April 13, 2021 (42:11)
Spike Lee: DO THE RIGHT THING (1989,120 min)
Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries

Vimeo link for **ALL** of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS

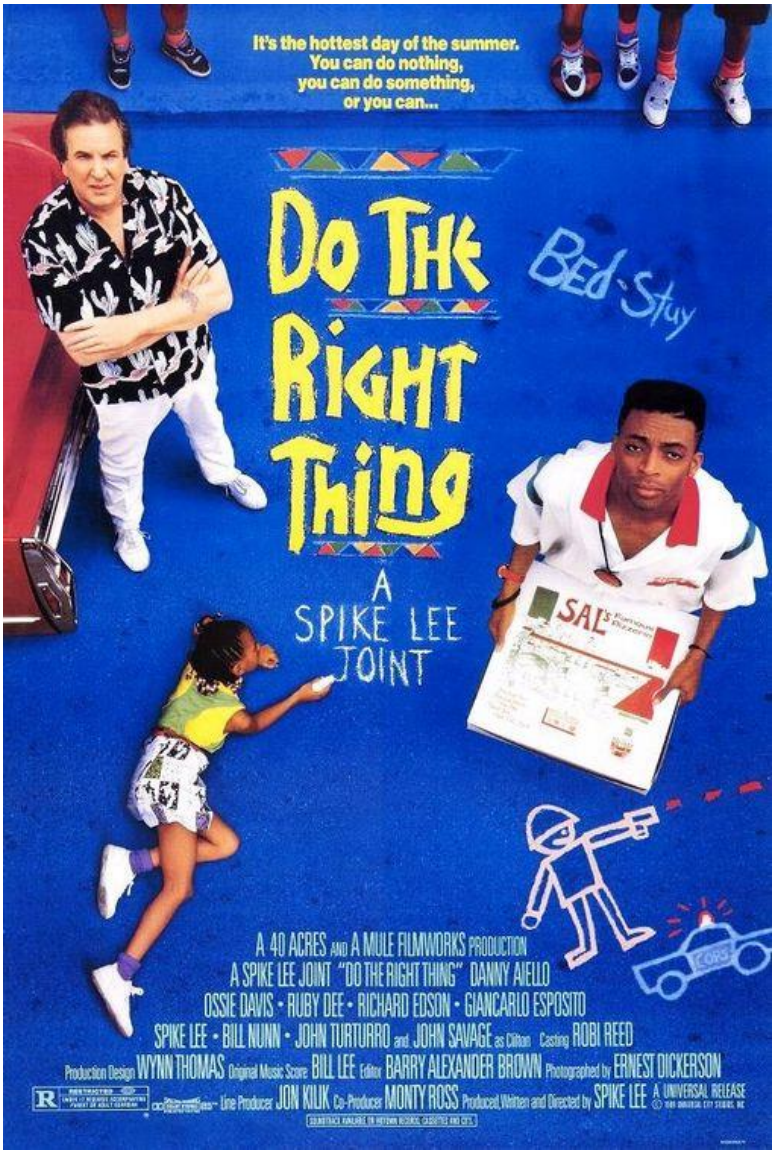
Vimeo link for our introduction to *Do the Right Thing*

Zoom link for *all* Spring 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:
Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

Produced, Written and Directed by Spike Lee
Cinematography by Ernest R. Dickerson
Film Editing by Barry Alexander Brown
Music by The Natural Spiritual Orchestra (Bill Lee, conductor; Branford Marsalis, tenor and soprano saxophone)
Choreography by Rosie Perez

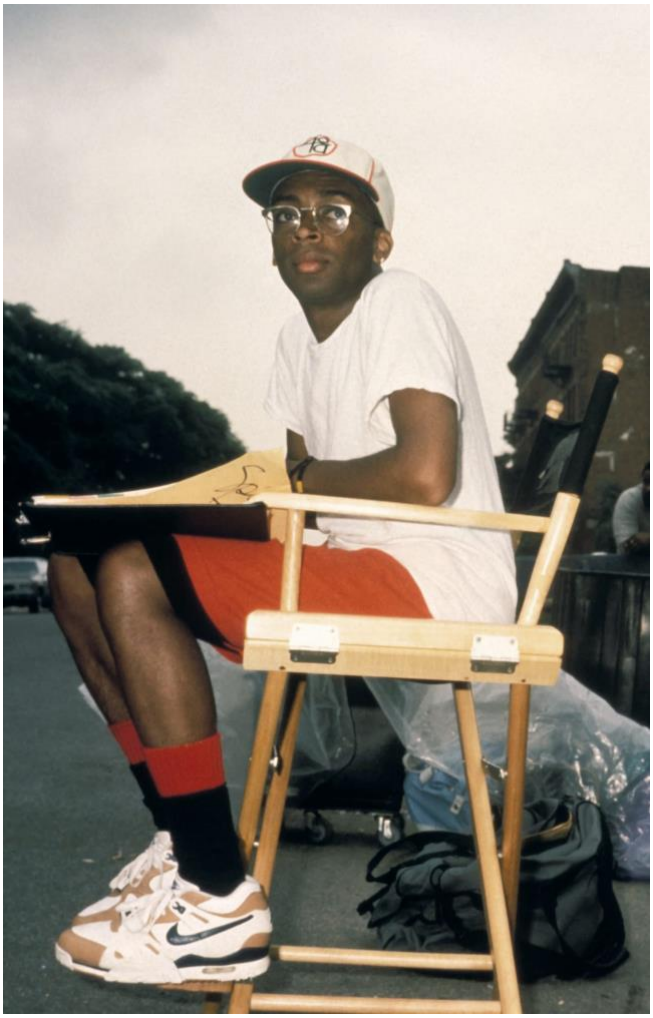
Though widely seen as one of the most important films of 1989, the film was memorably snubbed in the 1990 Academy Awards, only garnering nominations for Best Actor in a Supporting Role and Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen. It was recognized as a contender for the Palme d'Or at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival, however. Selected by the National Film Preservation Board for the National Film Registry, 1999

Cast
Ossie Davis...Da Mayor
Danny Aiello...Sal
Giancarlo Esposito...Buggin Out
Richard Edson...Vito



Spike Lee...Mookie
Ruby Dee...Mother Sister
Bill Nunn...Radio Raheem
John Turturro...Pino
Paul Benjamin...ML
Rosie Perez...Tina
Robin Harris...Sweet Dick Willie
Frankie Faison...Coconut Sid
Steve White...Ahmad
Leonard L. Thomas...Punchy
Samuel L. Jackson...Mister Señor Love Daddy
Joie Lee...Jade
Miguel Sandoval...Officer Ponte
Rick Aiello...Officer Long

Martin Lawrence...Cee
Roger Guenveur Smith...Smiley
John Savage...Clifton
Christa Rivers...Ella
Frank Vincent...Charlie
Luis Ramos...Stevie
Richard Habersham...Eddie
Gwen McGee...Louise



