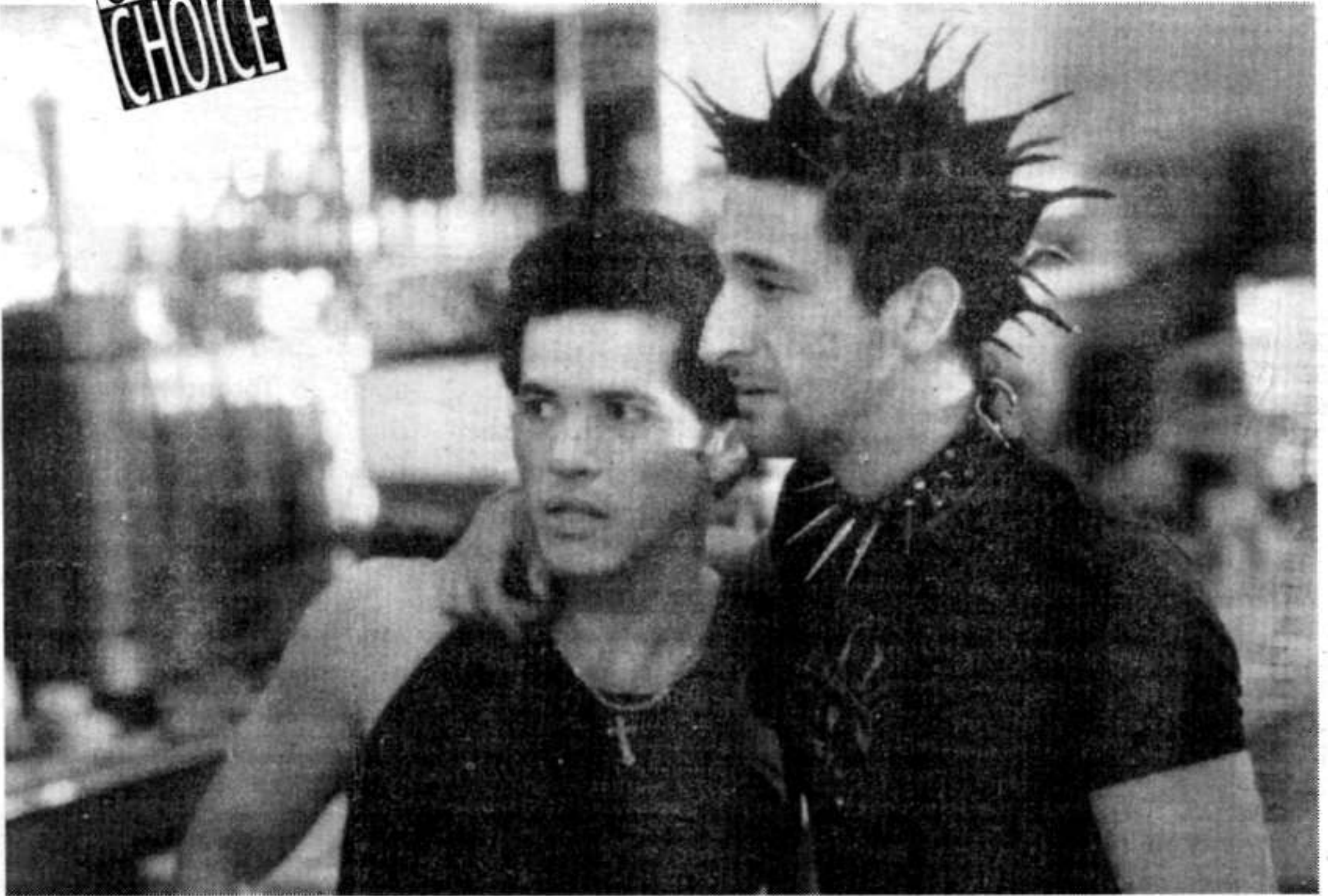


Document Citation

Title	Summer of Sam
Author(s)	Jonathan Rosenbaum
Source	<i>Reader (Chicago, Ill.)</i>
Date	1999 Jul 16
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	Section Two, p.2
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Summer of Sam, Lee, Spike, 1999

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Summer of Sam

New York City during the summer of 1977, with the Son of Sam serial killings providing a frame for (and backdrop to) the main action. This sprawling, highly ambitious film, adapted from a script by Michael Imperioli and Victor Colicchio, is the first in which director Spike Lee has concentrated almost exclusively on white characters (most of them Italian-American), and if his own cameo as a TV reporter is the least convincing performance, it nonetheless offers a succinct and fascinating summary of his complex relation to the story. Among the classic films echoed here are *M* (the tracking of a serial killer by everyone, including organized crime), the first half of *Fury* (the making of a lynch mob), and Lee's own *Do the Right Thing* (a sizzling New York summer and what it does to people). Perhaps the most remarkable achievement is the lead performance of John Leguizamo as a hairdresser who epitomizes

the sexual double standards the movie is designed to critique—it's one of the most fascinating portraits of a proletarian lunkhead since Brando in *On the Waterfront*. Like most of Lee's work, this movie bites off a lot more than it can possibly chew, and it bristles with the worst kind of New York provincialism. The period ambience is fairly potent, though as J. Hoberman has pointed out there's not a *Star Wars* reference in sight, undoubtedly because Lee's reference points are always local. But the breadth and energy of this fresco are still pretty impressive. With Adrien Brody, Mira Sorvino, Jennifer Esposito, Anthony LaPaglia, Roger Guenveur Smith, Mike Starr, Ben Gazzara, Patti LuPone, and Bebe Neuwirth. Bel-Air Drive-In, Bricktown Square, Burnham Plaza, Chatham 14, Esquire, Evanston, Ford City, Lincoln Village, Pipers Alley, 62nd & Western.

—Jonathan Rosenbaum