

# [Bridging black and white essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/bridging-black-and-white-essay-sample/)

1. Introduction

Do The Right Thing (1989) is a cult film written, directed, and produced by the inimitable Spike Lee, which won numerous awards and nominations both in the United States and around the world.  Racial conflict and bigotry are discussed in the setting of Brooklyn, New York, a community of various ethnic origins, and was also criticized for including concepts and scenarios that could encourage black viewers to start riots.

The film takes place on the hottest day of the year, which may be a reference to temperament and moods; that the environment is composed of blacks and Latinos, with Koreans running the local store and Italian-American Sal owns Sal’s Famous Pizzeria, sets the tone for possible conflicts arising from the mix of cultures and ideologies.

The various characters named in the story all represent several important stereotypes that contribute in the formation of the film’s message, which is to showcase the black cultural identity through cinematic style; this is accomplished through the perceived relationships of the black characters with other ethnicities, as well as the multi-racial community’s projection of identity as a whole, in the American context.

Several familiar characterizations are brought to the fore, such as the Italian practice of the whole family being involved in the business, and the Korean value of industry and entrepreneurship.  Surprisingly, the established personalities of African-Americans and Latinos in the story appear more along the lines of negativity; though these will be disproved later in the film.

1. Characters

The major characters each represent an ethnic race in the melting pot that is Brooklyn.  Sal, the Italian-American restaurant owner, devotes his time and attention to his restaurant, and has employed the services of his sons Vito and Pino.  The Italian values that observe no boundaries between family and business are apparent in their setup, with the father and sons even commuting to work together.  Pino is depicted as having issues with his African American neighbors, while Vito, on the other hand, maintains friendships with blacks—particularly Mookie.

Mookie, played by Spike Lee himself is shown as a delivery man working at Sal’s, who continues to live with his sister Jade.  He is also portrayed as a less-than-ideal employee, who hardly ever performs as he is expected.  Mookie has a Puerto Rican girlfriend, with whom he has a son.  Once more, the black representation in the storyline shows the lack of responsibility in terms of familial obligations.

A host of other characters, of different racial origins and motivations, are also included to give texture and ethnic emphasis.

III.      Social and Cultural Perceptions

There are very strong statements of contempt against the presence of other cultures:  the existence of a Korean family owning a grocery, in the midst of jobless African-Americans; the showcase of one’s culture—in this case, Italian—at the expense of rejecting others, as manifested in Sal’s refusal to include African-American photos on his Wall of Fame, echoing his son Pino’s sentiments; the prevalence of mostly white police officers in a predominantly African-American neighborhood, one who eventually kills a black man under the pretext of arrest; and the collective impression of blacks being violent and wild, which causes a riot after the murder of Radio Raheem.

In all the examples, taken in the context of the unbearable heat the neighborhood was experiencing that day, violence is prepped to be the end result.  There are degrees of violence implied in each situation, all of which graduate into the final act of riot and mob mentality.  No heroes are upheld in the film, nor are there villains—the story was formulated to allow audiences to question the objective and motivation of each character involved in a ‘ violent’ situation, a subjective area that does not clearly define, in specific terms, the difference between right and wrong (Emerson).

1. Violence as Justice or Self-Defense

The two quotes at the end of the film provide very divisive views from two of the most respected names in African-American history—Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.  While one rejects violence as a means to attain racial justice, deeming it immoral and impractical, the other defends violence only as a means for self-defense.  These two differing ideologies compose the goal of Lee—to provide an avenue for blacks and non-blacks to assess current social and cultural perceptions, in the wake of numerous violent episodes that have taken place in America alone.

As the character Mookie is depicted with a strain of violence as he throws a garbage can through his employer’s window runs opposite his easygoing character; he may not be passionate or determined, at least not in terms of career, but he is of extreme intelligence—which is shown as being opposite of the other black characters in the film—a trait most often attributed to whites.  However, many may feel that his action is justified, coming from the injustice he had experienced (Johnson, 2008).

On the other hand, the scene showing how Buggin Out and Radio Raheem were restricted from playing Raheem’s boom box at full volume, resulting in violence, may be considered as quite a trivial reason to resort to such ends.  Though the whole thing started with Buggin Out’s boycott of Sal’s because of the absence of African-American faces on the wall, the stereotype of violent blacks becomes pronounced and reinforced.

These two examples are obviously deliberate efforts of Lee to create a balanced portrayal of characters, given the context of violence and its purposes (Hinson, 1989).

But the final reason for violence, the unnecessary murder of a black man by a white police officer, may be the precise manifestation of violence being used for self-defense; for there is no valid reason shown, either than a common street rumble even cheered on by onlookers, for a man to take justice into his own hands—specially is the act was racially-motivated.  The fact that Radio Raheem and Buggin Out were in a fight with Pino and Sal, both white, quickly made the decision for the white officer—that the black man is the cause of it all, and it would not matter to have him killed.

1. Violence in Recent Times

The film’s debut was at a time when America was besieged by gang wars and riots, mostly participated in by blacks.  This may have been Lee’s takeoff point—to expose the many reasons for violence by blacks, from the trivial to the critical.  But times have changed, and violence can no longer be relegated to the African-American culture territory.

Violence is now a common occurrence everywhere, even involving children and teenagers.  The reasons for it have gone beyond achieving justice or self-defense; in many cases, it has become a rite of passage.  There have been documented events showing violence among schoolgirls, an apparent emphasis on power relations; violence among young boys, a discriminatory act against the weak and helpless, which has also happened to senior citizens; and violence among grown women, most likely an extension of power and relationship issues.  Of course, the original reason of racism has not really gone away—the video showing white officers beating a black man is probably still quite vivid in everyone’s minds.

1. Personal Views

Being a Chinese immigrant, I had my own share of experiences regarding racial stereotypes, some of which had been discussed in the film.  First off, I was language-challenged.  While there were some of found it laughable, there were others who actually helped me adjust and understand American English speaking styles and contexts.  The fact that I had to attend an American high school made it a totally different story all on its own.  True—some thought I spoke funny, and some saw me as entertainment.

I would compare this to some issues in the film, particularly with the Korean store owners.  During the riot, the Korean guy’s attempt to show his sympathy towards the blacks (who were actually about to turn their wrath to his store) was to say, “ I black!  We same!”, in his broken English.  Then one of them, Coconut Sid, told the mob to spare the Korean’s store because “ he’s alright”.  It really takes an open mind to allot time to get to know people, and not judge them because of their race.

VII.     Conclusion

Martin Luther King, Jr. was correct in every way, when he dissuaded people from using violence as a means for racial justice; there are other ways, all of them non-violent and peaceful, to make one’s voice heard.  On the other hand, Malcolm X’s statement may hold true and fitting in specific situations—war is an example.  If violence is used against you and your country, would there be any other resort than to fight back?

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