, Showtime: 12; Geoffrey Macnab, "Summer of Sam," *Sight and Sound* 10.2 (Feb. 2000): 57-8; and Paula J. Massood, "Summer of Sam," *Cineaste* 25.2 (Mar. 2000): 62-4.

[6] In Hinckley's (12) estimation, exploiting audience bloodlust would have benefitted Lee's bottom line though not ensured a better final product.

[7] Although Denis Hamill ("Summer of '77" 5) notes that the layoffs included both policemen and firemen, Roberts's article offers the most comprehensive listing of the happenings in New York City during the summer of 1977 and is therefore cited. However, various pieces of information on this period in New York history are available elsewhere. See also McCarthy ("Summer of Sam" 36); Harden (1); Hamill, "Living

Dangerously" 4 and "Bx. Denizen Recalls Summer of Terror," *New York Daily News* 27 Jun. 1999, Suburban: 2; Harpaz ("Unforgettable Summer"); Corliss ("Bronx Bull" 75); Elizabeth Snead, "'Summer' Fever; Revisiting a Season of Fear Has Spike Taking the Heat," *USA Today* 24 Jun. 1999, Life: 1D; Lewis Beale, "Uneasy Living: New York in the Summer of '77; Killings Set the Tone Amid the General Weirdness," *New York Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, New York Now: 52; Rene Rodriguez, "Summer of Spike?; Latest Film Again Puts Lee at Heart of Firestorm," *Houston Chronicle* 5 Jul. 1999, Houston: 1; "The Summer of Evil," Editorial, New York Times 3 Jul. 1999, Editorial Desk: A10; and Joseph Gambardello, "Tabloid Days; Spike Lee's 'Summer of Sam' Is Set in a Brutal Season in New York. Here's How One Reporter Remembers It," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 5 Jul. 1999, Features Magazine, Lifestyle: F05.

[8] Hamill ("Bx. Denizen" 2) relates Colicchio's experiences in late-'70s New York in painstaking detail. Snead (1D) also reports on Colicchio's and Imperioli's late-'70s exploits. Kit R. Roane provides testimony from New Yorkers who share similar experiences with Colicchio and Imperioli as well as the characters in *Summer of Sam*. See Roane, "Filmgoers Revisit a Summer They Couldn't Forget," *New York Times* 3 Jul. 1999, Metropolitan Desk: B2.

[9] Although Lee seconds Colicchio and Imperioli's emotion about the dark shadow cast by Berkowitz to Miller (182), the filmmaker insists that it did not affect him as much because the serial murderer "wasn't coming to Fort Greene. He wasn't coming into Bed-Stuy or Harlem. So it wasn't the heightened fear that you had elsewhere. People of color were alarmed up to the point where they found out he was white. And that's why I put that [the 'man-on-the-street' news broadcast scene starring Lee himself] in the film. Because we were all scared that like if this guy's black, we're all gonna catch hell for this." This notion of borders and their transgression figures prominently in *Summer of Sam*.

[10] Lee relates various similar versions of the summer of 1977. See Winters (G02); Hamill ("Living Dangerously" 4); Snead (1D); Roberts (E1); Strauss ("Doing the Spike Thing"); Harpaz ("Unforgettable Summer"; Rodriguez ("Summer of Spike?" 1); "One Crazy Summer" (22); Gambardello (F05); and Eric Messinger, "The Way We Live Now: 6-27-99: Questions for Spike Lee; New Kid on the Block," *Houston Chronicle* 27 Jun. 1999, late ed. Magazine Desk: 14.

[11] Lee himself seems to share Roberts's sentiments in a January 1999 address to students at Milwaukee Area Technical College, in which he cautions students against delaying the declaration of a major like he did. See "People in the News," *Associated Press* 30 Mar.1999, Domestic News: n. pag.

[12] The reminiscences of Lee's cowriters, Colicchio and Imperioli, echo the director's. For Colicchio's, see Hamill "Bx. Denizen" 2; for Imperioli's, see Aftab 246.

[13] Goldner's partial list includes Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1992), Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), Gillian Armstrong's *Little Women* (1994), Roger Michell's *Persuasion* (1995), Roland Joffè's *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), Pen Densham's *Moll Flanders* (1996), Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (1997), Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997), and Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999). Aftab (297) reports that Lee aimed to join this tradition in the 21st century with *Spike Lee's Huckleberry Finn* before the untimely death of writer Ralph Wiley (Lee's partner in the companion book to *Malcolm X* and autobiographical basketball memoir *Best Seat in the House*) in 2004.

[14] Tait (17) also observes this homage in early 21st-century works by auteurs such as Cameron Crowe (*Almost Famous*), David Fincher (*Zodiac*), and Ridley Scott (*American Gangster*).

[15] The *Newsweek* article entitled "One Crazy Summer" (22) reports the drop in murders from 1,553 in 1977 to 631 in 1998.

[16] Lee would concur with Macnab's assessment, sharing his perception of 1999 New York City with Sam

Roberts (E1): "Today, [the city is] cleaner, the air's better, the schools are worse, the cops are worse, there's more guns."

[17] Lee expresses similar sentiments to Aftab (191). Also during this interview with Strauss ("Doing the Spike Thing"), Lee renews his long-standing criticism of the MPAA rating system that dates back to *She's Gotta Have It*: "[t]hey're still denying that they have two different standards (for sex and violence), and it's ludicrious[.] … How seeing sex is going to be more harmful to Little Johnny than seeing people being maimed, bludgeoned, shot […] As a parent, I know which one I'd rather have my children see." Lee voices the same concern to Aftab (208), the director's almost feminist phrasing interesting considering his masculinist/misogynist branding: "No one had really heard of Sharon Stone before *Basic Instinct* and she blew up when she spread her legs on film. But actresses are asked to compromise themselves, not just from the director but the producer too. All the time: Are you going to show your tits or your ass? They say that shit all the time. It is men making decisions. And of course they would rather have heads explode on screen than show a penis."

Part II: He Gots ta' Get Paid

Chapter 5: "Once You're Deviated, You Can't Go Back": Subverting Sexuality in *Summer of Sam*

The reality of an "all-white" Spike Lee Joint was met with shock in critical circles, receiving notices in publications from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Daily News* to the *Boston Herald* to *Variety*.[1] The hype resulting from *Summer of Sam*'s (1999) focus on matters other than inter- and intraracial dynamics starring a predominantly Italian American cast is mostly due to two factors: the race-based controversies surrounding the content of the Spike Lee Joints through *Malcolm X* (1992) and the director's persona from the start of his career through *He Got Game* (1998). Surely aware of this fact, and ever-willing to exploit the media's fascination with his pro-black persona, Lee himself heralded *Summer of Sam*'s predominantly nonblack cast during an interview with Janet Maslin at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival.[2] The filmmaker recognizes the mainstream[3] potential of employing a predominantly nonblack cast and is convinced that if *Summer of Sam* is commercially successful, its predominantly Italian American cast "could have something to do with it" (qtd. in Maslin "Fascinating Features" E3). I argue that Lee's broaching of his new movie's predominantly Italian American cast and its conceivably positive effect on the film's commercial outcome was Spike Lee's admission of his casting motivation, itself a potential acknowledgment of his current position on the Hollywood ladder.

Although the filmmaker himself played a role in fostering *Summer of Sam*'s label as "the first all-white Spike Lee Joint," he would subsequently take umbrage to it. Reminding critics and audiences alike of his previous direction of white actors in his

most critically- and commercially-successful works, *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Jungle Fever* (1991) in particular,[4] Lee subtly reinforced his hypothesis of what a predominantly nonblack cast would do for *Summer of Sam*'s box-office bottom line. Perhaps guided by the same premillennial retrospection that characterizes several '90s films, critics had concluded as early as January 1999 that in *Summer of Sam* Spike Lee was reaching back to his earlier work, specifically *Do the Right Thing*. Relying on the movie's synopsis, critics such as Bob Strauss cite the director's aptitude for "depicting hot and bothered New York summers" as a basis for such a comparison ("High-Fives").[5] Maslin notes Lee's execution of the slowly-rising-to-an-explosion narrative he deployed in *Do the Right Thing* in *Summer of Sam* while simultaneously highlighting both films' affinity for local color. That the color is white this time makes surprisingly little difference to Mr. Lee's approach. These characters roam the neighborhood, affect macho posturing and endlessly shoot the breeze just as the filmmaker's Bedford-Stuyvesant characters did. And they become embroiled in a story with similar slow-building but unstoppable momentum, as that scorching summer's craziness starts to tear old friendships apart. ("Red Hot Buttons" E1)[6]

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The critical consensus yielded the perception that *Summer of Sam* represented Lee's attempt to reclaim a measure of Hollywood influence. Columns previewing the summer movie season led the way, Strauss and Mick LaSalle respectively referencing the film and its director with words such as "recapture" and "comeback" ("High-Fives"; "Beyond the Blockbuster" 38). Unfortunately for the director, the perception that he was on the downside of his career fed the "that's-why-he-went-to-an-all-white-movie" conversation

surrounding *Summer of Sam*, thereby resulting in him waging a three-front war as the picture prepared to enter theaters.

First, Lee emphasized to his audience directly, as well as to the media, that his decision to take on the project was in response to his New York sensibility and not his perceived lack of Hollywood stroke.[7] Jeff Millar notes this disposition in his review of *Summer of Sam*, observing that it "is intensely about New York City, in that kind of masochistic way by which the middle class born and bred there exhibit their pride of place. So intense you might feel a bit excluded" (1). The potentially harmful implications of such a New York story were also voiced by exhibitors Robert Bucksbaum (president of *Reel Source*) and Paul Dergarabedian (of Exhibitor Relations) and analyst Leonard Klady (of *Variety*). Speaking to Robert Dominguez, Bucksbaum, Dergarabedian, and Klady each anticipate *Summer of Sam* to generate favorable business in New York and little business elsewhere (52).[8] Bucksbaum would also consider the reaction of African American moviegoers to an all-white Spike Lee Joint, pondering if they would support widely-expected Fourth-of-July box-office champion *Wild Wild West* (1999) (starring Will Smith) instead of *Summer of Sam* (Dominguez 52). Lee, too, anticipated a backlash from the black community, arguing that *Summer of Sam* did not represent his forsaking cinematic depictions of the African American experience in favor of box-office success.[9] Ever the prognosticator, Lee accurately anticipates the charges of "sellout" levied against him for releasing an all-white movie, predicting to George Khoury that "African Americans are going to say I'm a sellout because the movie doesn't have a black theme" (154).[10] Finally, in the familiar refrain of Spike Lee critics conflating his characterization of whites, gays, and Jews with his personal views, *Summer of Sam* was branded "anti-

Italian."[11] Lee considered the anti-Italian charge "ridiculous," asserting that

> [t]he film is loosely based on real people and real events in the Country Club section of the Bronx. The gangster in the film, [Luigi,] played by Ben Gazzara, who puts a bounty on Son of Sam's head, is based on (jailed mob boss Vincent) Gigante. On the night of the blackout, he told his guys to get bats and go out and patrol the area for Son of Sam. So I really hope this anti-Italian thing doesn't come to fruition, because that would just be another smokescreen to detract from the film. ("Living Dangerously" 4)[12]

Unfortunately, Michael Fleeman's report of *Summer of Sam*'s $7.8 million rollout over the five-day, Fourth of July holiday weekend demonstrated that the anti-Italian thing, the nonblack cast thing, and the "Spike-lost-his-mojo" thing each came to fruition ("Wild, Wild Weekend").

Although *Summer of Sam* does represent Lee's third-highest debut weekend, behind three-day openers *Malcolm X* and *He Got Game*, the tepid overall response to the film validated the prognostications of the various exhibitors and analysts. According to Andrew Hindes, the thirteenth Spike Lee Joint "did best in urban markets, while finding few takers in small town America" (1).[13] Concerning Lee himself, the perception of his potential irrelevance as a Hollywood player advanced by Strauss and LaSalle was now reality, as articles reviewing the 1999 summer movie season would attest. In a *New York Daily News* article entitled "Winners Losers," Lewis Beale and Jack Mathews place Lee in the "Losers" column, bestowing him with the "Longest Drought" label (37). Rene Rodriguez, though, frames Lee's box-office misfortune as a question. Citing the commercial aspirations of *Summer of Sam*, its subsequent box-office failure, and the

previous misfires *Girl 6* [1996] and *He Got Game*, Rodriguez asks, "[W]ill anyone take a chance on him again?" ("Summer Flicks" 53). For the next three years, the answer would be no.

Perhaps the media frenzy surrounding *Summer of Sam* as the first Spike Lee Joint starring a predominantly nonblack cast as well as its supposed anti-Italian characterization originates from a January 1999 item on the purported end of the NBA lockout. Lee volunteers information about his upcoming project to Andrew Jacobs, declaring that "It's my first all-Italian-American film[.] … There aren't any black stars" (B2). More significantly, Jacobs's article takes us back to Game 5 of the NBA (National Basketball Association) Eastern Conference Finals, in which the Indiana Pacers faced off against the New York Knicks in Madison Square Garden. Lee's infamous back and forth with star Pacers guard Reggie Miller resulted in the baller's 25-point fourth quarter and a Pacers last-second victory.[14] Recounting the Game 5 backlash, Jacobs reports that "Lee found himself a front-page demon in the city's tabloids, the scapegoat for the home team's ugly defeat" and that Lee himself "sweated through the final playoff game … worried that a Knicks loss might bring about an angry mob" (B2).[15] Not only does this item announce *Summer of Sam*'s predominantly white cast, but it also (unwittingly?) reveals one of the movie's major themes: the practice of labeling sacrificial lambs. Jacobs's use of the terms "scapegoat" and "mob" was adopted by many reviewers of *Summer of Sam*, who additionally note that though the film's characters are not black, they—Ritchie (Adrien Brody) in particular—share a particular experience with many black Americans: scapegoating.

Lee eagerly advanced the major theme of scapegoating in *Summer of Sam*, just as

he had done with its predominantly Italian American cast. In a prerelease interview with Denis Hamill, the filmmaker clearly and concisely synopsizes *Summer of Sam* for its prospective audience: "[It is] about scapegoats … about people looking to blame someone. Instead of blacks or minorities … it's anyone who is different" (qtd. in "Living Dangerously" 4). James Verniere and David Ansen follow suit, each recognizing Ritchie's fate as the neighborhood scapegoat for the murders perpetrated by David Berkowitz ("Staying Alive" s11; 65). However, Lee's summation of the film at the time of its release (and by extension Verniere's and Ansen's reviews) owes a great debt to Roger Ebert, whom the filmmaker credits in a post-release interview with Rene Rodriguez:

> Roger Ebert pointed it out to me at Cannes[.] … He said, "People are going to say this film is different from the others," but I think it's very similar, because in the other films, African-Americans were used as scapegoats, and in this film, it's a gay person, a punk rocker. The way Roger broke it down made me reassess that. I had known it was there, but not to that extent. ("Summer of Spike?" 1)

Indeed, Ebert's report from the 1999 CIFF simultaneously foreshadows and diffuses the hoopla surrounding Lee's first all-White movie: "It comes billed as his first film not about an African-American subject, but it might better be described as his first without any major black characters – because the subject is scapegoating, something black Americans know a lot about" ("A Sizzling Look"). Ebert reiterates his point in a later prerelease interview with Lee, observing that *Summer of Sam* dramatizes "how the neighborhood is affected by the notion that it may be harboring a serial killer, and how

everyone who acts even slightly out of the ordinary becomes a suspect" ("Summer of Spike"). Ebert expands on this idea in his actual review of *Summer of Sam*, arguing for an underlying subtheme: "The almost sexual quality of gossip; people are turned on by spreading rumors and feed off one another's excitement" ("Summer of Sam"). The chief purveyors are Joey T (Michael Rispoli), Anthony (Al Palagonia), Brian (Ken Garito), and Woodstock (Saverio Guerra)—the petty criminals who hang out and sell and use drugs by the neighborhood dead end sign, our resident macho posturers.

In *Summer of Sam*, Vinny (John Leguizamo) spends most of his time trying to quell neighborhood rumors. The morning after the Son of Sam has taken his sixth and seventh victims, a fate which Vinny and Chiara (Lucia Grillo) narrowly yet unwittingly escape, Brian and Anthony corner Vinny after his declaration that he witnessed the corpses while driving Dionna (Mira Sorvino) home from the disco:

> Brian: Yo, Vinny, man, I'd be freaked out too, since the killer knows you saw him. … You could be number eight.
>
> Anthony: He could be stalking you. If he caught your license plate, he knows where you live.
>
> Vinny: I only saw victims! I didn't see nobody. Don't start spreadin' that shit, fuckin' asshole! … I didn't see him. I didn't see no fuckin' killer, you numbnuts, so don't fuckin' spread that word around. … Ritchie, where the fuck were you last night, huh?[16]

Unknowingly, Vinny's innocent jesting of Ritchie on his whereabouts the night the Son of Sam visited the South Bronx shifts the gaze away from him and onto Ritchie, planting the seeds of fear and suspicion that will ultimately lead to Ritchie's violent fate during

the movie's climax. Later, while styling Ruby's (Jennifer Esposito) hair in Gloria's (Bebe Neuwirth) salon, Vinny again corrals local blather from Dee (Kim Director), a patron who "heard around the neighborhood" that the hairdresser had seen the Son of Sam. During a later scene in Chickie's diner, Ritchie shatters a ketchup bottle and tastes the blood on his hands in reaction to Chickie's refusal to serve him and Vinny, Chickie banishing the punk from the establishment as a result. In a subsequent scene in the diner, Chickie exaggerates the maniacal nature of Ritchie's act to Joey T, Vinny berating Chickie for the hyperbole. Community gossip dictates the list of Son of Sam suspects the Dead End Boys compile, of which the focus is—as Brian relates—those who do not fit in: "Ritchie the Freak[,] … Billy the Jew, … that fuckin' guy that drives the bus to City Island"; neighborhood newcomer Frankie Cadillac and Vietnam vet Johnny Nasso; Father Cadilli because of the whippings he used to dole out to the Dead End Boys when they were children; and Reggie Jackson due to the number 44 on his New York Yankees jersey. Finally, as the narrative rises to a crescendo, neighborhood homosexual and sometimes crossdresser Bobby the Fairy, né Bobby Del Fiore (Brian Tarantina), discovers Ritchie's secret occupation at Male World, which results in a scene reminiscent of the racial epithet montage in *Do the Right Thing*. During the scene, Anthony and Brian flank Vinny, each whispering in his ear about Ritchie's "hidden identity" as the Son of Sam:

> Anthony: Killer, fag, pimp, punk rocker.
>
> Brian: Queer, pervert, homo, degenerate, whatever the fuck it is. I mean, come on. Who wants something like that around here anyway?

This final prattling moment is most indicative of Ebert's assertion of gossip's ability to

turn people "on"; in this case the turn-on is literal: Vinny betrays Ritchie, thus cementing the punk rocker's scapegoating and beating at the hands of the Dead End Boys, their misguided sense of community (exacerbated by the fear and uncertainty associated with the Son of Sam) an example of "lynch mob mentality" in action.[17] In prerelease items such as Lee's interview with Hamill and Joe Morgenstern's review, the term "lynch mob" is used to characterize Joey T and the boys ("Living Dangerously" 4; "Shocking and Profane" W1).

After the film's December 21, 1999 home video release, both *Sight and Sound* and *Cineaste* published reviews of *Summer of Sam*, each noting its possible racial undertones. In *Sight and Sound*, Geoffrey Macnab concurs with Ebert and anticipates Paula Massood's *Cineaste* review. Macnab relies on film history, namely Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1926), to illustrate *Summer of Sam*'s depiction of a "lynch-mob mentality [that] gets out of control [and results in] an innocent man [being] targeted simply because he doesn't fit in" (58). In contrast, Massood analyzes Lee's filmmaking technique in the penultimate scene. Ritchie is savagely beaten by the Dead End Boys after having returned to his mother Helen's (Patti LuPone) garage from a brief sabbatical in the city with Ruby. Each of the Dead End Boys is convinced that the punk rocker, based on the "foreignness" of his personal expression (sexuality, demeanor, and choice of music and fashion), is the Son of Sam. Massood concludes that through this beatdown, "Lee not-so-subtly suggests that the fate of ... 'deviants' and 'deviance' is often meted out at the hands of an angry mob" ("Summer of Sam" 64). According to Massood, Ritchie's outsider status is not only due to his Otherness but to his "leaving the Bronx for the East Village" ("Summer of Sam" 64). Ultimately, this notion of border crossing

constitutes Massood's central argument, that Lee's New York

> is not so much the melting pot or "mosaic" of its booster's claims as it is a collection of separate ethnic and racial enclaves set in close and uneasy relationship with each other. The history of the city shows that this system works as long as there's no significant trespassing. What *Summer of Sam* demonstrates is what happens once the system is disrupted criminally, sexually, culturally, racially, or ethnically. ("Summer of Sam" 63)[18]

Massood's thesis, as is the case with much of *Summer of Sam*'s critical reception, expands on prerelease items, particularly Sam Roberts's recollection of New York City during the summer of 1977, in which he observes that Ritchie is "shunned by former friends … not only for daring to be different, but for doing so in another neighborhood. In Manhattan, yet" (E1).[19] Roberts supports his assertion with a common conception amongst many New Yorkers at the time, that "Manhattan … was synonymous with hope" (E1). *Summer of Sam*'s climax, the Dead End Boys' violent making of Ritchie into a sacrificial lamb, is the origin of the scholarly conversation surrounding the film, the conversation itself expanding on the critical notices of the movie's presentation of scapegoating.

Dan Flory is characteristic in his philosophical approach to cinema, particularly that of black filmmakers.[20] According to Flory, African American film *noir* reflects a developing subfield in philosophy which deploys "studies in cognitive aspects of race" that each "challenges dominant forms of cognition" (197). This subfield, Flory continues, therefore yields the discipline of philosophy the "access to that overlapping yet distinct parallel universe of human experience where racist oppression radically alters everyday

life, even as this oppression is overlooked by those professing to describe, theorize, and explain 'universal' human experience" (197). The theorist argues that black *noir*, especially the 1990s cycle by directors such as Bill Duke, Carl Franklin, Charles Burnett, Kasi Lemmons, and Spike Lee, accomplishes its depiction of everyday racist oppression by appropriating the common thematic concerns of film *noir*—"power, confinement, determinism, and marginalization"—from class inequality to social injustice, "thereby ascribing a racialized dimension to the trappings of power" (197). Relying on Manthia Diawara's "*Noir* by Noirs: Toward a New Realism in Black Cinema," Flory further charges that Black noir films, "[r]ather than highlighting moral or legal transgression, [use] black and darkness tropes ... to foreground the oppression forced on African Americans by white society" (202). Evoking Massood's border-crossing thesis, Flory transposes *noirish* elements (particularly confinement and determinism) onto Ritchie, developing his conceit through an analysis of the character's adoption of punk rock style. Ultimately, Flory concludes that the images associated with Ritchie's new appearance, particularly his foreign-looking (i.e. non -white, -American, -heterosexual, -Christian) spiked hair, is racially coded (205). The subsequent neighborhood response—mobs marching through local streets with baseball bats on the prowl for "outsiders" and a diner that refuses to serve customers who appear out of place—further indicates Spike Lee's fashioning of *Summer of Sam* into a parable of racial lynching (207).

Flory arrives at this conclusion via his understanding of Lewis R. Gordon's *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* as it relates to certain plot points in *Summer of Sam*. First, the Dead End Boys' ostracizing Ritchie and classifying him with a hated group, blacks in this case, and their subsequent assault on the punk comes to represent an exercise in the

imposition of white power over the black body (206). Second, Ritchie's acceptance of punk rock ideology, a system that questions and challenges the status quo, aligns him with the many black social and political figures who likewise opposed their circumstances and were therefore subjected to white "punishment" (206). During a stroll along the beach, Vinny blames the preceding fiasco at Chickie's on Ritchie wearing a spiked dog collar around his neck. Ritchie's reply voices his newfound worldview: "You're a fuckin' dog of society, man. You're on a leash to a certain way of thinking." Finally, NYPD Detectives Petrocelli (Anthony LaPaglia) and Atwater's (Roger Guenveur Smith) recruiting of local mob boss Luigi (Ben Gazzara) to help catch the Son of Sam illustrates the historically-collusive relationship between white vigilantism and bureaucracy (206-7). Ultimately, Flory takes the position that Ritchie's expression of punk rock is the allegorical equivalent of any black man's existence and is therefore responsible for Ritchie's deterministic spiral into neighborhood scapegoat, a fact Vinny tries to impress upon Ritchie as they converse outside influential, downtown punk club CBGBs while Joey T and Brian are inside prowling for Ritchie:

> [Joey T's] got them all riled up, and they're looking for you. … They got this list that they've been makin' and spyin' on people. You're at the top of the fuckin' list. … [Y]ou've been acting so fuckin' strange that I don't even know what to do anymore. … Ritchie, look at yourself, okay. Look in the fuckin' mirror. … Look at that hair. … Normal people don't dress the way you do. … I don't know you, Ritchie. I don't know who you fuckin' are.

Ironically, Ritchie's voluntary "abnormal" appearance suggests an opposing reading of

Summer of Sam, one that would attribute Ritchie's fate to his own doing.

Mikal J. Gaines suggests that perhaps performance is vital to *any* subversive interpretation of *Summer of Sam*. Although Gaines does note the validity of Flory's lynching assessment, he also critiques it as "limited" but does so only after similarly entering the conversation (153). Gaines also considers Ritchie's performative nature a suitable entrée to an analysis of the movie; however, he identifies the punk's striptease routine at Male World as his focus. Gaines situates Ritchie within the tradition of the blues as defined by Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, definitions that Gaines reports are commonly set in opposition but are in actuality accurate assessments of the blues' development via "epistemological fluctuation, paradoxical or outright contradictory stasis within systems of meaning, as well as its capacity for seeming incoherence" (148). Gaines roots his argument, though, in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, especially her theory of approaching abjection: "a particularly profound and *collective* awareness of bodily vulnerability, an ever-looming sense that the next moment could mean violation, infiltration, or even devastation of the highest order" (149). Noting the trademark violence (and its function) in the films of Spike Lee, Gaines observes that "Lee's protagonists' chosen means of expression frequently reflect the violence of their respective vernaculars and reconfigure" Kristeva's approaching abjection by their ambiguity and residence in the liminal space "between abjection and expressive practice" (149). The result of which is what Gaines deems the director's "attempt to adapt the … ideology of the blues to the cinema" (149). Indeed, Gaines perceives in both the blues and in Lee's protagonists an abjection which "assumes that personal subjectivity has communal significance, political implication, and discursive power" (149). Lee's "neo-

blues subject" is indicated by Ritchie's "affiliation [not] with a racially oppressed class but instead through … disruptive use of expressive practice within vernacular culture" (151).

Gaines sees Ritchie as the full embodiment of Lee's blues project. "Spike's blues," as Gaines classifies it, "interrogates the blues as a mode of survivability, mobility, adaptability, agency, and potential freedom" (150). Male World enables Ritchie to achieve each of these due to its location safely outside of the South Bronx. Ritchie's striptease performance, comprised of "stabbing" and "dismembering" a doll fashioned from what appears to be white sheet-covered pillowcases into a female effigy hanging by a rope over the stage, illustrates Gaines's theory of the neo-blues subject, "whose deliberately violent *play* is meant to 'signify' upon the abject and create alternate systems of meaning" (150). Ritchie's costume (complete with oversized safety pins and spiked dog collar), the nature of his striptease act, and the venue of its presentation (a male burlesque house whose clientele is comprised of middle-aged, middle-class, homosexual men), clearly denotes that he "uses the aesthetics of punk, sadomasochistic play, and indeterminate sexuality to embrace the abject" (Gaines 150). Ritchie's act creates alternate systems of meaning for the characters within the diegesis of *Summer of Sam* as well, for his destruction of the female doll occurs intermittently with his actual striptease on the male doll. Ironically, Gaines affirms Flory's thesis by observing that Ritchie's striptease is "a more complex instance" of Amy Louise Wood's conception of lynching photography (154). According to Gaines, the effect of lynching photography is "a blurring or conflation of the visual image of violence and the methodology of social control that it represents" which results in the uniformity of both image and methodology,

the ensuing "real and representational violence reif[ying] white hegemony" (154). Gaines's notice of Ritchie's performance also subverts Flory's position, suggesting that "the imagined threat of homosexuality … especially the homosexual body, displaces the position that the imagined threat of black male sexuality would normally have occupied in the lynching act" (154). In a final irony, within Gaines's complication of Flory's argument is another confirmation: the complication is itself an allegorical conclusion.

R. Barton Palmer also reaches back to Massood's notion of border-crossing. Commencing with an acknowledgment of the film's depiction of "the insularity of a settlement closed in by geographic barriers," Palmer observes that adherence to these boundaries deems Vinny and Dionna's opening disco dance as a "calculated performance … [and] erotic display" (57, 59). However, he quickly moves on to situate himself in direct opposition to Dan Flory, and by extension Mikal Gaines. Palmer argues that such subversive readings of the movie both ignore its narrative on the surface and oversimplify Spike Lee's attention to the milieu of its characters (63). Palmer takes his position opposite Flory by citing three aspects of the film: 1) *Summer of Sam*'s marginalization of its black characters and their experiences, 2) its inconsistency with Lee's history of openly exploring national tragedies such as racial lynching on screen—especially in *Malcolm X*—and 3) its execution of Ritchie's "lynching," which is not a lynching at all in Palmer's estimation (61-3). Palmer foregrounds his thesis by emphasizing the film's framing device starring Jimmy Breslin, assuaging that Lee's "on-screen spokesman is a white journalist … [and thus] signals [the director's] shift away from identity politics" (60).[21] Palmer argues that Lee thus "shows himself to be a moralist" in *Summer of Sam* by establishing David Berkowitz, who is devoid of "a history, a voice, or familial

connections," as a demonic specter representative of evil and the neighborhood residents as the would-be good (65). Ultimately, the community's, specifically Luigi and the Dead End Boys', susceptibility to the frenzy resulting from the nefarious atmosphere elicited by the Son of Sam leads Palmer to deem Lee's project ineffective.

Palmer does recognize *Summer of Sam*'s illustration of pervasive strife, arguing that the film not only depicts "breakdowns in sanity, emotional restraint, humaneness, and respect for the social order," but also how such collapses "are revealed not as deviations but as symptomatic, even exemplary" (64). This is how Palmer accounts for the vigilante violence dramatized in the film, a show of neighborhood strength he characterizes as "not directed outward, toward some group that presents itself to be 'othered' and scapegoated (as would be the case in a lynching, properly speaking)" but instead toward the community itself, resulting in "[t]he victimized becom[ing] victimizers" (64-5). Therefore, in Palmer's assessment "[i]t is the decline of the social order itself in an era of rapidly changing values that is the film's main subject" (64), a sentiment that, like Flory's and Gaines's discussions, evokes earlier reviews of *Summer of Sam*, namely Dave Kehr's. Kehr also sees social breakdown and "the descent of order and reason into anger and chaos" as the movie's subject (75).[22] Likewise, Palmer echoes Massood, noting that "Ritchie's story … is the most poignant and compelling" ("Summer of Sam" 63). Palmer's assessment not only references pre- and postrelease reviews of *Summer of Sam*; it also offers an explanation for the scholarly conversation on the film, which revolves around Ritchie and nearly disregards Vinny.[23]

Each of the scholars is correct in his estimation of Ritchie's standing as moral center of the South Bronx enclave (Flory 203; Gaines 156; Palmer 66). Likewise, Gaines

and Palmer accurately perceive Ritchie as emblematic of the rapidly shifting values within American culture at large (156; 68-9). However, Vinny's relationships with both Ritchie and Dionna also dramatize the late 1970s period of change and backlash and constitute, as Geoffrey Macnab observes, *Summer of Sam*'s true focus (58). Indeed, the narrative belongs to Vinny, a fact both first assistant director Mike Ellis and Spike Lee affirm to Aftab (248). With the exception of Macnab's and Ebert's reviews, however, Vinny is reduced to his ultimately fatal flaw: a debilitating Madonna-whore complex brought on by profound Catholic guilt (58; "Summer of Sam").[24] The scholarly conversation on Vinny—between Flory, Gaines, and Palmer—only marginally expands its focus. Flory provides a few sentences scattered across two paragraphs that mostly characterize Vinny, according to his role in the Dead End Boys' lynch mob, as a backstabber who "inexorably succumbs to the dictates of the 'white gaze' by giving in to the idea of seeing Ritchie as someone punishable for being different" (204).[25] Gaines omits Vinny from the body of his text, first mentioning the Bronx hairdresser in a lengthy endnote suggesting his subconscious jealousy of Ritchie's "non-heteronormative sexuality" (10, 166). Palmer offers an entire section on Vinny, its title a play on one of Vinny's lines of dialog, a segment that upon further inspection evolves into further analysis of Ritchie and devolves into plot retelling as it relates to Vinny (68-70).