SPIKE LEE (20 March 1957, Atlanta, Georgia) is an American film director, producer, screenwriter, actor, and professor. Lee's films are typically referred to as "Spike Lee Joints" and the closing credits always end with the phrases "By Any Means Necessary," "Ya Dig," and "Sho Nuff." He has won numerous accolades for his work, including an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, a Student Academy Award, a BAFTA Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, two Emmy Awards, two Peabody Awards, and the Cannes Grand Prix. He has also received an Academy Honorary Award, an Honorary BAFTA Award, an Honorary César, and the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize. He made his directorial debut with *She's Gotta Have It* (1986). He has since written and directed such films as *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Crooklyn* (1994), *Clockers* (1995), *25th Hour* (2002), *Inside Man* (2006), *Chi-Raq* (2015), *BlacKkKlansman* (2018) and *Da 5 Bloods* (2020). Lee also acted in ten of his films. Lee's films *Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X*, *4 Little Girls* and *She's Gotta Have It* were each selected by the Library of Congress for preservation in the National Film Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." In 1993, he began to teach at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in the Graduate Film Program. In 2002 he was appointed as artistic director of the school. He is now a tenured professor at NYU. He has directed 24 feature films, 10 short films, 11 documentaries, 8 television films, series, or specials, 7 stage shows, many music videos, and even a video game (*NBA 2K16*): "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts" (2006). Some of the others are “Sucker Free City” (2004), *She Hate Me* (2004), *25th Hour* (2002), *Come Rain or Come Shine* (2001), *Bamboozled* (2000), *The Original Kings of Comedy* (2000), *Summer of Sam* (1999), *He Got Game* (1998), *4 Little Girls* (1997), *Get on the Bus* (1996), *Clockers* (1995), *Crooklyn* (1994), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *School Daze* (1988), *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1983), *Sarah* (1981), *The Answer* (1980) and *Last Hustle in Brooklyn* (1977). He produced all of his own films and wrote most of them as well.

OSSIE DAVIS and **RUBY DEE** often appeared in films and theatrical productions together during their long marriage. **DAVIS** (18 December 1917, Cogdell, Georgia— 4 February 2005, Miami Beach, Florida) appeared in 195 films and tv series, among them "The L Word," She Hate Me (2004), "JAG," "Cosby," 12 Angry Men (1997 TV), *I'm Not Rappaport* (1996), *The Client* (1994), *Grumpy Old Men* (1993), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990), *School Daze* (1988), *Don't Look Back: The Story of Leroy 'Satchel' Paige* (1981 TV), "Ossie and Ruby!" (1980-81 TV Series), "King" (1978 mini TV Series), "Bonanza," "N.Y.P.D.," "The Fugitive," *and The Emperor Jones* (1955 TV). **DEE** (27 October

1924, Cleveland) has been in nearly 100 theatrical and tv films and tv series. She has one film in post-production (*Clarksdale*, one filming (*Steamroom*) and one in production (*Flying Over Purgatory*). She also appeared in *The Way Back Home* (2006), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005 TV), *Dream Street* (2005), "Touched by an Angel" (1999), "Cosby" (1999), *Tuesday Morning Ride* (1995), "The Stand" (1994 mini TV Series), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), "Spenser: For Hire" (1987), "The Atlanta Child Murders" (1985 mini TV Series), *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1982 TV), *Cat People (1982)*, "Ossie and Ruby!" (1980-81 TV Series), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1979 TV), *Buck and the Preacher (1972)*, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1972 TV), *"East Side/West Side" (1963)*, *"The Fugitive" (1963)*, *The Balcony* (1963), *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), *Edge of the City* (1957), *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), and *What a Guy* (1939).

DANNY AIELLO (20 June 1933—12 December 2019, NYC) acted in 106 films, most recently: *One Moment* (2021). Others include: *The Last Request* (2006), *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006), *Prince of Central Park* (2000), *Mambo Café* (2000), "The Last Don" (1997 mini TV Series), *Prêt-à-Porter* (1994), *Mistress* (1992), *Hudson Hawk* (1991), *The Closer* (1990), *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), *Harlem Nights* (1989), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Moonstruck* (1987), *Man on Fire* (1987), *Radio Days* (1987), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), *Fort Apache the Bronx* (1981), *Hide in Plain Sight* (1980), *Bloodbrothers* (1978), *Fingers* (1978), *The Front* (1976), *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973).

JOHN TURTURRO (28 February 1957, Brooklyn, NY) won Best Actor at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival for *Barton Fink*. His directorial effort *Illuminata* was nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1998. He has acted in 115 films and television series, including, *The Batman* (*post-production*), *The Plot Against America* (TV Series, 2020), *The Good Shepherd* (2006), *Romance & Cigarettes* (2005), *She Hate Me* (2004), *Secret Window* (2004), *Secret Passage* (2004), *Collateral Damage* (2002), *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing* (2001), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *Cradle Will Rock* (1999), *Rounders* (1998), *He Got Game* (1998), *The Big Liebowski* (1998), *Girl 6* (1996), *Clockers* (1995), *Quiz Show* (1994), *Mac* (1992), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Barton Fink* (1991), *State of Grace* (1990), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *The Sicilian* (1987), *The Color of Money* (1986), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985) and *Raging Bull (1980)*.

ROSIE PEREZ (6 September 1964, Brooklyn, NY) has acted in 78 films and tv programs, among them, *The Flight Attendant* (TV series, 2020), *Birds of Prey* (2020), *She's Gotta Have It* (TV series, 2019), *High Maintenance* (TV series, 2019), *Pineapple Express* (2008), *Just Like the Son* (2006), *Jesus Children of America* (2005), *Lackawanna Blues* (2005 TV), *Riding in Cars with Boys* (2001), *King of the Jungle* (2000), *Somebody to Love* (1994), *Fearless* (1993), *White Men Can't Jump* (1992), *and Do the Right Thing* (1989).

GIANCARLO GIUSEPPE ALESSANDRO ESPOSITO (FROM WIKIPEDIA) (born April 26, 1958) is an American actor. He is best known for portraying Gus Fring in the AMC crime drama series *Breaking Bad* (2009–2011) and the prequel series *Better Call Saul* (2017–present), for which he won the Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Drama Series and earned three nominations for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series. Esposito's other television roles include Federal Agent Mike Giardello in the NBC police drama series *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1998–1999), Sidney Glass / Magic Mirror in the ABC supernatural drama series *Once Upon a Time* (2011–2017), Tom Neville in the NBC science fiction series *Revolution* (2012–2014), Dr. Edward Ruskins in the Netflix comedy-drama series *Dear*

White People (2017–present), Stan Edgar in the Prime Video superhero drama series *The Boys* (2019–present), and Moff Gideon in the Disney+ space western drama series *The Mandalorian* (2019–present), the lattermost of which earned him a Primetime Emmy Award nomination. He is also known for his appearances in several Spike Lee films, such as *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), and *Malcolm X* (1992). Esposito's other major films include *King of New York* (1990), *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man* (1991), *Fresh* (1994), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Ali*(2001), *Last Holiday* (2006), *Gospel Hill* (2008), *Rabbit Hole* (2010), *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials* (2015), *The Jungle Book* (2016), *Money Monster* (2016), *Okja* (2017), *Maze Runner: The Death Cure* (2018), and *Stargirl* (2020).

