

# **"If I Was Six Feet Tall, I Would Have Been Italian": Spike Lee's *Guineas***

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*"Fight the Power! Fight the Power! Fight the Powers that Be!"  
Bensonhurst. Howard Beach. "Fight the Powers that Be!"*

The place-names signify areas where Italian Americans and African Americans have met in violent conflict. In the media, these are quickly converted to illustrations of ethnic incompatibility and diversity that is posited as a threat to the American Dream. When does America speak of race or ethnicity, if not to reenforce a negative typology of violent, unpredictable, emotional, and therefore dangerous groups clamoring at the gates of civil society? When do we hear ethnicity mentioned if not during periods of inter-ethnic conflict?

The threat of ethnicity has spawned a comparison with cultism, which represents similarly menacing communities that define themselves (or are defined) as outside of the mainstream. America's relationship to "cults" being not altogether felicitous, the association of ethnic identity with the end products of Jim Jones' Jonestown, David Koresh's "Ranch Apocalypse," as it was dubbed by *U. S. News and World Report*, or the Move "family," feed the fear of difference that seems to run rampant in the U. S. A. As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., warns in his national bestseller *The Disuniting of America* (1993), "a cult of ethnicity has arisen both among non-Anglo whites and among non-white minorities to denounce the idea of a melting-pot, to challenge the concept of 'one people,' and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate

ethnic and racial communities." Given the generally xenophobic depictions of "ethnics" in the media, this becomes a very appropriate baptism.

While on the surface Howard Beach and Bensonhurst are simplified into white/black conflicts, they are, on the contrary, orchestrated beyond the facts to maintain the fictional category of "whiteness" as an untouched and innocent category. "Whiteness" is salvaged as the only safe category for all good citizens, no matter what their background. "White" is in fact a colour-blind category; one does not have to be white (as in caucasian) to be "white," for this is an aesthetics, an ideology of cultural absorption and erasure rather than an ethnic category.

The two Spike Lee films that I will consider in the following pages, *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Jungle Fever* (1991), might be read to support the apocalyptic warnings of Schlesinger and others who would erase the *pluribus* from the exalted *E pluribus unum*. However, I would contend that both films illustrate differences between groups in order to highlight similarities that underline the *pluribus* in the dictum. Further, Spike Lee's representations of ethnic conflict constitute a critique of "white" ideology by exposing the mechanisms through which "whiteness" instrumentalizes ethnic conflict to its benefit.

#### *IS THERE HISTORY HERE?*

The undercurrents that flow beneath the violence of Bensonhurst and Howard Beach are related to questions of racial definition, privilege, and inadequacy not only in the relationship between African Americans and Italian Americans, but within the Italian American community itself. Such questions are historically determined in the experience of both groups within the American frame; and, in order to establish a context for the Italian American component of the equation, I think it might be helpful to briefly outline the historical background of some Italian immigrants to the United States of America. And I will stress here that, though the immigrant experience for Italians might be similar regardless of the region from which they emigrated, I am most concerned with Southern Italian immigrants for reasons that will be made clear below.

The history of Southern Italy, the region from which most Italian immigrants originate, is steeped in an ambiguous relationship with the rest of the peninsula. Construction of Southerners as

the "other" within found support in the research of followers of Cesare Lombroso, such as Enrico Ferri and Alfredo Niceforo, who established the racial inferiority of southern Italians through cranial measurements and other pseudoscientific criteria. The works of these scientists, along with a long-standing myth of the richness and fertility of the land (which such an inferior population could not properly manage), served to substantiate such earlier accusations toward Southerners, ones that justified the annexation of the South in 1860 in what was euphemistically termed "unification."

