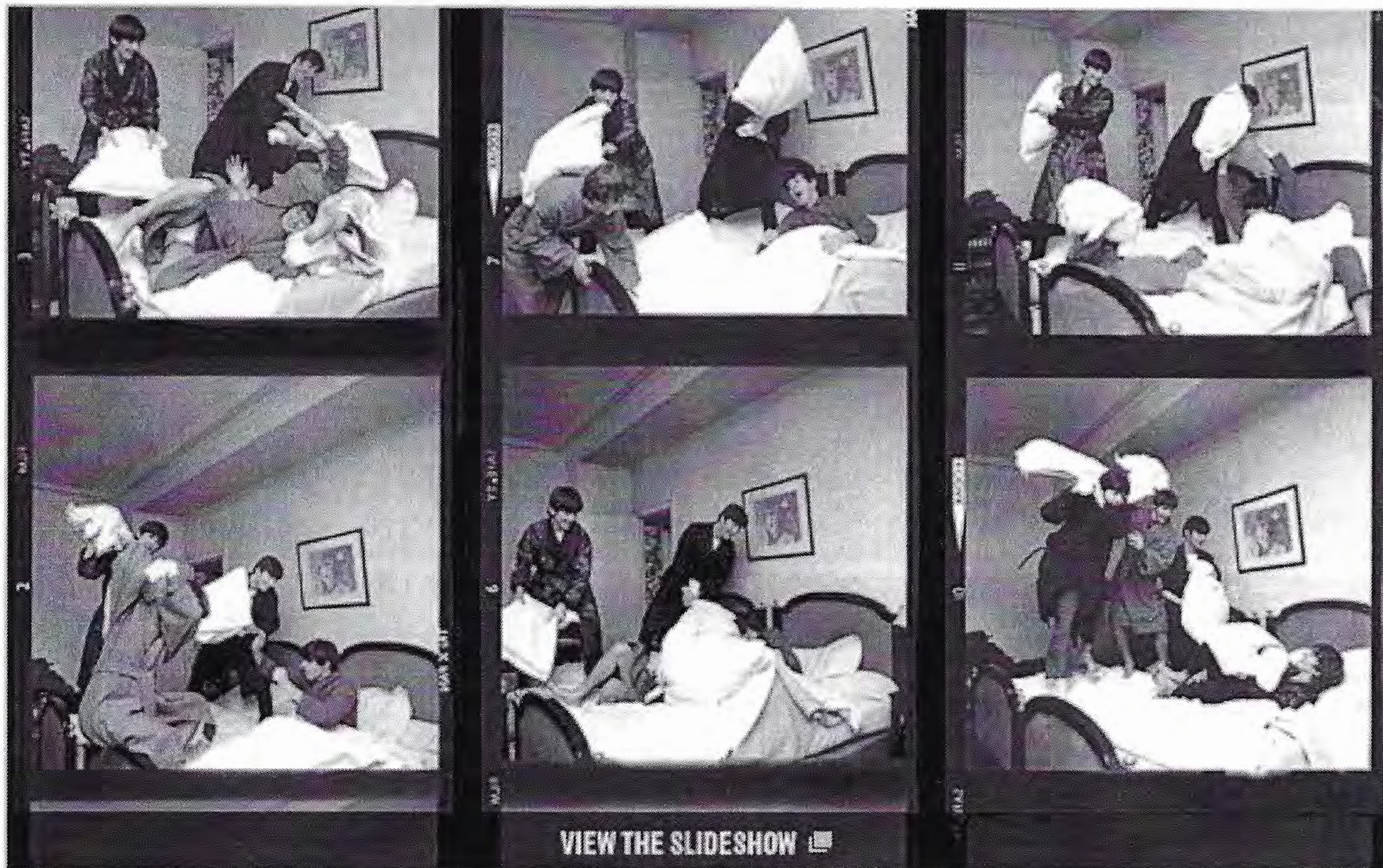


Being in the Room

Harry Benson got shots you just don't see anymore.