SAMUEL LEROY JACKSON (from Wikipedia) (born December 21, 1948) is an America Widely regarded as one of the most popular actors of his generation, the films in which he has appeared have collectively grossed over $27 billion worldwide, making him the highest-grossing actor of all time (when cameo appearances are excluded) He rose to fame with films such as *Coming to America* (1988), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Patriot Games* (1992), *Juice* (1992), *Menace II Society* (1993), *True Romance* (1993), *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *Fresh*(1994). Jackson has especially been noted for his roles in the Spike Lee films *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing*(1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Oldboy* (2013) and *Chi-Raq* (2015) and in the Quentin Tarantino films *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Django Unchained* (2012), and *The Hateful Eight*(2015). For his role in *Pulp Fiction*, he was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. Jackson is a highly prolific actor, having appeared in over 150 films. His other roles include *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *A Time to Kill* (1996), *Hard Eight* (1996), *Eve's Bayou* (1997), *The Red Violin* (1998), *The Negotiator* (1998), *Unbreakable* (2000), *Shaft* (2000) and its sequel/reboot, *Coach Carter* (2005), *Snakes on a Plane* (2006), *The Other Guys* (2010), *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), and *Glass* (2019). Jackson also won widespread recognition as the Jedi Mace Windu in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (1999–2005), and later voiced the role in the animated film *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008). With his permission, his likeness was used for the Ultimate version of the Marvel Comics character Nick Fury; he subsequently played Fury in 11 Marvel Cinematic Universe films, beginning with a cameo appearance in *Iron Man* (2008), as well as guest-starring in the television series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* He will reprise this role in the upcoming Disney+ series *Secret Invasion*. Jackson has provided his voice for several animated films, documentaries, television series, and video games, including Lucius Best/Frozone in the Pixar films *The Incredibles* (2004) and *Incredibles 2* (2018), Whiplash in *Turbo* (2013), the title character of the anime television series *Afro Samurai* (2007), and Frank Tenpenny in the video game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004). In 2016, Jackson served as the narrator of the acclaimed documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* based on James Baldwin's writings.

"Spike Lee" from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink, Detroit,1998. Entry by Charles Derry.

Born Shelton Jackson Lee in Atlanta, Georgia, 20 March 1957; son of jazz musician Bill Lee. Education Morehouse College, B.A., 1979; New York University, M.A. in Filmmaking; studying with Martin Scorsese.

Spike Lee is the most famous African-American to have succeeded in breaking through the Hollywood establishment to create a notable career for himself as a major director. What makes this all the more notable is that he is not a comedian—the one role in which Hollywood has usually allowed blacks to excel—but a prodigious, creative, multifaceted talent who writes, directs, edits, and acts, a filmmaker who invites comparisons with American

titans like Woody Allen, John Cassavetes, and Orson Welles.

His films, which deal with different facets of the black experience, are innovative and controversial even within the black community. Spike Lee refuses to be content with presenting blacks in their "acceptable" stereotypes: noble Poitiers demonstrating simple moral righteousness are nowhere to be found. Lee's characters are three-dimensional and often vulnerable to moral criticism. His first feature film, *She's Gotta Have It*, dealt with black sexuality, unapologetically supporting the heroine's promiscuity. His second film, *School Daze*, drawing heavily upon Lee's own experiences at Morehouse College, examined the black university experience and dealt with discrimination within the black community based on relative skin colors. His third film, *Do the Right Thing*, dealt with urban racial tensions and violence. His fourth film, *Mo' Better Blues*, dealt with black jazz and its milieu. His fifth film, *Jungle Fever*, dealt with interracial sexual relationships and their political implications, by no means taking the traditional, white liberal position that love should be color blind. His sixth film, *Malcolm X*, attempted no less than a panoramic portrait of the entire racial struggle in the United States, as seen through the life story of the controversial activist. Not until his seventh film, *Crooklyn*, primarily an autobiographical family remembrance of growing up in Brooklyn, did Spike Lee take a breath to deal with a simpler subject and theme.

Lee's breakthrough feature was *She's Gotta Have It*, an independent film budgeted at $175,000 and a striking box-office success: a film made by blacks for blacks which also attracted white audiences. *She's Gotta Have It* reflects the sensibilities of an already sophisticated filmmaker and harkens back to the early French New Wave in its exuberant embracing of bravura techniques—intertitles, black-and-white cinematography, a sense of improvisation, characters directly addressing the camera—all wedded nevertheless to serious philosophical/sociological examination. The considerable comedy in *She's Gotta Have It* caused many critics to call Spike Lee the "black Woody Allen," a label which would increasingly reveal itself as a rather simplistic, muddle-headed approbation, particularly as Lee's career developed. (Indeed, in his work's energy, style, eclecticism, and social commitment, he more resembles Martin Scorsese, a Lee mentor at the NYU film school.) Even to characterize Spike Lee as a black filmmaker is to denigrate his talent, since there are today virtually no American filmmakers (except Allen) with the ambitiousness and talent to write, direct, and perform in their own films. And Lee edits as well.

Do the Right Thing, Lee's third full-length feature, is one of the director's most daring and controversial achievements, presenting one sweltering day which culminates in a riot in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. From its first images—assailing jump cuts of a woman dancing frenetically to the rap "Fight the Power" while colored lights stylistically flash on a location ghetto block upon which Lee has constructed his set—we know we are about to witness something deeply disturbing. The film's sound design is incredibly dense and complex, and the volume alarmingly high, as the film continues to assail us with tight close-ups, extreme angles, moving camera, colored lights, distorting lenses, and individual scenes directed like high operatic arias.

Impressive, too, is the well-constructed screenplay, particularly the perceptively drawn Italian family at the center of the film who feel so besieged by the changing, predominantly black neighborhood around them. A variety of ethnic characters are drawn sympathetically, if unsentimentally; perhaps never in American cinema has a director so accurately presented the relationships among the American urban underclasses. Particularly shocking and honest is a scene in which catalogs of racial and ethnic epithets are shouted directly into the camera. The key scene in *Do the Right Thing* has the character of Mookie, played by Spike Lee, throwing a garbage can through a pizzeria window as a moral gesture which works to make the riot

inevitable. The film ends with two quotations: one from Martin Luther King Jr., eschewing violence; the other from Malcolm X, rationalizing violence in certain circumstances.

Do the Right Thing was one of the most controversial films of the last twenty years. Politically conservative commentators denounced the film, fearful it would incite inner-city violence. Despite widespread acclaim the film was snubbed at the Cannes Film Festival, outraging certain Cannes judges; despite the accolades of many critics' groups, the film was also largely snubbed by the Motion Picture Academy, receiving a nomination only for Spike Lee's screenplay and Danny Aiello's performance as the pizzeria owner.

