



Do the Right Thing

During the hottest day of the year, Mookie (Lee) travels around his predominantly black Brooklyn neighbourhood making deliveries for the local pizzeria run by Italian American Sal (Aiello). As the temperature rises, so do the simmering racial tensions in the community. Expertly crafted, exploding with his distinctive visual style and humour, Spike Lee's cinematic sucker-punch is a landmark of American cinema that remains just as powerful and profoundly relevant as the day it debuted.

Kimberley Sheehan, bfi.org.uk

Spike Lee's third feature, *Do the Right Thing*, remains a genuine one-off. A vivid, unabashedly theatrical snapshot of one blisteringly hot day in the life of a multicultural Brooklyn block, it was an impassioned response to simmering racial tensions in New York City by its then 32-year-old auteur. From the superb performances by a vast ensemble cast to Ernest Dickerson's searing cinematography; from its barbed, lyrical screenplay to the lushly versatile jazz score by the director's father Bill Lee, it resounds as a singular artistic triumph.

Despite an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay, Lee's urgent dispatch was ignored by the Academy in the Best Picture category, which was won instead by the reassuringly tame race-relations drama *Driving Miss Daisy*. Yet *Do the Right Thing*'s influence looms large across popular culture on an international scale: it's a clear forerunner for urban dramas like *La Haine* (1995) and *City of God* (2002); it's been affectionately parodied on *Sesame Street*; and even the Obamas claim they saw it on their first date. Moreover, many of the issues it raises are still pertinent: Ryan Coogler's Sundance-winning *Fruitvale Station*, for example, echoes Lee's film in its focus on the police killing of a young black urban American male.

Steve McQueen, director/writer: The first time I saw *Do the Right Thing*, when it was over, I didn't speak for a while. I was just trying to take it all in. It was a knockout – almost like being in a boxing ring. Sometimes it was brutal, and sometimes beautiful; an attack, done with style, anger and compassion. In terms of giving a snapshot of a New York community, the only thing that comes close are those films from the 30s and 40s like *Angels with Dirty Faces*.

It brings back great memories, but also painful ones, and that combination is so powerful. Great art has a resonance in the past, present and future, and *Do the Right Thing* is just that. When it came out, the echoes with the UK political situation were loud and clear. In England, there was police brutality and unemployment, and it resonated with me in a direct way. I love the bit when John Savage's character – the white guy wearing the Larry Bird jersey, carrying his bicycle – steps on the new Air Jordans that Buggin' Out is wearing, and this sparks a heated conversation about gentrification. It reminds me of what England was like at the time, and it also illustrated the importance of trainers back then!

There are many iconic moments: the to-camera 'love and hate' speech by Radio Raheem stands out, as does the conversation between pizza-shop owner Sal and his racist son Pino, who says he feels sick of being in the neighbourhood. Through the window of the pizzeria you can see the autistic character Smiley milling around, and the way Lee builds up the tension is

amazing; it's ingrained in my mind. But my most powerful memory is right at the start: you see the Universal logo – the image of the world turning – and there's this lazy saxophone melody over it ['Lift Every Voice and Sing', the so-called 'Negro National Anthem']; it's as though Universal's logo becomes part of the fabric of the piece, and it feels like the setting for an old fable that's been told and retold. There's the 40 Acres and a Mule [Lee's production company] symbol, and then we go into the stunning credit sequence with Rosie Perez dancing to Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power'. It's just beautiful. I was knocked out before the film even started.

Chaz Ebert, writer/broadcaster: My husband Roger and I had our first date in September 1989, but we didn't discuss *Do the Right Thing*, even though it meant so much to him. He didn't assume just because I was black that I wanted to discuss Spike's movies. At some point we did talk about it, though, because it made an incredible impression on Roger – he even threatened never to go back to the Cannes Film Festival because it didn't win a prize [it lost out to *sex, lies and videotape* for the Palme d'Or]. Spike wrote a letter to Roger that said, 'Thanks for sticking up for me. I give you permission to go back to the Cannes Film Festival.'

One of the things Roger found so strong about the film was his feeling that Spike did a movie about race in America that didn't take sides. Usually, such movies have an agenda. In 1989, from an African-American point of view, we were very excited to see the movie. Lee had burst on to the scene: this new voice to advocate for urban black Americans. We were also irritated because some social commentators said there was going to be this big race riot because of it. And we said: 'Why would a movie start a race riot?' It was incomprehensible to us that people would think that way.

I also remember leaving the cinema after those two closing quotes on the screen, from Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Some people said, 'Did you see the juxtaposition of those quotes? He had the Malcolm X one last – "I don't even call it violence when it's self-defence, I call it intelligence" – so does that mean he was advocating violence?' We said: 'No, he had both on the screen to leave it up to you to decide which was the most valid for the state of race relations at the time.'

Destiny Ekaragha, director/writer: I grew up on an estate in New Cross in London, but it didn't feel like we were in the 'ghetto' – we were just a bunch of kids that would play out in the summer. For me, *Do the Right Thing*, which I first saw in the 90s in my early teens, captured exactly that feeling, with its colour and vibrant characters like Mister Señor Love Daddy in his budget radio station. One of my favourite lines ever is when he says, 'Today's weather is... HOT!' He ain't messing around with degrees Fahrenheit or anything like that.

