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Rolling Stone®

Special Double Issue

Rod Stewart

Some Guys Have All the Luck

EXCLUSIVE

Norman Mailer

'Harlot's Ghost' Part One

Guns n' Roses

The Summer's Hottest Tour

Spike Lee

The Rolling Stone Interview

L.A. Gangs

Living and Dying With Bloods and Crips

Surfer Boys

California's New Pump House Gang

Rod Stewart and Rachel Hunter

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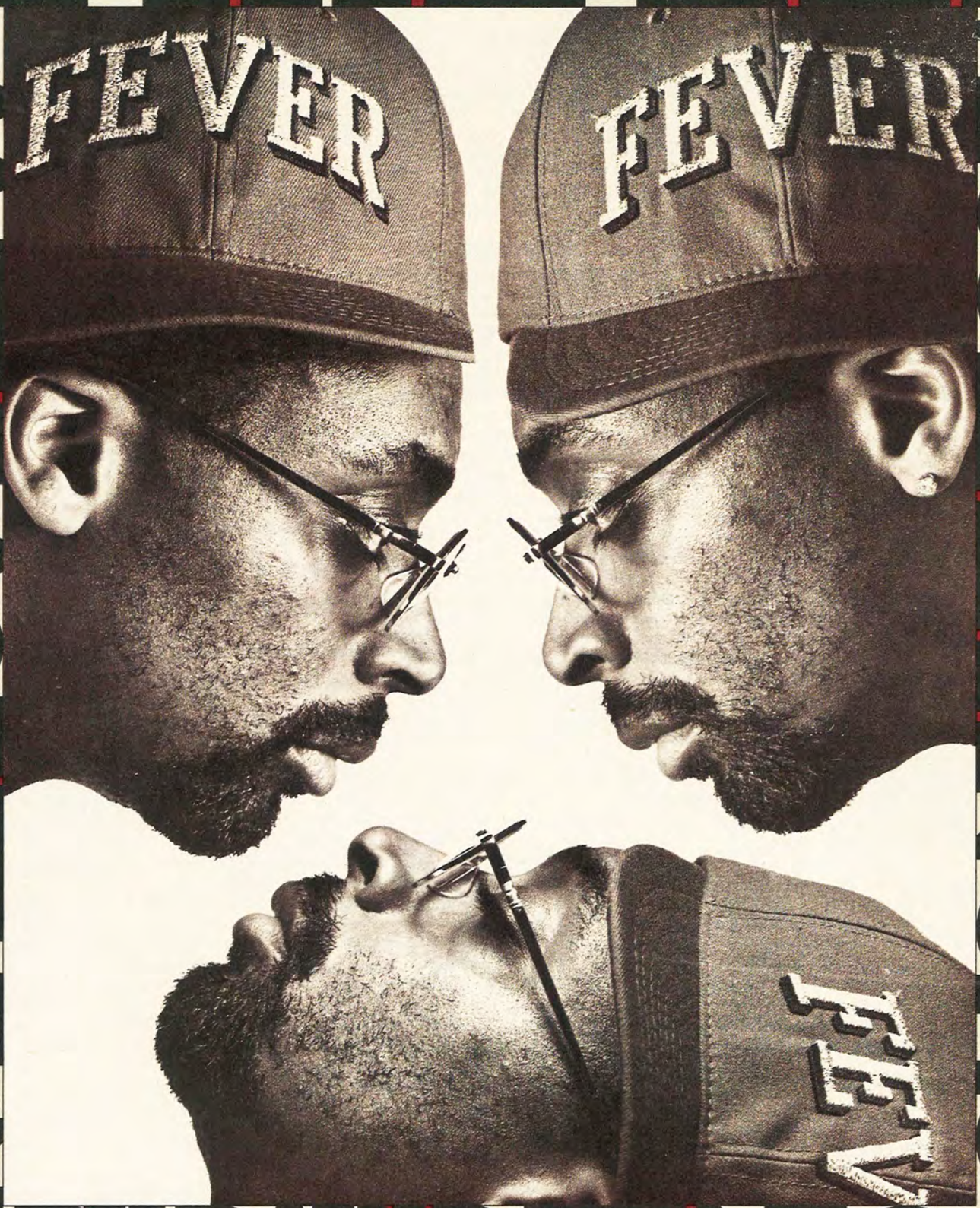
COVER: Photograph of Rod Stewart and Rachel Hunter by Andrew Eccles, Stockholm, Sweden, May 1991. Hair by Edouard Le Nabat; makeup by Tuija Valén.

NORMAN MAILER *Illustration by Philip Burke*

SPIKE THE FEVER

THE ROOTS OF SPIKE LEE'S INTENSITY



BY DAVID BRESKIN

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERT WATSON

MARKETEER, PROVOCATEUR, propagandist, genius, racist, humorist, writer, actor, director, producer, pitchman, chauvinist, homophobe, hoop fan, hype artist, egotist, entrepreneur, innovator, caricaturist, visionary, radical, reactionary: Spike Lee has been called all these things. What he wants you to know, though, is that he is a Strong Black Man. You can call him anything you like. You can, as he is fond of suggesting, kiss his ass. Two times, if you please.

Born Shelton Jackson Lee in 1957, he was called Spike by his mother, a schoolteacher. His father is a musician. They raised the family of five, uncomfortably middle-class, in Brooklyn – for a time in an all-white neighborhood. Since elbowing his way through NYU film school, Lee has made five movies. They've all made dollars, if not always sense.

While Lee's refrain that he "wuz robbed" whenever his films fail to win a desired award grows tiresome, and his incessant racial rationalizations ("They go for the golden white boys every time") cry wolf, his positive energy and impact on American film cannot be denied. We met twice in April, in New York City, where he was editing sound on his current film, *Jungle Fever*.

As far as your image, people think of you as a hustler. Now, we know that everybody has to hustle to make it as an artist. . . .

Do people accuse Madonna of hustling? I'm asking.

It's got a different spin with you. In other cases, it's "So-and-so is hard-working," but with you it's –

Self-promotion.

Are you conscious of that?

Look, I know there are two sets of rules. So, that's just the way it is. I just have to keep doing what I do best – and know what I have to do – and pursue that. I can't let other people dictate the agenda.

Speaking of agendas, let's discuss the 'Spin' issue you edited last fall. Donald Bogle wrote a piece on black cinema that ended like an advertisement for your movie 'Mo' Better Blues,' and there was a piece on Joie, your sister, in that issue.