Both *Mo' Better Blues* and the much underrated *Crooklyn* owe a lot to Spike Lee's appreciation of music, particularly as handed down to him by his father, the musician Billy Lee. *Crooklyn* is by far the gentler film, presenting Lee's and his siblings' memories of growing up with Bill Lee and his mother. Typical of Spike Lee, the vision in *Crooklyn* is by no means a sentimental one, and the father comes across as a proud, if weak, man; talented, if failing in his musical career; loving his children, if not always strong enough to do the right thing for them. The mother, played masterfully by Alfre Woodard, is the stronger of the two personalities; and the film—ending as it does with grief—seems Spike Lee's version of Fellini's *Amarcord.* For a white audience, *Crooklyn* came as a revelation: the sight of black children watching cartoons, eating Trix cereal, playing hopscotch, and singing along with the Partridge family, seemed strange—because the American cinema had so rarely (if ever?) shown a struggling black family so rooted in popular-culture iconography all Americans could relate to. Scene after scene is filled with humanity, such as the little girl stealing groceries rather than be embarrassed by using her mother's food stamps. *Crooklyn*'s soundtrack, like so many other Spike Lee films, is usually cacophonous, with everyone talking at once, and its improvisational style suggests Cassavetes or Scorsese. Lee's 1995 film, *Clockers,* which deals with drug dealing, disadvantage, and the young 'gansta,' was actually produced in conjunction with Scorsese, whose own work, particularly the seminal *Mean Streets*, Lee's work often recalls.

Another underrated film from Lee is *Jungle Fever* (from 1991). Taken for granted is how well the film communicates the African-American experience; more surprising is how persuasively and perceptively the film communicates the Italian-American experience, particularly working-class attitudes....

The most important film in the Spike Lee *oeuvre* (if not his best) is probably *Malcolm X*—important because Lee himself campaigned for the film when it seemed it would be given to a white director, creating then an epic with the sweep and majesty of David Lean and a clear political message of black empowerment. If the film on the whole seems less interesting than many of Lee's films (because there is less Lee there), the most typical Lee touches (such as a triumphant coda which enlists South African President Nelson Mandela to play himself and teach young blacks about racism and their future) seem among the film's most inspired and creative scenes. If more cautious and conservative, in some ways the film is also Lee's most ambitious: with dozens of historical reconstructions, and the biggest budget in his entire career. *Malcolm X* proved definitively to fiscally conservative Hollywood studio executives that an African-American director could be trusted to direct a high-budget "A film." The success of *Malcolm X*, coupled with the publicity machine supporting Spike Lee, helped a variety of young black directors—like John Singleton, the Wayans brothers, and Mario Van Peebles—all break through into mainstream Hollywood features.

And indeed, Lee seems often to be virtually everywhere. On television interview shows he is called upon to comment on every issue relevant to black America: from the O.J. Simpson verdict to Louis Farrakhan and the Million Man March. In bookstores, his name can be found on a variety of published books on the making of his films, books created by his own public relations arm particularly

so that others can read about the process, become empowered, find their own voices, and follow in Lee's filmic footsteps....There may be no other American filmmaker working today who is so willing to take on all comers, so politically committed to make films which are consistently and unapologetically in-your-face. Striking, too, is that instead of taking his inspiration from other movies, as do the gaggle of Spielberg imitators, Lee takes his inspiration from real life—whether the Howard Beach or Yusef Hawkins incidents, in which white racists killed blacks, or his own autobiographical memories of growing up black in Brooklyn.

As Spike Lee has become a leading commentator on the cultural scene, there has been an explosion of Lee scholarship, not all of it laudatory: increasing voices attack Lee and his films for either homophobia, sexism, or anti-Semitism. Lee defends both his films and himself, pointing out that because characters espouse some of these values does not imply that he himself does, only that realistic portrayal of the world *as it is* has no place for political correctness....

Notable also is the director's assembly—in the style of Bergman and Chabrol and Woody Allen in their prime—of a consistent stable of very talented collaborators, including his father, Bill Lee, as musical composer, production designer Wynn Thomas, producer Monty Ross, and cinematographer Ernest Dickerson, among others. He has also used many of the same actors from one film to another, including Wesley Snipes, Denzel Washington, his sister Joie Lee, John Turturro, Samuel L. Jackson, Ossie Davis, and Ruby Dee, helping to create a climate which propelled several to stardom and inspired a new wave of high-level attention to a variety of breakout African-American performers.

Vinson Cunningham: "*Do the Right Thing:* Walking in Stereo" (Criterion Essays, 2019)

He even walks in stereo. So proclaims a kid on a stoop toward the beginning of *Do the Right Thing;* he's stunned by the sun but also by the sight and sound of Radio Raheem. Raheem is silent but so solid—Bill Nunn glowers benevolently, occupying almost every inch of the frame when it tries to take him in; swatches of sky slip around him, but little else—and his boom box, blasting Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," does all his talking for him. *He walks in stereo.* What a perfect metaphor for a person at his best, or at least his most impressive: irreducible, +unrepeatable, attacking from all angles, fully alive. This guy whose voice we've barely heard is nevertheless precisely calibrated between a fader's extremities—listen with *this* ear and catch one facet of his personality, listen with the other and get engrossed in something else. It's possible, with just this glance, to isolate Raheem's parts but also to hear how his composition coheres.

Human experience, en masse and within each life, is stubbornly stereophonic; it refuses to express itself through just one speaker. And although it seems almost flip and far too broad to say that Spike Lee's fiery furnace of a masterpiece is, at heart, a disquisition on humanity—in all its variety and perversity; with its precarious, usually doomed, but always moving attempts at balance—here we have it, at the outset, and in everything that follows. The loose flow of vignettes that fills the early parts of the film, stitched together liltingly by editor Barry Alexander Brown, makes a whole world of complication. Sure, pigmentation is a problem. Of course. So are money and ownership and distant melting ice caps and the Celtics—that gentrifying cyclist's telling Bird T-shirt—and sublimated sex and fragile patrimony and, amplifying everything, the hallucinogenic Brooklyn heat, surrounding (sometimes suffocating) Lee's characters like loud music.