Much of the Pre- and Post-Risorgimento literature (the period during which Italian nationalism fermented and actualized its desires) illustrates quite well the attitudes regarding Southern Italy. Resistance to unification was painted as *brigantaggio* (banditism), as criminal, in order to veil the repression of a movement that engaged a full 2/5ths of the newly established national army, and resulted in 10,000 deaths, and twice as many imprisonments and banishments. The resistance lasted decades, during which typifications of Southerners as Africans, Indians, cannibals, etc. became even more rooted. These assignations were, of course, used in derogatory terms meant to associate Southerners with other equally despised peoples. The rhetoric was meant to justify a military intervention that was then to spread to further colonialist annexations on the African continent; the chronological coincidences between the repression of southern rebellions and the invasion of African lands such as Eritrea are not to be overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

The result of the so-called unification of the Italian peninsula was political and economic oppression, which brought about the massive exodus of Southern Italians. During the one hundred years following unification, approximately 25 million Italians emigrated, two thirds from the South. In addition to this one must account for the additional millions that migrated from the South to the North of Italy to labor in the industries of that region.

The positioning of Southern Italians in a North American, U. S., context is problematic, given the slavery paradigm that has fixed a white/black binary system of confrontation. However, this simple, dichotomous, dominant paradigm has, aside from African Americans, often included other groups deemed racially inferior, such as Southern Italians, Jews, Arabs, Asians, Native Peoples, and others. F. James Davis, in *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition*, notes that

in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), Madison Grant maintained that the one-drop rule should be applied not only to blacks but also to all other ethnic groups he considered biologically inferior "races," such as Hindus, Asians in general, Jews, Italians, and other Southern and Eastern European peoples. Grant [. . .] and others succeeded in getting Congress to pass the national origins quota laws of the early 1920s. This racist quota legislation sharply curtailed immigration from everywhere in the world except Northern and Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere, until it was repealed in 1965. Grant and other believers in the racial superiority of their own group [. . .] consider miscegenation with any "inferior" people to be the ultimate danger to the survival of their own group and have often seen the one-drop rule as a crucial component in their line of defense. (13)

Such a background calls for a deeper investigation into the past relations between Southern Italians and African Americans in order to attempt to understand the distance that has grown between these two communities.

#### MASKING THE ETHNIC MASK WITH AN ETHNIC MASK

One of the most entertaining ethnic role-playing that involves Italians is that established by Chico Marx in films such as *Animal Crackers* (1930) and *Coconuts* (1929). Marx's Ravelli character wears the mask of the Italian immigrant as a vehicle for his Jewish humour, and the mask is often acknowledged in the comedies. Charles Musser's essay, "Ethnicity, Role-playing, and American Film Comedy: From Chinese Laundry Scene to Whoopee (1894-1930),"<sup>2</sup> which treats the Marx brothers' comedies, isolates this ethnic game playing and defines

Ravelli's choice of a new identity [as] perverse because the guise of an Italian immigrant hardly moves him up society's totem pole toward WASP respectability. Rather, it is a gesture of solidarity with another "swarthy race." His choice of an Italian persona is a refusal to assimilate. (69)

Similar representations of ethnic shield, or mirror, and solidarity are to be found in many recent films, among which are Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*<sup>3</sup> and *Jungle Fever* wherein the mask is often cast as an instrument of various levels of conformism. As I will show, these films use Italian immigrants as a sounding board to address issues of ethnic inclusion/exclusion, solidarity, difference, and similarity. Lee casts Italians as different, but not so

different, from Blacks, because in the end they too cannot achieve full acceptance. This re-establishes the Italians' ties with the typifications assigned them in their homeland and as immigrants, and thereby highlights their marginality. The unearthing of these links in the psyche of Italian Americans is most likely the element that instigates the violent reactions toward the visibly different subject that becomes the mirror image of their own oppression.<sup>4</sup>

In the published journal and script of *Do the Right Thing*, (1989), Lee writes "that the idea for *Do the Right Thing* arose for me out of the Howard Beach incident. It was 1986, and a Black man was still being hunted down like a dog" (118). At Howard Beach three African American men were chased from a pizza parlor by a group of Italian Americans. One of the African Americans died as he attempted to escape across a busy thoroughway.<sup>5</sup> In *Do the Right Thing*, Lee portrays the tensions between Sal, Vito, and Pino, who run a Pizzeria in Bed Stuy, and the Black residents of the neighborhood. These tensions build throughout the film until they climax in violence: destruction of the pizzeria, and the death of one of the young AA protagonist at the hands of the police.