Yeah, I don't see no problem with that, at all. I had no conflicts about having an article about my sister in a magazine I'm editing. And first of all, I do not tell people what to write, and it was never implicit that Bogle should write about me. The article was about black cinema.

But someone else wrote a review for that issue about Wynton Marsalis's current album and you killed it. Why?

Because the person said this album is a piece of shit. I did not agree, and I did not think this person knew anything about jazz. So I was not going to print that.

Now, if he didn't know anything about jazz but said this album is the most brilliant thing since Louis Armstrong played "West End Blues," would you have printed it?

I don't know that I would have printed that either, but if somebody says that Wynton Marsalis doesn't know what he's doing, and he's a hype artist, and his album's a piece of shit, I'm not going to print that.

This critic, Richard Walls, has pointed out that his review of the Neville Brothers – also negative – was allowed to run in that same issue, the difference being that you don't know the Nevilles like you do Wynton.

No, I know the Nevilles. I mean, not like I know Wynton. I mean, I was the editor.

Some people feel an editor's function is to try to help the writer best express what he's got to say.

Oh, that is bullshit! You're telling me that the *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, ROLLING STONE or *Spin* . . . All editors make decisions on what they want in and what they want out of the magazine. I don't know what type of Utopian magazine you're talking about.

You didn't want Wynton being dissed in your magazine.

I was the editor.

Do you still see your function as a filmmaker as one of "shedding light on problems" so they can get discussed and understood?

Not every film. It depends on the subject matter. I think we start to get in trouble if we expect the artist to have answers all the time. For instance, *School Daze* was the examination of petty, superficial differences that still keep black people apart. To me, we black people are the most ununified people on the face of the earth.

The same differentiations exist within a lot of cultures.

Yeah, but they ain't in the shape that we're in. We don't have the same liberties as other people.

There's a tension, maybe a fundamental contradiction between unification and diversity. How do you deal with that?

I think Jewish people are very diverse but they are very unified, on a lot of things. You talk about Israel: Jewish people are unified on the state of Israel.

You've never heard people argue like Jews argue about what to do about it, or how to deal with Israel.

I know Jewish people are more unified than black people, I know that.

Why do you think that is the case, historically?

I don't want to get into the whole Jewish-black thing.

I'm not asking about Jewish-black relations, I'm asking why you think Jews are more unified than blacks.

As far as America is concerned? Because I don't think Jews have ever been taught to hate themselves the way black people have. That's the whole key: self-hatred. That's not to say that Jewish people haven't been persecuted. I'm not saying that. But they haven't been taught to hate themselves to the level black people have been. When you're persecuted, it's natural for people to come together; but when you're also taught at the same time that you're the lowest form of life on earth, that you're subhuman, then why would you want to get together with other people like that? Who do you hate? Yourself.

'JUNGLE FEVER' WAS NOT DONE AS AN ANSWER TO MY FATHER MARRYING A WHITE WOMAN."

'Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads,' your thesis film, brings up the problem of economic self-reliance. What kind of economic –

I don't really have a program. All I'm saying is that black people for too long haven't really thought of owning businesses. That's the key. Because when you own businesses, you have more control and you can do what you want. That was one of the key things about *Do the Right Thing* – the whole thing about Sal's Famous Pizzeria, between Sal and Buggin' Out. Buggin' Out rightfully felt that Sal should have the decency to at least have some black people up on the Wall of Fame, since all his income is derived from people in the community who are black and Hispanic. Sal had, to me, a more valid point: This is my motherfucking pizzeria, and I can do what I want to do. When you open your own restaurant, you can do what you want. Of course, now Buggin' Out countered by trying to organize a boycott of Sal's, which has always been one of our ways of fighting that type of thinking. But in the case of Buggin' Out, it didn't work.

A boycott takes patience, organization, determination –

And more than rhetoric, and that's something that Buggin' Out didn't have.

It's sad that the fight is over a symbol when the economic realities are so much more significant. You can spend all your time trying to boycott a Korean deli in Brooklyn –

Black people should have their own fruit and vegetable stands in Flatbush. I'd be crazy to spend a year out there boycotting that one Korean place! That doesn't make any sense to me.

Let's go to 'She's Gotta Have It.' The film is set up to answer a question that you were continually asking yourself, during the writing of it: "Why does Nola do all this loving?" In your journal, a couple of times you write, "I better know the answer."

Well, I don't know that I ever really found out the answer. She was really just trying to explore. All she was doing was, she was living her life as men lead theirs. And in most circles, women cannot do it without being labeled a prostitute or a whore or a nymphomaniac.

But what she does is make love to men, and not much more.

She does other things [*laughs*], but this is what we showed! I mean sex is a large part of her life. That's what makes her happy. And doing it with different men, not just one same old guy.

Michele Wallace, the black feminist, wrote that the film is "about a black woman who couldn't get enough of the old phallus, and who therefore had to be raped."

She couldn't get enough, so she had to be raped?

When she refused to marry Jamie, he punishes her with violent sex.

For me that scene is not a stamp of approval of rape. It was my intent to show how horrible it is. So if people have problems with it, you could say it was in the execution of it, but it was never my intent.

But if it was so horrible, why did you write that "it's there that she decides it's Jamie she truly loves."

So what does that mean?

So a woman who is being raped decides at that point that it's the rapist she actually loves?

But I don't think it was because of the rape, though. This is some thing she's been thinking about. She felt that he was the one that cared about her the most. I always wanted it to be ambiguous whether that was a rape or not, anyway.

A rape also functions as the climax of your next film, 'School Daze.'

Uh-huh.

Were you conscious that you had done that on your first film and here, on your second, it was going to be the climax again?

Yeah, I was conscious of it, because that film has a lot to do with sex, and the way this particular fraternity was using women. That was my experience in college. We could have shown guys running a train on her.

I know at one point you considered doing that.

That would have been too much. But that stuff happened all the time, so it wouldn't have been like we were making that up.

You got criticized by some who felt the film wasn't so much a critique of sexism and color-consciousness as a display of it.

It was definitely a critique. It was showing how stupid it is. Numbers like "Straight and Nappy," where the two factions sing about which hair is better; it was definitely a critique of these petty, superficial differences.

But you got critiqued by some women saying that the men were concerned with ideas and politics, divestiture and what have you, while the women were concerned only with looks.