Whenever these scholars mention Vinny it is in relation to Ritchie, perhaps because of Ritchie's status as "someone who is defined by his connections to others" (Palmer 66).[26] Gaines supports this in the conclusion to his essay's tenth endnote, where he calls for a reading of *Summer of Sam* that focuses on Ritchie and Vinny as "sexual doppelgangers" due to the contrast between Vinny's extramarital affairs and Ritchie's

dancing at Male World, implied trick-turning in the establishment's ladies room, and "acting" with Ruby in pornographic movies (166). Here, Gaines again recalls the sentiments of earlier *Summer of Sam* reviews and prerelease items, especially Roger Ebert's, Janet Maslin's, and Rene Rodriguez's. Ebert charges Ritchie with "lead[ing] a double life as a dancer in a gay club" ("Summer of Sam"). In addition to Ritchie's occupation, Maslin cites Vinny's cheating, Dionna's disco darling act, Ruby's immersion into punk rock and porn acting, Joey T's doting expression of fatherhood, Gloria's affair with Vinny, Petrocelli and Atwater's seeking of criminal assistance, Luigi's cooperation with law enforcement, and Berkowitz's unassuming postal worker. Based on the dual nature of these characters, Maslin concludes that "virtually everyone in the movie leads some kind of double life" ("Fascinating Features" E1).[27] Rodriguez, engaging in the time-honored tradition of comparing Spike Lee to Woody Allen and Martin Scorsese, observes that Lee's filmography itself "doubles as a cinematic ode to all that is good and bad about New York" ("Summer of Spike?" 1). Likewise, Gaines evokes Ebert, Massood, Bob Strauss, Dave Kehr, Gary Thompson, and Michael O'Sullivan. Ebert, Massood, and Strauss each perceive the narrative's two couples (Vinny/Dionna and Ritchie/Ruby) as the binary on which the story is constructed ("Summer of Sam"; "Summer of Sam" 62; " 'Sam' Captures '77"). Kehr, Thompson, and O' Sullivan, however, view the Vinny-Ritchie dynamic as the film's basis (75; "Long, Heated 'Summer'" 52; N40).[28] Most significantly (and ironically), Gaines's note at the end of his essay provides an entrée into reading the Vinny character (and better interpreting Ritchie), for its comparison of Kristeva's theory of abjection to the figure of the repressed/Other as outlined in Wood's landmark study of 1970s horror films provides an ideal framework for an investigation

into both the Bronx hairdresser and the would-be punk rocker.[29]

Vinny and Ritchie, specifically their individual psyches, equally constitute the site of *Summer of Sam*'s meditation on fear and self-loathing, with Wood's "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s" serving as the roadmap for each man's troubled consciousness. The issues associated with Wood's terms "bourgeois" and "capitalist," simply do not figure prominently in *Summer of Sam*, in which all of the characters represent the working class (with the possible exception of Luigi, who definitely exploits the working class). The film presents a sexually repressed, neurotic culture (the Italian South Bronx enclave) existing within a larger, sexually liberal, revolutionary culture (New York, and by extension America).[30] From this purview, then, the scholarly propensity to discuss Vinny in relation to Ritchie is understandable, for the two men embody Wood's failing surplus repression binary: Vinny the neurotic, Ritchie the revolutionary. Two scenes in particular, during which Vinny and Ritchie converse about the women in their lives, alert the audience to the hairdresser's and wannabe punk rocker's divergent psychic standings as they relate to surplus repression. The scene immediately after Ritchie's reemergence in the neighborhood after a self-imposed exile in Manhattan depicts the extent of Vinny's repression, Catholic guilt, and Madonna-whore complex; ironically, it also characterizes the relationship between the two friends throughout the narrative, a rapport that mimics a confession in which each functions as the other's priest. While parked in front of his father-in-law Mario's (Arthur Nascarella) Italian restaurant in what is later revealed during Vinny and Dionna's first major dustup to be Dionna's pristine Ford Gran Torino, Vinny confides in Ritchie about the previous night's activities, relating his tryst with Chiara in the very front seat of the car in which

they sit: “Between you and me: now it’s bad enough that I balled her, right. But then some sick side of me had to drive Dionna right past the spot where I was just sticking it up her cousin’s ass, you know.” Vinny and Chiara’s narrow, unwitting escape from being Son of Sam victims six and seven and Vinny’s subsequent witnessing of the bodies result in a borderline crippling sense of remorse.[31] That guilt, of course, is the obvious cause and effect of Vinny’s extramarital dalliances, particularly the “deviant” nature of his preferred sex acts: “[B]utt-fucking, 69, doggy style. … You don’t do that shit with your wife. … [I]t’s a fuckin’ sin. … God is telling me, ‘You shouldn’t be doing these things with your wife.’ … God spared me. … [I]t’s a fuckin’ omen. … I think God’s tellin’ me that I’m gonna burn in Hell if I don’t stop cheatin’.” According to Aftab, this is the genesis of Vinny’s paranoia: “[H]e now almost wants Sam to murder him in divine retribution” (249). This mania only intensifies with the city’s (and by extension, the Dead End Boys’) fear of the Son of Sam and ultimately results in Ritchie’s beating.

During the later scene in Chickie’s diner, as a “normal” duo—signaled by their preppy, polo-shirt-and-khaki-shorts attire—scowls at and castigates Ritchie based on his appearance, Vinny affirms the neighborhood’s neurotic perception of Ruby’s promiscuity: “Doesn’t it bother you that Ruby’s been with so many guys? That she’s been shtupped by so many fuckin’ guys? … It would schieve me a little bit, you know. I mean, Ruby’s a nice girl, but she is a whore, you know.” In his reply, Ritchie exhibits his revolutionary nature by taking the opposite position: “What she did before she met me is her business, don’t you think?” Later on during the same conversation, Ritchie again evinces a revolutionary streak by answering Vinny’s inquiry (“You don’t love [Ruby], do you?”) with a question of his own: “[W]hat’s your interpretation of love?” Expectedly,

Vinny's rejoinder again exposes his neurosis, particularly as it pertains to the concept of normality, which defines love as "[c]ommitment, responsibility, marriage, kids." Ritchie, though, gets the last word by again calling into question not only normality, but Vinny's own lack of commitment and responsibility within his own marriage: "What, you and Dionna gonna have kids?" Ultimately, Vinny's neurosis only worsens as his life descends into utter chaos, during which he becomes, as Macnab suggests, more and more manic (58). On the other hand, Ritchie's suggestion of the possibility of an alternate paradigm for love provides the basis for what Massood deems *Summer of Sam*'s "most meaningful alliance" ("Summer of Sam" 63). This meaningful alliance develops into a "nontraditional" love that is expressed in Ritchie exposing Ruby to the gay club scene (and presumably his bisexuality), the punk rock scene (even naming Ruby lead singer of his band Late Term Abortion), and the pornography scene (which constitutes their only physical contact).[32]

In contrast to the implicative nature of Vinny and Ritchie's dialogue in these instances, their interaction with Dionna and Ruby in the following scenes reveals each man's true nature. Ironically, in addition to representing Wood's respective positions on surplus repression, they also serve as examples of Vinny and Ritchie's voicing the inverse of their differing psychic responses to surplus repression. On two occasions, Ritchie voices Wood's summation of basic and surplus repression, one seemingly suggesting the revolutionary notion of surplus repression's malleability and the other implying its neurotic pervasiveness. During Ritchie and Ruby's not-quite first date in Helen's garage, before Ruby can even utter her reply of, "I figure, you're born into a slot … and that's life," the would-be punk rocker assures her that she need not let her

neighborhood classification as a "slut" define her: "You could be whatever you want, I think." Later, on the beach with Vinny after their banishment from Chickie's diner, Ritchie simultaneously characterizes basic and surplus repression while implying his bisexuality:[33] "It's like everybody's got two personalities, Vin. … [O]ne you're born with, one the fuckin' world gives you. … [I]t's like, I got these things I like doin'. I like doin' 'em so much, it's like I have to do 'em. Now, do I really like doin' 'em, or was I preprogrammed at an early age to respond to liking them?" Ritchie's inquiry references Wood's theory that "the groundwork of repression is laid in infancy" while also encapsulating the philosophy of punk rock culture. Ironically, punk rock ideology acknowledges the prevalence of what Wood would characterize as surplus repression by questioning it while also bearing in mind ways of ultimately changing it (64).

Vinny replies to Ritchie's theory of man's duality by predictably expressing the reverse position: "Are you sayin' that if I fuckin' cheat on Dionna, it's not me that made me do it, it's the fuckin' world? … Take responsibility for your fuckin' self, man." This is the first of three instances of Vinny's divergent responses to surplus repression, the final two revealing his neurotic psychic position. During the first of his major scrapes with Dionna, while shortcutting through a cemetery after an unexpected night of alcohol- and drug-induced swinging at infamous sex club Plato's Retreat, Vinny browbeats Dionna for participating in a guy-gal threesome that he had encouraged while conveniently neglecting to mention the anal sex in which he and another woman engaged. The ensuing knock down and drag out merits extensive reproduction:

> Vinny: Did that guy fuck you better than me?
>
> Dionna: I'm embarrassed. …

> Vinny: Fuckin' embarrassed about? Did he fuck you better than me?
>
> Dionna: I did it for you.
>
> Vinny: Oh, that's really nice. You did it for me. Did you like it for me? Did you fuckin' come for me, huh? Was that for me?
>
> Dionna: That was the pills. That was the coke.
>
> Vinny: Don't blame the pills, you fuckin' lesbian fuckin' whore.
>
> Dionna: You were there, too. You're a fuckin' whore.
>
> Vinny: I can't be a whore 'cause I'm a man, okay. You're the fuckin' whore, you stupid, lesbian fuckin' whore!
>
> Dionna: And you're a faggot fuckin' hairdresser! [slaps him across the face]
>
> Vinny: Fuckin' piece of shit. Fuckin' make me sick, you fuckin' slut. [spits on her]
>
> Dionna: [slaps his mouth] I am a slut? You're calling me a slut? You lowlife piece of shit! You fucked my cousin! … I smelled her pussy juice all over your fuckin' face! You fuckin' sick bastard! How dare you? And all this time I'm thinking there's something wrong with me. You perverted, sick fuck!

From here, the scene evolves into Vinny suffering a verbal smackdown at the hands of his wife, during which Dionna plays on his insecurity by first concocting an elaborate fantasy involving the taboo of miscegenation should Vinny desert her in the cemetery and then by voicing her displeasure with his impotence.[34] Vinny's only retort is to acknowledge his flaccidity, but even in the midst of owning up to it, he reverts to

neurosis and singles out Dionna: "[Y]ou don't fuckin' turn me on anymore."

The couple's penultimate row, in another moment depicting the sexual quality of gossip, happens just after Gloria has informed Dionna of not only her affair with Vinny but also of Vinny's numerous affairs with patrons of her beauty salon. During this scene, a bookend to the earlier one in which Ritchie suggests the pervasive nature of surplus repression, Vinny alludes to the same notion in his appeal to keep Dionna from moving out of their apartment and leaving the marriage: "I am sorry. But, baby, I'm not me, okay? ... He's fuckin' – he's in a cult. Ritchie's in a cult, okay. … He's brainwashed me. I don't even know who the fuck I am lately, okay. So the shit I'm doing right now is not even me. I'm not responsible for it." Mostly, Vinny deploys variations of the word "responsible," other than his chastisement of Ritchie to take responsibility for himself, when he is denying culpability either outright or via his expression of the behaviors, ideas, and even deities of the dominant, surplus repressive society he inhabits. Vinny, however, does seem to stumble upon a significant observation during his front-seat confession to Ritchie about his liaison with Chiara: "What if I can't stop [cheating]? … [O]nce you're deviated, you can't go back. You know that." Ritchie, try as he might to walk a revolutionary path, proves Vinny right by deviating to pervasive, surplus repressive behavior rooted in the South Bronx of his upbringing.

Ritchie, like Vinny, succumbs to neurosis when his secret comes to light. When Bobby the Fairy recognizes Ritchie at Male World, the punk rocker engages in ill-phrased hyperbole ("I'll kill you!") to dissuade Bobby from divulging the site of his occupation. Unfortunately, Ritchie inadvertently seals his own fate. Bobby's subsequent persuasive appeal to Joey T characterizes the would-be punk rocker as "crazy" and

murderous, thus providing Joey T and the Dead End Boys with the final mark on their list that cements in their minds Ritchie's "secret" identity as the Son of Sam. In the scene outside of CBGBs, after Vinny—previously informed by the Dead End Boys—has castigated Ritchie for withholding his place of employment and participation in porno films, the absent Bobby the Fairy again bears the brunt of the wannabe punk rocker's venom: "Bobby the Fag don't know shit, okay. 'Cause he's a homo, now I'm one?" Kent Jones notes Spike Lee's aptitude in delivering "illustration[s] of the degree to which people are products of their environment" (46). In this context, then, perhaps Lee's presentation of Ritchie—and Ruby's earlier observation of being "born into a slot"—functions as his suggestion that it is futile for individuals to attempt to traverse the preexisting boundaries of their being.

True to Ritchie's observation of the dualistic quality of human behavior, the aforementioned scenes depict the competing notions within both his and Vinny's individual psyches; most importantly, however, these scenes illustrate not only the pervasiveness of surplus repression, but also the ubiquity of the fear associated with its manifestation. Furthermore, the scenes' depictions of the psychosis of surplus repression illustrate what occurs when repression is externalized. In fits of oppression, both Vinny and Ritchie lash out at Dionna and Bobby respectively, thereby successfully ascribing to Wood's concept of "the Other" and projection. These scenes also illustrate the self-loathing that results from surplus repression: Vinny's and Ritchie's homophobic, and borderline violent, outbursts towards Dionna and Bobby constitute the hairdresser's and wannabe punk rocker's oppressive outward projection of their own repressed homo- and/or bisexuality.

To be more precise, Vinny embodies self-loathing in *Summer of Sam*, the primary consequence of his extramarital affairs. It is not the liaisons themselves that indicate Vinny's self-hatred; rather, it is his rationale for habitually cheating on his wife, which of course originates in his Catholic guilt/Madonna-whore complex. His affinity for anal sex is Vinny's *primary* motivation for stepping out on Dionna; however, *all* of the "deviant" sex acts Vinny confesses to enjoying (anal intercourse, simultaneous fellatio and cunnilingus, and vaginal intercourse positioned behind his partner) share a major similarity besides sexual pleasure: they do not require Vinny to witness his partner's face. Perhaps these acts are the surplus repressive means that allow him to express his bisexuality while maintaining the appearance of normality. Vinny's aversion to seeing his partner is illustrated in the Gran Torino sex scene with Chiara, in the Plato's Retreat orgy scene with a nameless, faceless woman, and in his two love scenes with Dionna, both in the bedroom of their apartment. During the married couple's first love scene, as Vinny is atop Dionna in the missionary position, he reaches for the switch of the lamp on the night stand and turns it off, to which Dionna—in a voice exuding both a longing for intimacy and a recognition that she will probably never experience it with him—protests: "I wanna see us." Vinny turns on the light, and they commence intercourse; for the duration, however, Vinny closes his eyes and tilts his head down while Dionna beholds his face, trying to pull it closer to hers for a kiss. In a later bedroom scene, during which Dionna wears the blond wig Mario had given her for protection from the Son of Sam (whose victims were all brunettes) while fellating Vinny, he protests, stops her, and subsequently apologizes for making her "do this." Dionna, in another heartbreaking tone that conveys both her eagerness and desperation to please her husband, apologizes for performing oral

sex on her husband, pleading, "Tell me how you like it. I'll do it different. … [B]aby, I-I-I wanna make you happy." Vinny's neurotic response to surplus repression, Catholic guilt/Madonna-whore complex, and self-loathing are all voiced in his response, which concludes with him turning off the light: "It's just—you're my wife, okay. And I love you just the way you are. Let's do it just like normal people, the way we always fucking do it. Let's just do it regular." Vinny's rejoinder also evokes an uncertainty; it is as if he is trying to talk himself into loving Dionna "just as she is" and into engaging in the sexual activity of "normal people" so that he will cease feeling abnormal. Dionna's "abnormal" sexual behavior ultimately triggers Vinny's oppression; however, that oppression is the manifestation of his repression, latent self-hatred, and fear that he actually *is* a "faggot" hairdresser.

Ritchie's oppression of Bobby is also rooted in fear, but it is one of suffering oppression at the hands of the repressed for being who he *is*. The least repressed character in *Summer of Sam*, Ritchie seems to embrace his bisexuality, as evinced by his introducing Ruby to his secret life as a dancer at Male World and into underground porno flicks. Indeed, Ritchie embodies number seven on Wood's list of Other figures: "[d]*eviations from sexual norms—notably bisexuality and homosexuality*" (67).[35] The South Bronx, particularly the Dead End Boys', fear of Ritchie's Otherness is the projection of its own repressed Otherness, which not only results in Ritchie's oppression but also allows gay, cross-dressing Bobby to join the lynch mob because he is gay and cross dresses in the neighborhood, whereas Ritchie performs stripteases, punk rock songs, and in porno movies outside its borders. An analysis of *Summer of Sam*'s brief depiction of the Ritchie-Ruby porno scene reveals, strangely enough, a more tender version of the

Vinny-Dionna love scenes. Like the married couple, Ritchie and Ruby have vaginal intercourse in the missionary position; however, although Ritchie chokes Ruby for S&M effect, he maintains eye contact with her. Ritchie also does not turn away during his performance at Male World, sustaining eye contact with the customers, nor does he lose Ruby from his sight as she unbuckles his belt and attempts to consummate their relationship; Vinny and the Dead End Boys interrupt that gaze. The only instance of Ritchie refusing to look is when Ruby tries to seduce him the first night in Helen's garage. He stops her, presumably because he desires a more substantive relationship with her and because he wants her to recognize that she "can be anything [she] want[s]," which is to say, not the neighborhood slut the Dead End Boys perceive her to be. Perception likewise determines Ritchie's fate, for the conclusions drawn about him derive from his appearance.

Numerous characters at numerous points throughout the narrative invoke how Ritchie looks to substantiate their discernment of his depravity, which is simply the manifestation of their fear of his Otherness. Therefore, Ritchie's oppression of Bobby is based neither on his own repressed bisexuality nor self-loathing; rather, it is a manifestation of Ritchie's fear of being *viewed* as an object of hatred worthy of oppression.[36] The control in this 21st-century social experiment from Spike Lee thus aims to punish Ritchie because he refuses to subscribe to the South Bronx's conception of normality: "conformity to the dominant social norms" of appearance, taste in music, and monogamous heterosexuality (Wood 71).

[1] These notices came from critics such as Janet Maslin, "Critic's Notebook; Fascinating Features on Sidelines Outsparkle Main Event at Cannes," *New York Times* 21 May 1999, Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk: E3 and "Film Review; Red Hot Buttons in Lee's Steaming 'Sam,'" *New York Times* 2 Jul. 1999, Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk: E1; Roger Ebert, "Lee's 'Summer of Sam' a Sizzling Look at '70s N.Y.," "The Summer of Spike," and "Summer of Sam," *Roger Ebert.com*, Chicago Sun-Times, 23 May 1999, 27 Jun. 1999, and 2 Jul. 1999: n. pag; Todd McCarthy, "Summer of Sam," *Variety* 375.2 (May 24, 1999): 36; Denis Hamill, "The Year of Living Dangerously; Spike Lee Explains Why His 'Summer of Sam' Is Less About Murder Than Late-'70s Mayhem," *New York Daily News* 27 Jun. 1999, Showtime: 4; Dave Kehr, "Quickies: Summer of Sam," *Film Comment* 35.4 (Jul./Aug. 1999): 75; Bob Strauss, "Doing the Spike Thing; Often the Subject of Controversy, Director Lee Fields Plenty of It Over New 'Summer of Sam,'" *Los Angeles Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, L.A. Life: n. pag.; Robert Dominguez, "In H'Wood, the Fear Is That It's Too N.Y.," *New York Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, New York Now: 52; and Stephen Rea, "From Spike Lee, 1970s Nostalgia Without a Point Trying to be Both Funny and Furious, 'Summer of Sam' Is a Misguided Saga," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 2 Jul. 1999, Features Weekend: 03.

[2] This may have also been Lee's strategy to thwart the negative attention wrought by accusations of exploitation from the families of Son of Sam victims.

[3] In his recap of the American box office during the summer of 1999, Rene Rodriguez deems *Summer of Sam* Lee's "most commercial effort to date." See "Some Summer Flicks Were Worth the Panting," *Philadelphia Daily News* 3 Sep. 1999, Features Yo!: 53.

[4] Lee recalls *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever* in prerelease interviews with Denis Hamill, "Living Dangerously" 4 and "H'wood Strikes Terror in Our Hearts – Again; 'Summer of Sam' Isn't a 'White' Film, Says Director Spike Lee: It's a Good N.Y. Story About What Happens to Outsiders," *New York Daily News* 28 Jun. 1999, New York Now: 38 and George Khoury, "Big Words," *Creative Screenwriting* 6.3 (May/June 1999): 38-42, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2002, 146-54.

[5] Also making the *Do the Right Thing* connection were Ebert ("A Sizzling Look," "The "Summer of Spike," and "Summer of Sam"); McCarthy (36); Kehr (35); Maslin ("Red Hot Buttons" E1); "Rebels vs. the Evil Empire," *Rolling Stone* 813 (May 27, 1999): 72; Laura Winters, "Pros and Cannes; American Filmmakers Bringing Their Well-Received Works Back Home," *Washington Post* 30 May 1999, Sunday Arts: G02; Elizabeth Snead, "'Summer' Fever; Revisiting a Season of Fear Has Spike Taking the Heat," *USA Today* 24 Jun. 1999, Life: 1D; Hillel Italie, "At the Movies: 'Summer of Sam,'" *Associated Press* 28 Jun. 1999, Entertainment News: n. pag.; Eleanor Ringel Gillespie, "Movies; Too Many Plot Lines Spoil Lee's Overheated 'Summer,'" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 2 Jul. 1999, Arts and Entertainment: 11; James Verniere, "Staying Alive; Spike Lee Relives New York's Boogie Nights of '77," *Boston Herald* 2 Jul. 1999, Arts and Entertainment: s11; Mick LaSalle, "The Dog Days of Lee's 'Summer'; Director Captures Paranoia of Season When Son of Sam Went on Killing Spree," *San Francisco Chronicle* 2 Jul. 1999, Daily Datebook: C1; Rita Kempley, "A Bronx Cheer for 'Summer of Sam,'" *Washington Post* 2 Jul. 1999, Style: C01; David Ansen, "Spike Stew," *Newsweek* 134.2 (Jul. 12, 1999): 65; David Thomson, "Film; The Right Thing, Even When It Ends Up Wrong," *New York Times* 25 Jul. 1999, Arts and Leisure Desk: 7; and Richard A. Blake, *Street Smart: The New York of Lumet, Allen, Scorsese, and Lee*, Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2005, 209-79, especially 277. Blake's seventy-page chapter chronicles the history of Fort Greene, Brooklyn and then traces the locale's ostensible influence on both Lee's filmmaking preoccupations and on his body of work itself.

[6] Also observing the macho posturing exhibited by Vinny and the Dead End Boys are Gillespie ("Overheated 'Summer'" 11), Ansen ("Spike Stew" 65), and Jack Mathews, "High-Energy Flashback Nails the Headlines, but Spike Lee's Movie Is Too Unfocused," *New York Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, New York Now: 53.

[7] Lee's New York compulsion is broached in Hamill ("Living Dangerously" 4 and "H'wood Strikes Terror" 38), Verniere (s11), and "People in the News," *Associated Press* 30 Mar. 1999, Domestic News: n. pag.

[8] Bucksbaum and Dergarabedian cite Lee's successful metropolitan track record in their prognostication. Dergarabedian goes even further, taking into account Lee's cinephilic audience while simultaneously indulging in the consistent, unfortunate Woody Allen comparison: "He's a lot like Woody Allen[;] his movies don't make tons of money, but he has a sophisticated following."

[9] Lee preemptively defends himself against such anticipated claims in "People in the News 3/30/99," "Rebels vs. the Evil Empire" (72), Hamill ("H'wood Strikes Terror" 38), and Strauss ("Doing the Spike Thing").

[10] Lee's direction of a series of Navy commercials did not help ease the "sellout" rumblings. See Aftab 253 and Bruce Horovitz, "Navy Recruits Spike Lee to Direct TV Spots; Controversial Filmmaker at the Helm for Six Ads," *USA Today* 14 May 1999, Money: 1B. Lee's working with a government agency such as the United States Navy sharply contrasts with his interaction with NBA star Karl Malone during the early-'90s. Mike Wise's short profile of Malone assesses the baller as an atypical NBA player based on his demeanor, dress, opinion, choice of residence, and hobbies and recounts Malone's past run-in with Lee, who had seen the ballplayer on television wearing an FBI cap—a gift from an FBI agent in the Portland, Oregon office—and sent Malone a box of "Malcolm X" hats in response. Wise quotes Malone, who quoted Lee: "I respect you as a player and a person and I always have. But, my brother, if you only knew what the F.B.I. did to us a number of years ago, you wouldn't be wearing that hat." See Wise, "On Pro Basketball; It's All Image, Except with Karl Malone," *New York Times* 6 Mar. 2000: D5.

[11] This characterization was advanced by Kempley (C01); Rea ("Misguided Saga" 03); Blake (217); Horwitz ("Family Filmgoer" 7/9/99 N45); Gary Arnold, "Opening," *Washington Times* 1 Jul. 1999, Washington Weekend, Movies; Mini-Reviews: M22 and "Spike Lee's 'Summer of Sam' Slowly Fizzles," *Washington Times* 2 Jul. 1999, Metropolitan Times; Arts & Entertainment; Movies: C17; and Richard Corliss, "Bronx Bull," *Time* 154.1 (Jul. 5, 1999): 75.

[12] Furthermore, Lee assures Hamill ("H'wood Strikes Terror" 38) that *Summer of Sam* could not be anti-Italian because "it was co-written by two Italian-Americans. ... I never heard a word like that from the mostly Italian-American cast." Ben Gazzara ("Luigi" in the film) underscores Lee's point, fervently defending his director to Hamill in the profile "Big Ben; Gazzara, Who Plays a Mob boss in 'Summer of Sam,' Is Glad to Find Himself Busier Than Ever as He Nears 70," *New York Daily News* 18 Jul. 1999, Showtime: 19. Critics such as Arnold ("Opening" M22 and "Fizzles" C17) and Corliss ("Bronx Bull" 75) do recognize co-writers Colicchio and Imperioli, concluding that they are responsible for the Italian American "caricatures" they perceive in *Summer of Sam*.

[13] Anthony Breznican seconds Hindes's emotion, analyzing *Summer of Sam*'s box-office opening in almost identical terms. See "'American Pie' Leads Gross-Out Comedies at the Box-Office," *Associated Press* 12 Jul. 1999, Domestic News: n. pag.

[14] See "Winning Time: Reggie Miller vs. the New York Knicks," *30 for 30*, dir. Dan Klores, ESPN, 14 Mar. 2010, which documents Spike Lee's role in the mid-90s basketball rivalry between Lee's beloved Knicks and the Pacers.

[15] In *Summer of Sam*, Spike Lee himself (as man-on-the-street TV news reporter "John Jefferies") characterizes the crowd assembled outside police headquarters in anticipation of the arrival of the now in-custody Son of Sam as a "potential lynch mob" exhibiting a "great outpouring of relief, rage, and vengeance." For a similar assessment of the characters that inhabit *Summer of Sam*'s universe, see Blake (217). Aftab (250) labels Lee's cameo appearance in *Summer of Sam* his "swan song as an actor."

[16] *Summer of Sam* is one of the most profane films ever. See Palmer (54) and R. Colin Tait, "That 70s Sequence: Remembering the Bad Old Days in *Summer of Sam*," *Cinephile* 5.2 (Summer 2009): "The Scene": 18-23.

[17] Aftab (245) reports Lee's affinity for Imperioli and Colicchio's script because of its dramatization of "human nature: when something bad happens, there has to be a sacrificial lamb."

[18] Ebert ("Summer of Spike") observes that the characters' preoccupation with the neighborhood results in their own self-importance, which results in their paranoia. Blake (216-8) also attributes *Summer of Sam*'s depiction of border crossing to Lee's NYC upbringing and subsequently traces the theme throughout the director's filmography.

[19] The theme of border-crossing receives notice in Maslin ("Red Hot Buttons" E1); LaSalle ("Dog Days" C1); Kempley (C01); Tait ("'70s Sequence" 23) and Jeff Millar, "Flashback to Summer of '77; Character Development Is a Failing in Lee's 'Sam,'" *Houston Chronicle* 2 Jul. 1999, Houston: 1.

[20] Flory applies his thesis of film *noir* appropriation to Duke's *Deep Cover* (1992), Franklin's *One False Move* (1992) and *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), Burnett's *The Glass Shield* (1995), and Lee's *Clockers* (1995) in "Black on White: Film *Noir* and the Epistemology of Race in Recent African American Cinema," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 31.1 (Spring 2000): 82-116.

[21] Gaines (156) acknowledges that "it does seem significant and unexpected that a filmmaker with racial politics as declarative as Lee posits a nonessentialist conception of the blues."

[22] Blake (277-8) also notes *Summer of Sam*'s depiction of social breakdown and observes that "[t]he institutions that might hold a neighborhood together—the police, the church, family, and old friendships—lose all meaning in the face of crisis."

[23] In addition to its focus on Ritchie, this conversation also shares categorical misspellings of pivotal characters' names ("Vinnie" for Flory and Tait, "Richie" for Gaines and Palmer), and misidentification of the narrative's setting (the East Bronx for the South Bronx for Blake and Palmer). Tait ("'70s Sequence" 20, 22) also refers to "Club 54," Berkowitz as the ".38 Special Killer," and the Dead End Boys as the "Bensonhurst Boys," perhaps conflating *Summer of Sam* with *Jungle Fever* (which takes place in Harlem and Bensonhurst, Brooklyn).

[24] Vinny's Madonna-whore complex/Catholic guilt became a staple of reviews from Kehr (75); Verniere ("Staying alive" s11); Millar (1); Maslin ("Red Hot Buttons" E1); Kempley (C01); Ansen ("Spike Stew" 65); Macnab (58); Massood ("Summer of Sam" 63); Tait ("'70s Sequence" 22); Strauss, "'Summer of Sam' Captures '77," *Los Angeles Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, L.A. Life; Gary Thompson, "Long, Heated 'Summer'; Spike Lee's Disjointed Take on New York '77," *Philadelphia Daily News* 2 Jul. 1999, Features YO!: 52; Mike Clark, "Overheated 'Summer of Sam'; Spike Lee Skims Through the '70s on the Shoulder of a Serial Killer," *USA Today* 2 Jul. 1999, Life: 6E; and Stephen Holden, "Tickets to Fantasies of Urban Desire; Each Leads to a Different New York," *New York Times* 20 Jul. 1999, Arts/Cultural Desk: E1.

