
Racial Discrimination And Brutality in F. Parker James' Book Do The Right Thing

Nothing brings out the worst in a person than a hot summer's day in the middle of a drought. Each character in *Do The Right Thing* is at a different degree of racism, and chooses to act upon their racism with varying degrees of violence. None of the characters seem to have a clue what the "right thing" is, and the answer is never revealed to the audience. Racism and violence is shown in an assortment of ways, from cutting words to destruction of property to murder. But both racism and violence must have strong roots in hatred before they can emerge together.

Sal is the most interesting character for me, because he is perhaps the only character who does not initiate a violent act. He respects everyone who comes into his pizzeria, as long as they respect him. He cares about his customers and his community, and he takes pride in the fact that he's run his pizzeria for years, been a well-loved and "famous" fixture of the community, and that the kids of the neighborhood were raised on his food. Sal takes pride in his heritage and is not afraid to show it. He does have his flaws: he lets his son Pino get away with being a totally rude jackass to his peers (including customers!) simply because they have a different upbringing and skin color. One of the neighborhood kids, Buggin Out, challenges Sal to update his Wall of Fame (featuring a cast of celebrities and heroes with Italian heritages) to include some "people of the color." Sal denies Buggin Out's request, which creates a spark of hatred in Buggin Out's brain. Sal doesn't resort to violence until he's been pushed to the edge by everyone else around him: Pino's hatred for almost everyone, Mookie's laid back attitude about responsibility, Buggin Out's annoying pestering about the Wall of Fame, and Radio Raheem's refusal to adhere to the very understandable rule of no music in the restaurant all contribute to the outburst. But still, Sal does not direct his violence onto a person, like everyone else in the film. Sal directs his violence onto Radio Raheem's boom box, which is theoretically forgivable and replaceable, when he could have easily directed it right into Radio Raheem's face.

The policemen have an important role in this tale, however short it be. They come into a situation they know nothing about with high expectations and extreme prejudice. They have nothing but contempt and expect the lowest from this community. The policemen work to break up the fight that broke out between Sal and Radio Raheem over the demolished boom box, but they react differently to each man. When they get Sal away from the fight, they make sure he's okay, help him stand, and keep people from getting too close. When they get Radio Raheem away, they wrestle him into a choke hold and refuse to release even though Radio Raheem is tapping out and has stopped struggling to get back to the fight with Sal. The policemen have the highest level of racism and hatred and end up committing the highest possible act of violence and have the shortest amount of screen time than anyone else in the movie. Yet, because of the act that started the brawl, Sal is blamed for the death of Radio Raheem, not the policemen.

Mookie is probably the worst of the bunch, in my opinion. He is supposedly the closest thing to a hero the film has, yet he is no role model nor cares to be. He has the most power and chooses not to utilize it. Mookie shirks his responsibility in every area of his life: his girlfriend and son, his sister, and his job. He does what he wants when he wants and expects what he

doesn't deserve in return. Still, the people in the community look up to Mookie and even Sal seems to respect him on some level. Mookie is a rollercoaster of a person, going from calm to violent, from peacekeeper to problem-starter. He doesn't have firm roots for any one opinion and this makes him the most dangerous because he is unpredictable. Mookie decides to talk to Buggin Out and tells him to calm down and leave Sal alone, and then turns around and throws a garbage can through Sal's front window. Mookie sparks the violent turn of events that leads to the pizzeria burning down and justifies his action by comparing it to Radio Raheem's death. But can the death of a man be compared to the death of a legacy? Mookie's hatred and sadness over the death of his friend pushed him to violence.

Racism and violence go hand in hand, yet they come together so much stronger when they are bonded with anger. When anger and racism and violence are through with their destruction, no one is left the winner: Sal is stripped of his livelihood, his legacy, and the life he worked to build; Mookie is left with broken relationships, a broken community, and no job; and the policemen are no closer to leaving their prejudices behind to make the community a stronger and healthier place. Violence only breeds destruction and is never the right thing to do.

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