I would say that the balance was more in the male parts, not the female parts, but I wouldn't say that they were complete bimbos, the females.

Does a white woman who gets a fat-lip operation evidence self-hatred by doing that?

No, she just wants to be black. She wants those full lips. [*Laughs*] But that's not my major concern, what white people do to themselves. I can't worry about that.

Silly-ass white people!

[*Laughs*] If they want to sit in the sun and bake themselves and get skin cancer to get black, let 'em! That's not my priority. Black people, for me, that's a priority. Any race is going to say that their own race is

a priority. Now, at the same time, it doesn't mean that you should do that by oppressing other people.

Did you feel the film was antigay, or were you just portraying what you felt was real?

Portraying what's real. How is it that Martin Scorsese can sit in the back of a cab in *Taxi Driver* and say, "See my wife up there? She's up there with a nigger. You ever seen what a .44 Magnum does to a pussy?" I have never read one article saying Martin Scorsese is a racist because he played that character, talking about his wife up there in the apartment with the nigger and he's going to blow her pussy up with a .44. I mean, I like his films a lot, but nobody ever says nothing about that.

But you would defend his right to play that character?

Yes! And I didn't say he was racist because of that, either. But nobody has ever written that. I presented the way it is with a lot of black males, but I don't think I'm a homophobe.

Why do people have that idea?

Because I have a character saying "fag." All my thoughts don't come out of *every* single character I write.

Let's go to the main issue: color-consciousness among blacks. Why do you feel that black men are more interested in light-skinned black women?

Why? Because they're closer to white. I mean why, why, why do little black kids – if they have a choice between a white doll and a black doll – why do they pick a white doll? Same thing.

What would you say about a fair-skinned white man who's interested in dark white women or black women?

I can't answer that question.

How many people have asked you, "Does Mookie do the right thing?"

How many people are there in New York City?

And what's your answer to them?

Black people never ask that. It's only white people.

Why's that?

Because black people understand perfectly why Mookie threw the garbage can through the window. No black person has ever asked me, "Did Mookie do the right thing?" Never. Only white people. White people are like "Oh, I like Mookie so much up to that point. He's a nice character. Why'd he have to throw the garbage can through the window?" Black people, there's no question in their minds why he does that.

Yeah, but why you do something and whether what you do is right are very different things. I know why he does it but –

But only white people want to know why he does it. I spoke at twenty-five universities last year, and that's all I ever got asked. "Did Mookie do the right thing?"

What do you tell them?

I feel at the time he did. Mookie is doing it in response to the police murdering Radio Raheem, with the infamous Michael Stewart choke hold, in front of his face – also knowing this is not the first time that something like this has happened, nor will it be the last. What people have to understand is that almost every riot that's happened here in America involving black people has happened because of some small incident like that: cops killing somebody, cops beating up a pregnant black woman. It's incidents like that that have sparked riots across America. And all we were doing was using history. Mookie cannot lash out against the police, because the police were gone. As soon as Radio Raheem was dead, they threw his ass in the back of the car and got the hell out of there so they could make up their story.

What about attacking Sal?

I think he likes Sal too much. For Mookie, in my mind, Sal's Pizzeria represents everything – and that's why he lashed out against it. It was Mayor Koch, it was the cops – everything.

That's "the power" to him?

It's the power at the moment. But when it's burnt down, he's back to square one, even worse. Look at all those riots: Black people weren't burning down downtown; they were burning down their own neighborhoods.

You end up with no place to have pizza; that's the net effect of the whole action. You haven't stopped the police, you –

That's the irony. Because that's the only way they can really fight. They felt very powerful at that moment, but it was fleeting.

Now Malcolm X said that whether you're using ballots or bullets, your aim has to be true, and you don't aim for the puppet, you aim for the puppeteer. Isn't everybody on the corner there in 'Do the Right Thing' aiming for just a puppet, and not a very powerful puppet at that?

That's true. But Mayor Koch is not in front of them. Rarely do you get a chance to actively engage the enemy, and the closest there was, was Sal's Pizzeria.

One of the disturbing things to me about the reaction to that film is that people focused on the burning of the pizzeria and not the death of Radio Raheem, and that there might be a reason for that other than just hog-calling racism.

The thing I liked about *Do the Right Thing*, especially for critics, is that it was a litmus test. I think you could really tell how people thought and who they were. And if I read a review and all it talked about was the stupidity of burning the pizzeria, the stupidity of the violence, the looting, the burning, and not one mention of the murder of Radio Raheem, I knew *exactly* where they were coming from. Because people that think like that do not put any value on black life, especially the life of young black males. They put more importance on property, white-owned property.

IT'S A MIRACLE THAT BLACK AMERICANS ARE AS COMPLACENT AS WE ARE."

I'm going to assume that that's true, that those people don't put a value on black life. But let me suggest another reason why the burning of the pizzeria becomes the centerpiece of the picture and not the death of Raheem. I think there are aesthetic, as opposed to racial, reasons. Two reasons: One, Radio Raheem is not a fully drawn character – he's a caricature. He's a type, albeit a new type for many people. But the audience doesn't really develop an empathy for him.

I don't know if I agree with that. I think a life is a life.

It is, but Mookie's life would have meant more to the audience, because they knew Mookie better. The second reason is that the burning reads as the climax of the film in terms of the way it's shot and structured.

What you're saying are both good points. But I'm talking about people that don't even *think* about the death of Radio Raheem. What's important to them is that the pizzeria was burnt. For them, Sal is the cavalry. Fort Apache among savages. That's who their interest is with.

You criticized Spielberg's 'Color Purple,' but couldn't it be argued that the neighborhood you paint in Bed-Stuy is as unrealistic a portrayal – in terms of material conditions, if not behavior – as what Spielberg did in 'The Color Purple,' where the house was too big, everything was too clean –

We did not paint the grass, we did not paint the flowers.

But you did get asked, and I know you felt the questions were racist, why weren't there any drugs in this movie?

Why do you have to have drugs in films about black people? Why am I the only filmmaker in history that's been asked, 'Why are there no drugs in your films?'

You yourself wrote that it might be "a serious omission" not to deal with drugs in that film; and then you backed off for aesthetic reasons and felt it might be too much to handle for that film and didn't want to pay lip service to the problem. But when people asked questions about it, rather than admit that it was an issue, you were very defensive and said the question was racist.