By Logan Hill Published Nov 29, 2009

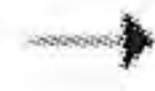
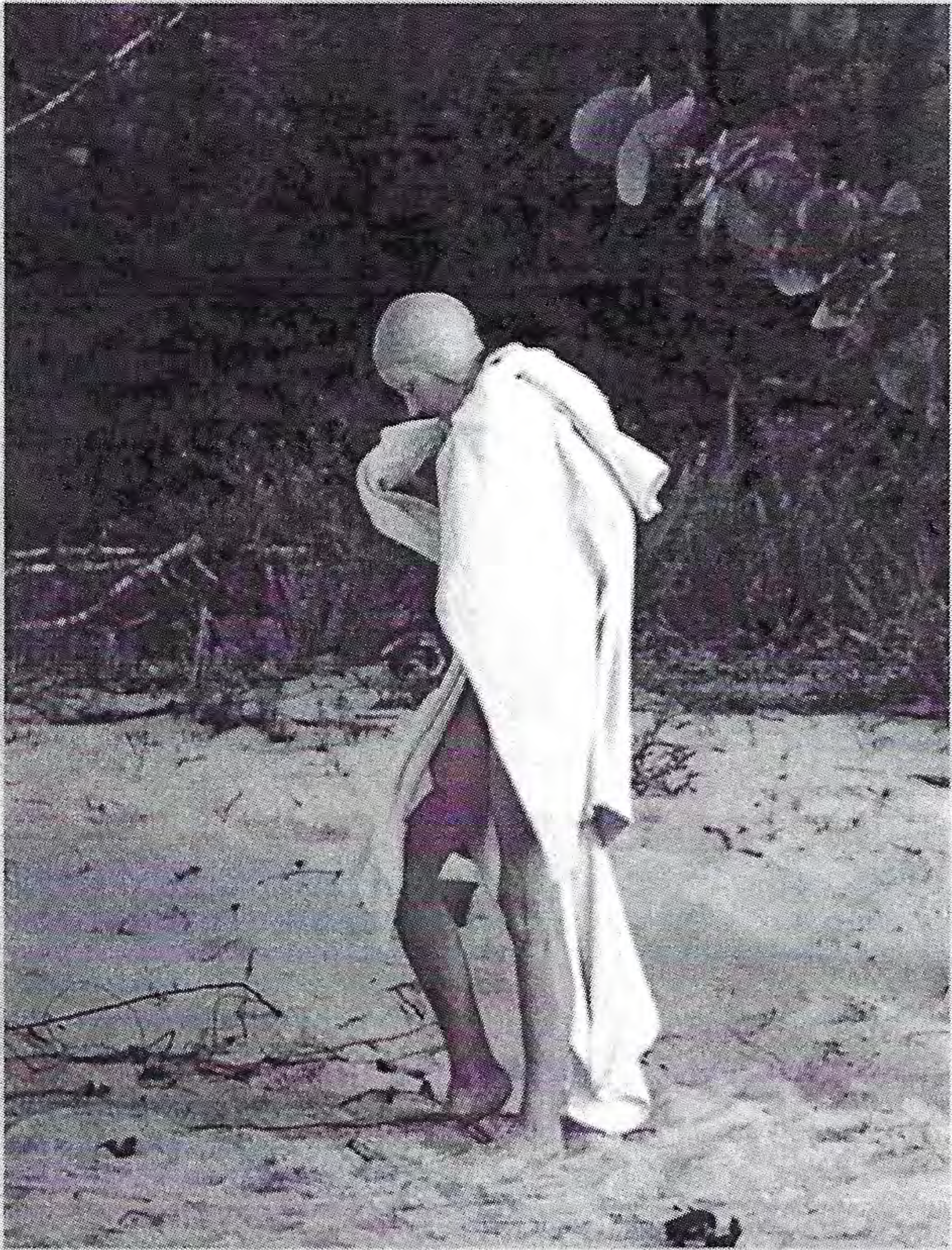
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All photographs by Harry Benson

“These days, there’s nothing intimate,” says photojournalist Harry Benson, who for six decades has captured the private moments of presidents, princesses, and pop stars. As powerHouse Books’ new monograph *Harry Benson: Photographs* demonstrates, he relentlessly and patiently wormed his way into hotel and locker rooms long before high-powered publicity firms began restricting access. “I always see other photographs where the photographer has backed off, and I think they could have taken it just a little bit further,” says Benson, who customarily worked light, without assistants or lighting rigs. “You have to get them moving. A picture that is moving is moving all the time.”

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Greta Garbo, Antigua, 1976

"I was doing a story for *Town & Country* on the rich people in Antigua, and there's a woman who kept on telling me to come to her guest house. I couldn't get away from her. And then she said 'And, you know, next week Greta Garbo is coming.' And Garbo was going to be sleeping in the house right near me on the beach, which meant that I had a boat docked right outside. So I just bided my time. I had a friend with a wife and baby—they were on the boat, on the top deck, so I didn't look suspicious. Garbo didn't know I was there. I didn't spoil her holiday by chasing her up the beach like paparazzi, but I probably spoiled her holiday when she got back and saw this picture. I wanted her to be alone, but to get this, it's worth it. I don't feel like I did a terrible thing—certainly not—but the thought has crossed my mind."

Photographs by Harry Benson

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**The Beatles, Paris, 1964**

"About two nights before these pictures were taken, I'm in the Beatles' hotel room in Paris. Paul says, 'Some pillow fight we had last night,' but I wasn't about to suggest they do it then—there was another photographer in the room. So I wait till about two nights later, back in the hotel room. Brian Epstein, their manager, comes in with a cablegram and says, 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' is on the charts in America, and now we're going on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.' So after Brian left, I said, 'Oh, how about a pillow fight?' John said, 'No, it's childish.' But Paul is drinking. A little while later, John comes and hits Paul in the back of the head, and that was it. It could not be staged: It just flowed. For me, it was an important shoot. I was going to America with them, and I never came back. Every photographer comes down to one—that's mine."