But violence is not the central focus of the film. At a subtler level, there is a different type of tension that plays on the similarities between the two groups. Throughout both films, characters take on each other's movements, expressions, etc., as part of the process of ethnic masking. Gold chains, hand movements, verbal and physical communication, none are the dominion of one or the other group; Italians act Black, and African Americans act Italian.

Ruthe Carter, costume designer for *Do the Right Thing*, describes one important aspect of ethnic masking, or interference.

When Pino, John Turturro's character, comes to the pizza shop in the beginning of the film, he's all in black. [. . .] Then he changes to a white 'guinea' T-shirt for work. When the family closes up shop for the night, John changes back into the black outfit. Which is all meant to support his character's disdain for the work he does and the neighborhood. (p. 7 center section)

Pino's chameleon-like character is indeed reflected in his dress, as are Sal's (his father) and Vito's (his brother). But I would offer that this is also related to the ethnic image that they hold of themselves. All three arrive at the Pizzeria wearing variations of black and white dress, an indication of their socio-ethnic position. Then, Sal and Vito wear black tops on the job, while Pino changes to an all white uniform, apron and "guinea" shirt. Outside of the

Bed Stuy, the black outfit represents Pino's otherness, his blackness in a WASP world, even if only in the safety of his Italian neighborhood.

Within the confines of the black neighborhood that represents society's oppression/repression of blackness, Pino must establish a distance from the situation that will grant him the power that he feels he is denied on the outside. Therefore, the "guinea" shirt, because it is white, becomes a sign of power, in the context of the Black neighborhood. Pino likes to flaunt his power either with his younger brother, whom he constantly berates and abuses, with Mookie (Spike Lee), the Black delivery person that works at the Pizzeria, or the Black customers. However, the shirt is the most ambiguous sign of "whiteness" that Pino could have chosen, since its "guinea" qualifier is one of colour difference.

An opposite but parallel figure to Pino is found in the character of Buggin' Out. Buggin' Out is a crucial character in that he attempts to organize a resistance to the Pizzeria's presence in the neighborhood. He complains to Sal that the only photos on the Pizzeria's Wall of Fame are of famous Italian Americans, and that maybe, given the neighborhood and clientele, some famous African Americans should be included.

*Buggin:* Hey, Sal! How come there ain't no brothers up on the wall here?

*Sal:* You want brothers on the wall? Get your own place, then you do what you wanna do. You can put your brothers, and uncles, and nieces, and nephews, stepfathers, stepmother, whoever you want on the wall, see . . .

*Buggin:* [. . .] Rarely do I see American Italians eatin' in here; I only ever see Black folks. And since we spend much money here, we do have some say.

Sal's refusal fires Buggin' Out to organize a boycott of the pizzeria. However, he finds few allies aside from Radio Raheem, who irritates Sal with his music, and Smiley, who walks around the neighborhood selling photos of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. The confrontation that climaxes the film is partially instigated by Buggin' Out's activism, as such it presents an important critique of the contradictions of the Italian American's self-positioning against its historical past, in other words its wanting to take on the appearance of the dominant.

The part of Buggin' Out is played by the actor Giancarlo Esposito, who is half Black and half Italian, and early on in Spike



Lee's journal Esposito appears as a potential catalyst for the film's chemistry, someone to fully represent the blindness regarding Italian ethnic status.

December 29, 1987

Giancarlo Esposito is half Black and half Italian. He could play a character called Spaghetti Chitlins (I don't know about the name, it's the first thing that came into my mind). He's more readily accepted by Blacks than Italians.

I'm gonna have this Black-Italian thing down to a T. Some Italians may say it's biased, but look at how the Black characters were portrayed in Rocky films. (38)

While not all viewers are privileged to this information, Esposito's invisible IA side provides a balance to Pino's character. The name Giancarlo Esposito in the credits does not provide an immediate link to a black actor. Buggin' Out's ethnic mask is permanently in place, and he must therefore act accordingly. His alliance must be to the part of his identity that is most oppressed, since it is to that part that others—like Pino—react. "Rarely do I see any American Italians eatin' in here" is Buggin' Out's ironical challenge to Pino's refusal to acknowledge his blackness.

Pino is directly challenged regarding his identity by Mookie in the following exchange:

*Pino:* How come niggers are so stupid?