I didn't say that all the time. I can tell how questions come. And how questions are asked, how people are thinking. So that's where that came from.

With the quotes at the end of the movie, aren't you making almost a false opposition between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X?

I don't think it was a false opposition. The most important thing for me about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X is that they both wanted the same thing for black people. It's just that they chose very different routes to arrive there. This has always been a choice that black people have had to make: which way to go to achieve our freedom. It doesn't have to be either-or, it can be a synthesis.

Right. But the way it reads in the film is that it's either-or.

All I can say is, that's your interpretation – but I always saw it as a synthesis of both.

But the way you close your journal on the film is with the words: "We have a choice, Malcolm or King. I know who I'm down with."

Right, I'm leaning more toward Malcolm X because my thing is more in line with what he was trying to do. But that does not negate what Martin did either. But there's no strategy in just standing there and getting whupped upside the head with a club. I'm sorry.

There were gains that came because of it.

Not merely because of that though.

Not merely, no. But in certain cases, nonviolence can work as a strategy, no?

Oh, I agree with that. Certain cases.

It wasn't going to work against the Nazis, because they were going to throw your nonviolent ass into a cattle car.

Yeah, but when black people are trying to achieve their freedom, we're always saddled with "Why don't you be nonviolent?" Well, how come we always got to get stuck with the nonviolent tactic? [*Laughs*] While everybody else is doing what they have to do.

You'd admit that the burning of a pizzeria is not the most effective means of combating injustice. How could the response be more effective in authoring constructive change?

That's a difficult question. I don't have the answer.

One of Malcolm X's favorite quotes was by Goethe: "Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action." If Malcolm was watching that scene go down, would he have felt fear because it was ignorance in action?

[*Pause*] He might. But he would have perfectly understood why they were doing what they did. See, Malcolm never condemned the victim. And the people who were burning down the pizzeria were the victims.

What's your opinion of your own work? There is a retrospective book of photos and essays on your first five films, "Five for Five." Now, nobody bats 1.000.

Well, I have my own Elias Sports Bureau, you have yours. [*Laughs*] I have my own statistician.

That's why they call them "fantasy leagues," Spike. I'm just curious about how you look back at your work. Some artists find it painful to look at their early work.

For me, the only film I can't look at is *School Daze* – I mean, *She's Gotta Have It*. It's painful for me to watch that film. The filmmaking, the acting. Any time you see bad acting in a film it's the director's fault. And at that stage I was really not at ease working with actors.

Are you comfortable delineating influences? [Pause] Scor-

sese is an obvious influence, but other than that?

That's about it, as far as filmmaking. A great film for me to see was Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* – it opened up to me what the possibilities could be. 'Specially since I knew Jim; he was ahead of me in film school. I knew I could do this now.

In your own work, there's frequently conflict within a single film between different styles – which is unusual for mainstream, narrative American cinema.

I wouldn't use the word *conflict.*

Juxtaposition?

Yes, that's better. It doesn't bother me to mix stuff like that up, because I don't think I make genre films. I don't think I make films that can be classified in one specific cubbyhole. I think the better question might be: Do you think you've been successful with the juxtaposition? I really couldn't do a film that's *one thing* all the way through. That wouldn't be very interesting for me.

It does create certain kinds of collisions that people are not used to.

Most of the movies that people are used to suck anyway. They're the same old formula, and at the end of the movie everything is wrapped up in a nice little bow. Very rarely do those movies ever make you think, and once you leave the theater, by the time you're back on the subway or driving home, you've forgotten what you watched. It's like disposable entertainment. You sit there for two hours, and it washes over you and that's it.

You like your endings to be really open-ended.

Not all the time. I just don't think everything has to be resolved.

Do you feel that's the work for audiences, to build a resolution in their heads?

Yes, I feel that. But not just to build a resolution, but to think. I think we don't *demand* enough of the audience. No subtlety. Playing down to the lowest common denominator all the time. Making films for an intelligence level of retarded twelve-year-olds.

Well, there's something about narrative itself that conditions people to want a period at the end of a sentence.

The condition comes from Hollywood and people who've been force-fed films like that. Not narrative.

Let's talk more about black film. You said, in the documentary on the making of 'Do the Right Thing': "The No. 1 concern is to try to be the best filmmaker you can be and not be out there bullshitting, saying you're a black filmmaker."

I think it holds true more now than when I said that.

Are there people out there bullshitting, saying, "I'm a black filmmaker, love me!"

Not "love me," but a lot of people are getting deals now, to make films, and I'm not begrudging anybody, but we'll find out the contenders from the pretenders.

Do you still want to be seen as a "black" filmmaker, or a filmmaker first, who happens to be black? It's a subtle but important distinction.

To me, I don't think there's ever going to be a time in America where a white person looks at a black person and they don't see that they're black. That day ain't coming very soon. Don't hold your breath. So that's a given. So why am I going to get blue in the face, worrying about that? For me, that's one of the most important things Malcolm X said: "What do you call a black man with a Ph.D.? Nigger." That's it. So why am I going to spend time and energy saying: "Don't call me a black filmmaker. I'm a filmmaker!" I'm not getting into that argument. I'll leave that to the other *Negroes.* [*Laughs*] The other so-called Negroes.

Do you still feel that you are writing for a black audience? Right up front you said, "Look, Woody Allen writes for intellectual New York City Jews and I write for blacks."

Yes, but that does not exclude – if you do it well – everybody else. I like Woody Allen's films, but there's stuff in those films I don't get, and the person next to me is *dying!* I don't get it. But that does not deter from my enjoyment of the film. I think the same is true of me. Black people be rolling down the aisle, and white folks don't understand it. They may not get everything – all the nuances – but they still enjoy the film. So I don't think there's any crime in writing for a specific audience.

I think people were surprised, maybe because of their own naiveté, that you would do that, that you would want to –

See, that's that whole crossover motherfucker that motherfuckers fall into. That's because anytime they see the word *black,* they have a negative connotation. I wasn't raised like that. That wasn't my upbringing. So I'm never going to run from the word *black.*

You've also written, "Black people are the most creative people on this earth."

I agree. I think so. I still agree.

How can you say that one race of beings is more creative than another race?