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O.J. Simpson, *New York*, 1974

"O.J. had just broken the rushing record, with 2,003 yards in a season. But he was really happy because he'd just telephoned some girl—he was on the way to California to meet her. He'd been giving a lot of interviews. I try not to become a pest with somebody, but you're watching them like an old dog who doesn't take his eyes off you. I just stayed back and just waited for everyone to leave, and followed him into the showers. It was just a happy day in his life ... he's not having very many happy days in his life."

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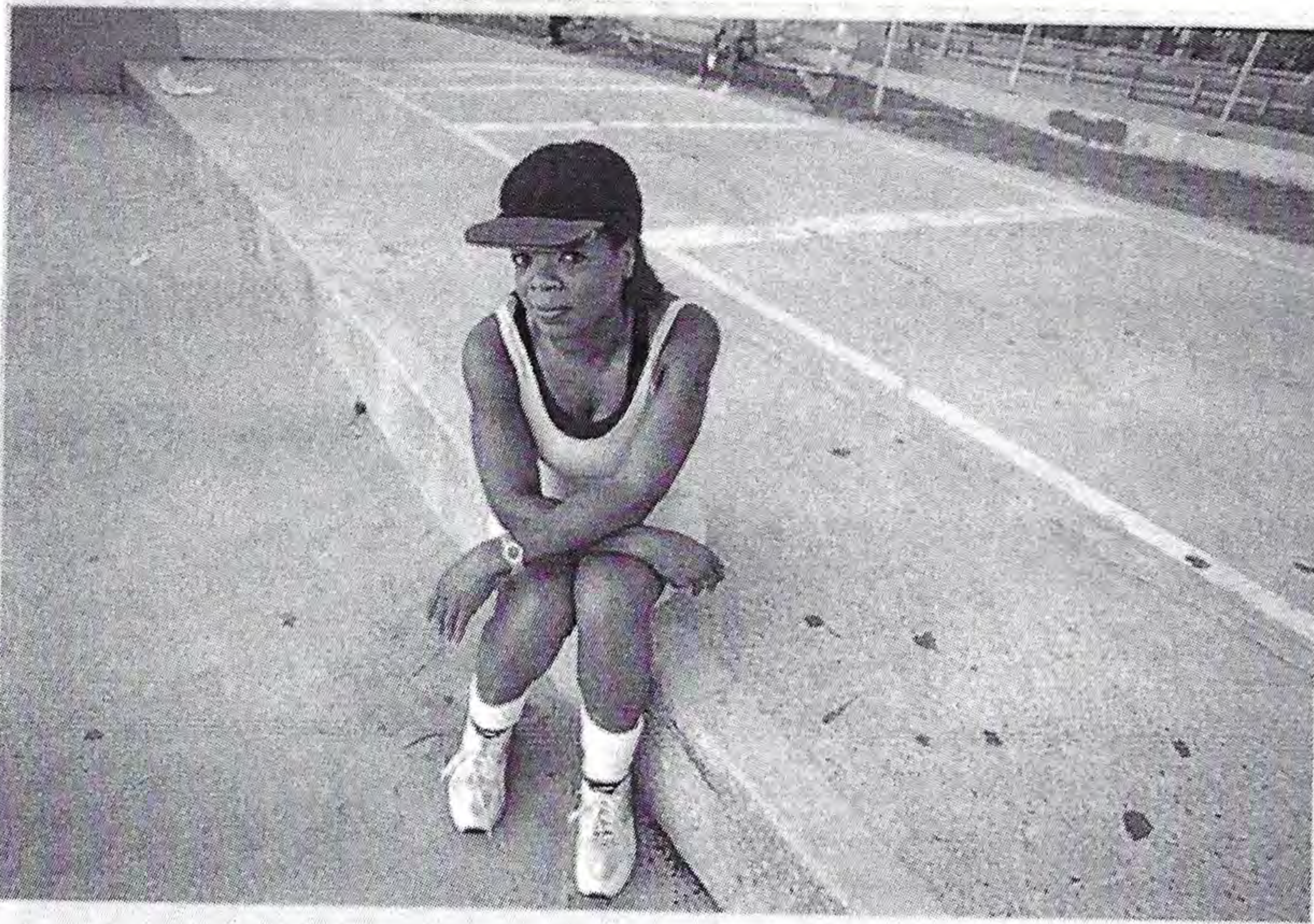
Muhammad Ali, *At training camp in Deer Lake, Pennsylvania*, 1976

"His wife, this good Muslim woman, had just left, and his girlfriend—the one he married eventually—was just coming over. So you're in the middle of this moment. The girlfriend drove in right as I was driving out."