In the small and finely scrutinized world of *Do the Right Thing* (1989), everything's more of a pain in the ass than it needs to be. Humanizing difficulty stretches out in each direction, makes a summer day feel like a fraught year. Another striking scene introduces Rosie Perez, as Tina, a young mother nearing the brink, shouting Spanglish imprecations over babysitting at her mother as she barrels through their thin railroad apartment. She moves straight outward, sometimes in shadow and sometimes washed in lozenge-orange light, toward the lens, which scurries backward. She looks like she might drop through the screen and onto your floor. Later, in an excruciatingly intimate, frankly objectifying moment, Mookie—Tina's boyfriend and her baby's father; Lee's alter ego, played by the director himself; our main character and antihero—

smears ice across her lips and brown-skinned legs and breasts, thanking their Creator as he goes, as if preparing her for some impromptu vivisection. *Here,* Lee seems to say of Perez, whose first movie appearance this is—*here's a new person for you: totally real.*

Although his story is always rolling toward tragedy—blood and the billy club, fire and water—much of Lee's art here, and his deception, comes from how he lingers on little episodes, and on the people who populate them. As if introducing us to each child of a bustling family, he brings forward a face or two at a time and chides them into offering us a wave. Here's Da Mayor (Ossie Davis), the drunken neighborhood warden; here's Mother Sister (Ruby Dee, doing a haikuist's unwasteful work with her few lines)—whose name is all relationship, implicitly connected on both ends—watching from the window; here's a salty triumvirate of older men, sitting outside, backgrounded by a fire-engine-red wall, talking shit and trading complaints. Lee's great talents are already brilliantly present here, in this third feature: effusive place-love and a visual style that makes his best characters individual and iconic at once. His people talk bombastically but with surprising vulnerability; Lee's writing drips with offhand wit and streetwise poetry. And his humane visual style, full of humming color and plain interpersonal curiosity, is an honorific engine. His later ability to dignify Denzel Washington as Malcolm X, in 1992, and—improbably—Savion Glover and Tommy Davidson as minstrels in *Bamboozled* (2000), and, in *When the Levees Broke* (2006), the victims of the U.S. government's neglectful response to Hurricane Katrina, is as much visual as moral. In *Do the Right Thing,* this ethic is compounded by Ernest Dickerson's photography, with its emphasis on symmetry and synchronized motion; the vivid, color-clashing outfits arranged by costume designer Ruth E. Carter; and Wynn Thomas's production design, which turns Bed-Stuy into a haunted, waiting stage. The saint-making impulse that led to Lee's famous floating-walk effect—first seen in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) though absent from *Do the Right Thing*—is a twin to the one that gives us that loving early glimpse, a brief portrait, of poor Raheem.

"Lee's gift to his characters is his own unshakable and nearly religious interest in faces."

Icons are everywhere. Behind the cash register at Sal's Famous Pizzeria there's a painting of Pope John Paul II. Trouble starts with faded headshot photography: the slice joint's "Wall of Fame" is uniformly Italian in extraction; Sinatra, Pacino, and Travolta hang there as inspiration for Sal (Danny Aiello) and his sons, Vito (Richard Edson) and Pino (John Turturro). Buggin Out (Giancarlo Esposito) wants to see some darker luminaries mixed in, the better to suit Sal's largely black clientele. The local radio DJ, Mister Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson), does his work among posters of Keith Sweat, Whitney Houston, Tracy Chapman, and Anita Baker. Smiley (Roger Guenveur Smith), the stuttering hustle man, sells scrawl-embellished images of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.—another pair of channels, never quite as far apart as our public imagination has tended to insist—not unlike the scores of pious artisans who set up shop outside the entrances of certain shrines, hawking statuettes and pocket pictures of the Virgin. Lee's gift to his characters is his own unshakable and nearly religious interest in faces.

And consider Mookie, who, among the personae, tips most perilously and fruitfully over the border into archetype. Lee's willingness to symbolize this lost, half-charming, mostly harmless kid—and, along the way, to symbolize himself—is perhaps what has kept him (well, both of them) so fresh over the thirty years since *Do the Right Thing* first appeared in theaters, and has allowed the

film to prophesy with such uncanny precision our own time. Mookie's entire look—throwback Dodgers jersey, artfully parted fade, fluorescent shorts, rare-looking Nikes—would be just as on-trend on a skinny black kid in 2019. Plop him down in today's Bed-Stuy, or Bushwick, or Harlem, or Lower East Side, and nobody bats an eye. He uses a towel festooned with a classic Knicks logo that has, these days, made its way back into use. Little wonder, then, that his woes—a kind of ironized alienation, low cash flow, and, before long, a friend murdered by police—feel just as fresh.

By the time *Do the Right Thing* was released—or maybe *unleashed* does its seismic and immediate impact more justice—Lee had already established himself as one of America's foremost young filmmakers, following the success of *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) and *School Daze* (1988). His eye for comedy was clear, as were his elegiac love for black people and his deep involvement in the politics of the moment. Now he found himself in the middle of one of New York City's periodic inflammations of racial angst, sparked by state-sanctioned racist violence and intermittently settled in the streets. Lee dedicated his new film, an opus of racial proximity, to the families of Eleanor Bumpurs, Michael Griffith, Arthur Miller, Edmund Perry, Yvonne Smallwood, and Michael Stewart: each black, each killed by police or a white mob. All those names: songs cut short. (Incidentally, the crown Smiley draws over Dr. King's head looks something like the crowns famously used by Jean-Michel Basquiat to honor bygone black heroes. Basquiat was so spooked by the killing of Stewart, a fellow graffiti artist, that he dedicated a painting, *Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart),* to the incident.) Toward the end of *Do the Right Thing,* after Raheem's asphyxiation by baton, the crowd starts to invoke the dead, first tentatively, then as a chant. The litany of names has become one of the signature rhetorical tropes of the twenty-teens; Lee's crowd has memorized their list—on which Raheem is just the latest item—just as well and as thoroughly as contemporary viewers can tick through the likes of Trayvon Martin, Laquan McDonald, Sandra Bland, and Philando Castile.

Two years after *Do the Right Thing,* in 1991, a riot bloomed like a rash in Crown Heights, punctuating tensions between blacks and Jews that rhymed perfectly with the black-Italian (and, to a much lesser extent, black-Korean) strife that Lee sketches. Earlier that same year, on the other side of the continent, Rodney King had been pummeled by a gang of highway cops. Ten years after the film came out, in 1999, NYPD officers fired forty-one shots at Amadou Diallo, an innocent Guinean immigrant, killing him just after midnight, steps away from his own home. Fast-forward twenty-five years from *Do the Right Thing,* to 2014, and alight on Eric Garner, an eerie echo of Raheem: also big of body, also a fixture in his neighborhood, also choked to death on the sidewalk for no reason. Back in '89, some viewers were worried that Lee might provoke black audiences to violence. What a strange and oblivious concern, what with reality's steady supply of kindling for the fire. Lee's crucial climactic passage—death, rage, riot—is easily the most blankly realistic in the film.

Its notes of righteous anger notwithstanding, *Do the Right Thing* is an early articulation of the uneasy ambivalence that would become the signature black political attitude of the nineties. (It's not too hyperbolic to say that this movie helped to call that decade, tonally and visually, into being; the fonts and angular graphics of its opening credits foreshadow those used in classic black sitcoms like *Martin* and *Living Single,* and its high-flying, supersavvy argot is echoed in John Leguizamo's one-man shows and Wanda Sykes's stand-up specials.) The civil-rights generation, with its totemic victories and liberal Protestant openness, was long gone, and its fierce successors, Black Arts and Black Power—those political-artistic twin nationalisms—were beginning to recede. Now Lee's generation would start to sift through the work of their forebears and start to edge toward a tentative blend. The most chaotic moments of *Do the Right Thing* jibe

naturally with lines like these, from Gwendolyn Brooks's late-sixties poem "Riot":

"Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)
and they were coming toward him in rough ranks.
In seas. In windsweep.
They were black and loud.
And not detainable.
And not discreet."