[25] Flory evokes Ebert ("Summer of Sam"), whose analysis of Vinny reveals an even "deeper theme[:] … how scapegoats are chosen. … [T]he ringleaders require validation for their suspicions," which is why "everyone's looking for Vinny. They need him to agree with their choice of victim – to validate their fever. It's as if they know they're wrong, but if Vinny says they're right, then they can't be blamed." Within this observation is the implication of Vinny's status as protagonist.

[26] Vinny's association with others, as Macnab (58) implies, defines the *film*, not the character, and therefore should receive more critical/scholarly attention.

[27] Maslin ("Red Hot Buttons" E1) revisits her initial notice of the doppelganger motif in *Summer of Sam*.

[28] Blake (244) acknowledges the symbolic qualities of Lee's characters, observes that the director "structures his propositions in terms of pairs," and then traces that strain throughout his body of work.

[29] In addition to Gaines's creation of a space for a potential psychosexual reading of *Summer of Sam*, his deployment of the term "doppelganger" and the recognition of Ritchie's status as the film's moral center also suggest a space for its analysis as a horror film; see Wood 71-2. Stanley Crouch argues that overtly political films by black directors, such as *Do the Right Thing* (1989), are positioned to the white, mainstream audience as horror films vis-à-vis reviews, marketing, and counterprogramming. See Aftab 96.

[30] See Tait ("70s Sequence" 22) and Palmer (67-8), where Tait implies and Palmer articulates that the doppelganger motif suits Ritchie and the Son of Sam. Additionally, Tait and Palmer both evoke Gaines's neo-blues subject via their recognition of Ritchie's and the Son of Sam's statuses as liminal figures. Tait reminds us that the character Ritchie "is a punk rocker in a disco area and speaks with a mock British accent in the Italian neighbourhood in which he lives. He dances at a queer theatre, allowing men to perform oral sex on him for money, which … stands at odds with his sexuality, rendering him asexual, yet sexualized" ("70s Sequence" 22). Palmer (64) relies on the real-life biography of "Son of Sam" David Berkowitz to underscore the liminality his character represents in the film: "Italian American by birth but later adopted and renamed by a Jewish couple[, h]e is never located precisely in the social space the film constructs."

[31] Palmer (68) implies that this near-miss mirrors Ritchie's rescue from the Dead End Boys by his stepfather Eddie (Mike Starr), thus further distinguishing Vinny and Ritchie as doppelgangers.

[32] Palmer (66-7) also notes that Vinny and the Dead End Boys interrupt the consummation of the couple's relationship and entrance into normality.

[33] Of the critics and scholars mentioned herein, only Gaines (153) suggests that Ritchie may not be bisexual, based on the ambiguity with which his ladies room activities at Male World are presented: "While it is certainly implied that Ritchie is prostituting himself, the nature of this prostitution remains uncertain. The viewer does not know if [he] is actually having sex … at the theater. He could very well be performing another more private show similar to the one he performs on stage." Although Gaines's point is valid, I side with other critics and scholars on the basis that it would likely take much more than two private dances (the number of instances Ritchie is shown letting a customer into the ladies room) for Ritchie to earn enough money to purchase a brand new Fender Stratocaster guitar. In contrast to Gaines's responsible take on Ritchie's possible bisexuality, Tait ("'70s Sequence" 22)—based on no visible diegetic evidence— veers into the extreme, inexplicably concluding that Ritchie allows Male World customers to fellate him in the ladies room.

[34] Based on her participation in this argument and her willingness to please Vinny by any means necessary before that breaking point, even going so far as asking Ruby what turns Vinny on (in what Crouch deems "one of the most remarkably intimate scenes between two women ever filmed"), Dionna begs a feminist character analysis. See Crouch, "Spike Scores a Masterpiece," Editorial, *New York Daily News* 12 Jul. 1999: 27. See also Aftab 253, where Crouch reiterates his affinity for the Dionna-Ruby scene.

[35] Each of the following critics deploy the term "Otherness" or variations of it, including "the other": Maslin ("Fascinating Features" E1); "Rebels vs. the Evil Empire" (72); Winters (G02); Hamill, "Living Dangerously" 4 and "Bx. Denizen Recalls Summer of Terror," *New York Daily News* 27 Jun. 1999, Suburban: 2; Ebert ("Summer of Spike" and "Summer of Sam"); Strauss ("'Sam Captures '77"); Thompson ("Long, Heated 'Summer'" 52); LaSalle ("Dog Days" C1); Morgenstern ("Shocking and Profane" W1); Kempley (C01); and Corliss ("Bronx Bull" 75).

[36] *Summer of Sam*, as Flory implies in his assessment of Vinny's succumbing to the dictates of the white gaze, situates a male character into Laura Mulvey's landmark thesis on Hollywood film's predilection for objectifying the female body via "a controlling and curious gaze" (60). See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

Chapter 6: "It's All About Tomorrow": *25th Hour*, a Meditation on Moving on in a Post-9/11 World

25th Hour (2002) represents the "another chance" some critics doubted Hollywood would grant Spike Lee. Ironically, the filmmaker himself is partially to blame, the content of his *Summer of Sam* (1999) follow-up antithetical to the concept of marketability. *Bamboozled* (2000) is the first 21st-century Spike Lee Joint centering on a fictional narrative, and it represents the filmmaker's instituting a practice of alternating between projects with commercial and noncommercial aspirations. Lee's prerelease exacerbation of the predominantly nonblack cast featured in *Summer of Sam* alerts us to this fact. So, too, does Lee's assurance that his next project—the then-unfilmed and -untitled *Bamboozled*—would be "negroidal" (qtd. in Hamill, "H'wood Strikes Terror" 38). Unlike *Summer of Sam*, Lee chose to work from his own original screenplay for *Bamboozled*, which like *Summer of Sam*, arose out of Lee's personal experience in 1970s New York City.

Early in his career as a student in the Master of Fine Arts program in film production at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Lee found the African American image throughout the history of U. S. popular culture to be a fertile ground for cinematic exploration. In *The Answer*, the young filmmaker presented a narrative about a young black screenwriter tasked with penning and directing a $50 million remake of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Lee fashioned this story as a critique of the stereotyped image of blackness Griffith's picture propagated (Aftab 258). The filmmaker returned to this theme in the year 2000, examining 19th-century-style minstrelsy through the prism of 21st-century media—the television industry in particular—with the goal of

producing a media-critiquing satire in the vein of Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), Mel Brooks's *The Producers* (1968), and Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976) (Aftab 258).

Bamboozled focuses on Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans), a protagonist who has had enough of being an underappreciated, token African American staff writer for a struggling, UPN-type network.[1] In order to get fired and thus out of his contract, Dela—as his coworkers nickname him—creates the most offensive variety show he can imagine: *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*. For the variety show, Dela exploits two homeless street performers, Manray (Savion Glover) and Womack (Tommy Davidson), who, seeking wealth and fame, willingly don blackface and answer to the names "Mantan" and "Sleep'n Eat." Unexpectedly, Manray and Womack's aspirations are realized while Dela's are thwarted: a television audience comprised of all ethnicities (including President Clinton) makes the show a breakout ratings hit. Like the protagonist of *The Answer*, Dela and Manray become "bamboozled" as a result of the images they project. While Dela basks in an acclaim he feels is overdue and Manray indulges in the life of comfort he has long strived for, both lose sight of the detrimental effects blackface has wrought on African Americans throughout history and end up further promoting it.

This confusion is emblematic of the real-life struggle with identity many African Americans face. Spike Lee knows that this conflict is rooted in the image of blackness promulgated by (white) American pop culture which, because of the disproportionate distribution of power under the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow, became stereotyped to the point of caricature:

> [t]he image of African-Americans has been subverted. Look at Al Jolson,

> look at minstrels. … The problem of black identity goes back to what W.E.B. DuBois said about the duality of being the descendants of slaves. Because you have the African side and the American side, and that can be very schizophrenic. No matter who you are, if you don't have knowledge of self, then you are going to be lost, because you can't be somebody who you are not. That is the fundamental problem. (qtd. in Aftab 259)

It was also the fundamental problem Lee encountered in getting *Bamboozled* off the ground. The perception of the Spike Lee Joint's lack of box-office viability was cemented by Lee's revisiting such a painful, shameful period of our nation's past through the often commercially-risky genre of satire—especially after *Summer of Sam*'s paltry $19,283,782 gross ($2,716,218 loss).[2] As a result, Lee experienced his greatest difficulty in acquiring financing since *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) due to his box-office track record, or lack thereof (Aftab 261). The sub-par box-office performance of the Spike Lee Joint combined with the potentially explosive content of *Bamboozled* subjected the filmmaker to lowballed offers for a budget at every turn, even from eventual distributor New Line Cinema.

More than any other Spike Lee Joint, *Bamboozled* marks the convergence of Lee's documentary and commercial impulses. The filmmaker's experimentation with the documentarian's tools became practical necessity, Massood noting that Lee's "more 'politically sensitive' films" exhibit a more pronounced cinema vèritè style that relies on "cheaper technologies" such as digital video "as a means of cutting production costs" ("We've Gotta Have It" xxiv).[3] New Line only offered $10 million to finance *Bamboozled*, only $2,185,266 of which the Spike Lee Joint recouped at the box

office.[4]According to Lee, New Line "didn't believe in the film, so there was no investment beyond the initial one"—as evidenced by the studio's assignment of the platform release strategy (qtd. in Aftab 269). A platform release dictates that a movie open in just a few theaters (usually in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) before gradually expanding to more theaters in more locations, sometimes resulting in a wide release. However, this strategy empowers the studio, for the platform release is dependent upon word of mouth; if word does not spread, the studio can dump the picture without having spent much money on promotion and advertising. Aftab reports that Lee "bore no shred of compromise" and continued employing the documentarian's tools in service to his documentary impulse.

Although filmed after *Bamboozled*, *The Original Kings of Comedy* (2000) is technically the first 21st-century Spike Lee Joint. Released during the much-ballyhooed summer of 2000,[5] *The Original Kings of Comedy* marked Lee's return to the concert film subgenre, documenting two live performances of the "Kings of Comedy" tour starring African American standup comics Steve Harvey, D.L. Hughley, Cedric the Entertainer, and Bernie Mac. Largely unknown to mainstream (white) audiences, the comics received their due upon *Kings*' release, publications such as *Variety*, the *New York Daily News*, and *USA Today* marveling at the two-year, eventually $37-39 million-grossing tour they launched in 1997 on the strength of exclusive "urban" (black) radio advertising.[6] The picture received rave reviews, now par for the course with Lee's nonfiction movies, the filmmaker's technical expertise augmenting whatever real-life subject being presented. In the case of *Kings*, in addition to the individual greatness of Harvey's, Hughley's, Cedric's, and Mac's central performances, Lee garnered praise for recreating the

communal atmosphere of the live show. The filmmaker asserts to Aftab that he arrived at such an effect by "ma[king] a rule that if we cut away to an audience member laughing, it had to be in reaction to that specific joke" (257).[7] Harvey noted Lee's "sho[oting] from some interesting angles" as well as interspersing "the stand-up with some behind-the-scenes stuff" (257). The combination resulted in a sleek, almost two-hour experience that finished second at the box office for the weekend of August 18, 2000, David Germain reporting the picture's $11.7 million-dollar gross ("Top Seller"). *The Original Kings of Comedy* represented Lee's highest box-office rollout; however, its suspect marketing (opening in only 847 theaters), foreshadowed the marketing strategy for *Bamboozled.* The larger-scale platform release initiated what would become a familiar refrain concerning the Spike Lee Joint: everyone involved expressing that Paramount (which had released the film through its MTV Films subsidiary) had missed a golden opportunity (Aftab 257-8).

Lee followed *The Original Kings of Comedy* and *Bamboozled* with *A Huey P. Newton Story* (2001), Roger Guenveur Smith's one-man show. For this film, Lee employed the same methodology as he did with *Kings*, except he "shot … on TV-broadcast-standard DigiBeta" video which—because the tape had to be changed—required an intermission (Aftab 271). Lee's directorial contribution to Smith's show was the filmmaker's (at the behest of director of photography Ellen Kuras[8]) requesting the audience to arrive wearing all black so that they could be filmed in silhouette (Aftab 271). *A Huey P. Newton Story* debuted on premium cable network Black Starz! on June 8, 2001 to raves for both star and filmmaker. Lee returned to premium cable television the next year, reteaming with HBO for the documentary feature, *Jim Brown: All-*

American (2002).The filmmaker's objective relation of Brown's life garnered Lee critical acclaim he had not received since *4 Little Girls*. *Jim Brown: All-American* is noteworthy for underscoring its director's career trajectory. Lee recalls that, for the first time since *Malcolm X*, [w]e went over budget[.] … HBO said they weren't going to give me a penny more. I was incredulous: stuff goes over budget all the time" (qtd. in Aftab 273). Lee reveals whom he turned to for help, in the process defending his relationship with Nike: "I had nowhere to turn so I called Phillip Knight, and he sent me a check. A big one" (qtd. in Aftab 273). According to Knight (founder and CEO of Nike), "I thought that we ought to do it, that he has been a friend of the company" (qtd. in Aftab 273).[9] A relationship Lee had started with *She's Gotta Have It* paid off sixteen years later.

25th Hour's release also owed much to a previous connection. Disney, which had distributed *Summer of Sam* through its Touchstone Pictures subsidiary, reengaged Spike Lee for *25th Hour*. In an interview with Lee, Charlie LeDuff reports that Disney's soliciting the filmmaker's services was a direct response to the lack of viable Academy Awards contenders on its 2002 release slate (1). Intent on garnering Oscar buzz, Disney greenlit *25th Hour* with a $15 million budget (LeDuff 1). Disney's award season aspirations for 2002 dictated that *25th Hour* open in theaters within that calendar year, a common Hollywood strategy for so-called "Oscar bait" films which determines that limited theatrical releases late in the year are most effective. The latest Spike Lee Joint was released on five screens in New York and Los Angeles on Thursday, December 19, 2002. With the exception of major holidays, movies typically open in theaters on either Wednesdays or Fridays; therefore, *25th Hour*'s entrance into the marketplace on a Thursday appeared unorthodox. Aftab reminds us that the second installment of Peter

Jackson's fantasy epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Two Towers* (2002), had opened nationwide the day before, and Martin Scorsese's period epic, *Gangs of New York* (2002), was set to bow in multiplexes across the country on the next day (284). Thus, the seemingly unconventional Thursday release date of *25th Hour* is actually par for the course for the Spike Lee Joint, continuing the filmmaker's subjection to the counterprogramming release strategy Disney had enacted for *Summer of Sam* three years earlier. Like *Wild Wild West* (1999) and *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (1999) during the summer of 1999, longer-anticipated, larger-budgeted winter 2002 event pictures such as *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and *Gangs of New York* overshadowed the Spike Lee Joint at the box office, *25th Hour* managing to gross a meager $13,060,843 ($1,939,157 loss).[10] To add insult to injury, Terrence Blanchard's Golden Globe nomination for Best Musical Score was *25th Hour*'s lone major awards recognition (Henerson U6). His collaboration with Disney and its release strategy, which resulted in another unsuccessful box-office performance,[11] are not the only parallels between Lee's winter of 2002 and summer of 1999.

Spike Lee's observation of the motion picture and television industries' bearing the brunt of condemnation for the massacre at Columbine High School (which on a certain level informs *Summer of Sam*) proved prophetic. Three years after *Summer of Sam*'s theatrical run, Lee himself became somewhat of a scapegoat. In October of 2002, the filmmaker's 1992 epic, *Malcolm X*, reentered the national lexicon through two federal court cases. First, in an October 5 article, Katharine Q. Seelye reports on the infamous "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh's 20-year prison sentence for "aiding the Taliban and carrying explosives" (1). Two days later, Andrew Kramer informs of the charging of

two American-born Muslims, Jeffrey Battle and ex-wife October Lewis, with "conspiracy to levy war against the United States, conspiracy to provide material support and resources to al-Qaida, and conspiracy to contribute services to al-Qaida and the Taliban." Derek Rose recounts Lindh's sentencing in a Boston courtroom on October 4, especially the alleged terrorist sympathizer's statement, which named *Malcolm X*—Lindh having first watched it at the age of twelve with his mother—as the nexus of his religious voyage (27). According to his mother, Deanna Douglas, Battle had become enamored with Islam after viewing Lee's film (Rose 27). When broached about *Malcolm X*'s conversion power, in typical fashion, the director attacked the question: "Not all followers of Islam are terrorists. That question is not only asinine but idiotic" (qtd. in Rose 27). Lee's link to these American terrorist stories was a fortuitous circumstance, for *25th Hour* itself explores the impact of Islamic terrorism on the United States, the September 11, 2001 attacks on the director's beloved New York City in particular.

The project of cinematic nostalgia in which Spike Lee engaged by directing *Summer of Sam* became a part of mainstream American pop culture in 2002. Still reeling from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this nostalgia supplanted the localized spaces of 1970s-urban America with a '50s-style *sub*urban Americana. The ever-astute Paula Massood identifies this yearning and attributes it to *25th Hour*'s dearth of awards season recognition:

> In a year when the majority of Oscars went to films set safely in the past—and to genres (the melodrama, the musical) associated with different times—it makes sense that *25th Hour* would not appeal to Academy voters. The film is too contemporary, and its often uncomfortable struggle

> with making sense of the aftermath of September 11 may be too immediate for audiences who would rather avert their eyes from Ground Zero until something covers it up. ("Quintessential New Yorker" 5)[12]

Additionally, Massood's observation simultaneously suggests an explanation for the sixteenth Spike Lee Joint's unimpressive box-office performance. Marlaine Glicksman, though, provided a specific answer fourteen years earlier. On the occasion of *Do the Right Thing*'s (1989) release, Glicksman notes that "as always, Lee's films are topical" ("Bed-Stuy BBQ"). The topic of *25th Hour* could not have been more current, for it was, according to both Lance Gould and Carla Meyer, the first Hollywood movie to directly address the September 11 terrorist attacks (49; 38).[13] Released a little over a year after the attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, *25th Hour*'s psychological examination of convicted drug dealer Monty Brogan (Edward Norton) functions as a microcosm of post 9/11 New York City's psyche, an investigation in which both audiences and awards committees were unready to participate.

Spike Lee, however, was ready to contemplate the tragedy of 9/11, *25th Hour* representing the filmmaker's characteristic in-your-face response to current events. Like *Summer of Sam*, Lee's documentary, teaching, and American impulses are deployed in service to his New York sensibility, which guides his negotiation of *25th Hour*. On addressing the 9/11 attacks, the filmmaker expresses to Bruce Westbrook that he was additionally compelled by an artistic responsibility,[14] a duty he determines Hollywood shirked (11).[15] Westbrook, Gould, Evan Henerson, and Scott Bowles all reported on the phenomenon of mainstream film and television's unofficial, self-imposed "moratorium" on referencing the September 11 attacks, citing the digital removal of the World Trade

Centers from movies (particularly *Spider-Man*[16]) and promotional materials such as posters, the reediting of particular scenes, and the shelving of entire films (11; 49; U6; 8E). *25th Hour* co-star Phillip Seymour Hoffman (who plays Jacob, one of Monty's best friends) praises Lee's directorial approach to Aftab, the character actor's phrasing attesting to the filmmaker's cinematic directness: "Spike doesn't screw around; he addresses the here and now in New York … in a way that I think really took people by surprise. … [He] linked the story with the city, acknowledging that something awful had happened; life was going to change, it wasn't going to be the same for Monty Brogan or for the city" (281). Indeed, Monty's contemplative journey towards reconciling the major life change from mid-level Manhattan drug dealer to Otisville State Penitentiary inmate parallels New York's attempt to readjust in the wake of the change wrought by the 9/11 culprits.

Lee confronts this change immediately. After providing us with a pre-credit sequence suggesting a pre-September 11 New York, he progresses to the first of two scenes which, like *Summer of Sam*, attests to the change and its subsequent backlash during a particular period in the city's history. The opening credit sequence depicts the twin beams of light that "shone at night for five weeks last spring [of 2002] as mournful understudies for the twin towers" (Gould 49).[17] Henerson observes that the soundtrack, Terrence Blanchard's Golden Globe-nominated score, "nods to both the perpetrators and the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001 ... terrorist attacks" (U6).[18] Secondly, as we approach the midpoint, Lee's camera peers out of the window of a high-rise apartment and lingers over Ground Zero, where dump trucks haul debris away from the pit where the World Trade Centers used to stand. This sight, the filmmaker tells Gould, "TV and photography

can't do justice to[.] ... When you see it from that high up, it just adds such another dimension to the vastness of the destruction that took place" (49).[19] Lee stresses to several sources, including Stephen Schaefer and Henerson, that he decided to comment on 9/11 in *25th Hour* in a "millisecond" but was concerned about not going overboard with the 9/11 material (so as to seem exploitative) ("Post Positive" 047; U6). The two aforementioned scenes, in their poignancy, and the fact that they are the only direct references to the Twin Towers and Ground Zero, denote the director's successful balancing act.[20] Indeed, for Lee, *25th Hour* was successful in its negotiation of post-9/11 New York City, deconstructing it to Henerson:

> I think the way everything happens was very organic. Nothing was forced[.] ... I didn't ask to do '25th Hour,' it was sent to me, and the fact that it was set in New York was great. We did not want to have the whole 9-11 thing be like it was some kind of an appendage that was just sewn on, but the way David Benioff wrote the script, the whole way it was sold, it was an organic piece of the process. (U6)[21]

The naturalness that Spike Lee prattles is reflected in one of the two major shifts in American culture between *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour*: an all-white Spike Lee Joint was not as newsworthy an item in 2002.[22] The critical reception of *25th Hour*, though, was split on the organic nature of its portrayal of New York City after September 11, 2001.

The reviews for *25th Hour*, in regards to its depiction of post-9/11 New York City, fall into one of two camps. For critics such as Eric Harrison and Scott Galupo, the September 11 references serve as appendages to the central narrative, thus substantiating

the concerns Lee voices to Henerson. Galupo argues that the 9/11 material detracts from Benioff's novel, perceiving the September 11 references as "jammed into a story that's too personal to carry that kind of thematic weight" (B05). Harrison agrees, observing that the film's exploration of post-9/11 New York "feels grafted on" and is a result of "directorial interjections," a common criticism of Spike Lee Joints ("Rambles" 1). A.O. Scott and Roger Ebert join Harrison in highlighting Lee's cinematic fingerprints, all three concluding that the film is devoid of a traditional plot. Scott, though, praises this instance of Lee's trademark rejection of traditional Hollywood screenplay structure: "Monty is in no hurry to get to the penitentiary, and the filmmakers are not inclined to rush him" ("Confronting the Past" E3). Ebert also attributes the absence of traditional plotting in *25th Hour* to its effective evocation of post-9/11 NYC, noting that since the film "is about the end of this stage of Monty's life[:] … [T]here is no goal he is striving for--unless it is closure with Naturelle [Rosario Dawson] and his father" ("25th Hour"). In this context, Ebert and Scott align themselves with David Rooney and Mick LaSalle, critics who perceive that the September 11 references augment the central narrative of Monty's quest to set his affairs in order before entering prison for a seven-year term.

The quietness, solitude, and meditation that shrouded New York City at the time of *25th Hour*'s release are appropriately reflected in the film. Directly opposing Galupo, David Rooney perceives that the post-9/11 setting elevates the source material, which bears an identical storyline concerning Monty's preparation for incarceration (40). Mick LaSalle stands in opposition to Harrison, attributing post-9/11 New York with uplifting the movie itself, praising Lee in the process: he "takes the spiritual moment and crystallizes it into art. The result is a film of sadness and power, the first great 21st[-

]century movie about a 21st[-]century subject" ("Love Poem" D1). A.O. Scott expands on this notion, identifying the narrative function of the 9/11 material as "produc[ing] a wrenching, dazzling succession of moods" which create a conflicting "ambience of stunned grief and a slightly giddy, slightly guilty feeling of survival" ("Confronting the Past" E3).[23] Stephen Holden compares *25th Hour*'s atmosphere to *Summer of Sam*'s, noting that *Summer of Sam*'s Big Apple is "steeped in paranoia"—the result of real-life, large-scale acts of violence which claimed mass victims ("Post-9/11 and Pre-" 13).

Unlike *Summer of Sam*, which the critical establishment determined employed white characters to mask a common African American experience, *25th Hour* is largely immune to the critical propensity of ascribing a subversive racial meaning to any "all-white" Spike Lee Joint. Bob Strauss, however, comes closest to identifying a possible trangression, charging Lee with indicting New York (and by extension the United States) for its enforcement of the Rockefeller Laws ("Camp" U7). The laws' imprudent criminalization of drug possession and subsequent mandatory minimum sentencing has long been recognized to disproportionately affect the black community (Aftab 191). Therefore, following this analogy, white drug dealer Monty represents black everyman, uneducated from a working-class milieu with aspirations of ascending to the middle class. Monty's arresting officer, DEA Agent Flood (Isiah Whitlock, Jr.), is also telling, for he is an upwardly-mobile African American. Resurfacing as a member of the SEC in *She Hate Me* (2004),[24] Flood and his conflict with Monty represent Lee's reprisal of what Richard A. Blake identifies as one of the filmmaker's major themes: the struggle to achieve solidarity amongst African Americans regardless of social, educational, or physical status (260-1). This reading is flimsy at best, Strauss's suggesting it an example

of Edward Norton's estimation of the Spike Lee Joint's diminished luster in the 21st century: its director is "suffering from the Woody Allen syndrome. People say, 'Oh, it's just another Spike Lee movie,' and pay little attention" (qtd. in Leduff 1). Lee's obvious critique of the Rockefeller Laws, however, does serve as a launching pad for scholarly discussions of *25th Hour*.

Mark T. Conard examines *25th Hour* through the prism of ethics, Aristotelian virtue ethics to be exact. In a brief yet exhaustive overview, Conard informs us that this philosophy "center[s] around the development of the virtues as part of one's character" (27). Justice is the most essential virtue, its absence rendering *eudaimonia*, or flourishing—"the highest good for human beings"—futile (Conard 26). To Aristotle, justice consists of both lawfulness ("general justice") and fairness ("special justice), while injustice "arises from ... *pleonexia*, or greed, the desire to get more than one's fair share of things" (Conard 29). These competing notions are represented by Alasdair MacIntyre's internal goods and external goods. Internal goods can be "achieved through a specific activity, and whenever anyone achieves them, all those who cooperate in the activity are benefitted"; external goods, though, "aren't integral to the activity itself—for example, money and fame. These goods are limited and thus entail competition" (34). Gaining internal goods is a cooperative enterprise that demands the maintenance and exercising of virtues such as justice, courage, and honesty, Conard noting that "practicing the virtues often prevents one from achieving external goods" (35). External goods are acquired, then, by abandoning fairness. In terms of lawfulness, Conard notes Aristotle's care in emphasizing "correctness and justice in the creation of laws" themselves, distinguishing "correct laws" (which "aim at the common benefit of everyone in the

community") from laws that "incorrectly aim at the benefit of those in power" (29). Citing Terrence Irwin's conception of Aristotelian ethics, Conard identifies justice as a communal enterprise and argues that, in addition to its absence, "the flourishing of an individual is impossible outside of his or her community" (29). Even if one functions within that community, however, his/her ability to flourish largely depends on "the level of corruption and injustice in the community," Conard resolving that "for Aristotle, justice and law are intimately intertwined with morality and with flourishing" (30). By contrast, the New York City of *25th Hour* is a community rife with an injustice and corruption brought on by amorality and greed.

With Aristotelian virtue ethics as his guide, Conard determines that both general justice and special justice are foreign to *25th Hour*'s New York City. Citing an underlying racism in their construction and enforcement, which results in minorities' lopsided confinement and subsequent deprivation of the ballot, Conard deems New York State's Rockefeller Laws the epitome of Aristotle's concept of unjust laws (31). Pondering whether or not drugs should even be illegal, Conard suggests that the maintenance of their illegality exists to make "a lot of money for some very powerful people" (31). DEA agents Flood and Cunningham embody this lack of regard for Aristotelian justice or common good, Conard observing that the agents "encourage Monty's suspicions about Naturelle, and ... take a kind of perverse delight in his predicament, trying to use it to get Monty to turn in his Russian boss. This is what motivates them, rather than, say, a desire to keep hard drugs out of the hands of schoolchildren" (31). Frank (Barry Pepper), though, does show concern for the amorality of Monty's drug dealing; however, the bond trader's righteous outrage exists merely "to

affirm his belief in his own superiority" based on his adherence to the unjust laws that have convicted Monty (Conard 30). Yes, Frank obeys the law, but, as Conard points out, as a bond trader Frank also profits off the misery of other people, thus functioning as "an Aristotelian overreacher driven by … greed" (30). Frank embodies injustice and intemperance, "tak[ing] himself to be acting correctly when he pursues harmful pleasures, even though he is acting against reason and against his own best interests" (Conard 28). Frank's refusal to vacate his apartment across the way from Ground Zero indicates such intemperance, as does Monty's drug dealing.[25] However, while "he certainly doesn't display complete virtue," Monty does treat Jacob more respectfully than Frank does; hesitates to demonize Naturelle as a rat; and he saves Doyle from a terrible death (Conard 31). And although Monty represents Aristotelian justice, he still does not flourish, Conard argues, because of New York City's composition.

Conard concludes that flourishing is impossible within the community of New York because the city is not comprised of a single community (32). Conard informs us that Aristotle "conceived of the ideal community as the ancient Greek city-state, or polis," where an individual could find "like-minded citizens engaged in similar projects and focused on similar goals that one could befriend" and where he "could devote [him]self to political activity and philosophical reflection and thus have the best opportunity to flourish as a social and rational creature" (32). Because of its trademark multifarious citizenry and immigrant neighborhoods and the diversity of the values and interests that accompany such a varied population, which results in no consensus of a common good, New York cannot function as an ideal community for Aristotelian ethics (Conard 32). Instead, Conard argues that New York (and by extension all of "Western,

liberal society") most reflects the ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre (33). To MacIntyre, Western, liberal society is problematic, not Aristotelian virtue ethics, which Conard considers still applicable to a society like Aristotle's ideal community. Unlike that community, New York and all of Western, liberal society have been "pervaded by a radical individualism, a situation in which strangers occupy a common physical space but possess and embody very different and in fact incommensurable values (Conard 33). According to Conard, Monty's fuck monologue in *25th Hour* voices "the lack of a cohesive community and common values" in New York City: the convicted drug dealer lambastes Pakistani cab drivers, Korean grocers, Orthodox Jewish jewelers, Puerto Ricans, Italians, the poor, the wealthy, blacks, Catholic priests, Muslim terrorists, and his friends and father (33). Imposing a MacIntyrian reading on Monty's tirade, Conard characterizes New York as a futile enterprise: "there's no hope of cooperation, no hope of progress, and no hope of saving the place" (34). Like the city, Monty cannot be saved either—Otisville State Penitentiary will be his home.