*Mookie:* If you see a nigger kick his ass.

[. . .]

*Mookie:* Pino, who's your favorite basketball player?

*Pino:* Magic Johnson.

*Mookie:* Who's your favorite movie star?

*Pino:* Eddie Murphy.

*Mookie:* And who's your favorite rock star?

*Pino:* (hesitates)

*Mookie:* Prince.

*Pino:* The Boss. Bruuuuce.

*Mookie:* Prince.

*Pino:* Bruuuuce.

*Mookie:* Pino, all you ever say is "nigger this" and "nigger that," and all your favorite people are so-called niggers.

*Pino:* Magic, Eddie, Prince, they're not nigger; I mean, they're not black; I mean . . . let me explain myself: they're not really black. They're black, but not really black. They're more than black. It's different.

*Mookie:* Pino, deep down inside I think you wish you were black.

*Pino:* (laughs)

*Mookie:* Laugh if you want to, your hair is kinkier than mine. What does that mean? You know what they say about dark Italians.

The varying degrees of blackness, as they involve Pino and Vito, is illustrated by Vito's association with Mookie and Mookie's confrontational relationship with Pino regarding his identity problems. Vito's interactions with Mookie, his movements, and Mookie's declaration to Buggin' Out that "Vito's down," conflict Pino's assertion of himself within the family, in which Vito represents his black half, and the community to which he comes every day. Pino's struggle with his duality is beautifully shot by Lee in a scene where Pino in his "guinea" shirt confronts his brother Vito, in black shirt, in the back room of the pizzeria:<sup>6</sup>

*Pino:* Vito, I want you to listen to me. I'm your brother. I may smack you around once in a while, boss you around, but I'm still your brother.

*Vito:* So what Pino? So fuckin' what?

*Pino:* I love you, man.

*Vito:* I'm listening.

*Pino:* Good, I want you to listen.

*Vito:* Jesus Christ, Pino, I'm fuckin' listening.

*Pino:* Vito. Black, white . . . No, no, no, no!

*Vito:* What the hell you talkin' about?

*Pino:* You listening to me?

*Vito:* Stop busting my balls. I said I'm listening ten fucking times already.

*Pino:* Mookie is not to be trusted. No muligna' can be trusted. The first time you turn your back, boom, a spear right here. (Pino gestures) In the back.

*Vito:* How do you know this?

*Pino:* I know.

*Vito:* How do you know?

*Pino:* I know. I read.

*Vito:* Give me a break, Pino! I never seen you read nothin' in you fuckin life.

*Pino:* Read your history. It's historical. He, them, are not to be trusted.

*Vito:* What you want me to do about it?

*Pino:* Be on guard. Mookie has Pop conned already, so we have to look out for him.

*Vito:* What are you talkin' about?

*Pino:* That's exactly what I'm talkin' about.



The whiteness of the "guinea" shirt fools no-one, and is apparently only an attempt at self-deception for Pino himself. "You know what they say about dark Italians," Mookie taunts Pino. This hits the mark directly, not in the sense that Pino wishes he were Black, but that, in fact, Pino's subjectivity (as a Southern Italian) is Black identified. Pino *is* historically Black.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in *Do the Right Thing* the issues of identity denial and masking take center stage. In the final scenes, after the pizzeria has been destroyed in the aftermath of the confrontation between Sal, Buggin' Out, and Radio Raheem, and the latter's death at the hands of the police, the crowd turns to the Korean grocery store. The Korean grocer's fate, however, is different; he is spared because he identifies himself as Black. "Me Black, me Black" he yells in desperation. And, while such associations cannot fully repair racial and ethnic tensions they are elements that have too long been denied by the IA community in its urgency to achieve full invisibility within "whiteness."

Even Sal, a not unsympathetic Italian American figure in *Do the Right Thing*, maintains his position of denial, a weakness that is most evident just prior to the outburst that destroys his pizzeria. Sal's answer to the events that culminate in the killing of Radio Raheem is "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." By washing his hands of the injustice, by allowing the killing to go unchallenged, except by those who might be the next victim, Sal becomes associated with The Power That Be!