But the movie also contains an earnest and quite unconcealed yearning for togetherness. Yes, one of the three outdoor choristers, ML (Paul Benjamin), is aggrieved by the economic foothold gained by the Koreans who own the grocery store that sits across Stuyvesant Avenue from Sal's—but his buddies have fun reminding him that he, a West Indian, also stepped off "the boat" into New York. His pattern of absorption into the life of the city and the country is different from the grocers'—it's unavoidably inflected by his color—but it is no less real, and no less comic in its quickness. ML has rushed into American covetousness just as abruptly as Sonny and Kim the grocers (Steve Park and Ginny Yang) have claimed their stake in American commerce.

Even the soundtrack—a rush of prairie strings composed by Bill Lee, Spike's father, evidence of a love for blues and the old American songbook, plus Public Enemy's rhymes backed by a James Brown sample on loop—reaches toward admixture. And it's possible to e njoy *Do the Right Thing* solely in terms of its many voices and polyglot sounds. One of the film's more famous sequences—a handful of Lee's characters, each portraited in the frame, shouting out racial slurs in creative torrents, direct to camera—is made ironic by the multitude of accents it offers. Even bigotry is pluralistic here.

Lee's use of John Turturro's olive skin and voluminous hair makes racial ambiguity a kind of wordless speech. Pino hates "niggers" but loves Magic Johnson. And none of his bluster can dull his brother Vito's budding friendship with Mookie, or Sal's obvious crush on Jade, Mookie's sister (played by Spike's real-life sister, Joie Lee). After all the violence, Mookie and Sal share one last scene that starts with acrimony but ends up feeling like the beginning of a resolution. Buggin Out tells Mookie to "stay black," but Tina simply begs him to be a man. Nobody to whom both those designations pertain ever really has a choice.

We will always be disappointed with Spike Lee if we expect him to be something other than essentially, if pessimistically, liberal—a wary synthesist, stuck between sides of the stereo. He respects and loves the radicals, admires their bombast and unbounded, readily apparent love for the race and its people, but in the end won't see their premises all the way through. Just before the credits, two quotations scroll down the screen—one by Malcolm, defending political violence in self-defense; one by Martin, ruling it out. This undigested dialectic has, more or less, been our racial-political reality, from the nineties on forward.

The most fitting culture hero for *Do the Right Thing* might be Nelson Mandela, who isn't mentioned in the film but seems to me to hover over it invisibly. In some ways, Lee's tightly circumscribed story has more in common with the South African dynamic of white minoritarian rule—Sal and his sons are the only white people in sight, save that cyclist—than with the broad narrative of majoritarian terror in America. Mandela was released from prison less than a year after *Do the Right Thing* came out and wasted little time in running successfully for the presidency. Soon, the former radical who had once ardently defended the right of the oppressed to engage in revolutionary violence was heralded as a global symbol of peace and reconciliation.

Raheem—so exquisitely human; just a guy who keeps to himself and loves his music—is made to accommodate similar polarities. The first time we hear him talk at length, he's showing an admiring Mookie his pair of brass four-finger rings. They look sharp and well-kept and vaguely dangerous. One says love and the other says hate. The camera takes him straight on and flattens him into a sort of painting: we see the rings flashing, the row of brownstones spread wide behind him like a pair of Technicolor secondary arms, his "Bed-Stuy Do or Die" T-shirt and the odd focus in his eyes. He shadowboxes toward the camera, acting out the ongoing battle between

the two moral modes—they depend on each other, like percussion in the left ear and a horn line in the right. Love gets the KO, but hate hangs in there, just in case.

Roger Ebert: "Do the Right Thing" (Criterion 2001)

Leaving the theater after the tumultuous world premiere of *Do the Right Thing* at Cannes in May of 1989, I found myself too shaken to speak, and I avoided the clusters of people where arguments were already heating up. One American critic was so angry she chased me to the exit to inform me, "This film is a call to racial violence!" I thought not. I thought it was a call to empathy, which of all human qualities is the one this past century seemed most to need.

Perhaps I was too idealistic, but it seemed to me that any open-minded member of the audience would walk out of the movie able to understand the motivations of every character in the film—not forgive them, perhaps, but understand them. A black viewer would be able to understand the feelings of Sal, the Italian-American whose pizzeria is burned by a mob, and a white viewer would be able to understand why a black man—who Sal considered his friend—would perform the action that triggers the mob.

It is this evenhandedness that is at the center of Spike Lee's work, and yet it is invisible to many of his viewers and critics. Because he is black and deals with anger, he has been categorized as an angry man. However, it is not anger, but rather a certain detached objectivity that I see in his best work. His subject is the way race affects the way lives are lived in America. More than any filmmaker before him, he has focused his stories on African-American characters, considering not how they relate to the white society, or it to them, but how they relate to each other. *School Daze*is no less about skin color because all of its characters are black. *Jungle Fever* is not only about a romance between black and white, but about all of the social, class and educational factors that race stands in for. *Malcolm X* is about a man who never abandons his outrage at racism, but comes to understand that skin color should not define who he can call his brother.

In *Do the Right Thin*g, the subject is not simply a race riot, but the tragic dynamic of racism, racial tension, and miscommunication, seen in microcosm. The film is a virtuoso act of creation, a movie at once realistic and symbolic, lighthearted and tragic, funny and savage; one of the reasons we recoil at the end is that we thought, somehow, the people of this neighborhood, this street, whom we had come to know, would not be touched by the violence in the air all around them. We knew them all, Da Mayor and Radio Raheem, as well as Sal and his sons. And they knew each other. Surely nothing bad could come between them.

And yet something bad does happen. Radio Raheem is murdered; Sal's Pizzeria is destroyed. Spike Lee has been clever enough to make us sympathize with Sal, to *like* him and his pizzeria, so that it is not an easy target but a shocking one. And Lee twists the story once again, making the instrument of Sal's downfall not a "negative" character but the one we like the most, and identify with: Mookie, the delivery man played by Lee himself. The woman who found the movie a call to violence was most disturbed, I suspect, because it was Mookie who threw the trash can—Mookie, who the movie led her to like and trust. How could he do such a thing to Sal?

The answer to that question is right there on the screen, but was elusive for some viewers, who recoiled from the damage done to Sal's property but hardly seemed to notice, or remember, that the events were set in motion by the death of a young black man at the hands of the police. Among the many devastating effects of Lee's film, certainly the most subtle and effective is the way it leads some viewers (not racist, but thoughtless or inattentive or imbued with the unexamined values of our society) to realize that they have valued a pizzeria over a human life.

I have written here more about Lee's ideas than about his style. To an unusual degree, you could not have one without the other: style is the magician's left hand, distracting and entertaining us while the right hand produces the rabbit from the hat. It's not what Lee does

that makes his film so devastating, but how he does it. *Do the Right Thing* is one of the best-directed, best-*made* films of our time, a film in which the technical credits, the acting, and Lee's brazenly fresh visual style all work together to make a statement about race in America that is all the more powerful because it blindsides us.