Mikal J. Gaines also examines *25th Hour* through the prism of ethics, explicitly situating Monty alongside *Summer of Sam*'s Ritchie as a neo-blues subject. Gaines notes that, while "not a performer by trade," Monty does exude "an alternative performative personality that is invoked because of an uneasy relation to the abject which in this case is signified by the penitentiary and the prisoner" (161).[26] According to Gaines, the prisoner embodies Kristeva's concept of the corpse, a lifeless, possibly consuming menace to the living, who is "subject to the law but not its protections (crimes against the condemned, e.g., prison rape, are rarely treated as crimes but as appropriate punishment); stripped of citizenship rights (the felon loses the right to vote); silenced in dominant

discourse (except when used as the target of homophobic humor or demonized for political gain)" (161). Gaines suggests that a focus on the prisoner's plight would result in his victimization, and he applauds Lee for avoiding such a perceived pitfall in *25th Hour*. Citing its post-9/11 setting and mystery surrounding Monty's betrayer, Gaines argues that the film "is a compelling and informed critique of the ethics of punishment ... [which is] essentially based on what is frequently a faulty dichotomy of offense and retribution" (161). The instrument of this critique constitutes Spike's blues.

In addition to the false dichotomy of offense and retribution, the ethic of punishment is accompanied by three assumptions, which Gaines lists in painstaking detail. First, it "wrongly assumes that injury and antidote exist in easily separable dimensions"; second, punishment "assumes that vengeance can fully amount for the toll trauma takes on mind, body, and spirit"; and third, "[p]erhaps most problematically, punishment assumes that there is always a clear path of accountability, a singular moment of right- or wrong-doing by a singular individual" (161-2). The blues, though, functions "by drawing attention to [punishment's] imprecision, its ineffectiveness as a means of understanding human suffering" and disproves each assumption of punishment (Gaines 161). Instead of mutual exclusivity, Gaines argues that "[t]he blues proposes ... that the remedy to any illness usually carries with it some small dose of the infection" (161-2). The blues disregards rudimentary, black-and-whiteness of vengeance, "recogniz[ing] that the pain of trauma is not so easily quantifiable nor the path to healing so simplistically fulfilling" (162). Finally, the blues determines that the path of accountability may not be so straight, "propos[ing] that any act of heroism or villainy is only one in a series of existential crises with multiple perspectives and solutions" (162). Gaines concludes that

"*25th Hour* positions culpability as both an individual and collective problem that can be usefully though not wholly reconciled by the creative use of unconventional blues weapons" (162). Gaines arrives at this conclusion through the pre-credit sequence featuring Monty's rescue of Doyle, Jacob and Frank's windowsill chat overlooking Ground Zero, and the climactic scene in Carl Schurz Park, during which Frank beats Monty. Each sequence dramatizes "alternative blues healing ... and how a relation to the abject can be more than a debilitating encounter with the decaying self" (162). The first and last of the aforementioned scenes especially illustrate Monty's "tend[ency] to turn toward the abject rather than away from it" and his "instigat[ion] and ... demand[ing of] his own abjection," thus distinguishing Monty from Ritchie (162, 164).[27] Therefore, Monty is a *neo* neo-blues subject.

Monty and Ritchie are brought together, however, by both *25th Hour*'s and *Summer of Sam*'s engagement with the question of fate. In his review of *25th Hour*, Galupo observes that, just as *Summer of Sam* codes Ritchie's summer of 1977 in deterministic terms, so too does *25th Hour* concerning Monty's last day of freedom (B05). Indeed, Lee reengages the question of fate in *25th Hour*, but he tweaks his methodology by establishing a free will-serendipity binary as it pertains to Monty's existence, particularly his impending seven-year sentence to Otisville State Penitentiary. Gone is Lee's presentation of the dichotomy between choice and human nature exemplified by Ritchie's voluntary adopting of an appearance that awakens within those in his community the predisposition to scapegoat outsiders. Instead, *25th Hour* presents us with no less than three overt references to Monty and "bad luck," commencing with the pre-credit sequence. With his Ukrainian, Russian mob-affiliated associate Kostya (Tony

Siragusa) on the way to a drug deal, Monty comes across a dogfight-injured canine abandoned for dead on the street and rescues it after considering shooting it out of mercy. After struggling to get the dog in the trunk of his car, and with Kostya's unwillingness to help or understand Monty's compassion towards the animal, he suffers more berating from Kostya: "You're bad luck, Monty. You bring bad luck on me. Always everything that can go wrong, go wrong. It is not just you and me anymore when we go out. It's you and me and Doyle. … Doyle's Law." Kostya's mixed metaphor for *Murphy's* Law leads Monty to name the canine Doyle after taking him to a veterinary emergency room and adopting him as his own. This precredit sequence, we learn, is a flashback to an earlier time, but the film suggests that the influences of bad luck on Monty's life go back even further, before Monty *was* Monty.

While having his last meal as a free man with his father, James (Brian Cox), Monty reminisces with him about his long-departed mother. After entrusting his son with a photograph of the three when Monty was a child, James initiates a conversation that, ironically, implies that Monty's bad luck was predetermined:

> James: I ever tell you about the fights we had, naming you?
>
> Monty: Yeah, you wanted to name me James.
>
> James: James Brogan, Jr.: good, strong name. Nah, your mother thought it was too boring for you.
>
> Monty: She liked Montgomery Clift.
>
> James: *Loved* him. *Place in the Sun*, her favorite movie. I kept saying, "Montgomery Clift, look what happened to that poor fuck. Died way too young. Bad luck."

Monty: Bad luck.

Considering Montgomery Clift's good looks, rumored homosexual affairs, tragic car accident which damaged those good looks, substance abuse, and early death, it certainly does appear that Monty's prison term will carry him on a similar trajectory.[28] Third, not only does *25th Hour* imply that Monty's bad luck is predetermined, but it also suggests that his bad luck is hereditary. During his final meeting with Monty in his office in the bowels of his nightclub Bridge, Russian mob boss Nikolai (Levani) and his right-hand man Senka (Misha Kuznetsov) offer to financially support James while Monty is jailed, citing the death of Monty's mother:

Nikolai: I like your father. A hardworking man. He's had bad luck.

Senka: Everyone in the neighborhood loved your mother.

The pain of James's wife's passing was, of course, shared by Monty and might explain his involvement with hoodlums such as Kostya and Nikolai. Additionally, the movie provides an example of an overt reference to Monty's bad luck. During a last-morning-of-freedom sojourn with Doyle to his old high school, Coventry Preparatory School, Monty is confronted by an administrator (Michole Briana White), and their short conversation about his high school basketball career, especially her response, carries an implicit perception of Monty's bad luck:

Monty: [W]e were undefeated that year. Then I got kicked off the team for fighting, and the whole thing fell apart.

Coventry Administrator: That's too bad.

Monty's voluntary confession of fighting his way off of the team reveals not only the film's—and by extension Lee's—position on the actual effect of bad luck on Monty's

life, but also its revolutionary voice.

Monty embodies the revolutionary response to surplus repression. Wood reminds us that the revolutionary is capable of taking responsibility for his own life, which constitutes the narrative of *25th Hour*. By reviewing the prerelease material for the movie, we can learn the genesis of its position on the influence of chance on Monty's current existence and his status as its revolutionary voice. In an interview with Schaefer, Lee responds to an inquiry of whether or not audiences should feel bad for Monty or dislike him by assuring that "[w]e can have both emotions. As a director, I was sympathetic toward Monty Brogan, but at the same time feel he should go to the joint" ("Post Positive" 047). Norton agrees in an interview with Michael Powell, citing the film's major theme of "choices and the consequences of not examining the morality of what you're doing" (C01). For Lee, speaking to Bruce Westbrook, this self-examination results in Monty's accepting a revolutionary psychic position: "He'd lied to himself for so long and blamed other people for his predicament, and he just couldn't do it anymore. He finally admits to himself that he blew it" (11). There are four major scenes which distinguish Monty as *25th Hour*'s revolutionary presence, commencing with the much-ballyhooed "fuck monologue" in the men's room of James's bar.

A staple of *25th Hour* reviews, the fuck monologue (like *Summer of Sam*) reminded critics of *Do the Right Thing*.[29] Ebert, true to his reputation, goes the extra mile by highlighting that this scene appears in *The 25th Hour* (the novel on which *25th Hour* is based) and surmises a Spike Lee-influence on its author (native New Yorker David Benioff), who also penned the screenplay ("25th Hour"). Benioff himself acknowledges the "serious influence" Lee had on his art to Aftab (277).[30] Simultaneously

acknowledging the fuck monologue's presence in Benioff's novel, Jack Mathews still (misguidedly) argues that Spike Lee rips himself off in *25th Hour* in the fuck monologue which, the columnist concludes, the filmmaker reprises at the end as Monty is riding off to Otisville ("Repeat Offender" 48). In terms of the fuck monologue's function within the narrative, Galupo misreads it as a display of "teeming ethnic seething that, to [Monty]'s mind, left the city vulnerable to an attack from within" (B05). Stephen Rea, Mick LaSalle, and Jane Horwitz accurately perceive the irony of Monty's rant, that it is actually a tribute to the diversity of New York City, and simultaneously reveal its function in the film ("Up the River" W03; "Love Poem" D1; T42).[31] Most significant, though, is this monologue's conclusion, during which Monty takes responsibility for his circumstances. However, he does so only after lambasting the poor, Pakistani and Sikh cabbies, gays, Korean grocers, Russian mobsters (to which Kostya belongs), Hasidic jewelers (Jacob is also Jewish), Wall Street brokers (of which Frank is one), Puerto Ricans (Naturelle is Puerto Rican), Dominicans, Italians, the rich, blacks, the NYPD, the Catholic church, Jesus himself, Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, Jacob, Frank, Naturelle, and James. Immediately preceding Monty's acceptance of the role he played in his own downfall is an overt rejection of scapegoating the individuals, groups, and institutions he just castigated: "No. No, fuck you, Montgomery Brogan. You had it all, and you threw it away, you dumb fuck!" Monty retains this sentiment throughout *25th Hour*—that it is his fault he is on the way to prison at Otisville.

In addition to the significance of the fuck monologue, LaSalle also acknowledges the effectiveness of *25th Hour*'s shift in setting to Club Bridge, noting Lee's adroit "juggl[ing of] two realities simultaneously -- the overwhelming frenzy of the external

world ... and the overwhelmed inner life of the characters" ("Love Poem" D1). The juxtaposition of the outer and inner is on full display during Monty's confab with Frank on the skywalk, particularly through the now-former drug dealer's dialogue, which also serves as the second example of his revolutionary mindset. Despite Frank's admonitions—"Don't do this. ... Monty, you shouldn't talk like this. Man, you're gonna wrap yourself around in a twist, you keep thinking about this shit"—Monty expresses his regret: "Six months, ya' know? Six months before I got pinched, I was gonna come to you with the loot. Put me in some stocks, put me in some mutuals. ... I'm gonna kick back, watch my coin multiply. We're gonna get rich together. ... I just thought, 'No, you know, I can take out a little more to live on, a little more.' I got greedy, greedy. I just fucked myself." Monty's currently overwhelmed interior being is due to his own overwhelming infatuation with the exterior benefits of wealth that the illegal drug trade supplies.[32]

A seven-year prison sentence is not the only consequence Monty suffers; his relationships are also negatively affected. In an office in the bowels of Bridge, Monty meets with Nikolai, who exposes Kostya as the party who served Monty up to the DEA, thereby revealing Kostya's, DEA Agent Flood's, and DEA Agent Cunningham's (Michael Genet) motivation for planting the seed of suspicion about Naturelle's cooperation with law enforcement. Monty's conjecture is responsible for his short, distant demeanor towards Naturelle and threatens to ruin their relationship. Nikolai's revelation effectively ruins Monty's friendship with Kostya, which Nikolai and Senka entice Monty to finalize by killing Kostya with his own gun. True to his revolutionary psychic position, Monty designates where responsibility should go and refuses to shoot Kostya, instead

thumping the gun on Nikolai's desk and telling him, "Clean up your own fucking mess." Implicit in Monty's lead-in to that revolutionary act is an acknowledgment of personal responsibility: "You told me to trust this man, I trusted this man. Now I'm gone seven." Significantly, Monty's acceptance of blame precedes his placing blame and is thus indicative of his status as a revolutionary.

Monty's final revolutionary display occurs in his brownstone on the very couch in which he hid his heroin supply and cash. Having willingly taken a beating from Frank, Monty breaks down as Naturelle cleans his sort-of self-inflicted wounds: "Why'd you stay with me all this time? You should have left a long time ago. ... I'm such an idiot. ... Naturelle, I blew it. I really blew it." This scene serves an additional purpose beyond Monty's accepting culpability for his imminent imprisonment; it also functions as a response to an earlier scene at a bar inside Bridge, during which Naturelle approaches Frank with a favor:

> Naturelle: Keep an eye on Monty tonight, would you? Try to stick with him.
>
> Frank: What's the matter?
>
> Naturelle: He's just acting really strange.
>
> Frank: He's going to prison in a couple hours. How do you want him to act?
>
> Naturelle: I want him to act like he's scared.
>
> Frank: Well, he *is* scared, Naturelle. Believe me, he's scared.
>
> Naturelle: I just don't want him to hurt himself. So will you watch him for me? I don't think he wants me here.

Frank: Why? Why wouldn't he want you here?

Naturelle: You see the way he looks at me lately? It's like he doesn't trust me.

Frank: What reason does he have to not trust you?

This dialogue references even earlier scenes. Naturelle's concerns about Monty's seeming distrust of her, pent-up emotions about entering prison, and possible self-destruction are no doubt fueled by his frequent distant, icy demeanor towards her and the off-color remarks he made about suicide that morning. Her observation of Monty's lack of trust in her also references the dinner scene in James's bar, when Monty asks his father if he thinks Naturelle can be trusted. Frank's assurance of Monty's fear of being incarcerated originates in their skywalk talk in Bridge, during which Monty shares with Frank what he anticipates awaits him in prison—"Those guys are gonna use me up and end me"—which is presumably why Frank has retreated to the bar and is throwing back shots when Naturelle approaches him.

A battered, bloody Monty lying prostrate on the couch, openly weeping in front of his girlfriend is the culmination of Monty's 24-hour odyssey to set his affairs in order before entering Otisville State Penitentiary. It is his reaction to his own actions which led to his impending incarceration, what he expects in prison, his desperate measure to at least delay what he surmises awaits him inside, and who he is leaving behind on the outside. For the first time since his sentencing, Monty reveals his true feelings about entering prison to Naturelle: he is scared and he is apologetic for not trusting her. Interestingly, this outpouring arises only *after* Monty knows he can trust Naturelle. Ironically, Kostya's deception, which destroyed their friendship, disproved Monty's

distrust of Naturelle and salvaged their relationship before the former drug dealer's reporting to Otisville. The scene with Naturelle and Frank, as well as James and Monty's last supper, also serves a dual purpose, for its depiction of her anxiety about matters she cannot control proclaims that Monty's girlfriend, father, and best friend comprise *25th Hour*'s neurotic presence.

Neurosis is, Wood reminds us, the unhealthier result of surplus repression's failure. With the exception of Kostya (for obvious reasons), Monty's loved ones illustrate Wood's concept. Naturelle, James, and Frank each spend the former drug dealer's last day as a free man attempting to reconcile his fall and their roles in it. In the documentary *Spike Lee's* 25th Hour*: The Evolution of an American Filmmaker*, Brian Cox sums up the concerns of every significant person in Monty's life through his analysis of James's relationship with Monty: it is "absolutely about lost opportunity and the fact that his boy is now gonna go to prison, and he's gonna lose him. All the things you didn't do before become very relevant." The fact that Monty's plight is largely of his own doing appears lost on Naturelle, James, and Frank, and their dogged insistence on accepting and ascribing blame for his criminal descent and the resulting guilt (a 'la *Summer of Sam*'s Vinny) all indicate their neurotic psychic positions. In addition to Naturelle and Frank's bar blowup, during which she reveals her anxiety about the possible physical ramifications of Monty's mental state, *25th Hour* dramatizes two instances of the psychic effects of guilt and anxiety on Monty's father and best friend.

During dinner with Monty, before the son's psychic tirade which constitutes the fuck monologue, James talks around Monty's upcoming reporting to Otisville for a seven-year sentence, the resulting dialogue portraying the father's and son's divergent

psychic conditions:

> James: This should never have happened. You could've been -- you wanted money, you could've done anything you wanted. Doctor, lawyer.
>
> Monty: Don't lay that on me.
>
> James: That's all I'm saying.
>
> Monty: Don't lay that on me. When Sal and his crew were squeezing you for the payments, I didn't hear you wishing I was a law school student then. Not one word from you back then. Where'd you think that money was coming from -- Donald Trump?
>
> James: That was a mistake.
>
> Monty: Well, let's just forget it, then.
>
> James: There were a lot of mistakes. I should've stopped drinking when your mother passed.
>
> Monty: Pop, please. Please don't do this.
>
> James: 11 year-old boy with a dead mother and a drunk father. ... I got no one to blame but myself.
>
> Monty: Oh, stop. Stop. It wasn't you, Pop.

If there ever was an argument for the negative impact of Murphy's Law on Monty's life, it is in James's account of Monty's life post his mother's death. One could reach this conclusion, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, by categorizing Monty's turn to the illegal drug trade as the result of the havoc Murphy's Law wrought on James's life: a widowed single father to an eleven year-old boy who chose alcohol as a coping mechanism. The guilt James feels for his decision to abuse alcohol is palpable, as is his

anxiety for Monty's upcoming prison term, which he refuses to acknowledge is *not* due to any decision he did or did not make. James's guilt and anxiety manifest physically, as reported by Naturelle while visiting with Jacob and Frank at the bar in Chinatown before heading to Bridge: "[James] looks like he's aged twenty years in the past couple of months."[33] Monty, of course, does not allow James to assume blame for his decision to sell drugs. Instead, the son recounts how his father benefitted from his involvement in the illegal drug trade, intimating that if there was anything James should take responsibility for, it is knowingly accepting assistance in the form of drug money.

The competing neurotic and revolutionary psychic positions embodied by James and Monty appear to be simultaneously at war within Frank, *25th Hour*'s answer to both Ritchie and Vinny. During the second half of his bar blowup with Naturelle inside Bridge, Frank evinces an anxiety and guilt consistent with neurosis when justifying his now-short, -distant behavior towards her:

> How could he do this, huh? Just throw it all away. I'm his oldest friend. What'd I do to stop it? What'd I say to him? Nothing. Not a word. You know, when he started selling weed to the kids at Coventry, I didn't say shit. Everybody's talking about buying from Monty, you know, the whole school, and I knew they were gonna nail him. I knew it. I didn't say a word. Fucking last ten years, I've been watching him get deeper and deeper in with these friends of his, these *fucks* who you wouldn't want petting Doyle. And did I say, "Hey, careful, Monty, you know, you better cool out, man"? I didn't say shit. I just sat there and watched him ruin his life.

Like Naturelle and James, Frank accepts responsibility for another's actions—actions he had no part in deciding to take. This scene is duly significant, for it dramatizes Frank's acceptance of Monty's fate. Before this moment, Frank—particularly during the preceding skywalk talk—exhibits denial, another indicator of neurosis. During their skywalk talk, after Monty expresses his regret for being avaricious and its seven-year consequence, he confides in Frank. Monty's confession of past guilt is succeeded by resignation to his future:

> Monty: I'm not gonna make it, Frank.
>
> Frank: Yes, you will.
>
> Monty: There's a thousand guys up there who are harder than me. I mean, in a room, some junkie doesn't want to pay me, and Kostya behind me, I'm pretty scary. Up there, I'm a skinny white boy with no friends. Those guys are gonna use me up and end me.
>
> Frank: No, they won't, man. You know why? Because you're smarter than all of them. You're gonna get up there, you're gonna keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. You're gonna know the names, the whole scenario. You're gonna have the place wired in a week.
>
> Monty: The place is overcrowded. They got bunk beds lined up in the gymnasium to handle the overflow. I'm going in a room with 200 other guys, Frank. So picture this: first night, lights out. Guards are moving out of the space, looking back over their shoulders, laughing at me, "You are miles from home." Door closes, boom. I'm on the floor, I got some big guy's knee in my back. I can give it a little go, but there will be too many

of them. Someone takes a pipe out from under a mattress, starts beating me in the face. Not to hurt me, just to knock all my teeth out so I can give him head all night and they don't have to worry about me biting. Let's say I make it through seven years minus 84 days for good behavior. W-what then? What kind of skills do I have? I can't get a job in the straight world. I can't go back to doing this. It's 15 years to life for a second pinch. I mean, I-I'm gonna be a 38 year-old, punked-out ex-con with government-issue dentures.

Frank: 38 is still young. Alright, you're gonna get out, and you and me, we're gonna start something up. You know, a fucking bar. I mean, we're two Irish kids from Brooklyn. Where the fuck would we be without a bar, right? How can we not have a bar? Come on, we have free hot dogs on *Monday Night Football*, you know? We got an old jukebox in the corner. Green beer on St. Patty's Day, come on.

Monty: Fuck green beer, Frank. You've been working 15 years to get away from green beer.

Frank: God, I hate this shit, too. I'm just saying we got options, right?

Monty: I appreciate the thought. I don't see it, man. Seven years, you're gonna be running your own show. I don't see you working with me.

Frank: We've known each other since we were three. Have I ever broken a promise to you, huh? Have I ever once broken a promise to you? Have I ever said I'm gonna be somewhere and not shown up?

Monty: No.

> Frank: I'm gonna be there when you get out, you hear me? I'm gonna fucking be there.
>
> Monty: I know you will, I know you will, but you're not gonna be there tomorrow, and it's all about tomorrow.

Ever the revolutionary, Monty perceives the reality of the situation, accepts responsibility for his role in it, and seeks to move forward and live with its repercussions. Frank, on the other hand, refuses to acknowledge any aspect of Monty's predicament, and when he does—in the subsequent bar blowup with Naturelle—a major facet of his reconciling the situation is blaming himself for it. A textbook neurotic, Frank perceives Monty's predicament as somehow about himself.

Interestingly, Frank appears to harbor revolutionary tendencies in an earlier, bookending scene with Jacob, during which the schoolteacher displays a neurotic denial of Monty's future as an inmate. Peering down on Ground Zero through a window in Frank's apartment, Jacob and Frank consider Monty's drug-dealing past and prison-dwelling future:

> Jacob: You know, we hardly ever see each other anymore. You know, you and I are his friends from the past.
>
> Frank: Oh, yeah. Like his friends from the present have done him much good.
>
> Jacob: I just -- I just can't believe he's going away for seven years. Someone turns him in and --"
>
> Frank: Oh, don't feed me that shit. … Come on, Jake. Don't feed me that bullshit. Yeah, he got caught. But hello? Monty's a fucking drug dealer. ...

What, are you driving a vintage Super “B”? … No. He is. Yeah, paid for the misery of other people. He got caught. He’s gonna get locked up. And I’ll tell you something else. You two are my best friends in the whole world, and I love him like a brother, but he fucking deserves it. ...

Jacob: What’s he planning on doing with Doyle?

Frank: How the fuck should I know? I don’t know. Maybe leave him with Naturelle or something.

Jacob: They should at least let him take Doyle with him. … He wouldn’t be so lonely.

Frank: You can’t take a fucking dog to the hoosegow, Jake.

Jacob: I’m just saying it’d be kind of nice if he could. ...

Frank: It’d be nice.

Jacob: Monty’s tough. I think he’ll be okay. If it were me, I-I’d never last a day, but Monty, he’s different.

Frank: Oh, yeah. You believe that?

Jacob: Yeah.

Frank: You don’t fucking get it, do you?

Jacob: What don’t I get?

Frank: You want the simple version, Jake? Guys who look like Monty don’t do well in prison, alright. Man, he’s got three choices, and none of them are good. One, he can run. Two, catch the bullet train --

Jacob: Bullet train?

Frank: I’m not saying what he’s gonna do. I’m saying what his choices

are. His third choice is he goes to prison, that's it.

Jacob: Yeah, and that's what he's gonna do. He'll go and I'll see him when he gets out.

Frank: Maybe. I'll tell you what. After tonight, it's bye-bye, Monty.

Jacob: What does that mean?

Frank: Man, if he runs, he's gone. He ain't coming home. If he pulls the trigger, they close the casket. He's gone. They lock him away, he's gone. You'll never see him again.

Jacob: I'll see him again.

Frank: No, you won't.

Jacob: No, I'll visit him up there and I'll see him when he gets out.

Frank: This is such horseshit. This is so much like you, Jake.

Jacob: Like me?

Frank: You're not gonna see him --

Jacob: What's -- why --?

Frank: You'll never see him again. You think you're gonna kick back with some beers, reminisce—old times—you're still gonna be friends? It's over after tonight, Jake. Wake the fuck up.

In this scene, which clearly functions as a bookend to the skywalk talk, Frank assumes Monty's position as champion of reality, responsibility, and reconciliation, impressing upon Jacob that Monty will enter Otisville State Penitentiary as a result of his own actions, and he must decide how to move forward. Unlike Monty, however, Frank's verbalization is clothed in a righteous anger and moral outrage that Monty implies is

misguided due to the semantic difference between the illegal drug trade and the legal bond trade: "Fuck the Wall Street brokers. Self-styled masters of the universe. Michael Douglas-Gordon Gekko wannabe motherfuckers figuring out new ways to rob hardworking people blind. Send those Enron assholes to jail for fucking life!"[34] Also during the fuck monologue, Monty deems Frank's anger and disappointment as misguided judgment and repressed jealousy: "Fuck Francis Xavier Slaughtery, my best friend, judging me while he stares at my girlfriend's ass." True to his revolutionary nature, like Ritchie, Monty looks past the exterior and assesses the interior, which suggests that Frank's seemingly revolutionary response to Jacob is rooted in hypocrisy, a neurotic position if there ever was one.

Following the skywalk talk template, then, Jacob occupies the role of denier during his and Frank's windowsill chat. Jacob's presence, though, wields more significance than just as an extension of Naturelle, James, and Frank; he is the vehicle through which Frank's neurosis is explicitly revealed. If Frank embodies the neurotic-revolutionary binary like Vinny and Ritchie in *Summer of Sam*, Jacob represents *25th Hour*'s most repressed character, just as Vinny functions as his narrative's poster boy for repression. Lee ensures that his audience will discern Jacob's repression through the fuck monologue, during which Jacob teaches literature—emphasizing the word "repression"—while Monty (in voiceover) proclaims, "Fuck Jacob Elinsky. Whining malcontent." The attentive, enthralled gaze of his seventeen year-old student Mary (Anna Paquin), on whom Jacob has a crush, further distinguishes his repression.[35] Jacob's infatuation with Mary is clearly indicated by his awkward classroom- and student lounge-interaction with the girl. In response to Jacob's hapless infatuation with Mary, A.O. Scott perceives him

as "so sexually confused as to be almost inarticulate" ("Confronting the Past" E3). Evoking Wood's conception of surplus repression (particularly Western culture's repression of the sexuality of children), Scott concludes that Jacob is a "tongue-tied shlub" ("Confronting the Past" E3). In *Spike Lee's* 25th Hour*: The Evolution of an American Filmmaker*, Phillip Seymour Hoffman observes his character's dealings with Mary differently, musing that "I don't know if he's so much infatuated as stuck, you know, in his past, and he can't move forward." This numbness renders Jacob as the most vulnerable of the three lifelong friends, a vulnerability that often manifests itself as naiveté, most exhibited by the schoolteacher's inability to grasp the painful truth of what awaits Monty in prison.

The former drug dealer exercises the same candor during the skywalk talk, but it is not as lacking in humility. Frank's mode of address to Jacob is indicative of his adopted persona as a self-styled,[36] self-possessed, grafty Michael Douglas-Gordon Gekko wannabe, a "lizardy braggart" according to Scott ("Confronting the Past" E3). Frank and Jacob's windowsill chat, as well as their dinner in the upscale, Chinatown bar, is a non-stop contrast of boisterous, fast-talking, profane self-assuredness and -awareness and quiet, measured, stammering self-doubt and insecurity. During the skywalk talk, though, Monty issues a call for Frank to end the braggadocios act. Monty, adept at perceiving the core of people through their shell, knows that Frank's behavior around Jacob indicates his own denial of the former drug dealer's imminent imprisonment and disappointment in the decisions and actions which led to it. In fact, in *25th Hour*'s climactic sequence, Monty subverts his skywalk talk call by playing *to* Frank's hypermasculine persona and protective instincts towards Jacob, thus manipulating the Wall Street hotshot into helping

him achieve his goal of delaying the inevitable of his Otisville experience. From Scott's assessment of Monty's identity, we can deduce that Monty's insight into his lifelong friends' personas is gleaned from his own:

> [He] can talk a mile a minute while keeping his deeper feelings in check; he can, within a single scene, be almost sociopathicly controlled and terribly, childishly vulnerable. Monty *is* [my emphasis] all of these things: an outlaw big shot and a messed-up kid; a dutiful son and a drug pusher who sweet-talks schoolgirls on the playground; a cocksure tough guy and a terrified pipsqueak. ("Confronting the Past" E3)

Just as Frank evokes the conflicting psychic positions embodied by Vinny and Ritchie, and Jacob conjures Vinny's borderline crippling repression, Monty's ability to operate between an arrogant self-importance and uncertain vulnerability further aligns him with Ritchie (and Berkowitz) as his narrative's resident liminal figure. Monty's liminality is underscored by the fact that he is on the last day of step-back.[37] Monty's identity relative to his relationships further distinguishes him as *25th Hour*'s liminal presence: the Irish son of an alcoholic fireman, Monty deals drugs with a Ukrainian partner for the Russian mob while maintaining a long-term, committed relationship with a Puerto Rican stripper and retaining a fellow Irish bond trader and old-money, Jewish schoolteacher as best friends.

The scenes featuring the lifelong friends actually reveal that only their *expression* of masculinity is disparate; they are unified by a performance instinct that is manifest in a posturing that Stephen Holden deems "pungent, hyper-macho" ("Image" E1). This is illustrated early in *25th Hour* during the pre-credit sequence, long before we are privy to

Frank and Jacob's confabs. After rescuing Doyle, which consists of lifting a seriously-injured, 40-to-45-pound dog that appears to be some kind of terrier,[38] Monty boasts in Spanish, "Who's more macho? Monty is more macho!" This performance is chuckle-inducing, for Doyle is obviously no serious threat to Monty; he is all bark, just like Monty and the principal male characters of what Harrison calls "a very talky movie" ("Rambles" 1).[39] Jacob's "illegal" meeting with Mary in the teacher's lounge that includes a borderline inappropriate conversation about another student's grade explicitly engages the notion of traditional, socially-accepted masculine behavior. Defending his more favorable grading of a male student's essay about the death of his grandmother to Mary, Jacob admits that the male tendency to "have a hard time showing their emotions"[40] factored into his grading. This phenomenon is also apparent when we first meet Naturelle, when Monty matter-of-factly (idly?) threatens to choose suicide over Otisville, thus exhibiting a hypermasculine ideal:

> Monty: I want to be like that girl in the X-Men, that one that can walk through walls. ... If I can't do that, I don't know—boom—one shot to the head. Problem solved.
>
> Naturelle: Don't joke about that.
>
> Monty: Who says I'm joking?
>
> Naturelle: So what are we doing tonight? Before you kill yourself, that is? ...
>
> Monty: [W]ear that silver dress tonight, okay. ... That's how I want to remember you.

This scene precipitates Naturelle's later solicitation of Frank's vigilance over Monty and

adds weight to her declaration, "I want him to act like he's scared." Indeed, all of the principal male characters in *25th Hour* are acting, often in ways that suppress their fear of reconciling life-altering realities: Monty's prison sentence for himself and for Frank, infatuation with a minor for Jacob.

