

Color in do the right thing

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Jionne McMichael November 17, 2012 Art of Film Color As A Formalistic Device in Do The Right Thing Spike Lee presents his " truth" about race relations in his movie Do the Right Thing. The film illustrates the spectacle of blackdiscriminationand racial altercations and portrayed the “ true” realities of an African American living in the 1980s. The movie is set in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York on the hottest day in the summer where racial tensions are growing.

Spike Lee uses color dramatically to help illustrate and emphasize these growing tensions that ultimately escalates to violenceand tragedy and also, to help emphasize emotions. Color, as defined by Gianetti, is a realist technique but can be formalist having a subconscious impact on the viewer. There are two types of colors; warm and cool. Warm colorsstressadjectives such as violence, stimulation, aggressiveness etc. Cool colors stress adjectives such as serenity, tranquility etc.

Spike Lee definitely embraces this by using the elements of both warm and cool colors to emphasize the theme of escalating racial tensions that come to a climax at the end of the movie. In addition, it emphasizes the weather and the heat with bright tones. The color red is used symbolically to convey a variety of emotions. Mood and tone are created by this use of color. As racial tensions escalate, the color continues to visually dramatize what is going on in the minds of the characters as well as what is occurring in each scene.

From its first frame, the energetic credit sequence in which actress Rosie Perez dances in a red bodysuit vibrantly to Public Enemy's powerful anthem " Fight the Power," against a rear-screen backdrop that is lit in vivid blues and reds, right to its final shot. The film is an explosion of bright and warm colors

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and glows in an almost burning-furnace light full of vibrant red, orange, and yellow hues. In the first scenes, yellow light pours through windows of shuttered apartments, nearly obscuring or melting the actors and scenery around it.

In later scenes, particularly the nighttime sequences, a chiaroscuro effect is used, with blue and purple light surrounding the outer areas of the screen, and bright yellows and reds lit on the actor's faces and bodies. Overall, color is used as a metaphor for the emotions of the characters as well as to set the tone and mood. At the end of the movie, the culmination of these elements parallels the violent consequences of racism and prejudice. The different colors used in the film create a visual experience that helps to set the tone.

The bright, vibrant colors create strong impressions of the characters' emotions, as well as the overall mood of the movie. The main color used is red, which emphasizes the high temperatures experienced by the people in the neighborhood. In a scene showing Da Mayor's bedroom, the whole room is tinted with yellow, orange, and red to symbolize the heat. After this scene, we get introduced to the character Smiley who is standing in front of a big red building and he is being shown with an orange tint.

Then this scene is followed with Mookie in his sister, Jade's room. This room is totally red, to show that it is very hot in there. We can see the use of red, orange and yellow through out the movie to keep reminding us of how warm it is. The bright red brick wall that serves as a background for the three men on the corner gives the scenes involving them a tone of the weather. This brick wall is a reoccurring object in the movie, and it gets lighter or darker depending on the mood of the particular scene.

Tints of red, yellow, and orange are shown during the course of the film to maintain the mood of heat created by them. As the day progresses, bright yellow colors slowly transition into a darker yellowish or orange color. This is used as an indication of the setting sun and the dissipating heat. Color not only emphasizes the heat, but also emotions. The red color used so often reflects the tension, conflict, anger, and frustration among the characters. Their strong and passionate emotions are complimented by the tints of red, yellow, and orange used in the scenes.

As rising racial tensions mount, color is used again to emphasize the heat and emotion. When the rioters set Sal's pizzeria on fire, it is a bright contrast to the surrounding dark night. The bright color of the flames conveys the rage of the rioters over Radio Raheem's brutal death at the hands of the police. As Sal and his two sons watch their pizzeria burn down, we see that reoccurring red wall behind Vito. The red color stresses their emotions of anger about the injustices that are taking place. The color red is also used in reference of love and hate.

When Sal and Pino are sitting together in the pizzeria, the tone seems to be a bit red hinting some kind of love connection between the two. It is not the usual red color that shows the hot weather. Also Da Mayor gives red roses to Mother Sister, the red in the roses stands out from all the color during the scene. The use of color in the lighting also brings another important element into the ways that certain scenes play out through the movie. There is a lot of natural lighting being used portraying the characters just as they are. But at the same time, different locations provide for different lighting styles.

Such as is the case in Sal's Pizzeria where it seems everything is a bit too dark and somewhat shady. Even in the introduction when Mookie wakes up for the day the lighting being used makes his room seem jumbled and is an insight into his life being a mess. The bright fluorescent lighting in the Korean store makes everything stand out too much, and does not make the place seem inviting, but strictly business instead. The light in DJ Mister Señor Love Daddy's booth is relaxed and calm, just enough light comes in reflecting the cool personality he portrays.

In the scene where Mookie decides to take yet another break from work and visits Tina the mood is entirely set by the color of the lighting. The sun is going down and the room becomes blue. It provides the cool, just as the ice Mookie brings, and makes everything slow down as it happens. The scene where the character Buggin' Out gets his shoes scuffed by a white pedestrian is complemented by the warm colors of the mise-en-scene along with the costumes which are important in suggesting the positions of the characters in the community.

The mise-en-scene includes the brightly colored cars on the road as well as the red and brown buildings, all very warm colors. It appears that in the post-production the shots may have been edited to possess a red hue, intensifying the hot atmosphere that is created by the heat wave. Along with this, Buggin' Out and his group all match the mise-en-scene, wearing bright yellow, orange and red costumes suggesting their sense of belonging to the neighborhood. The contrast is presented through the entrance of the white man who is wearing a green t-shirt with blue socks pulled up, the antithesis of the warm colors the audience has been consistently presented with. The

color difference is emphasized in the juxtaposition of the shot, reverse shots where we see the frame filled with Buggin' Out and his friends wearing the warm colors and then the quick pace of the cuts to the white man wearing the cool green color. The contrast in colored clothing between the characters accentuates the difference in skin tone, instigating the audience's insight into the importance of racial tension within the film.

The out of place coloring in the white man's costume, suggests the unusual nature of him being in this black community, an idea pointed out by Buggin' Out when he says, " what do you want to live in a black neighborhood for anyway? " Also, the cool nature of the man's clothing could be seen to emulate the calm and collected manner in which he handles the situation, he keeps trying to diffuse the argument with apologies and through this, Lee highlights the hot-headed nature of Buggin' Out, a characteristic the audience is shown more explicitly later on in the plot.

In conclusion, Spike Lee is very clever in his use of colors. Warm colors, especially red, are used in characters clothing as well as props and lightening to help put emphasis on the growing racial tensions among the characters that ultimately ends in a huge riot and tragedy. Color is also used to help express emotions that the characters are facing. For instance, in the riot scene, there are so many reds and oranges that clash with the dark blue night to illustrate the anger of the riots after the murder of Radio Raheem at the hands of the police.

Spike Lee's use of color is forcing us to take sides with his ideology, which is very explicit in this film. The principal idea of Lee's film is that of the oppression of the black working class, by the non-black capitalists in their

very own community. Lee has his characters basically come right out and express their view on this subject. The black characters of the community are alienated from their capitalist counterparts and therefore feel a certain rage against them. By using color, he forces us to take sides with them and succeeds in that.