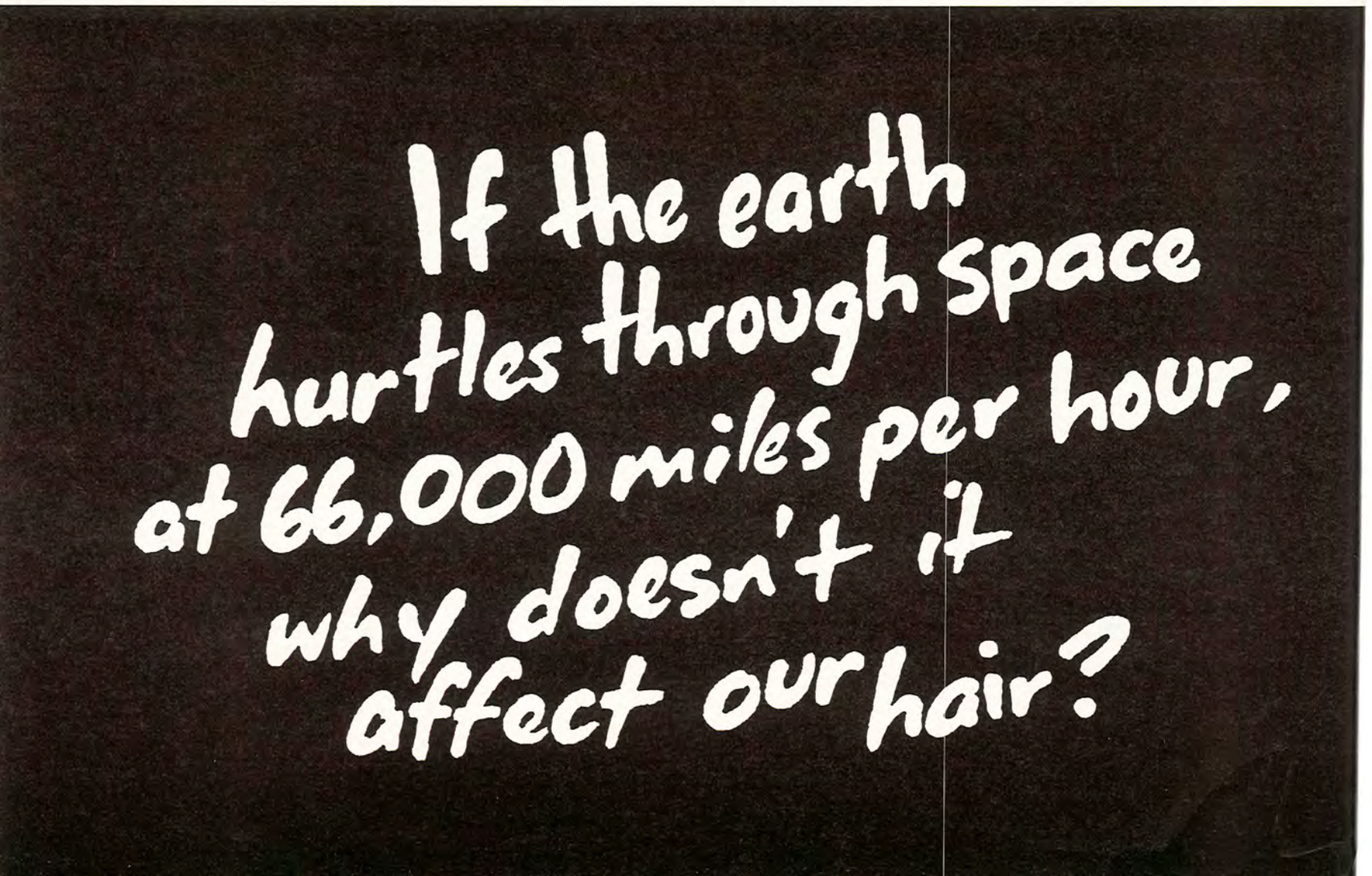
Easy, I just said it. I guess that makes me a racist.

We'll get to that. Are you speaking of all black people or American blacks?

Black people. Africans. Everybody black. Not just American blacks.

You've stated, though, that you think "black people have let black artists get away with too much." What do you mean?

Well, I think a lot of times black artists are not held accountable, as they should be. I don't feel that just because we are successful artists that we should be let off the hook, to do whatever we want to do pertaining to some matters: performing in South Africa; or like Eazy-E, having lunch with President Bush and being a member of the Inner Circle and donating $2500 to the Re-



publican party and at the same time being a member of a rap group [N.W.A] that says, "Fuck tha Police," not knowing that Bush – before the incident – had hailed [L.A. police chief Daryl] Gates as a hero. What kind of reasoning is that?

Hard-core hypocrisy.

They're frauds. Not everybody. But a lot of these guys, the reason they don't know anything is because they don't read. If they read, they would have some consciousness. So how are you going to donate $2500 to the Republican party, sit down and have lunch with him? How would you even *think* of something like that? But they don't think. He didn't think.

In 1987, in writing about racism, you wrote: "We're all tired about white-man this, white-man that. Fuck dat! It's on us." No more excuses. But if you ask white people if you had said that, given your persona, they would be surprised.

Yeah, but where are they getting their perceptions from? [*Laughs*] From TV, magazines and newspapers.

And are you coming across in a way that's not truthful to who you are?

Yeah, because the way the media portrays me is as an angry black man. The funny thing to me is when white people accuse blacks, when they see somebody black who's angry, they say, "Why are you so angry?" [*Laughs*] If they don't know why black people are angry, then there's *no hope*. I mean, it's a miracle that black Americans are as complacent and happy-go-lucky as we are. I don't think I have that much anger. I don't think I'm angrier than I have a right to be. See, that statement you read me is not a complete statement. On one hand, you cannot deny the injustices that have been committed against you as a people. On the other hand, you cannot use as an excuse: "Well, I really would have liked to have done that, but Mr. Charlie was blocking me every single time." I think that's the more complete statement.

You've said you don't think blacks can be racist.

Right.

Are you speaking of black Americans?

In this case, I am speaking of black Americans. And then what I always say, and people never print, is that for me there's a difference between racism and prejudice. Black people can be prejudiced. But to me, racism is the *institution*. Black people have never enacted laws saying that white folks cannot own property, white folks can't intermarry, white folks can't vote. You got to have power to do that. That's what racism is – an institution.

Institutionally hindering an entire people?

Yeah. Me calling you "white motherfucker," I don't think that's racism, I think that's prejudice. That's just racial slurs. That ain't gonna hurt nobody. *Anybody* can be prejudiced. That's the complete statement. But that never gets printed.