Do the Right Thing was the finest, the most controversial, most discussed and most important film of 1989. Of course, it was not nominated for an Academy Award as Best Picture (that award went to *Driving Miss Daisy*, which has a view of race in America that is rotated just 180 degrees from Lee's). To an extent, I think some viewers have trouble seeing the film; it is blurred by their deep-seated ideas and emotions about race in America, which they project onto Lee, assuming he is angry or bitter. On the basis of this film it would be more accurate to call him sad, observant, realistic—or empathetic.

***Do the Right Thing*. Ed Guerrero. BFI Publishing. London, 2001.**

"No doubt this film is gonna get more heat than any other film I've done. I know there will be an uproar about this one....We're talking white people and racism in a major motion picture. It will be interesting to see how studios deal with it. This film must have a wide, wide release. I have to have major assurances going in." Spike Lee

Lee is an issues-oriented film-maker whose work is always, in some way, grounded in collective, social values. Indeed, the controversies and representational politics of urban *blackness* are his fortune. All of Lee's films radically and thematically depart from one another, each marking a break with the style and content of its predecessor, with each film situated in its particular historical moment, attendant set of issues and circumstances of production, with none adhering to a particular formula or genre. Significantly, each of Lee's films is organised around a social issue, political conflict, or a personal theme, mixed with an insightful rendering of the subtle nuances and rhythms of African American culture and urban life....Broadly then, Spike Lee's features reveal a restless, developmental experimentation and creativity over what is an ongoing, successful and fast-moving trajectory of issues-focused films made increasingly popular by media-hyped public debate and controversy...

The charged, political, critical and media atmosphere at *Do the Right Thing*'s moment of release was, also, partly energised by sharply exploding controversies in the realms of American art and cultural production, as the nation's political right wing (coincident with a worldwide upsurge of religious fundamentalism) became politically visible and increasingly vocal about policing issues of 'decency' in the arts, humanities and popular forms of cultural production and consumption. With the slow disintegration of the Soviet Union and its alliances, and the fall of the Berlin Wall marking the official end of the Cold War, the United States was left with no grand ideological scheme or external counter-point superpower enemy to define, unify and defend its citizens against. Thus the complex weave of political debates and tensions between America's Left and Right, rich and poor, white and non-white, straight and gay, tended to sharpen and implode, focusing on escalating struggles over religion, culture, class and an array of identity and group differences....

Do the Right Thing's social and political influence was deemed important enough to impel both *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Nightline* to devote entire programmes to the film's broad reception and social impact. *The New York Times* ran at least five articles, a symposium of critics and experts on cinema, violence and race, a couple of Sunday features, as well as several reviews of the film....

More than any other issue on *Do the Right Thing*'s complex representational agendas though, the film's astute and timely focus on police brutality, in all of its attendant, corrupt expressions, will always rank it as one of the socially relevant and prophetic masterpieces of American cinema. At this writing, eleven years after its critically hailed and contentious premiere, the issues that *Do the Right Thing* has most expressly framed and persistently forecast—police brutality, racial profiling and the pervasive, differentially ill, treatment of communities of colour by the nation's police departments—are still

stubbornly with us. In a reactionary sense, conservative film critics have been correct to fear racial unrest, once again, spreading across the land; they're just in deep denial, or callously indifferent, as to the enduring causes of that unrest.

That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It. **Spike Lee as told to Kaleem Aftab. W.W. Norton & Co., NY, 2005.**

Gotta give us what we want
Gotta give us what we need
Our freedom of speech is freedom or death
We got to fight the powers that be.
Public Enemy, "Fight the Power"
(Shocklee/Sadler/Ridenhour)

By 1988 rap acts were selling out stadiums across America and starting to dominate the *Billboard* black music chart....The growth in rap's popularity since the release of "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 was emblematic of a shift in the cultural tastes of African-Americans. Rap music—unlike gospel, rhythm and blues, or the pop crossover sounds of Michael Jackson—was revisiting African roots through its syncopated polyrhythm and raw street-talk expressiveness, distantly derived from the songs that were developed as a mode of communication by African slaves. Rap's crucial break from the preceding black musical traditions of the twentieth century was that the street-talk style, similar to that used by Jamaicans in "toasting," served as celebration of the black working class; one that also criticized the sociopolitical system that clocked the progress of African-Americans.

Spike had previously conceived of a film called *Heatwave* to be set on the hottest day of the year. "In New York you have eight million people on top of each other," he points out, "and people get crazy when it's hot. Things start to get frayed. If you bump into someone, you might get shot." Piecing together his story, Spike wondered what might happen if a black person was murdered by police on a hot, humid New York summer's day. He then borrowed details from the true-life accounts: from Howard Beach, the baseball bat, the pizzeria, conflict between blacks and Italian-Americans, and a call issued by blacks to boycott pizzerias for one day in protest of the Griffith death. From the case of Michael Stewart, he took the lethal choke hold. But as he acknowledges, "there were many different things that influenced *Do the Right Thing*. I remember seeing an old *Twilight Zone* where a scientist had conducted a study showing that the murder rate goes up after the temperature hits 95 degrees....In terms of the racial climate in the city at that time, Mayor Koch had really polarized a lot of New Yorkers." Spike was determined to contribute to the downfall of Koch, who had been mayor of New York since 1978.

...As soon as Spike decided he would set his film on the hottest day of the year, he sought out the visual input of Ernest Dickerson...."I remember Spike had a yellow legal pad and the title on it was *Heatwave*. He said to me, 'I want you to really think about how you can give the feeling of the hottest day of the summer. What can you do visually to make the audience sweat?' Even before he showed me the script, he threw that at me, I've always been influence by the psychology of color. I think it's been proven that when you look at the color red your heart beats faster, and when you look at blue and green your tendency is to calm down. So I thought, What if the color scheme was all reds, yellows and earth tones, and nothing blue? On the East Coast, the weather changes a lot. Spike made sure that I had enough time to work that out, because the decision that I made ultimately determined where we were going to shoot. I knew that we needed to shoot on a street that traveled from north to south, because where the sun traveled east to west, one side of the street was always going to be in the shade. So if it was raining I could shoot

cloudy conditions and make it look like the shaded side of the street."

Spike wrote *Do the Right Thing* at a furious pace, taking only twelve days to complete the first draft. The film would take its lead from Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the great black literary work of protest. *Native Son* shocked many on its publication in 1940, as it broke from the stance popular among black authors of the time, who were advancing the idea of the sophisticated and cultivated "new Negro"—so called because this creature could assimilate into mainstream American society without difficulty. Instead Wright (as would Ralph Ellison a few years later in *The Invisible Man*) sided with the more aggressive and disillusioned black masses, turning the psychic and physical violence of black life outward onto white America.