The lifelong friends' performing is explicitly linked to their self-loathing, which in the universe of both *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour* is indicative of their guilt. Monty feels remorseful for his decisions and actions that resulted in a seven-year prison sentence, Frank for failing to explicitly reach out to Monty and dissuade him from selling drugs, and Jacob for being born rich, which led to his accepting a teaching job at his former prep school which, ultimately, enabled his current infatuation with an underage student. Their adoption of disparate masculine facades, then, suggests that in *25th Hour*, Lee revisits the theme of doubling so prevalent in *Summer of Sam*.[41] Appropriately, in this film the doppelganger figure, consistent with its horror film roots, is non-human. Doyle assumes a greater relevance once the theme of duality is discovered. When we first meet him, Doyle's abused, bleeding, and wounded almost-corpse foreshadows Monty's condition at the end of his last day of freedom as well as his expected way of life once confined. Galupo considers Doyle a "visual fixture ... an emblem of [Monty's] tough, survivalist mentality," a temperament the former drug dealer demonstrates during the climactic sequence, when he makes himself available for and insists on being bloodied and wounded in order to survive (or at least delay) his abuse at the hands of fellow inmates (B05). Monty's fascination with Doyle's pugnacious spirit during their first encounter—"He's got a lot of bite in him, huh? ... He's a good dog. I can see it in his eyes. Besides, he's a tough little bastard. He wasn't lying down for anybody"—intimates

that perhaps Monty sees himself in Doyle. Considering what Monty expects to encounter in Otisville State Penitentiary, the double entendre that is the last sentence of his observation is especially of note.

Like Doyle, Monty is good, as evinced by his initial request of Kostya's gun in order to end the canine's suffering with a gunshot.[42] Smallishness and fearlessness are the major traits of terriers, which, if Doyle is such a breed, account for both his fight amidst seemingly insurmountable odds and Monty's about-face on his proposed mercy killing: "He's not ready to go yet. He wants to live." Here, Monty might as well replace "he" with "I," which is why Naturelle initially perceives his ho-hum talk of committing mercy suicide as idle threat and why Monty takes such desperate measures to hopefully ease his burden while incarcerated. Finally, Doyle comes to represent the salvation that eludes Monty. In the VIP section at Bridge, Monty asks Jacob to assume custody of Doyle once he reports for his sentence, his pitch drenched in regret: "Saving him, saving him, I swear to God, the best thing I ever did in my life was save that little son of a bitch 'cause every day that he's had since then, that's because of me."[43] Together with his admission of greed during the skywalk talk, we see that Monty regrets his inability to save himself. Because of *himself*, he will lose seven years' worth of days. Although Lee is careful to maintain ambiguity concerning the nature of Monty's bemoaning his lost freedom—"Are his friends responsible to him? Should they have said something? Are they complicit because they did not say something? Is he a victim of draconian drug laws? Or is this the choice he made to traffic in people's misery?"—this scene tips the filmmaker's hand (qtd. in Aftab 284).[44] It reveals that Monty does not regret preying on people's addictions; instead he rues getting *caught* doing so and having to forfeit his freedom as a result.[45]

Loss figures prominently in *25th Hour*, most characterized by Monty's imminent imprisonment: James is preparing to lose a son, Naturelle is preparing to lose a lover, and Frank and Jacob are preparing to lose a friend—all because Monty first lost himself. Brian Cox's words in *Spike Lee's* 25th Hour*: The Evolution of an American Filmmaker*—that the movie is "absolutely about lost opportunity"[46]—ring especially true, as does Rosario Dawson's observation that the characters do seize openings "to place blame" on each other for Monty's downward spiral while simultaneously "trying to take attention off themselves." Dawson's character, Naturelle, witnesses this firsthand in the final chapter of her and Frank's bar blowup, during which Frank abruptly shifts blame for Monty's predicament from himself to Naturelle:

> Frank: I just sat there and watched him ruin his life. And you did, too, alright? We both did. We all did. …
>
> Naturelle: I told Monty he should quit a hundred times.
>
> Frank: Did you? Was that before or after he moved you into his apartment?
>
> Naturelle: Come on, of all nights, please not tonight. Just don't start.
>
> Frank: Who paid for the apartment?
>
> Naturelle: I need a drink. [Orders a drink while Frank pursues]
>
> Frank: Was that before or after he gave you that platinum necklace? … Who paid for the Cartier diamond earrings? This silver dress you're wearing? Paid in full by the addictions of other people. …You two fly down to San Juan, first class all the way. What do you think paid for Puerto Rico? You've never been to Puerto -- listen to me. You've never

been to P.R. in your life before Monty. You told him to quit? The hell you did, Naturelle. ... You knew the deal the minute you met him. Come on, you never had a real job in your whole life. You've been living off the fat of the land. And you never said a goddamn word.

Naturelle: Who are you to get all righteous with me? Huh? Did you disown him? You're his best friend, and you never said a thing, but this is my fault? I'm the evil one?

Frank: But I never took his money. Never once, not a red --

Naturelle: How long have you been saving this, huh? I came over here to talk to my friend Francis. One minute ago, you were my friend. Are you drunk? Tell me you've been drinking too much and you don't know what you're saying. You're fucking drunk. …

Frank: I know exactly what I'm saying. Seven years from now, I'll be at the prison gate and you'll be married to Monty, right or wrong?

Naturelle: What is wrong with you?

Frank: Right or wrong? …

Naturelle: You want me to be the bad guy? Fine, I'm the bad guy. Are you happy now? …

Frank: All I'm saying is you knew where he hid the money. You knew where he hid the drugs, didn't you?

Naturelle: What the hell are you saying? What the hell are you saying right now, Francis?

Frank: You know exactly what I'm saying. I told Monty when he first met

> you, but he wouldn't listen to me. I told him, "Naturelle Riviera, she ain't nothin' but a spic skank skeezer." [Naturelle smacks him and storms away as Jacob rushes towards Frank. She pushes Jacob away, too]

Not only is Frank's outburst indicative of his neurotic, judgmental nature, but it also denotes the physical expression of self-loathing, which is often oppressive. Acts of oppression, at least within the diegesis of *25th Hour*, are the products of Monty's loved ones' failure to verbalize to him their concern over his life decisions. Instead, they—especially Frank—favor internalizing those apprehensions until they erupt, frequently on each other. This loss of the ability to repress is illustrated during Frank and Naturelle's bar blowup as well as Frank and Jacob's windowsill chat. The ultimate discharge of repressed energy that manifests itself as oppression is the film's climax, which reconceptualizes the term "self-mutilation."

Commencing with Monty's (in)famous command to Frank—"Make me ugly"—the apex of *25th Hour* offers us a clinic in escalating tension. Meriting extensive reproduction, it functions as a prime example of Lee's commitment to ambiguity as well as the three lifelong friends' disparate expressions of masculinity:

> Monty: I can't go in there looking like this. I already told you, it's all about the first day. If they get one look at me looking like this, I'll be finished. Come on, this is -- you said anything. You just said you'd do anything. …
>
> Frank: What are you thinking? I'm gonna give you a black eye and nobody's gonna mess with you?
>
> Monty: I need more than a black eye, pal. ...

Frank: I can't do it. [Walks away; Monty gives chase]

Monty: I think you can.

Frank: I'm not gonna hit you, Monty.

Monty: You know what? I think you want to a little bit. …You think I deserve it a little. ... I think you have for years. ... You've been giving me that look like, you know, you want to smack some sense into me. Well, this is your chance.

Frank: This is your favor, "Make me ugly"?! What the -- where the hell is this coming from, man?! It's bullshit!

Monty: Don't pussy out on me, Frank. … Now, I'm not-I'm not gonna fight back.

Frank: I'm not gonna beat -- I'm not gonna kick you -- what the-what the fuck do you want from me, man?!

Jacob: This is insane!

Monty: Shut up! Shut up! Nobody's talking to you! I mean it! Stay out of it!

Frank: Alright, enough! This is bullshit! I'm gonna go get some breakfast. I'm gonna forget this shit. [Tries to walk away, but Monty grabs his arm] Listen to me. Don't do this, Monty.

Monty: What is all this bullshit you've been feeding me? "I'm gonna be there for you, Monty"? "I'll be there when you walk out"?

Jacob: Frank, he doesn't know what he's doing.

Monty: I think this whole situation's convenient for you.

Frank: What do you mean “convenient”?

Monty: You’re gonna send me away, say, “Bye, Monty,” so you can take care of Naturelle for me. Is that what this is about?

Frank: I would never fucking cross the line with her, man!

Monty: Oh, bullshit!

Frank: You’re full of shit!

Jacob: Frank, he doesn’t mean it.

Monty: [to Frank] You think I don’t see the way you look at her, at her titties, at her ass? Come on, you asshole. You’ve been wanting to fuck her for years. [Shoves Frank]

Frank: Don’t fucking do this, man! [Monty punches Jacob in the face, followed by a body shot. Frank pulls Monty off and throws him down, assuming the mount position]

Frank: Don’t do this! Don’t do this!

Monty: Do it!

Frank: No! ...

Monty: Do it, you fucking pussy! Do it! … [Frank beats Monty to a pulp, sobbing the entire time, until Jacob pulls him off]

Frank: I’m sorry!

Scott’s assessment of Monty’s liminal (manipulative?) identity is on full display via his calm assurance that he will not hit Frank back, heightened barrage of name-calling and weak shoves designed to goad Frank into fisticuffs, and inflicting physical violence on Jacob to finally set Frank off. Clearly, Monty has successfully exploited Jacob’s timidity

and Frank's protective instinct; however, it seems as if Lee insinuates that Monty's beatdown is not an act of retribution for oppressing Jacob but one of self-oppression brought on by profound guilt. Monty's emphasis on the necessity of his pummeling—"This is what need. ... I need you to really fuck me up. ... I need it, Frank. ... I need this from you"—functions as both a refrain and another instance of doubling. It is apparent that Monty feels that the aftereffects of a shellacking are a must in order to appear tough, thereby ensuring his survival in prison, but it is implied that his *conscience* requires him to endure such physical trauma.

This is an interesting discovery on two fronts. First, it aligns the protagonist of *25th Hour* with the protagonist of *Summer of Sam*, for Monty's sense of guilt deems him eligible for retribution on moral grounds just as Vinny's does. The inversion is that the former drug dealer has the psychic wherewithal and physical means to initiate his reckoning by manipulating Frank into the vessel of retribution. Vinny, however, succumbs to the paranoia of the random and (in his mind) divine instrument that is the ".44-caliber Killer"/"Son of Sam" David Berkowitz. Second, Monty's insistence on suffering a beatdown at the hands of Frank suggests that the former drug dealer acknowledges the amorality of his chosen vocation, thus affirming Lee's devotion to ambiguity and subverting my earlier observation that the director presents Monty as unconcerned with the moral implications of his profession.[47] Finally, *25th Hour*'s climactic sequence reinforces its (and *Summer of Sam*'s) notion of manhood as hypermasculine posturing. Although it is definitely clear that Frank is protecting Jacob, he does so without violence. He refuses to make Monty ugly until the drug dealer, reminiscent of a grade school dare, calls him a "pussy." Only then do the fists fly.

The three lifelong friends each lash out in response to perceived slights. Monty practices this behavior during the DEA interrogation flashback after Agents Flood and Cunningham have planted the initial seed of fear of prison (as it pertains to anal rape) and Flood has outlined Monty's fate under the Rockefeller Laws. Monty responds by asking Cunningham, "When you have your dick in his mouth, does he just keep talking like that? 'Cause it seems to me he just never shuts up, and I'm-I'm just curious, does that-does that get annoying? You know, you're fucking a guy in the mouth, and he just won't shut up." Our introduction to Frank is presented in similar terms. In the high-powered office of Shreve Zimmer, Frank is publicly castigated by his boss, Sal (Al Palagonia), and ordered to sell half of his contracts, which results in another schoolyard, tattle-tale moment from a coworker, Marcuse (Aaron Stanford):

> Marcuse: You better hop to, sonny boy. I don't see you picking up the phone to sell those contracts, and I'm pretty sure I just heard your daddy come over here and cut off your allowance, so I'm a little surprised. You're not gonna disobey a direct order, are you?
>
> Frank: You know, Marcuse, do I come into your bedroom and tell you how to blow your boyfriend? No. Go away.

Ryan Gilbey argues that such snarky, homophobic comments "starkly illuminate … [Monty and Frank's] insecurities" (58). In these instances, Monty's and Frank's insecurities are, respectively, not being "man" enough for prison and not "man" enough to practice disobedience, which they project onto those who perceive those insecurities.

Although his method (nonverbal) and target (female) are different, one could argue that Jacob also responds to perceived challenges to his masculinity by passionately

kissing Mary in a Bridge restroom. The girl, perhaps unintentionally, questions his manhood with her unfiltered observations. During their impromptu meeting in the teacher's lounge, she calls him sentimental, which is traditionally considered a feminine sensibility. The greatest "insult," though, occurs outside of Bridge, when the conversation shifts to the night's headlining performer, DJ Dusk:

> Mary: You're a fan of Dusk?
>
> Jacob: Yeah, s-sure.
>
> Mary: He's the absolute truth, right? I mean, he is so truth. I can't believe that you're into Dusk. I mean, no offense, but, like, I thought you'd be more into show tunes or Barry Manilow or something.

The connotations associated with male fans of show tunes are palpable and appear to be the last straw for Jacob. Unlike Monty and Frank, the lack of immediacy in Jacob's oppression is consistent with his repressive nature.

Monty, Frank, and Jacob's resorting to projection and oppression attests to the reality of the insecurities of which Ryan Gilbey speaks, insecurities that are manifestations of their self-loathing. True to the Spike Lee universe of the 21st century, self-loathing is the product of fear. The question, then, is what is the source of fear in *25th Hour*? Gilbey asserts that the film is about "a heterosexual man living in fear of being sodomised," which is understandable considering the many references to Monty's good looks[48] and the former drug dealer's goal of uglying up before reporting to Otisville State Penitentiary. It is also true that the loss of Monty to incarceration is the source of James, Naturelle, Frank, and Jacob's neurosis; they share his fear. In the case of Monty's father, girlfriend, and old friend Jacob, the possibility of Monty being violated by fellow

inmates is an unspoken component of their anxiety; his best friend Frank, however, verbalizes his concern for the jeopardy of Monty's "manhood." The term manhood, in this instance, comes to represent heterosexuality.

Following Gilbey's paradigm, and my own, it would be convenient to draw a parallel between Monty, Frank, and Jacob's fears and those of Vinny and Ritchie—the three lifelong friends in *25th Hour* and the two lifelong friends in *Summer of Sam* all harbor a fear of the Other. More accurately, one could argue that the three representatives of white Manhattan manhood (as in "masculinity"), like the Bronx best friends, fear their own repressed Otherness, thus accounting for their oppression of others. Scott astutely observes that Monty, Frank, and Jacob repress their Otherness differently. Monty retreats into himself, paralyzed by the thought of his enduring potential forced sodomy, smoldering until it is time to lash out at Frank and Jacob (as well as Flood and Cunningham) to preserve his manhood. Ever boisterous, Frank, too, lashes out at friends (Naturelle and Monty) as an act of protection and at Marcuse in defense of his own manhood ("Confronting the Past" E3). Jacob adopts what Ebert deems a "nebbishy" identity that projects a serious "lacking in social skills," a facade that affirms a lack of manhood, which Mary perceives and which results in her oppression by Jacob's kiss ("25th Hour"). It is indeed possible that these oppressions, which Gilbey argues are most symbolized by Frank's "blood-soaked fist," serve as physical manifestations of the three lifelong friends' repressed homo- or bisexuality, the bloody fist "under the circumstances [harboring] ... its own sexual connotations" (58). In this reading, Frank's fist represents not only what Monty (and his loved ones, by extension) fears he may face in prison but also what he, Frank, and Jacob fear they actually prefer.

The above analysis is appropriate if we were to acknowledge the merit of Gilbey's reductive claim that *25th Hour* is only about Monty's fear of prison rape. A close viewing of the film, however, renders Gilbey's argument at least partially invalid. Careful attention to the picture instead reveals it to be about a man living in fear of sodomy *and* what forcible sodomy while confined in prison represents. For Monty, anal rape represents the powerlessness of incarceration. The axiom equating rape with power is thus crucial to an understanding of *25th Hour*: just as the act of forced intercourse robs its victims of their own will as it pertains to their bodies, so, too, will Otisville State Penitentiary strip Monty of the power to govern his own body. As an inmate, Monty's waking and slumbering, bathing and eating, going out and coming in are all determined according to the state's will. The sexual implications of male-male anal rape are tangential. For Monty, a man accustomed to wielding sway, the only way to maintain a semblance of power over his own body is to deter forced sodomy by uglying up to appear tough. Ironically, Monty's lack of control in negotiating his involvement in the illegal drug trade resulted in his impending loss of freedom; therefore, drug dealing both empowered and disenfranchised him, leaving him with, what Norton considers in *Spike Lee's* 25th Hour*: The Evolution of an American Filmmaker*, "the consequences of not examining what [he was] doing." This is what the movie is about: the entire narrative comprises Monty's reconciliation of his drug-dealing past with his prison-dwelling future.

[1] Now-defunct, the United Paramount Network was a late-'90s start-up broadcast television channel that built its brand on lowbrow sitcoms featuring predominantly black casts playing dated ethnic caricatures.

[2] See "Summer of Sam," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[3]Lee celebrates digital video technology, telling Aftab (261) that "it has made filmmaking more democratic, in that you don't have to have millions of dollars to make films." Lee also credits Swedish "Dogma 95" filmmakers such as Lars von Trier with leading the way for digital features while simultaneously praising himself: "Nobody had done it on this scale yet, but we also felt it could be something that could work on video because the story is about the television industry."

[4] See "Bamboozled," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d: n. pag.

[5] From June to August, five African American-themed movies entered multiplexes, all achieving a measure—large in most cases—of mainstream success. First, Spike Lee discovery Martin Lawrence starred in *Big Momma's House*. Released as counterprogramming to the Tom Cruise star-vehicle *Mission: Impossible II*, *Big Momma's House* opened in second place with $25,661,041, ultimately grossing $117,559,438 for an approximately $88 million profit. John Singleton's reimagining of Gordon Parks's *Shaft* bowed in theaters two weeks later, finishing in first place with $21,714,757 in receipts, the Samuel L. Jackson (an early-Lee regular) starrer eventually grossing $70,334,258 for an approximately $24 million profit. A parody of the late-'90s cycle of slasher films marketed to teen audiences, Keenen Ivory Wayans's *Scary Movie* led the box office for the first weekend of July, opening with $42,346,669, a then-record for a motion picture directed by a black filmmaker. Ultimately, *Scary Movie* would gross $157,019,771 for an approximately $138 million profit, Wayans assuming the record for highest-grossing African American-helmed picture from Sidney Poitier (director of Richard Pryor-Gene Wilder starrer *Stir Crazy*). Wayans would not hold the record for long, as Singleton overtook him three summers later with *2 Fast 2 Furious*, which bowed with $50,472,480. The last weekend in July saw Eddie Murphy reprise his comeback role as Professor Sherman Klump in the sequel *The Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*, which ruled the North American box office the last weekend of July with $42,518,830 in receipts and finishing with a total of $123,309,890 (approximately $39 million profit). In an interview with Bob Strauss, Lee congratulated Keenen Ivory Wayans on his success while simultaneously expressing his discomfort with the type of films that were succeeding with mainstream audiences, Strauss concluding that the filmmaker "worrie[d] that clownishness may be a price of mainstream popularity." See "Big Momma's House," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; "Shaft," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; "Scary Movie," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; "2 Fast 2 Furious," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; "The Nutty Professor II: The Klumps," *Boxofficemojo.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.; Strauss, "Black to Black; A Stream of African-American Films Dominates This Summer's Box Office," *Los Angeles Daily News* 28 Jul. 2000, L.A. Life: n.pag.

[6] See Steve Chagollan, "When They Were 'Kings,'" *Variety* 379.8 (Jul. 17, 2000): 48; Denene Millner, "Standup Sensation; Four Black Jokers – Subject of Spike Lee's New Movie – Put on the Most Successful Comedy Tour in History. How Come Mainstream America Didn't Notice?" *New York Daily News* 6 Aug. 2000, Showtime: 2; and Josh Chetwynd, "Time Will Tell If Kings Conquer Summer Box Office," *USA Today* 23 Aug. 2000, Life: 5D.

[7] While acknowledging to Aftab (257) that Lee "really brought something" to *The Original Kings of Comedy* show, Pierson also credits the editor (Barry Brown) with replicating the "intimacy between what was happening on stage and the audience."

[8] Kuras is the cinematographer of choice for the post-*Malcolm X* Spike Lee Joint: *4 Little Girls*, *He Got Game*, *Summer of Sam*, *Bamboozled*, *A Huey P. Newton Story*, and *Jim Brown: All-American*.

[9] Ever the plutocrat, Knight attests to the unusualness of such a contribution: "I didn't know if it [his donation] was a legitimate expense for the shareholders, so I sent it from my own pocket. … I'm not going to be contributing money personally to every film [Lee] makes." See Aftab 274.

[10] See "25th Hour," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[11] *25th Hour* opened nationwide on January 10, 2003. Paula Massood (5-6) cites its availability on only 450-60 screens as evidence of Disney's dumping the film once it was clear that it would not receive major awards nominations. A philosophical, almost resigned Lee told her that it was simply "a missed opportunity." See Massood, "The Quintessential New Yorker and Global Citizen: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 28.3 (Summer 2003): 4-6. Norton offered a hypothetical alternative release strategy to Aftab (284-5), suggesting that Disney "should have held the movie, taken it to Cannes, somewhere it would have been really appreciated, and put it out in the quiet period in the spring."

[12] On March 23, 2003, the 75th Annual Academy Awards ceremony featured a near-sweep of the major categories by films dramatizing the past: *Chicago* (Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress) for the 1920s, *The Pianist* (Best Director, Best Actor—*Summer of Sam* star Adrien Brody, Best Adapted Screenplay) for the 1940s, and *The Hours* (Best Actress) for the 1920s and '50s.

[13] In response to *25th Hour* being the first Hollywood film to tackle post-9/11 New York City head on, Lee impresses upon Gould that it was never his intention to be the first movie to explore the events of September 11, 2001. See also Bruce Westbrook, "A New York State of Mind; Film Director Spike Lee Reflects on the City and His Film 'The 25th Hour," *Houston Chronicle* 5 Jan. 2003, Zest: 11.

[14] Lee would reiterate his fidelity to artistic duty to Meyer, "Speaking His Mind" 38 and "Filmmakers Reframe New York's Skyline; Three Post-Sept. 11 Productions Vary in How They Portray Impact of the Attacks," *San Francisco Chronicle* 19 Jan. 2003, Sunday Datebook: 36. See also Aftab 280.

[15] Lee takes similar jabs at his colleagues and Hollywood decision makers in interviews with Henerson ("Finest 'Hour'" U6); Benjamin Nugent, "Where Is the 9/11 Film?" *Time* 160.11 (Sep. 11, 2002): 19; Scott Bowles, "Head-on Spike Lee Says 'Hour' Is at Hand," *USA Today* 20 Dec. 2002: 8E; and Stephen Schaefer, "Post Positive; Spike Lee Takes a Look at New York Since 9/11," *Boston Herald* 5 Jan. 2003, Arts and Entertainment: 047.

[16] Ironically, *Spider-Man* star Tobey Maguire had commissioned David Benioff's adaptation of his own 2001 novel (*The 25th Hour*), written before the September 11 attacks. The rechristened *25th Hour* was Maguire's first foray as a producer, and he had also planned to star as Monty. However, after being offered the role of Spider-Man, Maguire stayed on as producer and passed the project to his first choice Edward Norton, who signed on to replace him. See Stephen Schaefer, "Boy Wonder; Tobey Maguire Gets Pumped Up for Superhero Role in 'Spider-Man,'" *Boston Herald* 1 May 2002, Arts and Entertainment: 045. In a separate interview with Schafer (047), Lee professes that he eagerly accepted the assignment in order to work with Norton and tell another story about New York City during a particular point in its history, ala *Summer of Sam*. See "Post Positive; Spike Lee Takes a Look at New York Since 9/11," *Boston Herald* 5 Jan. 2003, Arts and Entertainment: 047. Lee also expresses his desire to work with Norton to Westbrook (11).

[17] Westbrook (11) and Henerson ("Finest 'Hour'" U6) also note the opening credit sequence of *25th Hour*, as do critics Christy Lemire, A.O. Scott, Eleanor Ringel Gillespie, Eric Harrison, Gary Thompson, Stephen Rea, and Mick LaSalle. See their reviews: Lemire, "At the Movies: '25th Hour,'" *Associated Press* 18 Dec. 2002, Entertainment News: n. pag.; Scott, "Film Review; Confronting the Past Before Going to Prison," *New York Times* 19 Dec. 2002, The Arts/Cultural Desk: E3; Gillespie, "At the Movies: '25th Hour'; Spike Lee's Ode to New York," *Atlanta Journal Constitution* 10 Jan. 2003, Arts and Entertainment: 7; Harrison, "Disjointed '25h Hour' Rambles On," *Houston Chronicle* 10 Jan. 2003, Houston: 1; Thompson, "'25th

Hour' Doesn't Tick Along Like Clockwork," *Philadelphia Daily News* 10 Jan. 2003, Features: 37; Rea, "On the Town, Before Up the River; Edward Norton Plays a Drug Dealer Who's Been Ratted Out in Spike Lee's Latest New York Drama," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 10 Jan. 2003, Features Weekend: W03; and LaSalle, "Spike Lee's Love Poem to New York; '25th Hour' Is a Magnificent Elegy for the Post-Sept. 11 City," *San Francisco Chronicle* 10 Jan. 2003, Daily Datebook: D1.

[18] Henerson further ascribes narrative significance to the score: "Vocals and percussion musically represent the al-Qaida while Irish whistles, bagpipes, and Northumbrian pipes suggest the New York Police and Fire Departments. During the credit-opening musical sequence, the listener hears the two musical styles blended as an Arabic singer accompanies a bagpiper." See Henerson, "'25th Hour' Composer Knows His Client Well," *Houston Chronicle* 12 Jan. 2003, Zest: 14. Reviewing *25th Hour* for *Variety*, David Rooney correctly identifies the "Arabic" vocalist as "British-based Sri Lankan musician Manickam Yogeswaran" (40). See "25th Hour," *Variety* 277.51 (Dec. 16, 2002): 18-9.

[19] Schaefer ("Post Positive" 047), Westbrook (11), Meyer ("Speaking His Mind" 38), Gillespie ("Ode" 7), Harrison ("Rambles" 1), Rea ("Up the River" W03), and LaSalle ("Love Poem" D1) also acknowledge the ground zero scene. So, too, do Stephen Holden, "Film; New York, Post-9/11 and Pre-," *New York Times* 5 Jan. 2003, Arts and Leisure Desk: 13; James Verniere, "Lee Uses Poetic Pulse in NYC Film," *Boston Herald* 10 Jan. 2003, Arts and Entertainment: s11; Desson Howe, "'25th Hour': Overly Spiked Punch," *Washington Post* 10 Jan. 2003, Weekend: T41; Ann Hornaday, "'25th Hour: Stunningly True to Its Time," *Washington Post* 10 Jan. 2003, Style: C01; and Ryan Gilbey, "25th Hour," *Sight and Sound* 13.3 (Mar. 2003): 58.

[20] Lee also emphasizes the importance of balance to Meyer ("Filmmakers Reframe New York's Skyline" 36).

[21] Lee confesses to Schaefer ("Post Positive" 047) that *25th Hour* is "probably one of the easiest films I'd been involved in."

[22] Only Schaefer ("Post Positive" 047) and Jack Mathews drew attention to the predominantly white cast of *25th Hour*, Schaefer incorrectly noting that it "represents the first time Lee has directed a predominantly white cast." See Mathews, "With Going-to-Jail Tale, Spike's a Repeat Offender," *New York Daily News* 19 Dec. 2002, Now: 48.

[23] Richard Corliss concludes that the post-September 11 setting also serves to indicate character, the movie itself "suggest[ing] that Gothamites have been frozen in their tracks, like emotional zombies waiting to see if the next attack can make them feel deader than they already do." See Corliss, "25th Hour," *Time* 160.26 (Dec. 23, 2002): 72. LaSalle ("Love Poem" D1) concurs, charging the 9/11 material with illuminating the characters' mental state: "it's as if everyone in the film has been hit in the head and is just coming to. The pace of scenes is measured, and the characters ... seem not only uncertain but also in reaction against their uncertainty." Finally, Gilbey (58) ascribes a symbolic function to the September 11 references, positing that Lee's portrait of the wounded city is a metaphor for male heterosexuality in crisis.

[24] Revisiting *Jungle Fever*, Aftab (131-2) notes that Lee "was exhibiting a penchant for having characters return to his films. The keen-eyed viewer of *Mo' Better Blues* will spot Tommy Hicks and Tracy Camila Johns in the audience at Beneath the Underground, and others may notice that the first time we see Sam Jackson as Madlock he is listening to 'We Love Radio.' … In-jokes and repeat appearances are little gimmicks that Spike loves." Addressing his fidelity to intertextuality, Lee confirms to Aftab (132) that "[w]e always put little things in the films that people can discover fifteen years later. A lot of people don't remember that the same cops who killed Radio Raheem in *Do the Right Thing* are the same cops who push Wesley [Snipes] as Flipper up against the wall in *Jungle Fever*. They come back in another film too. You can't do it all the time, but if people are memorable to me and I like 'em and it feels right for the film I'll do it. I'm not going to force-feed it. Look at Agent Flood in *25th Hour*, played by Isiah Whitlock Jr. – it's

conceivable that he works in the New York City Police Department and through hard work he gets promoted to the SEC and returns to play that role in *She Hate Me*.

[25] Conard (28) situates Jacob in opposition to Monty and Frank, identifying the schoolteacher as *25th Hour*'s symbol of incontinence. Jacob's infatuation with Mary, and his eventual acting on it, is a visual representation of incontinence: he "understands the harmfulness of the pleasures in question, but owing to either weakness or impetuosity, he fails to act correctly."

[26] In endnote 25 (168), Gaines credits the fuck monologue with revealing the former drug dealer's doppelganger: his "fractured self."

[27] According to Patricia O'Neill (6), at the end of *25th Hour* Monty "is heading inexorably north" to Otisville prison, towards further abjection. In her article, O'Neill explores the inherent tension between localization and globalization and their convergence in New York and the NYC of the Spike Lee Joint. See "Where Globalization and Localization Meet: Spike Lee's *The 25th Hour*," *CineAction* 64 (Spring 2004): 2-7.

[28] Considering Monty's working-class upbringing and ascension to the middle class by way of the illegal drug trade, it is noteworthy that *A Place in the Sun*, about a lower-class man striving to climb the social ladder, was his mother's favorite movie.

[29] LeDuff (1), Strauss ("Camp" U7), Scott ("Confronting the Past" E3), Holden ("Post-9/11 and Pre-" 13), Harrison ("Rambles" 1), Thompson ("Clockwork" 32), Howe ("Overly Spiked Punch" T41), and Hornaday ("True to Its Time" C01). Rooney (40), however, recognizes the *Do the Right Thing* influence in terms of Lee's execution of the narrative, which unfolds over the course of one 24-hour period.

[30] In an interview with Massood (9), Benioff's answer to a question about the influence of *Do the Right Thing* on his novel suggests a subconscious Lee influence. See Paula J. Massood, "Doyle's Law: An Interview with David Benioff," *Cineaste* 28.3 (Summer 2003): 8-10.

[31] Also during the interview with Massood ("Doyle's Law" 9), Benioff considers the fuck monologue "a love letter and a hate letter. For any New Yorker there are times when you adore your city, and there are times when you can't stand it."