I see racism all over the world: one tribe to another tribe, the Japanese to the Chinese, and so on. It's incredibly complicated and incredibly sad, and so I can't buy your statement, "White people invented racism."

Where did it start then?

I don't know where it started. What do you think caused it?

Because they wanted to exploit people. Colonization. Why do you think there's no Native Americans? Why do you think they're on reservations?

You think that was the beginning of racism? The 1600s?

No, way before that.

We're talking about history now, and I'm curious as to whether you've thought about what are the origins of prejudice, what are the origins of racism. "White people invented racism" makes it seem like you believe there was a grand conspiracy to deny the fruits of the planet to everybody by a group of people sitting in a room in Amsterdam in 1619.

TO ME, WE BLACK PEOPLE ARE THE MOST UNUNIFIED PEOPLE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

You don't think there was a plan to wipe out the Indians?

I think that's certainly what happened, but I don't think it was drawn up like the Magna Carta.

Look, that shit had to be planned. There's no way . . . They saw the riches this land had and they took over. And that's what the Afrikaners did in South Africa. And before that, that's what all of Europe did when they split up Africa into colonies. I mean, [*pause*] maybe white people didn't invent the patent on racism, but they sure perfected that motherfucker! They got that shit down to a science that's being implemented now, full throttle.

You don't see any decline in it, do you?

What, racism? No. I don't smoke crack. [*Laughs*] If anything, it's on the upswing – with eight years of Reagan, and now Bush. And now this war, America's in this patriotic fever. I went to the Super Bowl, man, I wish I hadn't gone. I was nauseous with all that flag-waving and airplanes flying overhead. God bless America.

It's fascistic.

It was like being in Nazi Germany at that Super Bowl

game! Instead of Leni Riefenstahl –

– You had NFL Films!

You had NFL Films and "Up With People." [*Laughs wildly*] And Whitney Houston lip-syncing the national anthem. That marred the game for me.

Where do you think it comes from, Spike? Prejudice?

Where? I can't answer. I'm not a theologian.

You think it's a theological answer?

It might be. But who's to say that there's ever really been true peace on this earth. It's something we hope will happen some day, maybe in our grandchildren's children's time.

Because God knows there are tribes in Africa that loathe other tribes, and always have, predating the white man's arrival.

That's true. But did you ever read a quote or a statement from me, saying that black people don't fight among themselves? We kill, we kill each other – shit, white people don't even have to do anything. I mean, black males are killing each other at an alarming rate now. White people can just sit back and watch.

And keep score. You talked yesterday about the assault on black men. For every L.A. police idiocy, there's fifty black men assaulting other black men.

So that makes it all right what the cops do?

No, no, no. But the amount of black-on-black crime must be a bitter pill to swallow for you, as a black man.

You bet. I mean, we're killing each other.

Do you care that some people feel you hide behind the shield of racism, that you're quick to call people racists to deflect criticism of yourself?

No. [*Yawns*] That doesn't bother me, not at all.

Let me bring up two instances, quite specifically. When you opened your shop in Brooklyn, some dude from MTV asked you, "Spike, what are you going to do with the profits from this store?" And in what didn't get bleeped out, you said you don't ask Robert De Niro what he does with the profits from his restaurant. So you were assuming that he was asking you because you're black and you were opening your own business. I won't come to his defense – because I don't know what was in his mind, asking the question – but look, Robert De Niro is not at all a political guy, but there are white artists who –

That is *bullshit*. That is complete bullshit. No white person who's opened up a motherfucking business has *ever* been asked, "What are you gonna do with your profits?"

But people like Sting and Bono, who are political –

That is bullshit, that is bullshit. You're telling me people ask Sting if his album goes triple platinum, "What are you going to do with your profits?" This is motherfucking America. When black people start to make some money, then it becomes a fucking problem. [*Very upset, yelling*] Tell me a time when a white artist was asked, "What are you going to do with your profits?"

I've asked white –

That is bullshit! No one would ever come to someone's restaurant opening or book coming out and say, "Mr. White Person, what are you going to do with your profits?" I don't care what you say, that shit don't happen.

I'm telling you, I've asked white artists who have political points of view, okay, whether it be the rain forest or the Irish problem, if they're doing something about it, I've asked them.

That is not the same thing, David. I'm talking about the first day the store is open, and he has a microphone in my face, "What are you going to do with your profits?" It was a racist question. The night the motherfucking Tribeca Grill opened, they did not ask Robert De Niro, "What are you gonna do with your profits?" It's plain and simple.

Got it. The other controversy involved kids being killed for expensive sneakers such as Air Jordans. Then you wrote in 'The National' that the criticism of you was racially motivated. Do you feel it's possible to be concerned about what's going on – kids being killed for sneakers – and not have it be racist?

I don't believe that shit. [*Jumps up, acts this out*] You go around Chicago and look for some motherfucker that wears the same size Air Jordans you have and boom . . .

It seems illogical to me, too, but Michael Jordan reacted in a very different way than you did. Maybe because he has a different program than you do. But I know there were black groups that actually picketed Chicago Stadium and put out leaflets –

And Operation PUSH is behind that.

– about Michael and Nike, and the creation of status symbols in the community. Your reaction to that was very defensive. I'm not blaming you. You have a right to defend yourself, but –

You don't think I should defend myself when they're saying that the blood of young black America is on my hands and Spike Lee is responsible for black kids killing each other?

No, I would hope that you would. It was the manner in which you defended yourself that suggested that anyone who cared about that problem was a racist, because they don't really care about black kids anyway. To me, if it was white kids that were getting killed and someone screamed bloody hell, that you could say was racist – the only reason they care is 'cause it's white kids getting killed; if it were black kids in the inner city, no one would care.

Wrong. Wrong. The emphasis is wrong. The emphasis should not be on the sneakers. The emphasis should not be on the sneakers or the Starter jackets. The emphasis should not be on the sheepskin coats or the gold chains. The emphasis should be on: What are the conditions among young black males that are making them put that much emphasis on material things? What is it that makes the acquisition of a pair of sneakers or a gold chain that gives them their worth in life, that makes them feel like a human being? That's where the motherfucking emphasis should be.

THERE'S NO STRATEGY IN JUST STANDING THERE AND GETTING WHUPPED UPSIDE THE HEAD."

The causes, not the symptoms.

Exactly.

