

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

SPIKE LEE
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
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Spike Lee Interview
01-16-2021
Interviewed by John Maggio
Total Running Time: 00:11:00

START TC: 00:00:00:00

CREW:
Spike Lee interview take one, marker.

Learning about Lincoln

00:00:14:00

SPIKE LEE:

Well, as a young Black kid, I don't think it was uh, abnormal to be taught by your parents, even your grandparents, more. Especially if you were ... if you were one of those kids whose parents sent your Black ass down South for the summer. (laughs) So they could get a break. The Lees, my parents, they said, "You guys got to go." So you spent half the summer in Stowe, Alabama, my father's side, the other half in Atlanta, Georgia. And so, we would get more about the ... not textbook, but you know, Abraham Lincoln, uh, freed us.

The January 6th insurrection

00:01:07:00

SPIKE LEE:

Even before January 6th ... and I think many people, young people probably surprised that Abraham Lincoln, don't even know that he was a Republican. You know, I don't know- I don't know if that's general knowledge for the

young- for the younger generation. And uh, and the party has changed, because I would say, the Dixiecrats (laughing) were as bad as Republicans. So, you could make an argument, Republican, Democrat, it depends about what era you're talking about. And I want to go on record, I was not surprised what happened January 6th. Lynch mobs are in the history of the United States of America. And what you saw January 6th was a lynch mob. But I've seen pictures of lynch mobs, of broken Black bodies, hanging from trees, as the great Billie Holiday said- sang, the strange fruit. Lynch mobs, where young white kids were brought out to look, to see Black bodies that had been burned to a crisp, and then let's cut 'em down from the tree, and sell their body parts. Nigger toes. Make postcards. So, January 6th, to me, was not new. We've seen this before. As his- it's a part of American history.

00:03:00:00

SPIKE LEE:

First of all, I'd like to say this. Historians are going to write about the time we live now. These- this la- end of the- the last four years of talmar- turmoil of uh, Agent Orange, I don't say his name. And shout out to my man, Busta Rhymes came with that- that- that uh, that nickname. But what I'm looking for, I might not be alive. I'm looking for the books. The novels. The documentaries. The movies, the sculptures. The paintings. The photography. That's what I'm looking for. For the artists to comment on the world we live in right now. And- and- and- and- and- and historically, artists have led the way, to get to the truth. And that's what I'm looking for, and that's what I'm hoping for.

The hypocrisy of American ideals

00:04:02:00

SPIKE LEE:

So, viewers, you might have heard this before, but ... excusez moi. (laughs)
This country, United States of America was built upon ... the stealing of the
outright, stealing the land from the native people, the genocide of native
people, and slavery. That dastardly duo is the foundation of the United States
in America. The genocide of native people, the hijacking, the bogarting of the
land, and ... bringing my ancestors to Virg- to Jamestown, Virginia, 1619. And
one thing that particularly disturbs me ... when people use this term, the
Founding Fathers. The Founding Fathers were racists. The Founding Fathers
were pedophiles.

SPIKE LEE:

The Founding Fathers owned slaves. That's a fact. And, you know, but we're
fed, you know, this bullshit, George Washington couldn't tell a lie, you know?
And- and- and- and- and- and ... and come on, it's- it's just ... until we, it- as a
nation, until we come to that place where we can sit down and talk about the
sin of slavery, we're not going to get to where we need to be. And that's a- I
think that's- that- that's- that's bottom line. You know, we can't even ... all
this, let's sit down and heal, and come together. Yo, that shit can't happen
until we start talking about slavery. (laughs). Then maybe the healing will
start. But if you ain't talking about slavery, and what was done to native
people, I don't know what you're doing.

00:06:25:00

SPIKE LEE:

No, Lincoln- Lincoln helps. Abraham Lincoln, Honest Abe, yeah. He uh,
definitely helps, but uh ... we're ... I mean, I don't ... look, January Six, you
know, that- that ... you know, people going back to se- going back in history.

(laughing) The Civil War. And I don't think that- I don't think that was farfetched.

Confederate statues

00:07:02:00

SPIKE LEE:

Look, the majority of those Confederate statues were put up many, many years after the Civil War, and ... the shit- the shit gotta come down. The same way states have- have taken down, in some cases, the Confederate battle flag. And ... I always make this comparison. The same way my Jewish brothers and sisters feel about the swastika, that's the way Black folks feel about the Confederate flag. That's a symbol of hate. You know? And also, I'm going to look at the camera. You motherfuckers lost the Civil War. You motherfuckers lost the Civil War, so ... (laughing) I don't know what you're doing. (laughs) I don't know what you're doing. You lost the Civil War. You lost the war, the states came back together. Let's keep it moving. (laughs) Let's keep it moving. But you want to keep trying to fight the Civil War, and bring this shit back. And that's not helping.

Trump comparing himself to Lincoln

00:08:33:00

SPIKE LEE:

One of the craziest things Agent Orange said, this mother- I said, I'm going to say it. This motherfucker, Agent Orange is out of his goddamn mind. He's going to get up there and say he's done more for Black people ... unless perhaps, I might- I might be missing, it might not be exact quotes, but close the fuck enough. (laughs). This motherfucker says, (laughing) he's done more

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for Black people, perhaps more than ... only one that's done more perhaps was Abraham Lincoln. I grew up in ... before my parents bought the brownstone down the block, in Fort Greene, we- we were the first Black family to live in Cobble Hill. Stone Italian American. So I'm going to use some of my friends, my- my- you know, the stuff I heard. So, the- the commentary. When he said that comment, I was like, "Get the fuck outta here." (laughing) And you can put the initials, too. You know, take each letter for the first word. Get the fuck outta here. Don't even put your name in the motherfucking same sentence, for Abraham Lincoln. You didn't do shit for Black people, or Brown people.

SPIKE LEE:

Before you even got motherfucking office, said all Mexicans were rapists, drug dealers ... criminals. Talked about shithole cou- shithole ... countries in Africa. Let's talk about the full page ad you took of- you took in New York Times about the so called rape in Central Park that never took place. You ain't done a goddamn thing for Black people, except bring us ... nothing good.

END TC: 00:11:00:00