

Racial diversity in do the right thing essay



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Spike Lee's "Do The Right Thing" is a film that addresses the diverse array of cultures in Brooklyn New York. The film takes place on the hottest day of summer and focuses on the conflicts that arise around a small Italian family business titled "Sal's Family Pizzeria".

While it is the only white owned business in Brooklyn, a few of the characters are adamant to point out their frustrations that there are no black owned businesses. On top of this fact is the concept of a very closely knit interracial community jam packed in this small Brooklyn Neighborhood. The fact that it's the hottest day of the summer only adds to the already prevailing racial tension. From the very beginning of the film, the circumstances set up by Lee pose the notion that this diverse contemporary urban American neighborhood is about to reach its boiling point. Do The Right Thing is a multi-cultural train wreck waiting to happen, and the audience is able to watch as it unfolds. Lee establishes a perfect narrative undertone through the use of Samuel L.

Jackson as the town's favored disc jockey. His soulful dialect serves as a form of narration for the film, while at the same time he appears as the subconscious border between the town's civility and complete chaos. In addition, Lee composes a Brooklyn town of many diverse characters; while a little over the top, they are still very believable, and add much life to the film. All the inner city stereotypes common of the late 80's early 90's are depicted in a way that is not an exploitation, and very few characters come off as maliciously or heroically one sided. Within this predominantly black community the audience becomes familiar with Asian store owners, street corner boys, old drunks, motherly mammy-esque figures, proud Italians,

proud Hispanics, pro-black males, playful urban youth, racist cops, and even the mentally challenged. The unique nature of these characters is further emphasized through Lee's use of ethnically based music and imagery (Klein, 15).

The Italians favor Sinatraesque ballads and on the wall in Sal's pizzeria, there are pictures of white Italian American Icons. The black characters however, tend to listen to rap music and wear pro black jewelry or clothing that promotes African descent. While all of these elements provide the audience with a clear understanding of the differences that exist in Brooklyn, they also set the stage for many possible conflicts which Lee takes full advantage of throughout the course of the film. Radio Raheem walks through the town with a boom box blaring "Public Enemy," and he refuses to turn it down no matter the cost. Likewise, the Hispanics sitting on their stoop play their salsa and meringue music very loud, and the audience is already aware that a conflict will erupt the second these two characters cross paths. The street corner boys drink their beers and smoke their cigarettes, while they talk of their disappointment in the fact that there are no black owned businesses in Brooklyn.

They stare over at the Asian owners of the corner store with bitter intent. Racist police officers drive through and exchange distasteful glances with the men and both opposing groups simultaneously respond "what a waste. Meanwhile the town drunk, The Mayor, stumbles through the Brooklyn Neighborhood attempting to spread goodwill, but fails to attain any much deserved respect from the town youth. In the final riot sequence at the end of the film, once Sal's store is engulfed into flames, the angry mob turns to

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the corner store owned by the Korean family. As they approach the store to also burn it down, the Korean store owner stops them and declares that they shouldn't burn the store down because they are the same. The Korean owner declares that Koreans in America are black.

While many in the mob refuse to agree with this statement, they reluctantly decide not to burn the store down. This is just another example of the introspective commentaries the film offers on the state of race in America. All of these interactions between the characters give light to many sociological conflicts between races in America, and even within races themselves. In the case where the Mayor receives very little respect from his fellow black citizens, even when he saves a young boy's life in the street, this can be seen as Lee's comment on the disenfranchisement of young black America. The fact that the youth of the neighborhood don't respect their elderly is symbolically equivocal to them not respecting where they come from (Klein, 14). Inner turmoil with other races can be seen in the film, with the Italian family that owns the pizzeria.

Sal's oldest son in the film is undeniably a racist, while Sal and his youngest son are not. This leads to inner turmoil within the family specifically pertaining to the differences in how they interact with Lee's character who works as a pizza delivery boy for them. Many racially motivated conversations arise due to these differences in characters. At one point Sal's racist son, and Lee's character 'Mookie', converse over his racist persona. Mookie argues that Sal's son listens to predominantly black music, and yet he is a bigot.

Sal's son responds by stating the fact that the famous black he likes are more than just black. This is just an example of the many racial dialogues that occur as the result of the diverse character composition Lee sets up. When Sal's son sits down with his father, in an attempt to convince him to move the store into a white neighborhood, Sal expresses to his son the deep pride he has for the fact that all of the children in the town grew up eating his food. This sheds light on the compassionate nature of Sal and allows the audience to know that he is not essentially a racist. In fact, the majority of the characters in the film are not racist at their core, but just 'racialized' by their circumstance. This is specifically true of Spike Lee's character in the film.

The delivery boy Mookie, played by Spike Lee, is presented to the audience as a morally stable protagonist; and yet, he embodies one major negative black stereotype. He is an irresponsible father to the child of Rosie Perez (Glickman, 17). Lee's character, Mookie, is a prime example of the complex nature of all of his characters. The mayor is a very valiant and moral individual while at the same time he is a drunk. Sal is a strong character as well. He is a good father to his children and a hard worker who always tries to be obliging to the citizens of the Brooklyn neighborhood, but in the end it is his racial slur and the smashing of Radio Raheem's boom box with a baseball bat which eventually resulting the riot that burns down his store.

The major act that sparks the destruction of the pizzeria, though, is Mookie's response to all of the commotion (Glickman, 17). When Radio Raheem is killed by the police, and the town turns into an angry mob, Mookie incites them into becoming a riotous mob when he throws a trash can into the

window of Sal's pizzeria. At this point in the film, everything spirals out of control, but the irony is that all of the actions and reactions leading up to the final explosion are understandable. The final conflict of the film stems from "Sal's Family Pizzeria. There is a moment early on in the film where a young black customer complains to Sal that he should have pictures of some Black icons on his walls.

Offended by this, Sal kicks the man out of his restaurant. This small interaction between Sal and the young man spark what will eventually be the death of the strongest black figure in the film ' Radio Raheem, and the destruction of the pizzeria. The end of Lee's film has been labeled as one of the most controversial endings in cinematic history (Klein, 15). This is based on the fact that the viewers have no choice but to take sides in the calm of the final conflict.

An even greater testament to Lee's cinematic genius can be found in the fact that the film is open-ended. The conflict is never resolved, but left for the audience to interpret. According to Marlaine Glickman, " the theme of the film can be found in the title, and is very saying on the multifaceted conflicts within race relations (17)." It is first given reference to when Mookie is on a delivery and the Mayor stops him to advise him to " always do the right thing.

Mookie brushes this advice off and goes about his business, but it poses the question " what is the right thing? (Klein, 14)" In sum, Spike Lee's film Do The Right Thing is a comment of moral obligation within racial interaction. The audience has no choice but to sympathize with the views of the majority

of the characters in the film. While many of the actions performed by the characters are violent, or irresponsible there is a question of what is morally justifiable and what is psychologically understandable given the supposed circumstances of the characters. When the Mayor tells Mookie to “ always do the right thing,” the audience must ask themselves what is the right thing granted the situation (Glickman, 17).

Whether one deems it wrong to throw a trash can into a restaurant window, they must also acknowledge that it is wrong for the cops to commit murder (Klein, 15). The film is an authentic interpretation of the nature of real life interactions. No one is perfect in the film, and no one is simply just a representative of their race, and yet race is the most significant element of the film.