I understand that. But don't you feel, in creating those ads, that you increased the level of status attached to that particular product, Air Jordans, so that it became something more desirable? Don't you feel you increased people's desire for the product? Isn't that what a good commercial does? Makes them salivate, makes them want?

Yes, but at the same time I believe that young black Americans are not going to go kill each other over a pair of sneakers. That is my belief. I don't think a motherfucker is going to shoot somebody because he has a pair of sneakers. And if that's the case, then . . . then let's not sell cars. Let's get rid of the whole capitalist system as a whole! I mean, you just can't harp on the sneakers. If people want to be so righteous, let's do away with the shit across-the-board. Just don't jump on me, Michael Jordan and [Georgetown basketball coach] John Thompson.

Are you comfortable saying you're a capitalist?

[*Pause*] Am I a capitalist? [*Pause*] We all are, over here. And I'm just trying to get the power to do what I have to do. To get that power, you have to accumulate some type of bank. And that's what I've done. I've always tried to be in an entrepreneurial mode of thinking. Ownership is what's needed amongst Afro-Americans. Ownership. Own stuff.

Let's turn to 'Jungle Fever.' After your mother died in 1976, your father remarried a woman named Susan Kaplan. Is she a black woman or a –

She's Jewish.

What has that experience been like?

Well, I mean, that's his wife, so I really don't have nothing to say about it. [*Pause*] We don't get along that good, but that's his wife, so that's that.

Since you were an adult by then, it's not like she was your stepmother.

She hasn't been *nobody's* stepmother.

But you have a half brother by her.

Arnold, yeah; he's five.

Do you still look forward to having a family?

Yeah.

Five kids?

ALL BOYS [*laughs*]!

What is this "all boys" stuff? Nola in 'She's Gotta Have It' wants "five rusty-butt boys." Bleek wants a boy.

[*Yawns*] Well, I wouldn't throw a girl back in the ocean. But I want all sons. One girl would be all right.

Is it that you like boys more than girls?

I think there should be definitely more black men, that's for sure. Start to even it up.

Did the intermarriage within your family figure at all in your making 'Jungle Fever'?

No, not because of my father. I mean, it wasn't done solely because of my father. Intermarriage has been with us since slaves were brought over here from Africa. So that was not done as an answer to my father marrying a white woman at all.

There's a lot of religious themes that bubble up in 'Jungle Fever.'

Well, that's really because of who I wrote it for. Ossie [Davis] is an ordained minister. So I really wanted to bring that flavor to this film. You see that more in older black people. That's all we did: get on our hands and knees and pray, and sing to the high heavens. But I'm not too up on organized religion.

Of any sort?

Of any sort.

You think the church was used to hold black folk down in this country?

All over the world. The Bible in one hand and the gun in the other. It kept us praying to Jesus and worrying about the hereafter instead of what was happening now – getting our asses kicked! We were worrying about trying to get into heaven. Malcolm said the white man's heaven is the black man's hell. We want our heaven here on earth. So in a lot of ways religion has been used to oppress people.

The focus of 'Jungle Fever' is not so much on the interracial relationship itself as on the environment in which it has to operate. Why did you make that choice?

Because in this case, these two people came together for probably the wrong reasons. It really wasn't love. Even though Angie, I think she grows to love Flipper. But that's not the same case for him. And it's the two neighborhoods they're from, Harlem and Bensonhurst, and the boundaries that are crossed, and what happens to you when you cross those boundaries, how you're looked upon by friends, family and the two neighborhoods they come from.

It's pretty despairing in that regard.

It is. Again, this is not to say that is going to be the case, or is the case, with every interracial couple, but I think that with the dynamics today – especially here in New York City and, again, with those two neighborhoods – I think it's fairly accurate. The difference between this film and *Do the Right Thing* [*Cont. on 121*]

Stewart

[*Cont. from 48*] of him and Hunter sunbathing on their own property, he attired in bikini briefs and she in G-string and brassiere. The headline: YOU BARE IT WELL!) "The only thing I don't like about this country is the dread of the Sunday papers," he said ruefully. "You should see the last fifteen years of clips, lad." At this point there is so much gossip to clear up that even his liner notes to *Vagabond Heart* include a jaunty disclaimer. "Many foolish and hurtful things have been written about myself in the press over the years, most of which have been severely embroidered half-truths," he wrote, in part. "I'm not complaining, just stating a fact. . . . [But] those who scribble with crooked nib will one day have to answer to the great Editor in the sky."

I suggested that he may not be considered the most sympathetic character, especially given his abrupt marriage to Hunter mere months after breaking up with Emberg, who waited six years to marry him. "What the press doesn't understand," he said carefully, "is that Kelly left *me*. This has yet to come from my own mouth, but she was the one who left. It's the truth. If it wasn't, I certainly wouldn't say this, because I've got a court case coming up. She decided to leave me – she had another geezer, she bought herself a house, and I was left high and dry. And that's when I met Rachel.

"I'm just sick of it," he went on, exasperated. "Then there's this girlfriend [Raegan Newman], who says I was with her two weeks before I got married. Absolute fucking bullshit! Made love in an elevator! I'm very shy. I do not get my block and tackle out just anywhere! I'm not like that. What did I ever do to this girl? That smelly shitbag fucking bastard bitch."

This seemed as good a time as any to address the most indelible rumor ever to be attached to his or any career: the Stomach-Pump Incident. "Oh, the Cum-in-the-Belly story?" he said jovially. According to legend, Rod Stewart is said to have collapsed one night, more than ten years ago, in any number of American cities, where he was rushed to the nearest emergency room. There his stomach was pumped of its contents, the bounty of which included between one pint to four quarts of semen. (I spoke with urban-folklore expert Jan Harold Brunvand, author of such treatises as *The Choking Doberman* and *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, who knows of the Stewart myth and theorizes it grew out of a similar fantasy, known as the Promiscuous Cheerleader.)

"That story spread all around the fucking world," said Stewart, still tickled by it. "What's amazing is that it's a story that never appeared in the press, as far as I know. I never read it or heard it anywhere on the radio. I wasn't even in the country at the time it supposedly happened. And *you* know I'm not a queer! It was so laughable, it never really hurt me. What could it have been? A fleet of fucking sailors? Or footballers? I mean, what the hell? *Jesus Christ!*"

THERE IS SOMETHING REASSURING ABOUT a man who eats asparagus with his fingers. In search of a moral, we had gone to dinner at an ancient, sprawling hotel in Hertfordshire. The cavernous dining room was all but empty, and those few people who lingered at tables could not help but notice the man with the hair and the sleek Italian clothes.