#### *It's A JUNGLE IN HERE*

Lee's *Jungle Fever* is more explicit in its presentation of Italian racial ambiguity. The representation of the Italian American woman, Angie, played by Annabella Sciorra, could be said to be rather sympathetic. She in fact serves again to make the point as to the proximity of certain physical characteristics that complexly approximate and distance African Americans and Italian Americans.

The film uses relationships between men and women as central themes around which to discuss issues of race. Paulie Carbone (John Turturro) [Carbone means coal and therefore signifies blackness] is attracted to Angie, and Ms. Goode, an African American customer. Angie has an affair with Flipper, the African American architect, who is married to a light-skinned African American woman, Drew.

The various cross-over relationships form the background on which Lee addresses the fears of inadequacy of both groups. He uses African American women and Italian American men to explore this fear as it relates to race. The group of Italian American men that gather at Paulie's store find constant irritation in Paulie's interest in Ms. Goode, and express their insecurities regarding their own position as ethnics. Vinnie's feelings for Blacks are made quite obvious by the racist epithets he spews; however, his persona is black in many ways. He is stereotypically Black: he wears many gold chains, he drives a cadillac (rather than the camaro associated with IA), he listens to rap music, and dresses in black, the colour he hates. Another character, Frankie, often wears a large gold name plate around his neck, another element stereotypically associated with Blacks. It is Frankie who feels most threatened by the Anglo-Saxon features he believes "Italian American girls" find attractive. As the following exchange illustrates, Frankie becomes enraged when his prowess is put into question as a function of his appearance:

*Frankie* sits depressed at the counter in Paulie's News and Soda shop.

X: What's the matter, Donna got you in a state? I think she's bangin' that big blond headed guy. The one with the big blue eyes, the pretty boy.

*Frankie*: What's that supposed to mean? Just because I don't look like that, tall, blond, blue eyes, that don't mean I don't feel like that. What am I, some kind'a neanderthal? Fuckin' Italian girls, they're all the same. You'd think they'd want their own kind. No. What do they want? Fuckin' Robert Redford they want. Harrison Ford. Who's that other WASP. William Hurt. White Anglo Saxon Pricks. Those bums don't know the first thing about fuckin' romance.

Of course, the irony in Frankie's statements is that Angie is having an affair, not with a White-Anglo-Saxon-Prick but, with an African American, whose figure directly threatens Italian American desire for waspishness.

When word of Angie and Flipper's affair reaches their families and friends everything explodes and deep seated fears and prejudices emerge from both sides. With the breakdown of their romance, which according to Flipper is an impossibility, given racial differences, Angie brings to his attention that her skin colour is darker than that of some "blacks." This both highlights the Italian American woman's otherness in a culture that has

fetishized whiteness, and the abuse and rape of Black women at the hands of slave owners that resulted in the wide range of skin colour and led to the establishment of rules such as the "one drip" rule to assure continued exclusion of Blacks from representation in society.

As far as Italian American men are concerned, Lee also falls back on the group's worst stereotype: its "penchant for violence, and sexist relations with women."<sup>8</sup> Angie's father is ashamed of having a daughter who is a "nigger lover," and in his rage he refers to Flipper as a "black nigger," which would betray his belief that there are variations of nigger among which he might be included; and, toward the film's end, the men at Paulie's shop will physically attack him for his having dared to cross the colour line by going to a date with Ms. Goode.

It is perhaps at Paulie's shop that discussions of race relations, social participation and exclusion, and self-hatred are most clearly illustrated. Frankie is offered as the prime focus of self-hatred and racial ambivalence. When he acts worldly regarding the wants of Black women, his mother's identity (and therefore his own) are brought into question; his words once again stress the need to "feel normal," in other words blonde and blue eyed:

[In Paulie's shop, the men are asking Paulie about his relationship with Ms. Goode:]

*Frankie:* Paulie. Did you fuck her? You know, colored women, they like to fuck.

*Paulie:* What?

*Frankie:* Well, they're built that way. You put a saddle on them, you ride them into the sunset. I'm tellin' you. They love it, they love it.

*Paulie:* How do you know?

*Vinnie:* He asked his mother.