In the course of post-production, the final scene of *Do the Right Thing*, which had once led to Spike's deal with Paramount collapsing, would again cause problems. Barry Brown remembers, "Jim Jacks and Sean Daniels, the executives at Universal, were very concerned about the ending of the film. They really didn't want Mookie to walk away with Sal's money. I was adamant in myself—Spike had been there, I have been there, broke, and you've got nothing coming in down the line, you can't see where the next money is coming from—you don't walk away from $250 lying on the ground. You have to pick up the money. Otherwise it's bullshit." Spike concurs: "Money is all Mookie cares about. That is his god. When Sal throws the money at him, if he had any self-respect he wouldn't take it. But he's about the money, so he took it. Sam Kitt, another executive at Universal who was assigned to the film, he felt the same old shit where the studios want their main characters to be the most lovable people otherwise people won't like the movie. I don't agree."

...Spike was also criticized in some quarters for making a film about the urban black population and not addressing the issue of drugs. In his defense he asserted, "This film is about racism. Drugs are too big an issue to have to share space with a film on racism."...

Edward Norton was a student at Yale at the time of *Do the Right Thing*'s release and he remembers his surprise at watching the film: I think that, for me, the disconnect between seeing what was written about the film and the feeling that it had provoked in me was the beginning of an ongoing observation I've had over the years about the incredible misrepresentation of Spike Lee's work. The failure of the mainstream critical community to understand the true message of that film, the underlying humanity and compassion of it, was astonishing to me. When a certain kind of blind acceptance of what people have to say informs your view of life to a certain degree, and you then have that first experience of feeling like you are a generation and the things you believ, the values that you have are being attacked and misrepresented—in a way, that's your first experience with culture clash, and it's an intense one. I felt people were responding in exactly the opposite way to the people who were writing about the film and saying, 'This is a dangerous film, it's going to cause violence.' I sat there thinking the exact opposite. What I realized, way down the road, is what made people uncomfortable with it was that it didn't offer any easy answers."

from *Inner Views Filmmakers in Conversation*. David Breskin. Da Capo Press NY 1997

Do you feel you're an angry person?

Not at all. [Pause.] The funny thing to me is when white people accuse blacks, when they see somebody black who's angry, they say, "Why are you so angry?" [Laughs.] If they don't know why black people are angry, then there's *no* hope. I mean, it's a miracle that black Americans are as complacent and happy-go-lucky as we are.

Malcolm said, "Yes, I'm an extremist. The black race in America is in extremely bad condition. You show me a black man who isn't an extremist and I'll show you one who needs psychiatric attention."

Or is dead. But I don't think I have that much anger. I don't think I'm angrier than I have a right to be.

You get angry on a personal level though—like at Cannes when you said Do the Right Thing *was "robbed" of an award.*

It was really anger at Wim Wenders, that's who.

"I have a Lousiville slugger baseball bat deep in my closet with Wim Wenders' name written on it," is what you wrote.

[Laughs.] I just said that. I would never hit him in the head with a bat. What I was talking about was that it got back to me that the reason Wim Wenders didn't like the film was that he considered what Mookie does [throwing a garbage can through the window of a pizzeria and triggering a riot] as unheroic. But the James Spader character in *sex, lies, and videotape*, what's heroic about jerking off with an 8-millimeter camera? I didn't understand that thinking. [Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* won the award.]

Yeah, but that wasn't a movie about heroism. I mean, that wasn't even an issue in that movie?

But why have two separate rules?

Do the Right Thing*, even in its very title, sets up a moral universe and a code, so it's going to provoke a kind of scrutiny on the action that a movie in which things are more relative will not.*

See, I never buy that shit. Because I want my shit—I mean, if you're going to critique my work use the same motherfucking standards for everybody. Don't let shit slide and call me anti-Semitic every single way and then the shit goes by and nobody says nothing about the other stuff, work that's just racist in general.

I was trying to say that the film itself, within its own universe, sets up an expectation of moral action and heroism, and—

All I'm saying is that they gave out twelve or thirteen awards. Thirteen films got awards that year and we didn't get one.

I know you've complained about not receiving Oscars as well, but don't you ever feel that your work is more validated by not receiving the awards than if you were everybody's favorite?

I understand that. See, I'm not saying that awards are validating my work, saying it's great. But if you win an Academy Award, you know how much money a film makes after it wins one? That's it. Studios don't spend a million dollars on a campaign just to get the award, but they know the award will bring in a lot more revenue. That's why I wanted it for *Do the Right Thing.*

...I'm not asking about Jewish-black relations, I'm asking why you think Jews are more unified than black people.

As far as America is concerned? Because I don't think Jews have ever been taught to hate themselves the way black people have. I mean that's the whole key: self-hatred. That's not to say that Jewish people haven't been persecuted. I'm not saying that. But they haven't been taught to hate themselves to the level black people have been. When you're persecuted, it's natural for people to come together; but when you're also taught at the same time that you're the lowest form of life on earth, that you're subhuman, then why would you want to get together with other people like that? Who do you hate? Yourself....

How many people have asked you, "Does Mookie do the right thing?"

[Laughs.] How many people are there in New York City?

And what's your answer to them?

Black people never ask me that. It's only white people.

Why's that?

Because black people understood perfectly why Mookie threw the garbage can through the window. No black person has ever asked me, "Did Mookie do the right thing?" Only white people. White people are like, "Oh, I like Mookie so much up to that point. He's a nice character. Why'd he have to throw that garbage can through the window?" Black people, there's no question in their minds why he does that.

Yeah, but why *one does something and whether what one does is* right *are very different things. I know why he does it, but–*

But only white people want to know why he does it I spoke at twenty-five universities last year and that's all I ever got asked. "Did Mookie do the right thing?"

What do you tell them?

I feel at the time he did. Mookie is doing it in response to the police murdering Radio Raheem, with the infamous Michael Stewart choke hold, in front of his face—also knowing this is not the first time that something like this has happened, nor will it be the last. What people have to understand is that almost every riot that's happened here in America involving black people has happened because of some small incident like that: cops killing somebody, cops beating up a pregnant black woman. It's incidents like that that have sparked riots across America. And that's all we were doing was using history. Mookie cannot lash out against the police, because the police were gone. As soon as Radio Raheem was dead, they threw his ass in the back of the car and got the hell out of there so they could make up their story.

What about attacking Sal?

I think he likes Sal too much. For Mookie, in my mind, Sal's Pizzeria represents everything, and that's why he lashed out against it. It was Mayor Koch, it was the cops—everything.

That's "the power" to him?

It's the power at the moment. But when it's burnt down, he's back to square one, even worse. Look at all those riots: black people weren't burning downtown, they were burning their own neighborhoods....

One of the disturbing things to me about the reaction to that film is that people focused on the burning of the pizzeria and not the death of Radio Raheem, and there might be a reason for that other than just hog-calling racism.

The thing I like about *Do the Right Thing*, especially for critics, is that it was a litmus test. I think you could really tell how people thought and who they were. And if I read a review and all it talked about was the stupidity of burning the pizzeria, the stupidity of the violence, the looting, the burning, and not one mention of the murder of Radio Raheem, I knew *exactly* where they were coming from. Because people that write like that, who think like that, do not put any value on black life, especially the life of young black males. They put more importance on property, white-owned property.

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