"I love to come to places like this," he said. "I love it because there isn't anybody here." He ate his asparagus with his fingers (biting off the tips, discarding the stems). He ate his chateaubriand with utensils. He ordered three bottles of wine and sent one back, likening its taste to "salt water" and "dog shit." He told the wine steward to fill his glass completely at each pouring. "A bit more," he coached. "I'm a big boy."

He said this about being an elder statesman: "Nothing gives me more satisfaction than looking through the *Billboard* charts. There's *no one* else on the British charts today who was on the charts when 'Maggie May' came out." He said this about performing: "I'm a very happy man when I'm up there singing. I get up there sometimes and halfway through a song my arms are going and my legs are going. I think, '*Hold on, mate! You're forty-six! You shouldn't be doing this.*' Then I think, '*Yes, you should.*' I get my rocks off when I'm playing." And he said this about his heart: "Sometimes I've fallen short of the mark, in terms of loyalty. But for the first time in my life, I'd rather see my cock cut off than be unfaithful to this woman. I really would. It doesn't even cross my mind. I sound so corny, but I'd given up hope of ever feeling like this in my entire life, the way I feel about her. I just grew so complete and centered. I'm no longer on the hunt."

Also, and this seems an essential point, he said that he laughs in his sleep now. He dreams the dreams of heroes and kings. "Great fights, great fights," he said of them, beaming. "I always have fights with gargoyles in my dreams. I had a real punch-out with one last night, a terrible one. I thought it was maybe because I didn't have anything to drink last night, and my body didn't know what happened to it. Or it was because Rachel wasn't there. But what a puncher! They're punching me and we're all sweaty. I loved it. It doesn't worry me in the least.

"It was quite hilarious," he said, leaving all interpretation to other minds. "All I know is that I'm just punching the fuckers, and I'm laughing and punching some more."

By his own account, he has not yet lost a fight. ■

Lee

[*Cont. from 71*] is, that film was mainly about race, and this you add class and sex to that. For me, that's a much more combustible combination: race, class and sex.

Does the film not want to allow for the possibility that there could be love between Flipper Purify or Angie Tucci, or is it just Flipper that doesn't want to allow for that?

I think it's Flipper. But you have to realize, Flipper is the one who's married. I really do think there comes a point in the film where Angie loves Flipper. She's younger than him, too.

In your own personal life, you've had a little experience with some of the dynamics here, with your infamous lunch with Kim Basinger. It was reported in some newspapers that you and Kim were an item. [Spike laughs] The quote was "I wouldn't want 15 million black women to think I had gone astray."

I said, "I don't want the wrath of 20 million black women on my ass, thinking I had went astray." And that was the end of that; it was a joke.

Let's focus on the words "going astray." Is it your personal feeling that to marry outside the race is "going astray?"

I wouldn't do it, I wouldn't do it. But if two people are in love with each other, that's it. But I don't think I would marry anybody other than a black woman.

For political reasons or because you're simply not attracted to white women?

Exactly.

Which?

Both.

What about the name "Purify" for the lead character? Are we to make too much of that as a metaphor?

No. It was there for that reason.

Do you think the idea of a "colorblind" society is even something that's positive to shoot for, or is it just stupid?

I don't think Utopia is going to be a society where everybody's blood is mixed up. Hopefully, we can live a peaceful existence, and people can still have their distinct nationalities or backgrounds or races or whatever.

Would you call yourself an integrationist?

Not necessarily. I'm not going to break my neck to piss in the same urinal [*laughs*] next to some white guy. That battle's been won. I don't think the battle anymore is living next to a white person or going to the same school. The battle to me should be on the economic front.

What about the new Black Nationalism?

What, move back to Africa?

Not necessarily that, but it doesn't really advocate mixing; it advocates mixing as little as possible, even in a social way.

Do I advocate that? I think you should be around who you're comfortable with. I'm very comfortable around white people, so I have no qualms about it. I'm not calling for no separate state, or nothing like that. ■

Clash

[*Cont. from 55*] the defiant new art on their chests. And the best part is, there is no way this art can be shut down or deprived of its funds. It has already spilled over into the streets and into our homes.

At 7:00 p.m., Slayer takes the stage and tears into its set. There is a dense, pummeling quality to the band's sound – the bass rumbles, the drums explode at a rat-a-tat clip, and the guitars blare in buzz-saw unison – but it's all played with a remarkable precision and deftness. Meanwhile, the audience that is jammed up close to the stage erupts in frenzy, with some kids slamming and bounding hard against each other, while others clamber atop one another so they can dive over the barricade. This goes on and on until even the band can't take its eyes off the action. On a night such as this, there isn't anything in all rock & roll like a Slayer show. Watching the melee and hearing the fulmination of the music, you feel like you're seeing the most exciting live band since the Sex Pistols.

At the same time, this is also a band that deals with rather disturbing subject matter. When Slayer first emerged in the early 1980s, the group's repertoire (written at the time by guitarists Kerry King and Jeff Hanneman) was heavy with songs about Satan and hell. But in recent years, under the influence of bassist and vocalist Tom Araya, who is now the band's chief lyricist, the emphasis has shifted. Araya – whose family fled Chile during a time of political unrest and who has lived around some of the rougher sections of Los Angeles and witnessed the effects of gang warfare – decided the band should write more about the human and social horrors of the modern world, and over the course of the band's last three albums he has developed a special affection for such topics as political oppression, modern warfare, gang killings and serial murders. Perhaps the band's most chilling song is "Dead Skin Mask," about Ed Gein, the famous mass murderer who killed numerous people and flayed them and who later served as the inspiration for such films as *Psycho*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. In "Dead Skin Mask," Araya enters into Gein's soul and tells the story of his crimes from inside that dark and awful place.

"I know a song like that," says Araya, "where I'm writing it as if I *am* the person who is doing the killing, freaks people out. They say, 'How could you think that way?' Well, it isn't hard at all. In fact it's very easy. I sit there and I ask myself, 'Now, how would it feel if I really wanted to kill somebody?' And I know: I'd feel an exhilaration. I'd feel awesome.

"See, when I wrote 'Dead Skin Mask,' " Araya continues, [*Cont. on 124*]