It remains so important because it touches on issues of race and class – and people's perceptions of those things – like no other film before or after. It was the first film I saw which broke narrative and had people talking directly to camera. It was laying bare what different racial groups said about each other. It said: 'Make no mistake, we are living amidst racism – it's as thick as the humidity in the air.' Today, there are people pretending that racism doesn't exist, that we're in a 'post-racial' era – but that's the most stupid term I've ever heard. If people don't acknowledge that racism is still here, then we're going to go backwards. And that's why *Do the Right Thing* resonates today: it uses open dialogue and conversation to bring these issues to the surface.

Introduction by Ashley Clark, *Sight & Sound*, August 2014

DO THE RIGHT THING

Director: Spike Lee
©: Universal City Studios, Inc.
a 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks production
Producer: Spike Lee
Co-producer: Monty Ross
Line Producer: Jon Kilik
Production Supervisor: Preston Holmes
40 Acres Production Co-ordinator: Susan D. Fowler
Production Office Co-ordinator: Lillian Pyles
Unit Manager: R.W. Dixon
Location Manager: Brent Owens
1st Assistant Director: Randy Fletcher
2nd Assistant Director: Nandi Bowe
Script Supervisor: Joe Gonzalez
Casting: Robi Reed
Screenplay: Spike Lee
Director of Photography: Ernest Dickerson
Camera Operator: John Newby
Still Photography: David Lee
Special Effects: Steve Kirshoff
Do The Right Thing Logo by: Art Sims, 11:24 Design & Advertising
Editor: Barry Alexander Brown
Production Designer: Wynn Thomas
Costumes: Ruth Carter
Make-up: Matiki Anoff
Hair: Larry Cherry
Main/End Titles Designed and Produced by: Balsmeyer & Everett Inc
Music: Bill Lee
Music Performed by:
The Natural Spiritual Orchestra
Choreography ('Fight the Power'): Rosie Perez, Otis Sallid
Sound Design: Skip Lievsay
Re-recording Mixer: Tom Fleischman
Stunt Co-ordinator: Eddie Smith

Cast

Danny Aiello (*Sal*)
Ossie Davis (*Da Mayor*)
Ruby Dee (*Mother Sister*)
Richard Edson (*Vito*)
Giancarlo Esposito (*Buggin' Out*)
Spike Lee (*Mookie*)
Bill Nunn (*Radio Raheem*)
John Turturro (*Pino*)
Paul Benjamin (*ML*)
Frankie Faison (*Coconut Sid*)
Robin Harris (*Sweet Dick Willie*)
Joie Lee (*Jade*)
Miguel Sandoval (*Officer Ponte*)
Rick Aiello (*Officer Long*)
John Savage (*Clifton*)
Sam Jackson (*Mister Señor Love Daddy*)
Rosie Perez (*Tina*)
Roger Guenveur Smith (*Smiley*)
Steve White (*Ahmad*)
Martin Lawrence (*Cee*)
Leonard Thomas (*Punchy*)
Christa Rivers (*Ella*)
Frank Vincent (*Charlie*)
Luis Ramos (*Stevie*)
Richard Habersham (*Eddie*)
Gwen McGee (*Louise*)
Steve Park (*Sonny*)
Ginny Yang (*Kim*)
Sherwin Park (*Korean child*)
Shawn Elliott (*Puerto Rican ice man*)
Diva Osorio (*Carmen*)
Chris Delaney, Angel Ramirez, Sixto Ramos,
Nelson Vasquez (*Stevie's friends*)
Travell Lee Toulson (*Hector*)
Joel Nagle (*sergeant*)
David E. Weinberg (*plainclothes detective*)
Yattee Brown, Mecca Brunson, Shawn Stainback, Soquana Wallace
(*Double Dutch girls*)

USA 1989©

120 mins

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Sat 4 Mar 13:20; Sat 11 Mar 18:05
Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom)
Sat 4 Mar 15:30; Sun 5 Mar 10:30 BFI IMAX; Thu 9 Mar 20:50
Playtime Sat 4 Mar 17:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:30
The Searchers Sat 4 Mar 17:40; Tue 7 Mar 20:35
Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)
Sat 4 Mar 18:50; Tue 14 Mar 18:40
Apocalypse Now: Final Cut
Sat 4 Mar 19:40; Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX
Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)
Sat 4 Mar 20:15; Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30
Shoah Sun 5 Mar 11:00; Sun 12 Mar 11:00
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans
Sun 5 Mar 11:45; Mon 6 Mar 14:00; Mon 13 Mar 20:35
The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc) Sun 5 Mar 14:00 (with live accompaniment); Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)
Citizen Kane Sun 5 Mar 16:15; Tue 7 Mar 20:30
Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7) Sun 5 Mar 17:45; Wed 8 Mar 21:00
2001: A Space Odyssey Sun 5 Mar 19:00; Thu 9 Mar 18:00

Au hasard Balthazar Mon 6 Mar 18:30
Vertigo Mon 6 Mar 20:30; Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10
In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)
Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30
Late Spring (Banshun)
Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20
The Night of the Hunter Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45
Mulholland Dr. Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15
Beau Travail Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King's College London)
Daisies (Sedmikrásky) + Meshes of the Afternoon
Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)
Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)
Wed 8 Mar 20:30
Persona Thu 9 Mar 21:05
Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik) Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50
The Godfather Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15
Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles
Sat 11 Mar 18:50
Taxi Driver Mon 13 Mar 20:40

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