[32] In a deleted scene reminiscent of *She's Gotta Have It*, Monty faces the camera and confesses to the audience his motivation for selling drugs: "sway." What follows are a sequence of confessionals from his loved ones, all providing their definition of sway:

> Monty: [from the back of the limo Nikolai chartered for him] You know, people think I was after the money, and I was in a way. I mean, let's face it: money gets you nice things. I like Italian shoes and a fast car just like anybody else, but I don't need 'em. It wasn't like I grew up poor. I wasn't chasing the money, I was chasing the feeling. What I hungered for was sway.
> Kostya: [hanging out and posturing on the street corner] Sway helps make you money, and money helps make you sway. But sway is not money. This is sway …
> Naturelle: [jogging through East River Park] Sway is walking into the Import Warehouse in Brooklyn. All the clothes from Europe straight off the boat, still wrapped in plastic: Gucci, Prada, YSL [Yves Saint Laurent]. You can pick out what you want because everybody knows your boyfriend, and everyone owes him a favor.
> Jacob: [teaching his class] Sway is walking into the best 5-star restaurant in the city without a reservation and being seated right away.

> Frank: [rolling through the offices of Shreve Zimmer in his chair] Sway? [sneers] That's making a phone call in the morning and having courtside seats, Madison Square Garden, that evening. Lakers versus Knicks. Kobe and Shizzaq in the hizzouse.
> Mary: [in line outside Bridge] Sway is entering a club through the staff entrance, so you can skip the line, the cover charge, and the metal detector.
> Monty: [now strolling down the sidewalk along the East River] Sway is locking eyes with an undercover cop on the subway. You know what he is, and he knows what you are, and
> you wink at him 'cause he drives a battered Buick and you drive a vintage muscle car, and he cannot touch you. That, my friends, is sway.

[33] Benioff observes that his screenplay's shifting of the perspective from Monty to James during the ending fantasy sequence enhances the "sense ... that's there in the book, that his father is not going to survive Monty's seven years in jail." See Massood, "Doyle's Law" 10.

[34] During dinner at the Chinatown bar, Jacob critiques Frank's table manners, in the process taking him to task for his chosen profession: "You spend the whole week figuring out how to defraud foreign governments, whatever you do, and then you-you get out of there and you go out to the strange world outside your office called reality and you don't know how to behave."

[35] Having a drink at the bar after dinner, Jacob admits his obsession with Mary to Frank through a convoluted story involving a fictitious colleague, which Frank handily recognizes as Jacob himself.

[36] During dinner, after Frank's rather involved explanation behind the rating system he developed for New York City bachelors, Jacob questions Frank's focus on his physical appearance. Frank's responses reveal his denial:

> Jacob: Doesn't dyeing your hair drop you down a few places?
> Frank: Nope, not at all. Only bothers women if it bothers me.
> Jacob: Going gray does bother you.
> Frank: No, it doesn't.
> Jacob: Of course it does. If it didn't bother you, you wouldn't smear that goop all over your scalp 10 billion times a day.
> Frank: Hey, it's a non-issue, Jake.

[37] In an endnote, Aftab (276) defines step-back as "[t]he time given to a nonviolent first-time offender not judged to be a risk to public safety between sentencing and serving the jail sentence to put his affairs in order."

[38] Amy Taubin (13) characterizes Doyle as a "mostly pit-bull mutt." Unsure of Doyle's breed, Monty nonetheless assures a fearful Kostya that the dog is not a pit bull. I have yet to locate a credible source that identifies the breed of canine which plays Doyle. See Taubin, "Going Down," *Sight and Sound* 13.4 (Apr. 2003): 13-5.

[39] This bark reflects a subscription to normative gender performance consistent with Judith Butler's theory, one that Lee may be familiar with. However, although he seems to be aligning himself with Butler's notion, I hesitate to argue such a point due to Lee's often questionable filmic depictions of women. See Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, 1997, rpt. in *Feminist Theory Reader*, eds. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, 2010. 419-30.

[40] Considering his infatuation with Mary, the subtext here is that Jacob is numbering himself amongst such guys—that he in fact is speaking of himself.

[41] Barry Pepper notes that the "characters aren't all they appear on the surface." See *Evolution of an American Filmmaker*.

[42] Immediately before Monty's request of Kostya's gun, the drug dealer observes the dog's condition: "I bet he lost somebody some money, though." This observation foreshadows Monty's arrest and conviction, which effectively loses Nikolai money by removing one of his pushers off the street. After determining Doyle's will to live, Monty again foreshadows his prison sentence, assuring Kostya that taking him to the vet is a good thing: "[I]t's like a baby, okay. They don't scream and bitch like that, you know. They-they see the doctor coming with the needle. It's good for him in the long run." Prison, too, despite Monty's fear of going inside, could be good for him in the long run.

[43] Initially, Jacob is leery of taking in Doyle, citing the size of his apartment. Monty's rejoinder—"So what? Doyle's a tough dog. He's seen worse, you know. He'll learn to live in a small space. He'll survive"—further distinguishes Doyle as Monty's doppelganger. Monty, too, will have to learn to live in a small space in prison.

[44] Norton voices nearly identical sentiments in an interview with Demetrios Matheou. See "Interview: Edward Norton," *Sight and Sound* 13.4 (Apr. 2003): 12.

[45] Monty's drug-dealing and picking up a barely-legal Naturelle while doing so, Jacob's crush on his underage student Mary, and Frank's stubborn refusal to move out of his apartment across the street from Ground Zero despite the EPA's warnings of poor air quality lead Ebert to deem *25th Hour* an exercise in the sometimes detrimental effects of human nature. To Ebert the three lifelong friends exhibit an attitude of "we want what we want, no matter the social price." Citing each man's chosen profession, Taubin (14) considers Monty, Jacob, and Frank self-destructive, suggesting that "this tendency to walk close to the edge is a character trait nurtured by New York itself."

[46] Norton concurs during his interview with Matheou (12).

[47] To a certain extent, Benioff rejects the notion that *25th Hour* is a critique of mandatory minimum drug laws, insisting that he does not wish to "suggest that Monty's fate is simply the result of a Draconian government punishment handed down to individuals selling marijuana; it's the result of a felony conviction for selling heroin." See Massood "Doyle's Law" 10.

[48] Frank, during his windowsill chat with Jacob; Agent Flood, while conducting his interrogation; Nikolai, after exposing Kostya as the rat; and James, as he prepares to embark on the journey north to Otisville State Penitentiary, all mention Monty's good looks. Monty's request of Frank to make him ugly is itself a reference to the drug dealer's handsomeness.

Chapter 7: "Things Ain't All They Appear to Be": *Inside Man*'s Reengaging Post-9/11 New York by Revising the Bank Heist Genre

During the four years between *25th Hour* (2002) and *Inside Man* (2006), Spike Lee continued his tradition of following movies exploring universal themes (*Summer of Sam* [1999] and *25th Hour*) with blacker (in terms of characters), more polemical Spike Lee Joints (*Bamboozled* [2000] and *She Hate Me* [2004]). After its rejection for the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, *She Hate Me* bowed in American multiplexes on July 28, 2004 with the platform release *Bamboozled* was subjected to four years earlier and which *Red Hook Summer* (2012) would receive eight years later. In *She Hate Me*, a new feature of the Spike Lee Joint emerges: European characters. The conspicuous presence of the "foreigner" in *She Hate Me* indicates Lee's necessary acquisition of non-American funding in the wake of Hollywood's shift in focus towards blockbusters, especially preexisting properties such as franchises, comic book adaptations, and remakes of television shows and films (Aftab 293).[1] The content of *She Hate Me* likely did little to aid Lee in acquiring American financing, for its focus originates in the fuck monologue of *25th Hour*, particularly Monty's tirade against corporations and their extended reach during the Bush administration. Lee merged his distaste for big business and observation of the evolving nature of family in *She Hate Me*'s story of a corporate whistleblower who turns to impregnating middle- and upper-middle-class lesbians to replace his income (Aftab 291-2).[2] The critical reception of *She Hate Me* supplanted *Girl 6* as the most negative of Lee's career, the film's $365,134 gross (approximately $7,600,000 loss)[3] affirming the filmmaker's position as a mere blip on pop culture radar.

During this four-year period, Lee also (finally) made his mark in television, although the breakthrough came with the price of a continued perception that his career had lost its luster. The filmmaker's 2003 lawsuit against Viacom-owned cable channel The National Network (TNN), which had announced its rebranding as SpikeTV, did little to disprove this perception.[4] The lawsuit against Viacom was ultimately settled in 2004. Tonya Lewis Lee received a monetary settlement, which served to finance her production of *Miracle's Boys* (2005), a six-part miniseries adaptation of Jacqueline Woodson's novel of the same name (Aftab 289). The miniseries helped launch Viacom's teen network, The N, on February 18, 2005. Having directed the first and last segment of *Miracle's Boys*, Lee continued his relationship with Viacom by developing 40 Acres and a Mule's first television series—for Viacom's premium cable channel Showtime. Sam Kitt had brought Alex Tse's script, about tensions between Chinese and black gangs in San Francisco, to Lee with "[t]he plan for Spike to shoot a pilot and hand over the reins to other directors once Showtime decided on how many episodes to commission" (Aftab 289). Rechristened *Sucker Free City* (2005), Tse's screenplay represents, as Preston Holmes[5] notes, "the first time that Spike had done any long-form shooting in California" (qtd. in Aftab 289). Lee considered working with Showtime "small potatoes compared to HBO," declaring the network's "regime change" during shooting responsible for its successive changing of plans from an episodic series to a miniseries to a four-hour miniseries to a two-hour movie (qtd. in Aftab 291). Ultimately, *Sucker Free City* was screened as a "one-off" Spike Lee Joint during the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) before airing on Showtime on February 12, 2005 (Aftab 291). The abject failure of *She*

Hate Me, Lee's lawsuit against Viacom, and his eventual collaboration with Viacom all resulted in little-to-no prerelease coverage of *Inside Man*.

Inside Man as a Spike Lee Joint garnered little-to-no prerelease buzz, reflecting the star-centric marketing approach of distributor Universal Studios. Ali Jaafar reports that per this strategy, Lee's role as director was marginalized,[6] and *Inside Man* became a pop culture event as the next Denzel Washington movie or, in some cases, as the first on-screen collaboration of two-time Oscar winners Denzel Washington and Jodie Foster and recent nominee Clive Owen (5). Reviewers, however, focused on the picture as a Spike Lee Joint. The director was praised for delivering such an accessible film, "mainstream" the adjective of choice in the critical notices.[7] For some, locating *Inside Man* within the bank heist genre was the equivalent of acknowledging its mainstream pedigree.[8] The critical reception towards Lee's working within generic constraints was largely positive as well, the critical conversation centering on his (re)negotiation of the bank heist genre.

Working within a generic framework brought to the forefront Lee's transgressiveness as a filmmaker, which (though largely unnoticed) had been on display in his movies starting with *She's Gotta Have It* in 1986. Ruthe Stein and Wesley Morris suggest that Lee's refusal to rely on the heist movie setup reveals his trangressiveness (E1; 75). J. Hoberman expands on this notion, praising the film and its director: *Inside Man* is "an enjoyable exercise in popcorn pyrotechnics [which] demonstrates that Lee can be relied on to attack the clichés set before him with gusto" ("Catch Me"). Like the supposed "antagonist" in the film, Dalton Russell (Owen), Joe Morgenstern deconstructs the "how" of Lee's attacking the heist picture's conventions, naming the filmmaker's trademark divergent tones: "in part a police procedural ... also a densely detailed -- albeit

sometimes fuzzy -- comic fantasy that revels in the richness of New York's polyglot culture, and in its potential for violence and corruption" (W.1).[9] Indeed, as Christy Lemire notes, the "darkly funny undercurrent" of *Inside Man* aids in subverting the heist genre's conventions, and thus the audience's expectations ("Inside Man").[10] Glenn Whipp, though, considers *Inside Man* a failure as a heist film because of its depiction of the "blaring racial dynamics of New York, loosey-goosey acting, [and] the sardonic humor [that] have nothing to do with the genre" (U9). I argue that *Inside Man*'s self-awareness, a by-product of Lee's transgressiveness, also accounts for Whipp's assessment.

Lee subverts and affirms the heist genre by staging *Inside Man* in terms of earlier, standard-bearing heist movies, particularly Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). Indeed, some critics acknowledge *Dog Day Afternoon* as *Inside Man*'s template. Christy Lemire points out that the protagonist, Detective Keith Frazier (Washington), mentions *Dog Day Afternoon* by name within the diegesis of the film ("Inside Man").[11] Eleanor Ringel-Gillespie, James Verniere, Manohla Dargis, and Stephen Hunter follow suit, Hunter effusing that Frazier and Russell "are on the phone, doing a nice, 'Dog Day Afternoon' imitation, which is funny because both of them have seen 'Dog Day Afternoon' and realize they're in a version of it in reality" (H1; "Seize the Day" e11; E10; C01). Verniere and Christian Toto suggest that *Inside Man* belongs in the same class as *Dog Day Afternoon* ("Seize the Day" e11; D08). Jami Bernard and Stephen Rea take the opposing position, Rea dismissing the latest Spike Lee Joint as "not in the same league" (47; "Hostage Thriller" W03). Perhaps Bernard and Rea maintain this position because of what Todd McCarthy identifies as the absence of "grand theatrics and the

spectacle of the media/law enforcement frenzy" in *Inside Man* that is present in *Dog Day Afternoon* ("Genre Pic" 21). Ruthe Stein also perceives a major difference between the '70s picture and the 21st-century one, deeming *Inside Man* the 'anti-'Dog Day,' ... a film in which the crooks outthink the cops on every move" (E1). Kevin Maher expands on Stein's characterization of the more current picture, arguing that Lee wants the audience to think of *Dog Day Afternoon*, but the '70s film it most resembles is, ironically (based on their history), Norman Jewison's *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) (57). In terms of Lee trying his hand at genre filmmaking, the critics reached consensus on his technical achievements only,[12] resulting in notices declaring *Inside Man* the most impersonal, least passionate work of his career.[13]

Although characterized as impersonal, *Inside Man* became Spike Lee's personal best in terms of box-office success. The film's $29 million opening during the weekend of March 24, 2006 shattered Lee's $11.1 million record for *The Original Kings of Comedy* (Germain "No. 1").[14] The first-place debut also bested Denzel Washington's $22.8 million bow for 2004's *Man on Fire* (Germain "No. 1"). The second figure is most significant because, true to Universal Studios' star-centric marketing strategy, the actors received the lion's share of the credit for the movie's success. In light of *Inside Man*'s box-office triumph, at least one critic thought it appropriate to reevaluate Lee's twenty-year career. Caryn James, albeit briefly, offered a retrospective of Lee's career which highlights his starting point (*She's Gotta Have It*) and her estimation of his three best (*Do the Right Thing* [1989], *Jungle Fever* [1991], and *Bamboozled* [2000]) and worst works (*She Hate Me*). James's assertion is that "a Spike Lee film is more impressive at second glance" and that, after the passage of time, "[i]t's easier now to separate the films from

the inflamed rhetoric -- by Mr. Lee and about him -- that often surrounded them when they opened" (11). This could be attributable to the filmmaker himself, who admits during an interview with Jen Chaney (in which the columnist asserts the generic uniqueness of the Spike Lee Joint), "I speak out a lot less than I used to" (T29).

As is often the case with the critical establishment James and Chaney represent, the columnists make observations already acknowledged by those who have personally worked with Spike Lee. The year before *Inside Man*'s release, Aftab reported Bill Nunn's[15] observation that the Spike Lee Joint invites (I would argue demands) multiple viewings. Recalling his first and subsequent viewings of *School Daze* (1988), Nunn remembers feeling "disappointed. I thought that it was going to be all-round better. But like other Spike films – you can say, 'Man, this sucks,' and then you watch it again and flip over. That's the way that movie has been for me" (qtd. in Aftab 71). *Inside Man* also belongs in the better-the-second-time-around Spike Lee Joints because of its intricately-woven plot by first-time screenwriter Russell Gewirtz. This was not lost on the critical establishment which, in its near-unanimous praise of Gewirtz, posed the question: "Who really authored *Inside Man*?"

The sheer volume of critical notices for Russell Gewirtz is itself unusual because typically, only screenplays are recognized in movie reviews. Lemire initiates the discussion of *Inside Man*'s authorship, revisiting Melvin Donalson's suggestion that Spike Lee is better served working *with* a writer instead of as a writer-director ("Inside Man"; 110). This is likely the only explanation for Gewirtz's notices, although I am tempted to draw a race-based conclusion considering the predominantly nonblack critical establishment: perception demands that someone other than Lee must be responsible for

the most generically formulaic Spike Lee Joint of the filmmaker's career. Ironically, Lee's effusive praise of Gerwirtz's script likely contributed to the scribe's positive reception.[16] In this sense, perhaps the critical notices for Gewirtz merely echoed the filmmaker's notices.[17] Ultimately, though, a segment of the critical establishment fell in line with Lemire's assessment and recognized *Inside Man* as a true collaboration, assigning authorship to both Lee and Gewirtz. This is likely the nexus of Glenn Whipp's estimation of the picture's generic failure due to its comment on ethnicity,[18] improvisational acting,[19] and dark humor. The critical consensus determined such characteristics the result of Lee's involvement, while the genre setup and plotting was attributed to Gerwirtz.[20] Critics who focused more on Lee's fingerprints called attention to the depiction of "background" players such as Miriam and Vikram.[21] This critical context informs the scholarly conversation on *Inside Man,* which brings these background players to the forefront.

The tradition of ascribing subversive racial meaning to any Spike Lee Joint continues in the scholarly conversation on *Inside Man*. R. Colin Tait identifies "the critical reputation that Lee has created for himself as a political filmmaker" as the culprit for the scholarly propensity of interpreting transgressive ethnic comments in his work ("Class and Allegory" 56). In Tait's estimation, "[i]t is impossible, from a critical standpoint, for Lee *not* to make a political film, as his ongoing reputation ostensibly depends on Spike Lee saying highly politicized things about race and class in a straightforward fashion" ("Class and Allegory" 56). As we have witnessed with *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour*, the scholarly conversation often arises out of the critical conversation, and as Tait astutely notes, the critics mirror *Summer of Sam*'s Vinny: they

are on a leash to a certain way of thinking. By extension, so, too, are the scholars. Ironically, this is due to Lee's own leashing to the cinematic presentation of diverse images of blackness and of the Spikeisms (such as overlong, over-editorialized, highly-aestheticized, disjointed images) that characterize his pre-*Summer of Sam* career. Both Tait and David A. Gerstner underscore the post-*Summer of Sam* Spike Lee Joint's shift to more global issues of difference, and they both do so by following the critical conversation and expanding on it. In this case, instead of focusing on the stars, as many critics do, Tait and Gerstner shine a light on the background players.

Gerstner seconds the observations of Jami Bernard, Joe Morgenstern, and (especially) Kevin Maher, each of whom writes a review of *Inside Man* that reaches back to *25th Hour*. The connection between the two pictures—Lee's reprisal of the capitalism critique in the fuck monologue of *25th Hour*—provides the basis for the corporate whistleblower storyline in *She Hate Me*. Bernard, Morgenstern, and Maher are suggesting that, in *Inside Man*, the filmmaker continues his practice of linking a story to post-9/11 New York City. The three critics locate the still-lingering aftereffects of the September 11 attacks in the hostage situation of Manhattan Trust Bank (Bernard 47; Morgenstern "Money" W.1; Maher 57). Gerstner argues that the treatment of the hostages reflects *Inside Man*'s central theme: "the loss of difference" (246). Gerstner suspects that "difference" and "humanity" are analogous terms to Lee, supporting this view by pointing out that Russell and his gang of robbers dress the hostages in coveralls and white masks identical to theirs and gag them with white cloths (247). Citing the color of the masks and gags, Gerstner attests that the result of the hostages' detainment is "the erasure of culture and its conflicting voices" (247). Gerstner aligns himself with Maher by

suggesting that "[u]nder the auspices of the Patriot Act and other state-sanctioned controls, Lee's New York ... is now a place where civil liberties are silenced and 'cultural difference' suggests guilt" (246). The fact that Frazier and Mitchell interrogate the hostages as if they are suspects underscores what Gerstner calls "neo-state control" (246). Ironically, everyone is a suspect because of the homogeneity of the hostages and the robbers. This transgression effectively dispels the notion that *Inside Man* is an apolitical Spike Lee Joint.

Like Gerstner, Tait concludes that *Inside Man* is just as much a Spike Lee Joint as any of the filmmaker's previous, less genrefied works. The two scholars also agree that a major theme is the erasure of difference which results from the hostage taking in Manhattan Trust Bank. Tait, however, departs from Gerstner in terms of genre, arguing that the heist picture itself is subversive. Tait offers as support his observation that "the heist film's central tension always involves a tension between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' and always establishes an alternative set of values within contemporary discourse" (42). Tait's locating *Inside Man* within the tradition of the already-subversive heist genre results in the loss of difference representing a "blank canvas" that "can stand for any" historical atrocity, including the Middle Passage, the Holocaust, and Guantanamo Bay (53). Tait clarifies and expands on Gerstner's "neo-state control" idea. For Tait, capitalism—or the state's upholding of capitalism—is the root of such atrocities, just as it is for the hostages' current predicament (43-4). In a trangression characteristic of the heist genre, though, would-be antagonist Dalton Russell takes the employees and customers of Manhattan Trust Bank hostage in order to expose bank founder and CEO Arthur Case's (Christopher Plummer) alignment with the alternative ideology of Nazism.

The length to which Case had gone in his subjection to capitalism reveals him as *Inside Man*'s true antagonist.

Case leads a cast of characters which bear the mark of Lee's previous 21st-century characters: they embody Robin Wood's revolutionary and neurotic psychic position binary, and they exhibit fear and self-loathing based on their respective consciousness. However, likely because of the restrictions imposed by generic conventions, the characters that the near universally-praised cast[22] play are not as overtly psychologically complex,[23] especially Russell, who Amy Biancolli characterizes as "lacking any psychic baggage" (3). This is itself a psychic position. The opening, pre-credit scene immediately establishes Dalton Russell as the revolutionary presence in *Inside Man*. Comprised of a single, continuous closeup during which Russell addresses the audience (ala *She's Gotta Have It*) by preemptively answering common journalistic questions—who, what, when, where, why, and how—his monologue functions as both an introduction to the character and the narrative as a whole. The what, when, and why are especially significant due to the acceptance of responsibility explicit in his words: "The 'what' is easy. Recently I planned and set in motion events to execute the perfect bank robbery; that's also the 'when.' As for the 'why,' beyond the obvious financial motivation, it's exceedingly simple: because I can."

This monologue is revisited during one of the endings,[24] when we see Russell for the last time. He has emerged from his self-imposed, week-long incarceration behind the wall of a Manhattan Trust Bank storeroom and exited through the front door, just as he promised both Frazier and Miss White (Foster) he would do. On the way out, he again comes face-to-face with Frazier, "accidentally" bumping into him, and leaving a parting

gift in the hostage negotiator's suit coat pocket. After piling into an SUV with his accomplices—girlfriend "Stevie" (Kim Director), "Steve-O" (James Ransone), "Steve" (Carlos Andres Gomez), and Chaim (Bernard Rachelle)—Russell amends his original monologue:

> I'm no martyr. I did it for the money. But it's not worth much if you can't face yourself in the mirror. Respect is the ultimate currency. I was stealing from a man who traded his away for a few dollars. And then he tried to wash away his guilt. Drown it in a lifetime of good deeds and a sea of respectability. It almost worked, too. But inevitably, the further you run from your sins, the more exhausted you are when they catch up to you. And they do. Certain. It will not fail.

This voiceover references Russell's uncovering the secret Case had hidden in his own bank: a vague but lucrative involvement with the Nazis during World War II. Russell's concluding voiceover also affirms his earlier admission of planning the holdup of Manhattan Trust and reveals his motivation for doing so. Ultimately, Russell's final address cements the robber as *Inside Man*'s agent of change, as does the accompanying revelation of his leaving a Cartier diamond ring in Case's safe-deposit box as evidence that Frazier will use to implicate the banker as a war criminal. Thus, Dalton Russell occupies the same space as ".44-caliber Killer/Son of Sam" David Berkowitz in *Summer of Sam*.

Sandwiched between Russell's introductory and concluding scenes are two additional, essential scenes that illustrate Russell's position as both an agent of change and upholder of Wood's revolutionary ideal. The two scenes take place inside the bank,

where Russell holds dozens of New Yorkers hostage while simultaneously demonstrating a revolutionary psychic position. As part of his negotiation with Frazier, Russell allows Miss White to enter the bank because she is neither a police officer nor a bank representative. We should note that Frazier only permits Miss White to go in and talk to Russell due to his own separate negotiation with her and the mayor (Peter Kybart). We should also acknowledge Miss White's ability to traverse areas where officers of the law and even a bank CEO such as Arthur Case cannot enter, her entire operation functioning outside the law, in concert with the law, and even above the law. In this context, perhaps Miss White stands beside Berkowitz and *25th Hour*'s Monty Brogan as 21st-century, Spike Lee Joint liminal figures. Miss White definitely embodies power, as her moniker implies.[25] In one of many cat-and-mouse conversations that reveal power relations, Russell gains the upper hand, perhaps because he is the only pure revolutionary in *Inside Man*. His polite rejection of Miss White's $2 million guarantee in exchange for his surrender effectively turns her own evasiveness against her:

> Russell: Why don't you talk to me about these interests you're here to protect?
>
> Miss White: I'm afraid I can't.
>
> Russell: I can. ... During World War II, there was an American working for a bank in Switzerland. Now, I don't need to tell you that this period in history was rife with opportunity for people of low morals. People like this man. He used his position with the Nazis to enrich himself while all around him people were being stripped of everything they owned. Then he used his blood money to start a bank. Now, does this sound like it might

> be the man you work for? ...
>
> Miss White: I believe we understand each other.
>
> Russell: Good. So what the hell can you do for me since I clearly know more than you do, and I've planned this to perfection? ... What is it that you want?
>
> Miss White: Two minutes. The safety deposit box room. I just need to go to one box.
>
> Russell: Looking for this? [Slides aged, authentic Nazi paraphernalia underneath a bank teller window to her] This could be very embarrassing to your employer. He should have destroyed this a long time ago.[26] He didn't, so now it's mine. Now, if the day ever comes where I have to stand before a judge and account for what I did here, you and your boss will do whatever it takes to help me. ...
>
> Miss White: How did you know about all this?
>
> Russell: Doesn't matter. Fact is, all lies, all evil deeds, they stink. You can cover them up for a while, but they don't go away.

True to his concluding voiceover, Russell chooses respect—for himself and, presumably, those victimized by Nazism—by choosing a shorter (one-week), self-imposed term in a self-constructed prison.

During this scene with Miss White, Russell's frequent proclamations of his meticulous planning further distinguish him as a revolutionary. In his plan, even the hostages play a role, albeit an unwitting one: Russell clothes them in the same style of painter's coveralls and masks as he and his crew wear.[27] In addition to being

revolutionary in terms of accepting responsibility for his actions (planning the robbery and hostage-taking in this instance), Russell's dressing the hostages in his attire affords him the opportunity to roam free inside the bank and remain invisible to the authorities watching from across the street. Therefore, one could argue that Russell functions as *Inside Man*'s liminal figure based on his physical ability to move about undetected and, as the inside man, hide unimpeded. This freedom combines with his seemingly limitless knowledge of highly sensitive information, intelligence that even Miss White and the mayor are not privy to, particularly concerning Case's secret. Russell is thus revealed as the instrument of divine/kharmic retribution that Vinny, in *Summer of Sam*, perceives Berkowitz to be.

Russell and Frazier's initial face-to-face inside Manhattan Trust is the second scene which supports the notion of the hostage-taker's status as revolutionary figure and agent of change. After finally agreeing to let an unarmed Frazier in to assess the crime scene and assure the relative well-being of the hostages, the negotiator makes Russell another offer he can refuse, the resulting banter underscoring the bank robber's revolutionary psychic position:

> Russell: Any other proposals?
>
> Frazier: Oh, please. Do not say 'proposals.' My girlfriend, she wants a proposal from me.
>
> Russell: You think you're too young to get married?
>
> Frazier: No, I'm not too young. I'm too broke. Maybe I should rob a bank.
>
> Russell: You love each other?
>
> Frazier: Yeah. Yeah, we do.

Russell: Then money shouldn't really matter.

Frazier: Thank you, bank robber.

Russell: I'm just saying. Money can't buy love.

Again, Russell does not place paramount importance on money, even though the irony of his unapologetic robbing of a bank is palpable. Although Russell's standing as agent of change is not explicitly referenced in this scene, it is foreshadowed in this confrontation as well as when we first meet Frazier. At his desk in the police station, after a simultaneously tense and playful telephone conversation with his girlfriend, Sylvia (Cassandra Freeman), Frazier reveals his anxieties about marriage to his partner, Bill Mitchell (Chiwitel Ejiofor):

Frazier: Of course, if we got married then things would be different.

Mitchell: What's wrong with that?

Frazier: A wedding. Furniture. Kids. You know what a diamond ring costs?

The absolute ending of *Inside Man*—Frazier's discovery that Russell slipped a diamond from Case's safe-deposit box into his suit-coat pocket—distinguishes the bank-robber/hostage-taker as an agent of change in Frazier's personal life and perhaps upholds both Russell's liminality and supernaturality. Russell has supplied Frazier's need by giving him a diamond, simultaneously taking away the detective's excuses: he can marry Sylvia now.

On the surface, Frazier's anxiety about getting married seems indicative of a neurotic psychic state. However, once we remind ourselves that marrying (or at least asking to marry) Sylvia is within Frazier's control, we discover that the detective's

aversion to marriage is in fact revolutionary in nature. During his confab with Mitchell and also his first encounter with Russell, Frazier voices his rejection (at least to a certain extent) of the notion of heterosexual coupling and reproduction that Robin Wood identifies as the result of surplus repression. This sort-of psychological misdirection results from a nuance that Ruthe Stein recognizes, the critic arguing that Frazier is the most developed of the principal characters in *Inside Man* (E1). Like Russell, Frazier's revolutionary disposition is on display when we first meet him—on the phone, kind of arguing with Sylvia—in response to circumstances beyond his control:

> Frazier: Baby, I'm fighting for my life over here.
>
> Sylvia: Keith, every time we have this conversation, it's the same thing, "Not now."
>
> Frazier: Listen, listen. Do you know what kind of thin ice I'm on right now with this check-cashing thing? They want to lock me up. If this 140 grand doesn't show up somewhere soon, things gonna get rough for me.
>
> Sylvia: But you didn't take it.
>
> Frazier: Of course I didn't take it, baby. It's just some lying drug dealer trying to save his own ass by fucking me over. Eventually, it'll go away.

Because of the potential severity of what Frazier faces, one could infer that he would respond in a neurotic fashion; however, whenever he confronts questions of the missing $140,000 from the Madrugada check-cashing bust, he insists that there was no wrongdoing on his part. Three subsequent scenes illustrate his steadfastness.

The first of these three supporting scenes occurs in the back of the mayor's SUV, where Miss White attempts to flex her muscle by refusing to inform Frazier of her reason

for being at the bank and using the missing $140,000 to essentially extort him into allowing her to enter the bank and talk to Russell. Frazier's retort is one of recognition and decisiveness: "Oh, I see. Well, I had nothing to do with that." This reaction, as well as his revelation of secretly taping the meeting with Miss White and the mayor, further distinguishes Frazier as a revolutionary. Before this disclosure, though, Frazier reassures Miss White of his autonomy after she has left the bank, unsuccessful in her pitch to Russell. Like the robber/hostage-taker, Frazier engages in a game of cat and mouse. He directly attacks Miss White's evasiveness, which in this instance is in providing her assessment of the hostage-taker: "[Y]ou don't own me. This check-cashing thing, this-this coke bust, I can face that on my own. I know what I did and didn't do." Finally, Frazier's resolve concerning the Madrugada check-cashing bust is rewarded when, after his summing up the Manhattan Trust Bank heist/hostage situation to Captain Coughlin (Peter Gerety), he is told that the $140,000 turned up:

> Coughlin: [Y]ou wanna know where it was?
>
> Frazier: In my bank account?
>
> Coughlin: No.
>
> Frazier: My summer house in Sag Harbor?
>
> Coughlin: No.
>
> Frazier: My wallet?
>
> Coughlin: No.
>
> Frazier: Then, no, I don't wanna know.

