

Do the right thing



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Film Essay Spike Lee's ' Do the Right Thing' stages a series of confrontations designed less to arrive at a resolution in the traditional sense than to uncover some of the limitations of oppositional or binary thinking. This essay considers these various aspects of the film in an effort to reveal these theoretical and filmic elements. The first confrontation witnessed occurs at 9: 23 in the film when one of the Italian store owners yells at his son to clean out front. The confrontation is comedic and simplistic in its structure, and rather than willfully sweeping the front, the son attempts to defer to one of his brothers. The confrontation eventually devolves into the three of them arguing over who should sweep the area. This is indicative of the larger thematic elements of the film, as rather than reaching a solid conclusion the confrontation just falls into this unresolved absurd state. The next notable conflict occurs at 14: 20 in the film. This conflict is between an elderly African American gentleman and the Korean convenience store owners over alcohol products. The conflict never reaches a clear resolution as the man angrily submits, and there are underlining racial tensions in the argument. In having no clear resolution, the scene greatly contributes to this thematic tendency of resisting binary thinking. This conflict, in a non-racial sense, occurs outside the store, when a woman confronts the man for drinking the alcohol and he chastises her for not being civil. Like a stream of consciousness flow the film then cuts to Rosie Perez inside her apartment arguing with her mother over undisclosed, yet unresolved elements. At 20: 00 a customer confronts Sal about not having African American pictures on his wall. This conflict has the most racial undertones yet in the film, and results with the man being thrown out of the restaurant. Even as the reason behind the conflict appears racial, the film demonstrates that there is no

easy solution to the conflict. The next conflict that occurs is when a man's car is drenched with water from a fire hydrant. This conflict represents the gradual escalation of conflict and the film, and like the previous conflicts no clear resolution is achieved. In these regards it functions to aid both the narrative and to further develop the theme of unresolved conflict both of which have emerged prominently in the film at this point. The remainder of the film continues to follow this theme of unresolved conflicts as a means of demonstrating the limits of binary thinking. In large part these conflicts build on the previous in terms of intensity, beginning to point towards a catastrophic conclusion. Among these are the confrontation between the two Italian brothers that is revisited towards the end of the film. The conflict regarding African Americans on the restaurant wall is also revisited towards the end of the film, wherein Sal destroys the man's boom box and a full-scale brawl erupts. Rather than achieving any sort of lasting conflict resolution, the brawl ends with one man dead and an angry mob spitefully attempting to determine the complexity of what happened.