*Frankie:* Hey, what the fuck is that supposed to mean? My mother's not Black, she's just dark. There are dark Italians. Hey, I'm as white as anybody in here.

In the end, these films are nothing if not self-contradictory in their representations. Both racial anger and violence must be recast in the eyes of the viewer, lest we participate in the continuation of the stereotypes as somatic traits. While it is extremely hard to distance one's self from the offensive surface, the "in your face" critique, and to see in it a critique of the group's actions rather than an out-and-out stereotypical dismissal, that is exactly what Lee's films require. The violent I/A men represent the vio-

lence that has continued to emerge in the I/A community's relationship with its African American counterpart. It is a violence that potentially undoes the family in *Fever*, and which associates I/A men with the institutional violence done against women and minorities, it comes to form the mask I/A wear, one that includes them in the dominant's violent coercive apparatus. They, as other groups selectively designated as ethnic depending on the circumstances, serve to maintain dangerous tensions between minorities, tensions that work to dissipate resistance toward the dominant.

Lee's representations of Italian Americans are problematic in many ways, as are his dealings with issues regarding women, homosexuality, Jews, etc., but it must be repeated that Spike Lee appears never to speak directly on any matter. The director's convoluted games turn everything on its head. His statement "If I was six feet tall, I would have been Italian," in an interview to Barbara Grizzuti Harrison for *Esquire*, upsets the stereotype for short Italians and tall Africans simultaneously.<sup>9</sup> This is his *modus operandi*, to break stereotypes by crosswiring behavior and attitudes.

The character Frankie, in *Fever*, finds WASP features more desirable than the blackness with which, as "a dark Italian," he is associated. However, as someone so preoccupied with manhood and prowess, Frankie overlooks the stereotypical definition in which he might well revel of black men as "well hung."<sup>10</sup> His desire to be Waspish blinds him to the racism that he expresses toward blacks as a manifestation of self-hatred. I believe that such ambiguities further support my thesis that Italian Americans do not, in these films, merely stand in for "whites." Mark A. Reid's recent *Redefining Black Film* (1993), while offering a powerful critique of Lee's films, falls into the rut of dichotomy. Reid sees "the absence of white characters [in *She's Gotta Have It* as preventing] the film from reflecting a radically dualistic world" (94), yet only glosses over that presence in Lee's *Do the Right Thing*.

When Reid does address Lee's use of "whites" in his films, he quickly points to the "dualistic [nature of the] world." As such, he overlooks other historical/ethnic situations that amplify the scope of the film beyond what many African Americans see as demeaning representations of blacks. Reid criticizes Lee for his "insular portrayal of black life," yet fails to appreciate that the representation of other groups is similarly insular, stereotypical, and "tendentious."<sup>11</sup> We must therefore look into the mechanism of such overall representations for a more involved analysis of

Lee's films. Can we only be insightful regarding representations of our own group?

A simple statement used in recounting the percourse of the film such as "the Italian American police officers arrive" (102), aside from suggesting that Italian Americans have their own police force, overlooks the hierarchical structure and ethnic competition within police forces in the U. S. More than once during the course of the film it is made clear that one of the policemen, the one who ends up choking Radio Raheen, is Irish. This is not an accidental or meaningless presence. The dynamics of ethnicism within law enforcement agencies, which includes blacks, is extremely important in any consideration of ethnic or race relations. For obvious reasons, the make-up of the forces that uphold the law represents a hotbed of ethnic conflict in and of itself.

Finally, while I did not discuss class relations herein, I will only briefly mention that in *Jungle Fever* Lee offers a similar turn-around critique/warning to African Americans. Racism and class prejudice tend to mask each other. By showing Drew, Flipper's wife, in a dialogue with black professional women in which she calls Angie "a low class bitch," Lee forces us to ask if in fact hers is not racism masked by classism. Of course, the question is one that must be asked by each viewers of him or herself. How do we, black and white, men and women, react to the characters in *Jungle Fever*, a professional black man, a black career-woman, and working-class Italians. Is the conflict between the characters in the film a class conflict, an ethnic conflict, a matter of race, or all of these taken together?