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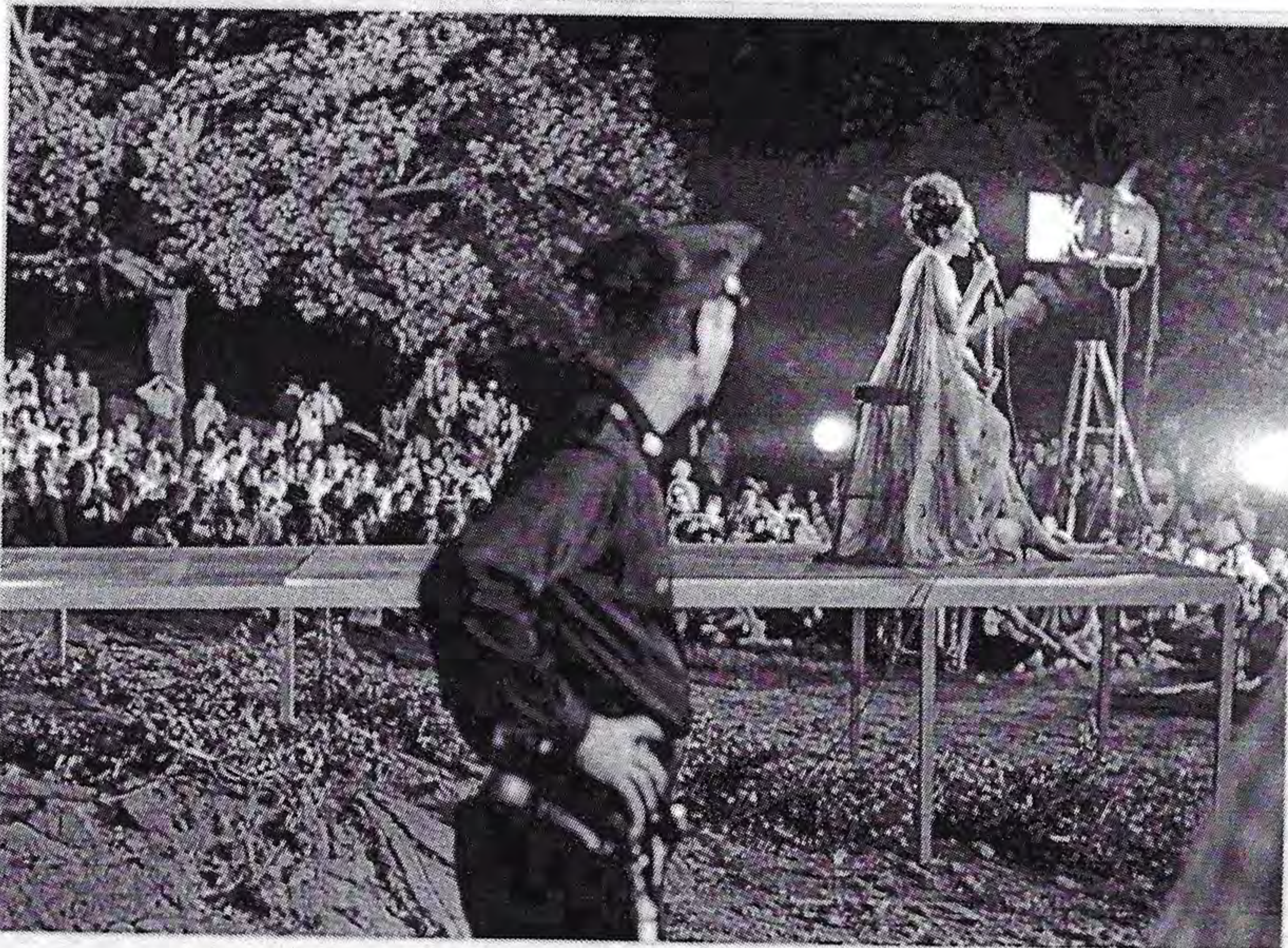
**Oprah Winfrey, Chicago, 1996**

"I photographed her quite a few times—I shot her first cover for *People*—but I like this one because I'd never seen a picture like that. You can't do pictures like this of her anymore. She lets herself be shot only by her own photographers. She was fine back then, but other people around her were closing in ... She wanted to buy my pictures [including this never-published one] so nobody would see them. Just a complete control freak. And this is not a mean picture! Now she's hiding all her fat."

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**Barbra Streisand, Central Park, 1967**

"Streisand looks like she's Frankenstein's mother here or something. She shouted at me to fuck off, because I was not doing the angle she wanted. But I didn't want a close-up of her. She's in Central Park! That's what I want to see. And it turned out to be a famous concert."