Frazier's lack of control over the $140,000 after turning it in as evidence, and his future as a detective and free man by virtue of its misplacement, are circumstances ripe for

neurosis. However, Frazier's certainty of the appropriateness of his actions when the money became his responsibility enables him to both account for the money while it was in his care and seize control of his future (as Detective First-Grade) by cutting a deal with Miss White and the mayor in exchange for Miss White's intrusion into the hostage situation. This final act exhibits the exact, precise forward-thinking exhibited by Frazier's would-be rival, Russell, thus revealing the cop and the robber as doppelgangers. Frazier's deal with Miss White and the mayor, however, is not the only deal portrayed in *Inside Man*, for before Frazier is able to broker his agreement, Arthur Case had to contract Miss White to interject herself in the bank robbery turned hostage situation.

Just as we did with Russell and Frazier, we immediately learn of Case's psychological standing upon his introduction. In this instance, that position appears as one of neuroses. Immediately after being informed of the robbery/hostage situation at Manhattan Trust, Case contacts Miss White, their subsequent stroll down the sidewalk along the East River revealing his neuroses:

> White: [Y]ou say that there are family heirlooms inside your safety deposit box. That's fine. But in my experience, people like you have people working for them that handle these kinds of things. And when they can't, well, they don't call me. Their people call me. So, immediately, I know that there's something in that box that you don't even want your closest aides to know about. No problem with me. You tell me I don't need to know what's in that box and I don't need to know. But if you tell me that it's a bunch of old baseball cards and I find out that it's the launch codes for a nuclear missile, then let's just say we no longer have an

agreement. ...

Case: What's inside that box, young lady, has belonged to me since before you were born. It's very valuable and poses no danger whatsoever to anyone.

White: Except you. Okay. Well, first, there are men with guns in there, so I can't guarantee any results. Agreed?

Case: Of course. ...

White: Now, um, what makes you think that they want to rob your box?

Case: I don't.

White: Well, why don't you tell me how you would like this to end?

Case: I'd prefer that nobody ever touch my safe-deposit box. Not them, not you, not the authorities. And the sooner this situation ends, the happier I'll be. Is that specific enough for you?

White: No.

Case: The contents of that box are of great value to me. So long as they remain my secret.

White: And if they're exposed?

Case: I'll face some difficult questions.

White: So it stays locked or it disappears.

Case: Precisely. Can you make that happen?

White: Yes.

Case: I hope so. I have to say, I can't help but be skeptical.

> White: Whoever gave you my number got the same deal. Clearly, they must have been satisfied.

The uncertainty that informs Case's concern about the status of his safe-deposit box, even though he admits to not knowing anyone who would want to pillage it, is the epitome of neuroses. Case is anxious because thieves have commandeered his bank and have access to his safe-deposit box—a situation he cannot control. Seemingly. However, in actuality—as Russell tells us when he slides the aged, authentic Nazi paraphernalia to Miss White while they are face-to-face inside the bank—Case "should have destroyed this a long time ago." Had the banker done so, he would not be haunted by the specter of being discovered as a Nazi sympathizer, and Miss White's presence would not have been required in the bank heist/hostage situation. Therefore, like Frazier's aversion to marriage, Case's dread of being exposed is of his own doing, by choice, a revolutionary position.

Case himself exhibits a revolutionary nature after the bank robbery is over. In his final conversation with Miss White, Case takes responsibility for his actions:

> Case: Tell me about the envelope. Where is it now?
>
> White: Well, the gang leader is going to hang onto it, as an insurance policy to keep you from seeking revenge. Clearly, he has a very low opinion of you.
>
> Case: And what might that be?
>
> White: Well, let's see. In a nutshell, um, that you got rich, doing business with the Nazis during the Holocaust.
>
> Case: Yes. It was 60 years ago. I was young and ambitious. I saw a short

path to success, and I took it. I sold my soul. And I've been trying to buy it back ever since. But you and this, uh, mystery man, you have an understanding?

White: I think so. And he managed to get out of there with the envelope. If someday he comes back to blackmail you, well, you'll pay him. And you'll get it back. So, I guess that's it.

Case: I suppose so.

White: Bullshit.

Case: I beg your pardon?

White: He didn't go through all that just to stick your envelope under his mattress. Look, they left money untouched, Arthur.

Case: So?

White: So, he had to have walked out of there with something else. The bank says that there was nothing missing. So, there had to have been something in that box that was worth more to him than your envelope. You don't have to tell me. There's only one thing it could be anyway. Diamonds.

Case: And then there's the ring. Cartier ring. It belonged to the wife of a Parisian banker. Wealthy family of French Jews. And when the war came along, the ring and everything else they owned was confiscated, and they were shipped off to concentration camps. None survived. We were friends. I could have helped them. But the Nazis paid too well. Can I trust that you

> will keep what you've learned here today confidential? Despite whatever you may think?

Case's confession contains not only his acceptance of responsibility for his actions during World War II, but also his attempted atonement via extensive philanthropy over the 60 years since. The fact that the motivation behind his philanthropic endeavors resides in a stashed-away document, as well as the remorseful intonation of his account to Miss White, suggests that Case is guilt-ridden. Russell, on the other hand, during his concluding voiceover, explicitly assesses Case's philanthropy as penitent: "[H]e tried to wash away his guilt. Drown it in a lifetime of good deeds and a sea of respectability." The burden that is Case's remorse, the extensive period he has borne it, and the response it elicits from him affirm our first impression: he is a neurotic on par with *Summer of Sam*'s Vinny and *25th Hour*'s Frank. The presentations of both Frazier and Case, then, employ the narrative tactic of the bait and switch (or bait-switch, bait-switch as it relates to Case). Most significantly, like Vinny, Case's guilt indicates his own self-loathing, the banker's hatred of himself due to his actions during World War II, which were themselves motivated by fear.

The youthful ambition Case speaks to Miss White about reveals his fear of the Other, namely the proletariat. More specifically, he dreads *becoming* a member of that group, his business dealings with the well-paying Nazis ensuring his freedom from being Otherized. However, just as his post-World War II philanthropy functions as an admission of culpability, Case's funding of his prosperity with Nazi blood money suggests an endorsement (or at least acceptance) of the alternative ideology of Nazism, a system of beliefs based on a fear of ethnic Otherness. Therefore, the measures Case takes

to resist being categorized as an economic Other in his youth ironically result in his classification, at least in the eyes of history, as an ideological/political Other. Now an elderly man, Case acknowledges his Otherness, which accounts for the second, major desperate measure of his adult life: calling in Miss White to ensure that that Otherness will not be exposed. Case, though, is not the only character that makes a deal with the devil.

In response to Frazier's aggressive tactics after Russell's marriage pep talk, the robber/hostage-taker stages a faux execution, thus prompting Captain Coughlin to relieve Frazier of his duties in favor of SWAT Captain Darius (Willem Dafoe). Darius subsequently orders a full breach, formulates a plan for his team to storm the bank, and takes his position with the team, leaving Frazier and Mitchell behind in the Mobil Command Center. The hostage negotiator then shares with his partner the specifics of his meeting with Miss White and the mayor:

> Mitchell: If this goes wrong, they're gonna dump this whole mess in your lap, you know?
>
> Frazier: I'm making First-Grade.
>
> Mitchell: What?
>
> Frazier: I'm making First-Grade. Things ain't all they appear to be. ... Thank the mayor and our mystery guest for that.
>
> Mitchell: You cut a deal with those guys?
>
> Frazier: Never make First-Grade? Shit. Worked too hard to let that happen. Everybody's getting theirs. I'ma get mine.

Frazier's admission contextualizes both his earlier warning to Miss White before ordering the police spotlights off for ten minutes so she could travel inside the bank and make her pitch to Russell, and her evasiveness in divulging the particulars of her face-to-face with Russell:

> Frazier: I know this game is a mile over my head, but if you fuck me ... …
>
> White: Look, Detective, our arrangement doesn't include me giving you a detailed explanation.

Frazier's admission confirms our suspicions of his dealmaking. Like Case, Frazier's agreement with White is motivated by money; however, the detective is negotiating *from* a position of economic Other in order to *ascend* from the proletariat. In this way, perhaps Frazier and Case function as doppelgangers. Additionally, Frazier's economic Otherness accounts for his rejection of heterosexual coupling, which *he* admits to Sylvia (and to us) upon his introduction: "Then, you know, I'll make First-Grade and we'll have enough money to buy a bigger place and then, you know …." His negotiation—an essential component of his profession—of a promotion bears additional fruit: Russell's diamond gift. Now in possession of a diamond, presumably Frazier will marry Sylvia and enter into heteronormativity, which then might unveil his own neurosis.

Frazier's assertion—"I'ma get mine"—also seems neurotic. This confession, as well as the deal that precedes it, casts *Inside Man*'s characters (including Russell) in an entirely different light. Mahnola Dargis calls attention to the preponderance of deal-making in the movie, observing the self-centeredness of its principal characters: Miss White "seems interested only in getting hers. Russell wants his ill-gotten gains, Detective Frazier wants his promotion, and the bank bigwig … wants his secrets kept" (E10).[28] In

this context, then, the major characters of *Inside Man* function as doppelgangers to lifelong friends Vinny and Ritchie (*Summer of Sam*) and Monty, Frank, and Jacob (*25th Hour*—all characters (even Ritchie and Monty) who exhibit varying levels of neurosis. Roger Ebert sums it up best in his review of *25th Hour*. According to Ebert, Monty's drug-dealing and underage courting of Naturelle, Jacob's crush on his underage student Mary, and Frank's stubborn refusal to move out of his apartment across the street from Ground Zero function as demonstrations of the particularly New York-style attitude—"we want what we want, no matter the social price"—displayed by Russell, Frazier, Case, and Miss White ("25th Hour"). Stephen Hunter also links the principal characters of *Inside Man* with those of *25th Hour* and *Summer of Sam* in his praise of Spike Lee's direction: he "may be at his best when people are shouting at each other, or deploying other forms of verbal aggression, trying to manipulate this way and that, groping for leverage, trying to avoid getting pinned. Everybody's a con!" (C01). Indeed, Russell, Frazier, Case, and Miss White are performing, much like Vinny and Ritchie and Monty, Frank, Jacob, and James. I would go even further and argue that the result of the performance in *Inside Man* mirrors Lee's own commercial impulse. Like Mookie (played by Lee himself) in *Do the Right Thing*, these characters "gots ta' get paid."

[1] Seeking European funding was becoming more and more common for independent filmmakers. Woody Allen exploits this practice, as the settings of his 21st-century oeuvre suggest: England for *Match Point* (2005), *Scoop* (2006), *Cassandra's Dream* (2007), and *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (2010); Spain for *VickyChristinaBarcelona* (2008); France for *Midnight in Paris* (2011); and Italy for *To Rome with Love* (2012).

[2] Aftab (292) includes a personal anecdote from Lee about him and his wife explaining to their two young children why some of their classmates have parents of the same sex. The director concludes that this teaching moment inspired him to insert the lesbian-impregnating storyline in *She Hate Me*.

[3] See "She Hate Me," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[4] Aftab (288-9) extensively chronicles Lee's issue with Viacom, arguing TNN's rebranding would result in confusion with the brand "Spike Lee," as well as the filmmaker's hiring of O.J. Simpson's defense attorney (Johnnie Cochran) to handle the case.

[5] Holmes served as production supervisor on *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Crooklyn*. He also was co-producer of *Malcolm X*, *She Hate Me*, and *Sucker Free City*.

[6] Wesley Morris concurs, observing that "the trailers made *Inside Man* look like another starry crime flick, and, disturbingly, Lee's name only appeared at the end, in the fine print." See "Recommended: Inside Man," *Film Comment* 42.4 (Jul./Aug. 2006): 75.

[7] See J. Hoberman, "Catch Me If You Can; By-the-Numbers Heist Flick Spiked with Ethnic Vaudeville," *Villagevoice.com*, Village Voice, 14 Mar. 2006: n. pag.; Todd McCarthy, "Lee Spikes Genre Pic," *Variety* 402.5 (Mar. 20, 2006): 21; Christy Lemire, "At the Movies: 'Inside Man,'" *Associated Press* 22 Mar. 2006, Entertainment News: n. pag.; Eleanor Ringel Gillespie, "Combination That Clicks? Bank on It; Sharp 'Inside Man' Dividends Beyond Heist Formula," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 24 Mar. 2006, Arts and Entertainment: H1; James Verniere, "Siege the Day; Spike Lee Negotiates Winner with 'Inside Man,'" *Boston Herald* 24 Mar. 2006, Arts and Entertainment: e11; Jami Bernard, "Spike's 'Inside' Moves," *New York Daily News* 24 Mar. 2006, Now: 47; Stephen Hunter, "Soaring Interest; Spike Lee's 'Inside Man' Is a Tense Bank Heist Drama That Compounds by the Minute," *Washington Post* 24 Mar. 2006, Style: C01; David Ansen, "All the Way to the Bank; Spike Lee Scores with the Taut, Entertaining 'Inside Man,'" *Newsweek* 147.14 (Apr. 3, 2006): 63; and Kevin Maher, "Inside Man," *Sight and Sound* 16.5 (May 2006): 57.

[8] See Hoberman ("Catch Me"); Ansen ("Bank" 63); Morris (75); Amy Biancolli, "Action Thriller; The Heist Moral Purpose," *Houston Chronicle* 24 Mar. 2006, Star: 3; Glenn Whipp, "Spike Lee Gets 'Inside' the Heist Genre," *Los Angeles Daily News* 24 Mar. 2006: U9; Manohla Dargis, "A Wall Street Bank Heist, with Star Power on Loan," *New York Times* 24 Mar. 2006, Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk: E10; Claudia Puig, "Lee's 'Inside Man' Pulls It Off; Fast-paced Thriller Is Right on the Money," *USA Today* 24 Mar. 2006, Life: 3E; Joe Morgenstern, "Weekend Journal; Review/Film -- A Thriller to Bank On: 'Inside Man' Is a Heist Film That's Right on the Money; After a Run of Small-Gauge Films, Spike Lee Pulls Off a Big Job; Astonishingly Vivid L'Enfant," *Wall Street Journal* 24 Mar. 2006: W.1; Christian Toto, "'Inside Man' Exhilarating; Spike Lee's Heist Film a Comeback," *Washington Times* 24 Mar. 2006, Show; Movies: D08; and Peter Travers, "They Got Game," *Rolling Stone* 997 (Apr. 6, 2006): 74.

[9] Ansen ("Bank" 63) agrees, arguing that "[w]hat keeps 'Inside Man' from becoming just another standard crime drama is its willingness to digress, to become a kind of sociological comedy of manners. The digressions, far from dissipating the tension, add to it."

[10] Hoberman ("Catch Me"), Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1), Biancolli (3), Puig (3E), and Ansen ("Bank" 63), agree on *Inside Man*'s humorous undertones. See also Steven Rea, "Lee's Smart N.Y.

Hostage Thriller," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 24 Mar. 2006, Features Weekend: W03.

[11] After his walk-through inside Manhattan Trust Bank to assess the well-being of the hostages, Frazier cites *Dog Day Afternoon* in his questioning of Russell's plan of escape:

> Frazier: Can I ask you a question?
> Russell: There's nothing to talk about.
> Frazier: What were you planning on doing if you actually got the plane and the pilots, huh? … You don't want a plane, you never did. Whoever heard of bank robbers escaping on a plane with 50 hostages? You saw *Dog Day Afternoon*, you're stalling.

[12] Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1), Verniere ("Seize the Day" e11), Puig (3E), and Hunter (C01) especially celebrate Lee's camerawork. Hoberman ("Catch Me"), however, considers the movement of Lee's camera superfluous.

[13] Hoberman ("Catch Me"), Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1), Dargis (E10), and Hunter (C01) each note Lee's more impersonal, less impassioned work in *Inside Man*. Gillespie, Dargis, and Hunter go further, praising the filmmaker's technical mastery in delivering a smooth, polished product.

[14] *Inside Man* would eventually gross $88,504,640 (approximately $44 million-plus profit). See "Inside Man," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d.: n. pag.

[15] Nunn co-stars in *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, and *He Got Game*.

[16] See Chaney (T29), James (11), and Maher (57).

[17] I would also suggest that there is a narrative element to the critical notices for Gewirtz. *Inside Man* is his first screenplay, and not only does it go into production, but it nets Brian Grazer as producer, Spike Lee as director, and Denzel Washington as star. Ironically, at work here is a kind-of "Hollywood ending," feel-good factor.

[18] Lee proclaims to Maher (57) that he included supplementary scenes to Gewirtz's screenplay, particularly the Sikh storyline with bank employee Vikram (Waris Ahluwalia). Hoberman ("Catch Me") and, presumably, Morris (75) also credit Lee with what Morris deems "editorial curlicues," of which the bank vault scene is a prime example. After bringing young hostage Brian (Amir Ali Said) some pizza and a bottle of water, Russell takes a seat beside the child on an adjacent stack of cash and inspects Brian's handheld video game, which displays an ultra-violent, hip-hop influenced video game in the vein of the *Grand Theft Auto* series.

[19] Lee confirms to James (11) his conscious decision to encourage improvisation to infuse Gewirtz's screenplay with some "New York flavor." Again, the Vikram material garners the most attention, Lee announcing Washington's ad-libbing the line: "I bet you can get a cab, though."

[20] See Gillespie (Combination that Clicks" H1), Stein E1, Hoberman ("Catch Me"), and Morris (75). Bernard (47), too, makes this distinction, enveloping it with the common criticisms of Lee's anti-Semitism and masculinism: he "still reserves his worst bile for Jewish characters, particularly women." The Jewish character Bernard is most likely referring to is Miriam (Marcia Jean Kurtz). R. Colin Tait ("Class and Allegory" 46-7) reminds us, though, that the same character (as well as the actress who plays her) first appeared as a hostage in *Dog Day Afternoon*.

[21] See McCarthy ("Lee Spikes Genre Pic" 21), Lemire ("Inside Man"), Verniere ("Seize the Day" e11), Dargis (E10), Rea ("Hostage Thriller" W03), Toto (D08), Ansen ("Bank" 63), and Travers (74). Rea deems the end-credit shots of the cast, especially the supporting actors, an "homage … to New York's ranks of struggling working actors, who here play African Americans and Italian Americans, Arabs and Albanians,

young Puerto Ricans, elderly Jews, gum-snapping secretaries, and iPod immersed hipsters—a teeming, diverse throng."

[22] The performances of the cast, particularly Washington, Owen, and Foster received extensive coverage from Lemire ("Inside Man"), Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1), Verniere ("Seize the Day" e11), Biancolli (3), Whipp (U6), Bernard (47), Dargis (E10), Stein (E1), Puig (3E), and Morgenstern (W.1). Again, Hoberman is the contrarian, arguing that the movie's stars are "frequently upstaged by the garrulously polyglot mob of unruly New Yorkers trapped in the bank or patrolling its perimeter."

[23] Whipp (U6), Bernard (47), Morgenstern ("Money" W.1), Toto (D08), and Travers (74) each lament the lack of developed characters in *Inside Man*. The underdevelopment of Miss White takes the brunt of the criticism (unsurprising considering the Spike Lee Joint and its depiction of women), while Frazier receives the least backlash.

[24] Lemire, Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1), Biancolli (3), and Hoberman ("Catch Me") each bemoan *Inside Man*'s running time and attribute it to the distended denouement. Gillespie observes that there are multiple endings; Hoberman, on the other hand, charges that Lee "couldn't cut a movie down to two hours if his life and the fate of Universal Studios depended on it."

[25] Verniere ("Seize the Day" e11), Bernard (47), and Stein (E1) deduce Miss White's name as Lee's comment on the arbiters of power: whites. Bernard, Stein, and Travers (74) also note *Inside Man*'s examination of power relations. In addition to Miss White, Stein notes Russell's first name, suggesting that Gewirtz gave the lead bank robber a name associated with "infamous 19th[-]century bank robbers named Dalton." Gerstner (245) observes that Russell shares screenwriter Gewirtz's given name, ultimately concluding that Gewirtz "writes" himself into his script.

[26] The critics ask several questions. McCarthy ("Lee Spikes Genre Pic" 21) and Lemire ("Inside Man") wonder why Case never destroyed the evidence, which Russell answers in his dialogue. Biancolli (3) inquires how Russell knows of Case's safe-deposit box. Stein (E10) and Puig (3E) do not list a specific example, Stein assuring that "nothing [is] gaping." Whipp (U6) considers "the whole thing … completely impossible." However, Morgenstern ("Money" W.1) and Ansen ("Bank" 63) attest that *Inside Man* is so enjoyable that it engenders willful suspension of disbelief.

[27] Gillespie ("Combination that Clicks" H1) identifies another plot hole and ponders how Russell and his crew know how many coveralls and masks to bring as well as what sizes.

[28] Bernard (47) and Ansen ("Bank" 63) follow suit, Ansen instead highlighting the bank employees and patrons who become hostages, a "big motley supporting cast that jostles and kvetches and bargains and explodes with all the juiciness you'd expect from a Big Apple crowd on a dog day afternoon."

Chapter 8: "I'm Here for my Children and Future Grandchildren": *Miracle at St. Anna*, a Legacy of Progress

In *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), Spike Lee announces his impulse to "have it all" by coloring Corporal Hans Brandt (Jan Pohl) of the German army as the film's moral center. Brandt's function in the picture also underscores Lee's trangressiveness: an American director daring to make a World War II movie with a Nazi as its most sympathetic character. Most significantly, the filmmaker further distinguishes this cinematic outing as a departure—along with the generic framework and non-New York City principal setting—by assigning non-principal character Brandt as the film's lone, predominantly revolutionary figure. Woodsian revolutionary and neurotic consciousness in the war-ravaged universe of the film, however, is revealed through how soldiers and militiamen respond to orders and conceptualize duty. When we first meet Brandt, he is a prisoner of Italian partisans Peppi (Pierfrancesco Favino) and Rodolfo (Sergio Albelli) and their crew, who have stopped in Colognora at the home of the Fascist Ludovico (Omero Antonutti) for provisions. The four surviving members of the all-black, 92nd Infantry Buffalo Soldiers—2nd Staff Sergeant Aubrey Stamps (Derek Luke), Sergeant Bishop Cummings (Michael Ealy), Corporal Hector Negron (Laz Alonso), and Private First Class Sam Train (Omar Benson Miller)—have been holed up at Ludovico's for days trying to reestablish radio communication with Captain Nokes (Walton Goggins), the comically-inept white commander of the all-black 92nd. We immediately deduce Brandt's Otherness in relation to the various American soldiers and Italian partisans occupying the small home at the dinner table: Brandt halts eating at the sight of Angelo (Matteo Sciabordi) and caresses the boy's face, strokes his hair, and encourages him (in hushed

Italian) to "run as fast as you can." Angelo further signals Brandt's Otherness amongst the soldiers, revealing to Hector that he ran as fast he could, like the German officer had told him "the first time." Finally, Peppi's later account of the massacre at St. Anna di Stazzema to Natalina (Lydia Biondi) reveals that Brandt eschewed orders by hiding Angelo and his older brother, Arturo (Leonardo Borzonasca), away from the church and hence the massacre. Brandt's rescue of Angelo and, at least temporarily, Arturo is overt disobedience of orders that results in him going AWOL, being branded a traitor, and hiding in forests while the German army hunts him like an animal. Unlike the other soldiers, however, Brandt's duty rests with neither his country nor the dominant ideology and politics its military defends.

On the surface, it would appear that Brandt's comrade, Captain Eichholz (Christian Berkel), also values life (or at least honorable death) over battlefield orders and duty. The German ambush on Colognora results in the deaths of Stamps, Bishop, Train, Renata (Valentina Cervi), Ludovico, Natalina, and every other villager; a bullet hole lodged in Angelo's shoulder as he quietly escapes with Hector's crucifix rosary draped around his neck; and the barrel of a German soldier's rifle pointed at Hector's face as he reels from a gunshot wound, slouching against a wall and clutching the severed statue head. In true *deus ex machina* fashion, Eichholz emerges just as the German begins to pull the trigger and orders his charge to stand down. Afterwards, Eichholz commands his soldiers to gather their wounded comrades and bury their dead, relinquishing his sidearm (a Lugar[1]) to Hector with encouragement (in English): "[d]efend yourself." This act of mercy is believable only if we recall Eichholz's display of compassion after his briefing by Colonel Pflueger (Waldemar Kobus) at Passo Croce:

Pflueger: First, there is a peasant, a terrorist named “The Great Butterfly [Peppi].” He’s causing many problems. He’s hiding in these mountains. Find him. When he is found, issue Directive Bandenbefehl to him and his criminal friends[:] ... General Kesselring’s standing field order for the Italian Republic. At a commander’s sole discretion, for every one German soldier killed, we execute ten Italian civilians. You should have been capable to execute that order at least once in nine months.

Eichholz: Colonel, with all due respect, if I execute this order my men would kill innocent civilians. It would be a violation of the Geneva Convention.

Pflueger: Partisans are not civilians, they are terrorists. They are not protected under the Geneva Convention. Bandenbefehl!

Eichholz: Bandenbefehl.

Pflueger: Secondly, the surprise counterattack is still planned. ... And three, a delicate intelligence matter of the utmost priority. We are missing a corporal from the 35th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 5th Company. Name: Hans Brandt, gone AWOL three weeks ago. ... You are to send out a search party. Find him. Don’t let him escape. And when you have him, get word to me immediately. ... [After Colonel Pflueger has left, Captain Eichholz relays orders to Lieutenant Claussen (Ralph Palka)]

Eichholz: God help this poor bastard, Brandt. Whatever’s he’s done, it’s no worse than what anyone else has done in this war. Mount a search

> party. We have to find him first, hold him, and give him a few days before Pflueger pulls out his teeth, one by one.

This exchange is noteworthy for its foreshadowing of Peppi's revelation of the massacre at St. Anna di Stazzema and illustration of Eichholz's neurosis. Although brimming with compassion, the captain abandons sympathy and does what his superior orders him to do: he mounts a search party for Brandt and carries out the surprise counterattack at Colognora. He does so despite the internal struggle between his conflicting senses of humanity and duty, the battlefield charge of murdering civilians and sending soldiers to dishonorable deaths winning out. Eichholz does, though, negotiate a way to maintain his compassion by planning to delay Brandt's release to Pflueger should the captain's search party locate the AWOL corporal, thus ensuring Brandt's enjoying a few more days of dignity. Eichholz's sparing of Hector is the ultimate expression of sympathy. Ironically, however, Eichholz's actions simultaneously affirm and subvert his duty to defend the alternative ideology and politics associated with Nazism.

The four survivors of the all-black 92nd Infantry face a similar psychic dilemma, for their enlistment in the United States Army results in their defending an alternative ideology and its accompanying politics. Of the four African American GIs, Bishop represents the most vociferous proponent of the cruel irony that is their defending the "American" way of life as part of a military that has adopted their country's Jim Crow hierarchy. Bishop travels a similar trajectory as Brandt, for the American exhibits a revolutionary aversion to following orders. The German's disobedience, though, arises from his own kindness and selflessness and results in Angelo's survival. Bishop's insubordination arises from his own cynicism and self-importance. In this context,

Bishop is the embodiment of the "I'ma get mine" disposition displayed by the principal players in *25th Hour* (2002) and (especially) *Inside Man* (2006). This outlook is most pronounced during Bishop's interactions with Stamps, the first of which occurs when the two men, along with Hector, encounter Train traveling across a bridge carrying Angelo. Intended to serve as cannon fodder for the Allied cause at the Serchio River, the surviving members of the Buffalo Soldiers have defied the odds and are back together, albeit behind enemy lines. Stamps's subsequent plan to rejoin their compatriots in the safe zone on the other side of the Serchio elicits a response from Bishop which demonstrates his frivolousness and selfish state of mind:

> Stamps: We wait here 'till dark, and then we cross back. ...
>
> [Train keeps heading towards the mountains, and Bishop follows] Where you goin'?
>
> Bishop: Look here, y'all go on back across that river if you want. Now, the only person with any luck around here is him. Plus, he owe me $1,400. Now, that's the kind of money that can set me up for the rest of my life. Even if the rest of my life is today.

Facing probable death, Bishop remains intent on "getting paid," even if it means disobeying the orders of a superior officer. A second scene also illustrates Bishop's propensity to disregard direct orders. After traversing mountainous terrain and setting up camp in Colognora at Ludovico's house, a still shell-shocked Angelo lies in the elderly Fascist's bed. Despite Renata and Natalina's previous efforts, the boy allows only Train to administer medicine and feed him soup. Soon thereafter, Train scoops the boy out of bed and into his arms like a baby:

> Train: Okay, Sarge, we ready.
>
> Bishop: We? Boy, where *we* going?
>
> Stamps: Bishop, if you wasn't chiseling him, we wouldn't be here.
>
> Bishop: You think Nokes is looking for us? ... Hector been tryin' to fix that radio since we got here.

Train's compassion and willingness to care for Angelo despite the additional burden mirrors Brandt's sympathy for the boy. Train also functions to underscore Bishop's instinct for self-preservation. Bishop, too, serves a purpose in the two aforementioned scenes: to highlight Stamps's devotion to protocol.

Ironically, Stamps has no specific orders to follow. The radio was damaged during the battle at the Serchio River, and fixing it has since occupied Hector. The tension between Stamps and Bishop is exacerbated by Nokes's re-entrance into the narrative after Hector reestablishes radio contact with "help" from Angelo.[2] Nokes is partly responsible for the surviving Buffalo Soldiers' current predicament. Their entrapment behind enemy lines with no means of radio communication is the result of Nokes's disregarding Stamps's earlier radio communication requesting that Nokes not give the order to bomb the enemy-occupied side of the Serchio. After reestablishing radio contact with Nokes, Stamps finally receives his orders: to find and capture Brandt and wait for his next radio communication. Stamps seeks a private audience with Bishop afterwards, his agitated and accusatory response exuding resignation:

> Stamps: This is a joke. First, your ace-boon-coon giant goes off the deep end, now this God-and-country redneck wants me to fetch a prisoner. Something's cookin' around here, and he ain't tellin'.

Bishop: I thought you liked Nokes? ... I seen you shinin' up to him.

Stamps: Just 'cause I ain't here, sleeves cuffing poker cards like you, don't mean I like Nokes. Besides, he ain't the worst.

Bishop: The man left us high and dry at the Serchio. Hear you tell it, you told the man three times to fire that 105, and he didn't.

Stamps: So what, he ain't the first white man don't trust colored folks' word. That knife cuts both ways, Bishop. Nokes reports to Colonel Driscoll. Driscoll's fair.

Bishop: Shit, nigga, is you crazy? The only reason white folks is thinkin' now about bein' fair in this army is 'cause the krauts is cuttin' their toenails too short to walk and they runnin' outta white boys to die.

Stamps: It don't matter. They said we couldn't fight. Had us float balloons, work as quartermasters, cook and clean, but the 92nd proved we could fight. This is our country, too. We helped build it from the ground up.

Bishop: We ain't never had a country of our own.

Stamps: I'm here for my children and future grandchildren, Bishop! This is about progress!

Bishop: Nigga, please.