Despite the great variety of objections I have heard brought against Lee's films, it would appear that his choice of sparring partners is dictated by a need to provide a space of conscientization and self-education for all ethnic groups as well as for African Americans. This would, in the end, prove profitable for all involved, lest we re-entrench in denial of both ourselves and our histories.

#### Notes

1. Whether due to reasons of external construction, or for other questions of self-identity, Southern Italians themselves are, to some extent, black-identified. This is of course a result of the Mediterranean, rather than European, sphere of influence in which the Italian South has moved throughout time. Pino Daniele, and James Senese's music, as in the albums *Nero a metà* and *Anema nera* respectively, are but two contemporary examples of this affiliation. As of late,

ragamuffin groups have further extended the reach to Africa in their music. The title of the Neapolitan group Alma Megretta's recent release, "Sons of Hannibal," speaks for itself. These representations of mestisization are blended into other figures steeped in traditional popular culture such as Pulcinella, who is often extended into a characterization of the mythical/popular revolutionary figure of Masaniello.

Another important figure in Southern culture is Gennariello, quintessential representation of Neapolitan culture in the films of Elvira Notari (cf. Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, 1993) during the twenties, whose physiognomy is most definitely African. Whether knowingly or not, in his "A Little Pedagogical Treatise" (1975), Pier Paolo Pasolini instrumentalized the name Gennariello to construct a particularly strong representation of a young Neapolitan boy as the figure of the "other" in Italian society.

2. In *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, Edited by Lester D. Friedman. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.

3. Spike Lee, with Lisa Jones. *Do the Right Thing* (New York: Fireside/Simon and Schuster, 1989). The quoted dialogues are from the film version, though page numbers are given from the published script.

4. In John Sayles' *Matewan*, and the more recent *City of Hope*, there is a very evident attempt at showing the proximity of the "minorities" involved in the struggle for survival. Even though Sayles does not hold back in showing the often violent tensions that build in the relationships between minorities, he offers characters and events that transgress the artificial boundaries of racism. In *Matewan*, in *City of Hope*, the story revolves around the involvement.

5. What struck me at the reporting of this incident, and some subsequent incidents similar to it, was that in the U. S. race and ethnicity are always mentioned as qualifying terms for negative situations. Everyone is American until something like what happened at Howard Beach takes place; then the inhabitants are referred to in the media as "Italians." The same when the incident happens at the hands of other ethnics groups, then they are identified as Jewish, Polish, or whatever else.

6. This shot of the swinging light illuminating the characters at intervals recalls Scorsese's opening shot in *Taxi Driver* and its later use by Bertolucci in *The Conformist*. In fact there are many elements in Spike Lee's films that recall Scorsese's technique.

7. The quoted dialogue is from the film, which varies somewhat from the published script. The dialogue can be found on pages 182-185 in Lee's script.

8. Robert Viscusi, "Breaking the Silence: Strategic Imperatives for Italian American Culture" in *Voice in Italian Americana*, Vol. 1, Spring 1990, Number 1, pp. 1-13.

9. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, "Spike Hates Your Cracker Ass" in *Esquire*, October 1992, p. 132. A piece of writing that is typically Grizzuti Harrison. She spends more time trying to convince both her readers and Spike Lee that she "likes" blacks. She always attempts to shift the focus that Lee places on Italians to her own experience that should somehow exculpate her from the guilt she seems to feel: "What if I told him that I knew James Baldwin? What if I told him about the time Jimmy and I got stoned together and he flirted first with me and then with my husband . . ." (134) and "Like the sister Billie Holiday had been to me, when a black man in Minton's jazz club on 118th street accused me of being a white devil-woman: 'She's a nigger,' Billie Holiday said. 'She can be raped. Anybody who can be raped is a nigger.' I loved her forever." (134) and so on and so forth.

10. There is a similar stereotype associated with Southern Italian men; and there are various symbols that are used to propagate that idea within popular culture. For example, to go along with the stereotype that all Southerners are



short, the fingers of the hand held as a gun (thumb up, index outstretched) is used to mean that Southerners may be short but they are well endowed.

11. Reid defines tendentious as referring "to images that objectify and ridicule blacks for the benefit of a viewer or listener" (2). This term seems to be especially dear to Reid, emerging over and over again during the course of the book.

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