Spike Lee Essay, Research Paper

The movie, Do the Right Thing, by Spike Lee is a hard hitting drama that deals with violence and racism in today’s society. This film is set in a primarily black neighborhood in close to the present time. Right in the center of this neighborhood stands a pizza parlor that is owned and operated by one of the most important characters in the movie, Sal. In the beginning of the movie, Sal is shown arriving to work with his two sons Pino and Vito. This gives an appeal to Sal as a family man. Right from the start Sal is portrayed as a hard working, kind, and devoted individual. Just the fact that he owns his own business in these rough and tough times shows that he is a smart, efficient, and dedicated man. Later in the movie we learn that Sal did in fact build his pizzeria by himself from the ground up, brick by brick, board by board which was no little task indeed. The fact that Sal gets to share his creation and hard work with his sons makes it all the more special to him. After Sal has finished his pre-opening preparations Sal’s Pizzeria is open for the day. Shortly after this, the main character of the movie, Mookie, comes strolling into the restaurant. Mookie works as the delivery man for Sal in this movie. Mookie literally delivers pizza, yes, but he also acts as a mediator between the two races. Sal relies on Mookie not only to get the pizzas delivered, but to also keep his fellow black folks happy with Sal so they will come and patronize his restaurant. I think that this shows a very interesting side of Sal. It for the most part pawns him off as a racist. On the one hand he can put on a happy face and greet all the black people as they shell their hard earned money out to him for his pizza, while on the other hand he turns into a bigot, hating most black people and talking behind their back while they are not around. Now I say most black people because Sal seems to have this father-son bond going on between him and Mookie where Sal is the white father and Mookie the black son who in the end finally rebels like all siblings do at some time in their life. Also Sal seems to have some kind of affection or love for Mookie’s sister, Jade. When she enters the pizza parlor Sal insists, if not begs to make her some special slices of pizza. He then drops what he is doing to go sit and visit with her. This shows another awkward side of Sal. Is Sal considering some sort of interracial relationship here? I mean Jade is only approximately 20-25 years old where Sal has to be at least 50-55. Is Sal changing his attitude toward black people? Hardly. This might prompt one to ask themselves if Sal is a racist then why does he own a restaurant in the middle of a black neighborhood. Well as Sal explains to Pino early in the movie it is purely business. Sal knows that he is not able to compete with the large restaurant chains, so he must travel to someone else’s turf to make a go of it. This is a point that is expressed in Bell Hooks Counter Hegemonic essay. She says that a scary, conservative idea voiced over and over again in the film is that everybody is safest in their “own” neighborhood and that it is best if we remain with people like ourselves. Now this doesn’t seem to hold true for Sal and his pizzeria at first. Just look at the facts, he has been in this neighborhood for at least 15 to 20 years without any problems that we are made aware of. Obviously he must be making a profit or he would have shut down years ago. The way I see it is that the main problem with Sal these days is that he isn’t in the business for the love of it anymore, he is in it for the money. After all of these years making pizza he has lost some of the fire that always got him going. I would be willing to bet that when Sal first opened up his pizza joint he was superficially friendly to all the people, including the black people, that came into his establishment. Through the years though Sal has built up some sort of grudge or hatred against a variety of black people that he has been holding inside and it is at the end of the movie that he reaches his limit of tolerance and blows his top. The movie and Sal’s character for that matter really start to take a turn for the worse when Buggin Out comes into the restaurant for a slice. While he is enjoying his slice he happens to notice that there are no black people on the wall. This angers Buggin Out and leads him to go ask Sal to put some up. This allows us to see another side of Sal. Sal pretty much come from the old school of thinking where he owns this place and things are going to be done his way, right away, or no way. He doesn’t even open his mind to new ideas. This shows that he is a very domineering and overpowering individual who fears change. This fear leads him into a shouting match with Buggin Out who insists that he will form a boycott against Sal’s and that none of his friends will every eat there again. Here Sal again relies on Mookie to smooth things over so this boycott really does not happen. Mookie really doesn’t have to work to hard because Sal’s pizza is well liked in the community. Day has turned into night and it is getting near closing time. The second after the doors are shut and locked four kids show up at the door wanting a slice. Here Sal shows his nice side and lets them because after all they love his pizza and he can’t fault them for that. Right after Sal lets them in Buggin Out and Radio Raheem (who had previous encounters similar to those of Buggin Out with Sal) storm into Sal’s Pizzeria with the radio blaring, a big pet peeve of Sal’s, demanding that Sal put some black people up on the wall and they aren’t leaving until he does it. Sal won’t even deal with them until they turn that music down, so since Raheem and Buggin Out refuse to turn the music down they just stand there and shout at each other for a while. At first when they are shouting the four black kids that came in earlier are on Sal’s side because they want to get their slices. However as the shouting match continues Sal says something that makes every black person irate and every white person cringe because they know that something bad is going to end up happening. Sal says something to the effect of “you niggers have no right to come into my restaurant and tell me what I can and cannot hang on my wall.” The character played by Martin Lawrence then stands up and says “oh so we’re niggers now?” It all goes down hill from there. The question now is did Mookie do the right thing as far as from Sal’s aspect? I believe he did and I think Sal, although he might not admit, thinks this way also! If Mookie had not thrown that garbage can threw that window and started that riot Sal would have never been able to make a go of it in that neighborhood again because the people now knew that he was two-faced. They knew what he really thought of them and I don’t think they would have been ever been able to patronize such a persons establishment again. At the end when Mookie goes to get his wages from Sal we learn that it is not the money aspect of the loss that bothers Sal it is the fact that Sal lost something that was really a part of him. All I have to say is that he should have thought of that before he opened his mouth. In closing, the essay written by Bell Hooks brings up a good point that I believe pretty much sums up the movie. She says that the lunatic violence that erupts in not just this community, but all segregated black communities finally hurts black people more than anyone else. Even though it seems like it is Sal who came out on the bottom here it is really the black community and relations among black people that are wrecked and ravaged for a long time after..