Together, the frustrated, long-suffering Stamps and the angry, resentful Bishop comprise a dichotomy between conflicting responses to racism, thus evoking the Martin Luther King, Jr./Malcolm X binary cited at the end of *Do the Right Thing* (1989). Additionally, the intraracial conflict between Stamps and Bishop—first explored by Lee in *School*

Daze (1988)—ultimately manifests sexually, over the affections of Renata, further denoting Lee's subversion of the war genre. The sexual "competition" between the two black GIs also subverts the Spike Lee Joint itself, for the intraracial tensions are expressed interracially and interculturally, revealing multiple conceptions of Otherness that characterize the Spike Lee Joint in the 21st century.

Stamps and Bishop's back-and-forth after Peppi and his band of partisans serendipitously arrive at Ludovico's with Brandt in tow underscores this sexual competition for Renata. This scene also illustrates Bishop's about-face on retreating from the village. Ironically, Bishop becomes eager to leave, but Stamps—as always—stands in opposition:

> Bishop: Look, we need to skedaddle the hell outta here. Hector, get on that radio.
>
> Stamps: Negative. We sit tight, wait for Nokes to radio again.
>
> Bishop: What the fuck is wrong with you?
>
> Stamps: That's what he said to do.
>
> Bishop: No, he said get a kraut prisoner, and now we motherfuckin' got one. He's sitting right here eatin' like a motherfuckin' butcher's dog.
>
> Stamps: We still gotta wait on the captain. Those was his orders.
>
> Bishop: You know, Stamps, we really can't sit up here with these wops 'till one of these signoras decides to give you some pussy. Now, you had your chance last night.

These sequences, as well as those on the bridge and in Ludovico's bedroom, reveal Stamps's slavish adherence to military hierarchy as neurosis. The scenes also

illuminate—ala *Inside Man*—a bait-switch pattern in terms of Stamp's motivation for fighting. On the surface, his military service appears revolutionary. He hopes going to war amidst the pervasive racism in America and its military will benefit his descendants, who would reap the spoils of his country's future progress in terms of race relations. However, that progress is determined by America's perception of blacks, something Stamps has no control over. Therefore, choosing military service based on something he cannot control is consistent with a neurotic psychic position. Concerning their bait-and-switch presentation, perhaps Bishop and Stamps function as doppelgangers, for each of the aforementioned scenes also exposes Bishop's revolutionary language as just that: talk. In this respect, Bishop exists beside the posturing, hypermasculine New Yorkers of previous 21st-century Spike Lee Joints: the Dead End Boys (Joey T, Anthony, and Brian) of *Summer of Sam* (1999) and Monty and Frank of *25th Hour*. Though he voices his displeasure with the racism of his superiors, he still remains with his comrades and does not disobey Stamps's orders, thus indicating his neurosis.

The other seemingly revolutionary voice most critical of the concept of Otherness in *Miracle at St. Anna* belongs to Peppi. While Bishop targets ethnic Otherness, Peppi's critique takes aim at alternate ideological/political Otherness. Like his German counterpart, Captain Eichholz, Peppi adheres to battlefield etiquette. He and his partisan band's unannounced visit to Ludovico's house demonstrates "The Great Butterfly"'s compassion, as he shares his soup and bread with his prisoner, Brandt. Unlike Eichholz, whose words and actions denote an internal questioning of the alternative ideologies and politics his military represents, Peppi verbalizes his struggle with the competing systems of belief unique to his country. The scene depicting Peppi returning to his crew's camp in

the mountains and sharing a private moment with Rodolfo displays both his meditation on ideological/political Otherness and foreshadows Rodolfo's betrayal:

> Peppi: I always have Marco's face in front of my eyes.
>
> Rodolfo: Don't worry about that. My brother is dead. Nobody cares about him anymore.
>
> Peppi: I care. In your opinion, when we will be in front of God, if we ever get there, is he going to ask us for our political card? Is he going to say, "Marco, no. Ludovico, no. You're not allowed in because you're Fascists." What's the difference between us and them in the eyes of God?
>
> Rodolfo: You're asking yourself too many questions. If you think too much, it will drive you crazy. ... Anyway, what's done is done.

Although asking such a question suggests a revolutionary mindset, framing it within the context of religion (as Wood would argue) actually indicates Peppi's neurotic consciousness. The guilt Peppi exhibits also reveals the Partisan's neurosis, his reconciling it within the Catholic tradition mirroring Vinny in *Summer of Sam* and (to a lesser extent) James in *25th Hour* and recalling Case's (non-faith-based) remorse in *Inside Man*. Like these three, Peppi's guilt manifests as self-loathing, which he bears for the massacre at St. Anna di Stazzema. However, unlike Vinny's extramarital dalliances, James's alcoholism, and Case's aligning with the Nazis, Peppi's self-loathing does not directly result from his actions. Although the carnage at St. Anna di Stazzema results from the German army's targeting of him as a "terrorist," Peppi is not culpable, for the Nazis' march to the village was out of his control. In this context, Peppi embodies the neurosis of Frank, Jacob, and Naturelle in *25th Hour* (concerning their failure to protest

Monty's drug dealing) and Case in *Inside Man* (regarding the robbery-hostage situation inside his bank). Responsibility lies with Rodolfo, who leaked Peppi's whereabouts to the Germans, an accountability he owns by murdering Peppi in the forest. Perhaps Rodolfo exists besides Brandt as a revolutionary; both, after all, are perceived as traitors.

In *Miracle at St. Anna*, fear is pervasive, the war itself arising out of Germany's (in the form of Adolf Hitler's) fear of ethnic Otherness and subsequent development of an alternate ideology influencing the country's political standing. Fear, too, is pervasive in the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint. The development of and subjection to ideological/political Otherness is illustrated in *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour* by Vinny, the Dead End Boys, Monty, Frank, and Jacob; their expression of homophobia comprises their response to their fear of the potential "spreading" of homo-/bisexuality. Likewise, *Inside Man*'s Frazier and Case demonstrate a peniaphobia arising from currently dwelling in (or possibly residing within) such class constraints. This sexual Otherness, socioeconomic Otherness, and ideological Otherness originate in the human condition, specifically our propensity to scapegoat each other, thus substantiating Wood's concept of repression and oppression and thus bringing us full circle to the notion Spike Lee himself advanced during the buildup to *Summer of Sam*.

Who knows more about scapegoating that those who are typically scapegoated? Lee exists within many such groups, each of which receives such treatment from other groups: African American men by white America, middle-class academics by the black under-class, and filmmakers/artists/musicians by societal institutions such as the church. Ever the liminal figure, the filmmaker's ability to negotiate these spaces appears for the first time in the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint, thereby distinguishing it as a simultaneous

African American, documentarian, teaching, American, and commercial enterprise. *Summer of Sam*, *25th Hour*, *Inside Man* and *Miracle at St. Anna* all achieve what the New York of the 20th-century Spike Lee Joint aims to do but does not: become a microcosm of the competing impulses in American culture.

Progress of a Different Sort

This study begins with Spike Lee's debut feature, *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), my introduction noting articles which focus on the young director by playing on the film's title. Twenty years later, critics still deployed this practice, particularly Ruthe Stein, who titled her review of *Inside Man* "A Masked Man Robs a Bank. There's Something Inside He Wants, and He's Gotta Have It." In a first, a critic—Stein in this case—reaches back to Lee and *She's Gotta Have It* by referencing a character in a Spike Lee Joint and not the filmmaker himself—in this case Dalton Russell. However, David A. Gerstner would maintain that the "he" in the title of Stein's article remains Spike Lee.

Part II of my study focuses on the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint, commencing with my reading of *Summer of Sam* (1999). Aftab reminds us that this movie represents the filmmaker's "swan song as an actor," a retirement which Lee did not honor by reprising his role as Mookie in *Red Hook Summer* (2012) (250). In his discussion of *Inside Man*, R. Colin Tait notes the absence of Lee's "trademark cameos" before concluding that that picture—based on his (and Gerstner's) "erasure of diversity" argument—"is still undeniably 'A Spike Lee Joint'" (56). Gerstner concurs, explaining that "[g]iven Lee's penchant to include himself in his earlier film productions as both director and actor, it would be remarkable if he marked his presence *inside* this film [*Inside Man*], by style

alone" (249). Gerstner goes even further, ultimately arguing that with the final accessory of Dalton Russell's wardrobe—a New York Yankees baseball cap—Lee "writes" himself into his own heist picture. Gerstner observes that the Yankees cap

> is at once overwhelmingly American (baseball as a pastime) and very New York/Lee (both often despised by many Americans). The tipping of his hat, as it were, at the moment of Dalton's escape from the confines of the cell aligns Lee with the character who creates the spectacle, a character who, we recall, importantly shares a last name with the screenwriter. It is Lee/Russell [Gewirtz] who gets away with the heist, … the perfect crime[,] by appearing to do one thing (and in that they succeeded—make a Hollywood genre film/steal the documents) while unfolding something entirely different. (249)

One could argue that this difference (more precisely, the erasure of it) is new to the heist genre. I argue, however, that Lee's presentation of a bank robber (Russell) forcing a group of (ethnically and culturally diverse) hostages to wear white masks and gagging them with white towels is actually a *staple* of the Spike Lee Joint: the imposition of white power over the black body and the black voice—robbers of culture, as it were.

This brings us back to the impetus behind the Spike Lee Joint and the "its" I discuss in the introduction and first four chapters of this study. I argue that the commercial impulse emerges in the 21st-century Spike Lee Joint starting with *Summer of Sam* and continuing in *25th Hour* (2002) and *Inside Man*. My reason for doing so is to highlight that these movies represent the first time in Lee's career that his actual films declare the commercial impulse that had previously been voiced only by his persona.

Often, the critical establishment's propensity to conflate the Spike Lee persona with the director himself—perhaps influenced by the filmmaker's cameos in his own pictures—resulted in its deducing the persona's presence in the director's movies. The filmmaker's presence in the Spike Lee Joint would then engender the perception that the film reflects his negative perception of whites, blacks dating whites, Jews, gays, and women. The fact that his physical presence departs from the Spike Lee Joint in the 21st century is noteworthy, for it represents his final plea to critics—after years of doing so through his persona—to review his work and not him (or who they *think* he is).[3]

Spike Lee functions as a specter throughout his 21st-century joints, maintaining a presence similar to David Berkowitz in *Summer of Sam*. The critical and scholarly conversation notes this presence as well (although not in similar terms), my reading of the pictures during this time period expanding on the conversation by locating the commercial impulse as evidence of Lee's presence. Although Gerstner argues that Lee appears under the guise of Dalton Russell in *Inside Man*, *Miracle at St. Anna* is the point of convergence for every issue in which my study engages. Lee comes full circle in this World War II epic, a genre film released at the end of the first decade of the 21st century that returns to the tripartite (documentary, teaching, and American impulse) approach over which Lee had emphasized the commercial impulse starting at the end of the last decade of the 20th century. The result is Lee's affirmation and subversion of his commercial impulse in *Miracle at St. Anna*. In other words, for the first time ever in the Spike Lee Joint, Paula Massood's three impulses and my commercial impulse work in concert. Furthermore, the competing desires within these four impulses mirror the conflicting compulsions within my concept of the Spike Lee persona. *Miracle at St. Anna*

thus represents Lee's revisiting of the New Black Aesthetic of *She's Gotta Have It*, the final theatrically-released Spike Lee Joint of the first decade of the 21st century confirming the "its" I argue "he's gotta have."

The first *it* I identify in chapter 1 of this study comprises Spike Lee's response to the lack of diverse African American images in Hollywood cinema during the mid-1980s. *He's gotta have* portrayals of varied black identity and experiences, which Lee accomplishes in *Miracle at St. Anna* with Stamps, Bishop, Hector, and Train. A.O. Scott observes in these surviving GIs "the ideological and social diversity that exists within black America," particularly Stamps and Bishop, who each "represent different responses to the challenges of racism" ("Hollywood War" E1). Scott furthers the contrast between the two GIs, characterizing Stamps as "disciplined, idealistic, and forward looking" and Bishop as "cynical … [and] fatalistic," his "gold tooth and rough talk mark him as a street-wise foil for Stamps's stiff-backed righteousness" ("Hollywood War" E1). Bob Strauss aligns himself with Scott concerning Stamps and Bishop while also noting the other two surviving Buffalo Soldiers:

> the men represent different regions and strata of our country. … Stamps … wants to set a good example, but the prejudice he encounters leaves him deeply conflicted. … Bishop … doesn't care about what anybody thinks and is out to get as much as he can for himself. … Hector … wonders sometimes how he got lumped in with the African-Americans. And then there's the big, dumb, good-hearted country lad, … Train. ("No Filmmaking 'Miracle'" L5)

Ann Hornaday essentially rephrases Strauss's observations; however, she also identifies an additional aspect to Lee's treatment of the last of the 92nd Infantrymen: "they hew to the classic 'one of each' temperamental distribution of World War II pictures" (C01). Lee thus revisits his method from *She's Gotta Have It*, but instead of presenting four emerging, real-world archetypes of African Americans, he inserts four African Americans into war-picture archetypes.

Like *Inside Man*, *Miracle at St. Anna* received harsh critical notices for its underdeveloped characters, one would assume because of the restrictions imposed by the conventions of the war picture genre. Hornaday, Todd McCarthy, and Elizabeth Weitzman each consider the four GIs as more types than characters (C01; "Miracle at St. Anna" 20; 43). Hornaday goes even further, singling out Train as a "particularly problematic … example of the 'magical Negro' stereotype that has bedeviled movies from 'The Green Mile' to 'Million Dollar Baby.' A condescending extension of the Noble Savage, the shamanistic gentle giant is a trope no less troubling for being so putatively benign" (C01).[4] Scott positions himself beside Hornaday by acknowledging the "cinematic traditionalism" of *Miracle at St. Anna*, which "[a]t its best … is a platoon picture" ("Hollywood War" E1). Whereas Scott praises Lee for "stick[ing] to the sturdy conventions of the infantry movie," Sonny Bunch argues that Lee approaches it in a similar manner to *Inside Man* ("Hollywood War" E1). Bunch identifies Lee's transgressiveness, supporting his argument by way of comparison:

> In movies like … "Saving Private Ryan" … or "The Great Escape" … a disparate group of ruffians overcome initial distrust and grow into great friends, drawing on one another's strength to defeat an intractable foe. …

> [I]t's done for a reason: If the protagonists don't care for one another, how are we supposed to care for them? By eschewing this formula, Mr. Lee fails to give us any better reason to cheer for our Buffalo Soldiers than that they're the "good guys." (B01)

With this observation, Bunch initiates a familiar refrain for the Spike Lee Joint, suggesting that the lack of character development is due to too many narrative strands: "a war epic combined with a crime thriller combined with a discourse on civil rights" (B01).[5]

Lee's fusing of African American subjectivity with a subversive depiction of another Other group not only recalls his *She's Gotta Have It* method, but also reveals the second *it he's gotta have*: a filmmaking career. The director revises this approach in *Miracle at St. Anna*, replacing the nontraditional female character with nontraditional (for war pictures) European characters. Carrie Rickey focuses on this transgression, noting that "[n]o sooner does he establish [the four black soldiers'] stories than Lee pulls back to tell a larger story of brotherhood and betrayal involving Italian partisans and Fascists" (W22). Furthermore, Rickey observes that, although "Lee's principal theme is to celebrate the men of color who, despite their experiences of stone racism, fought and died for their country," the filmmaker presents us "with good and bad Germans, saintly and sinister Italians, humanistic and sadistic Americans" to project a "subsidiary theme …: [s]ee the person, not the nationality" (W22). The operative word in Rickey's notice is "nationality" because, like *She's Gotta Have It*, in *Miracle at St. Anna* Lee merges the New Black Aesthetic with the national cinema of a European nation. In this case, the director reaches back even further, replacing the French New Wave with Italian

neorealism. A precursor to and influence on French New Wave filmmakers, neorealist directors such as Roberto Rossellini (*Paisan* [1946][6]) and Vittorio de Sica (*The Bicycle Thief* [1948][7]) shot almost exclusively on location in dilapidated cities or rural countrysides with nonprofessional, local actors for the purpose of exploring lower- and working-class life. Additionally, neorealist pictures often feature children in pivotal, though observational, roles, thus accounting for the presence of Angelo—the lone survivor and witness of the massacre at St. Anna di Stazzema. In this context, Train's assertion that "[t]he boy sees it all" is particularly noteworthy. Critics such as Scott, McCarthy, and James Verniere astutely pinpoint the neorealist influence in *Miracle at St. Anna*, the critical consensus—in a strange twist of fate—bemoaning the movie's lack of focus on the experience of the African American GIs ("Hollywood War" E1; "Miracle at St. Anna" 20; "WWII Masterpiece" e11).

The critical community called for Lee to make a black war movie in a seemingly marked departure from critics during the mid-'80s, perhaps reflecting Lee's influence. At the same time, though, we must remember the observation of R. Colin Tait, that the critical establishment expects politics—again because of Lee himself—in the Spike Lee Joint. Therefore, Lee's subjection to a leash of a certain way of thinking early in his career resulted in the critical call for a war picture centering on the plight of African American soldiers, thus indicating its members' own leashing. Scott, Strauss, Mick LaSalle, and Joe Morgenstern each suggest that *Miracle at St. Anna* would have functioned more coherently had Lee focused on just the black GIs ("Hollywood War" E1; "No Filmmaking 'Miracle'" L5; "Life Is Beautiful" E1; "Lee Fumbles" W.1). LaSalle also praises Lee for illustrating his "gift for making even minor characters specific"

("Life Is Beautiful" E1)—a 'la *Inside Man*. However, Bunch's response to the moments the film does engage the African American experience demonstrates the critical schizophrenia regarding the Spike Lee Joint. Bunch cites the flashback-within-a-flashback featuring our four heroes negotiating Jim Crow Louisiana, the plutocracy of the segregated military, and the physical battlefield of Italy amidst the German military's exploiting U.S. hypocrisy via the Axis Sally (Alexandra Maria Lara) broadcasts en route to the reductive conclusion that "[p]erhaps Mr. Lee simply wanted to remind us, yet again, that America's past is riddled with racism" (B01). Scott situates himself in opposition, cautioning us that, although *Miracle at St. Anna* is "occasionally corny and didactic … [and e]very now and then, the action slows down to make time for a speech or a carefully staged argument about racial injustice[,] … such speeches -- on the subjects of liberty and democracy and the mortal threat to those ideals posed by Hitler and his army -- have always been a staple of all but the most hardboiled and cynical World War II movies" ("Hollywood War" E1). Scott's reminders that *Miracle at St. Anna* is a war picture are noteworthy, for they lead to the question of authorship that characterized much of the critical conversation surrounding *Inside Man*.

Adapted by James McBride from his 2002 novel of the same name, *Miracle at St. Anna* suffered from negative reviews arguing against its multiple narrative arcs. Unlike *Inside Man*, for which screenwriter Russell Gewirtz received much praise along with Lee, McBride's influence as scriptwriter was marginalized. The critics agree that this picture is a Spike Lee Joint through and through—McCarthy, Rickey, LaSalle, Morgenstern, and Christy Lemire, each arguing that the director failed to "rein in" his writer ("Miracle at St. Anna" 20; W22; "Life Is Beautiful" E1; "Lee Fumbles" W.1; "Ambitious 'Anna'").

Again, due to the predominantly white makeup of the critical community, I am tempted to draw a race-based conclusion for McBride's marginalization; however, I resist on the basis of Lee's possibly race-based devotion to McBride's script. Perhaps this represents an instance of the Spike Lee persona affecting the execution of a Spike Lee Joint. The third *it he's gotta have*—the persona—also presented itself during the prerelease buildup to *Miracle at St. Anna* in the form of Lee's back-and-forth with the legendary Clint Eastwood. Susan Wloszczyna reports that the feud began at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival, when Lee "took aim at Eastwood's lack of black faces in his 2006 World War II accounts, Flags of Our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima" (7D). Wloszczya informs that Eastwood shot back through the press, suggesting that Lee "shut his face" (7D). Lee would go on to employ the dreaded "no comment" when asked about the Eastwood controversy in an interview with Sonia Murray (H1). Instead, the filmmaker preferred to emphasize that "his real target is Hollywood's mishandling of American history, which has mostly ignored the 1.1 million black men and women who served in World War II" (Wloszczyna 7D). According to Stephen Schaefer, another Hollywood legend—Steven Spielberg—brokered a truce between Lee and Eastwood, likely accounting for Lee's about-face on his Eastwood criticism ("'Miracle' Worker" 037). In a 1993 interview with Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas about *Malcolm X* (1992), Lee recalls his desire to cast Eastwood as the New York policeman in the hospital scene—a role Peter Boyle assumed—but Eastwood was shooting *Unforgiven*, also for Warner Brothers Studios (77). Having also interviewed Lee during this time,[8] Verniere suggests that Lee and Eastwood were working in concert, trolling the media, "slyly touting Lee's movie" ("WWII Masterpiece" e11). Finally, Gary Thompson's notice of the Lee-Eastwood row

reflects his tardiness—like that of the critical community he represents—in recognizing the pattern of Spike Lee controversies ("Casualty of War" 32). Nelson George had already outlined the "coincidental" convergence of a Spike Lee controversy and the release of a new Spike Lee Joint (Aftab 166).

An increase in box-office receipts is the aim of the Spike Lee controversy, the power resulting from box-office bankability—to explore more probing issues of race, class, and nationality—the fourth *it he's gotta have*. Unfortunately for Lee, even after the unabashed, commercial success of *Inside Man*,[9] "it's not a good environment for these types of movies [*Miracle at St. Anna*] to be made" (qtd. in Rea "Film Trend" H05). Lee attributes the environment to Hollywood's further increasing reliance on "comic book superheroes … or turning old TV shows into movies and sequels … or some other high concept film with stars attached to it," "name" directors such as Eastwood, Spielberg, or George Lucas receiving financing increasingly becoming the norm (qtd. in Murray H1). Like its predecessor, *She Hate Me* (2004), *Miracle at St. Anna* boasts not only an international cast, but also an international setting. This is due to the nature of the story, yes, but one could argue that—as Sheri Jennings notes in her interview with Lee—the filmmaker's ability to raise money overseas provided additional motivation to take on such a project. According to Jennings, Italian producers Roberto Cicutto and Luigi Musini provided $8.74 million seed money before shooting, Lee subsequently acquiring two-thirds of the final budget from Italian studio Rai Cinema and French distributor TF1. Lee continued his relationship with Disney, which provided the final one-third of *Miracle at St. Anna*'s budget and released the picture domestically through its Touchstone Pictures subsidiary in the tradition of *Summer of Sam* and *25th Hour* (M05). This process

evokes Lee's independent financing of *She's Gotta Have It*, McCarthy prognosticating that—like the box-office run of *She's Gotta Have It—Miracle at St. Anna* would likely receive its warmest reception from its target audience—European moviegoers ("Miracle at St. Anna" 20).

Spike Lee reminds us, though, that there are multiple target audiences for *Miracle at St. Anna*. In his interview with Rea, Lee admits that telling the story of the black soldier's contribution to the war effort was a major impetus for his directing the picture ("Film Trend" H05). A subsequent interview with Clarence Waldron includes a personal appeal from Lee that we have not witnessed since the buildup to *Malcolm X*: the director implores African American moviegoers that "[w]e need you to come out in full force on Sept. 26…There are so many films coming out right now, if you don't get the right numbers at the box office you get lost in the sauce" (20). Directly addressing the black audience reveals the fifth *it he's gotta have*: uplift. Ironically, at this point in his career—the success of *Inside Man* notwithstanding—Lee himself needed uplifting. The spirit of uplift is evident in *Miracle at St. Anna*, Stamps's proclamation that he went to war to uplift the race, the resulting progress constituting his children's legacy. In an interview with Eric Harrison, McBride locates the nexus of the Civil Rights Movement with black World War II veterans "because a lot of men from the 92nd Division came back to America and with the GI bill went to school, started families, and had real opinions - educated opinions - based on their experiences as combat soldiers and as educators and professors and architects and so forth about what the Negro should be allowed to do" ("St. Anna Writer" 1). This notion of a Civil Rights Legacy was especially evident during the buildup to *Miracle at St. Anna*'s theatrical release, which was set against the backdrop

of the 2008 Presidential Election. During the prerelease buildup, Lee had taken to wearing Barack Obama t-shirts during press junkets,[10] ultimately seconding McBride's emotion to Waldron:

> [t]his is a moment for us to share our heritage of our forefathers who were heroic and American patriots. And it fits in right now with what is happening in the air with this whole phenomenon of Barack Obama, this wave of enthusiasm, of hope, of change. Black men who fought in World War II knew that somehow down the line that this country would progress and they had a lot to do with it. (20)[11]

Indeed, President Obama represents the children and grandchildren Stamps travels to Europe to fight for, the progress he forges with Bishop, Hector, and Train is the inheritance of opportunities that did not exist in their time. The 1.1 million, World War II-era African American servicemen and -women enabled black people to negotiate spaces which were previously unavailable to them. In short, African Americans were afforded liminality.

The notion of a liminal figure takes on a special significance when discussing the *its he's gotta have*. George's notice of Spike Lee as the bridge between the Civil Rights Movement and hip-hop era suggests that Lee himself is also a descendant of Stamps, Bishop, Hector, and Train, for he was the first African American filmmaker to secure a space in the American motion picture industry, the ultimate marriage of art and commerce. One would be hard-pressed to argue against the idea that Spike Lee, in terms of his artistic achievement, is both the preeminent African American filmmaker and a preeminent American filmmaker. However, due to his commercial failures, he has not

received his just due as an auteur of the highest order. Therefore, money is the final *it he's gotta have*, and—like his pitch to foreign investors and the black moviegoing audience—it manifests in his appeal to a general audience during his interview with Wloszczyna: "If people love this country, they should see this film[.] … If there is any time to be patriotic, this is the time" (7D). As is often the case with the Spike Lee Joint, the time was not now, as it opened in ninth place with a measly $3.5 million en route to a disheartening $7,916,887 gross and approximate $37,083,113 loss[12] (Germain "'Eagle Eye' Soars").

Ultimately, I (grudgingly) conclude that it will never be Spike Lee's time. Perhaps because he is simply ahead of his time. I reach this resolution through the fact that the last Spike Lee Joint of the first decade of the 21st-century is a war film, a time-honored Hollywood genre that in Lee's hands becomes a simultaneous tribute to a diversified black experience and significant contribution to the tradition of America—images and contributions Hollywood has historically failed to acknowledge. The complexity of the competing impulses in the Spike Lee persona (capitalism and nationalism) is captured in *Miracle at St. Anna* by virtue of its existence as a war picture. Finally, this film—about military conflict—encapsulates the warring impulses in the Spike Lee Joint, for Massood's documentary, teaching, and American impulses are duking it out with my commercial impulse, the result of which is the critical community's consensus that Lee cannot get out of his own way. The critics, however, are themselves subject to this same leash. LaSalle's final analysis of *Miracle at St. Anna* thus characterizes both the Spike Lee Joint and the community which criticizes it: "[t]he movie caves in … under the weight of multiple intents and conflicting impulses" ("Life Is Beautiful" E1).

Spike Lee's gotta have it all: a cinematic image of the African American in his full humanity; a filmmaking career responding to his own call for that image; a persona which alerts American popular culture to the need for multiple representations of blackness; the power—via final cut privilege—to examine the African American experience accurately and honestly from a black subject position; the ability—via his filmmaking career—to grant access into the motion picture industry to other underrepresented groups; and the capital to ensure that he can continue to serve his other *its*. At the same time Lee demonstrates prowess of critiquing larger issues of sexuality and power, of which *Miracle at St. Anna* stands as an example beside *Summer of Sam*, *25th Hour*, and *Inside Man*. Like the pivotal players in its predecessors, *Miracle at St. Anna* evokes Wood's competing notions of the revolutionary and neurotic, the repressed and oppressed. The competing impulses within the Spike Lee persona and the Spike Lee Joint—even in the case of Wood's binary—distinguish the Spike Lee Joint as a genre of its own with the distinct ability to Otherize formulaic Hollywood genres. Indeed, the Spike Lee Joint presents a challenging concoction of multiple ideas and ideals that requires multiple viewings and—ideally—elicits multiple responses. But because Lee could not get out of his own way in his early career, the responses, at least from the critical community, remain the same. If only we could be like Angelo and "see it all"—then Spike Lee would get it all.

[1] This is the gun Hector kills Rodolfo with almost 40 years later, thus catalyzing the narrative of *Miracle at St. Anna*.

[2] Christy Lemire, Gary Thompson, Mick LaSalle, and Ann Hornaday each note Angelo's coding as a supernatural presence. This scene, during which the radio mysteriously begins working after a sustained glare from the boy, supports the critics' conclusion. Like Miss White, the fact that the boy's name is *Angel*o becomes noteworthy. See Lemire, "Review: Ambitious 'Anna' Never Hits Targets," *Associated Press* 22 Sep. 2008, Entertainment News: n. pag.; Thompson, "Casualty of War; Spike Lee's 'Miracle' Doesn't Deliver the Drama," *Philadelphia Daily News* 26 Sep. 2008, Features; DN Yo! Features: 32; LaSalle, "Life Is Beautiful – and Also Very Brutal; Movie Review," *San Francisco Chronicle* 26 Sep. 2008m Datebook: E1; and Hornaday, "Spike Lee's Heavy Artillery Blasts 'St. Anna,'" *Washington Post* 26 Sep. 2008, Style: C01. Bob Strauss, A.O. Scott, and Joe Morgenstern each note the magical realism of *Miracle at St. Anna*. See Strauss, "No Filmmaking 'Miracle' Here," *Los Angeles Daily News* 26 Sep. 2008, L.A.com: L5; Scott, "Hollywood War, Revised Edition," *New York Times* 26 Sep. 2008, Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk: E1; and Morgenstern, "Weekend Journal; Entertainment & Culture -- Review / Film: In 'St. Anna,' Lee Fumbles Epic of War, Racism; Striving for Sweep, Director Insists on Heavy Ironies," *Wall Street Journal* 26 Sep. 2008: W.1.

[3] During an interview with Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas (210-3, 215-6), Lee makes his most impassioned plea for objective criticism of the Spike Lee Joint. See Crowdus and Georgakas, "Thinking About the Power of Images: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 26.2 (Jan. 2001): 4-9, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cythia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2002, 202-17.

[4] It is noteworthy that Lee would choose to direct a screenplay which features such a character because during the prerelease buildup for *Bamboozled*, the director became fond of ridiculing the "magical Negro" archetype. See Crowdus and Georgakas "Images" 205.

[5] Lemire ("Ambitious 'Anna'") argues that Lee "find[s] some subtleties" through Stamps, Renata, and Peppi.

[6] Similar to Frazier in *Inside Man*, Hector references the cinematic template for the movie in which he exists, referring to several of the villagers in Colognora as "paisans."

[7] de Sica's follow-up to *The Bicycle Thief* was *Miracle in Milan* (1951), author James McBride's titling his novel *Miracle at St. Anna* perhaps an homage to de Sica's film.

[8] See "Doing the Job," *Sight and Sound* 3 (Feb. 1993): 10-1, rpt. in *Spike Lee: Interviews*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs, Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2002, 79-85.

[9] Lee laments that "what was bothering me is that I had come off my biggest movie ever[,] … and I was frustrated. So I took off for Italy and got this going." See Wloszczyna 7D.

[10] See Rea ("Film Trend" H05), Schaefer ("'Miracle' Worker" 037), and Wloszczyna (7D).

[11] Lee dismisses the Obama metaphor in an interview with Howard Gensler. See "Spike's War Story: 'Miracle at St. Anna' Recounts Tale of Black Soldiers in World War II," *Philadelphia Daily News* 24 Sep. 2008, Features; DN Yo!: 33.

[12] See "Miracle at St. Anna," *Imdb.com*, Internet Movie Database, n.d: n. pag.

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