

My sequence for Spike Lee's comedy-drama "Do the Right Thing" takes place at 47:56 and goes to 51:00. It is shortly before the film's midpoint. The film takes place on the hottest day of summer, at the end of which racial tensions come to a violent outbreak. Before the sequence, the underlying conflicts have been identified. As the sequence starts, Mookie is on his way to deliver a pizza and meets Radio Raheem, who is constantly blasting Public Enemy's song "Fight the Power".

The chosen sequence is important for the film, as it shapes the audience's understanding of Raheem. Furthermore, the battle of love and hate is a reoccurring theme, which is encapsulated in this sequence, along with the themes of violence and racial intolerance (Jacobs). These themes are portrayed in this sequence using colors, interesting cinematography, juxtaposition, editing, sound and the technique of breaking the fourth wall.

The film was inspired by real-life incidents such as the police beating and following death of a black graffiti artist in 1983 and the attack on three black men in Howard Beach in 1986, which were all racially charged (Beggs). Thereby, the film addresses racial and social disparities which are not suitably dealt with, ultimately leading to violent outbreaks, such as in the film. It is set in a primarily black neighborhood close to the present time and deals realistically with racism and violence in society. The inequality resulting from America's racial, generational and class conflicts is portrayed by choosing a melting pot of different cultures as the setting. The film remains relevant today, as none of the conflicts addressed have been resolved and are focused on by for example the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Lee chose to deal with the social issues by embracing stereotypes and confronting the audience with them, as clichéd perspectives are an integral part of racial conflicts. By setting the film only on one street in Brooklyn where the residents know each other, Lee enforces the fact that racism also occurs among people who are familiar (Thompson).

The sequence opens, as Mookie approaches Raheem, who sets down his boom-box. After a short small-talk, in which Mookie commented on Raheem's knuckle rings showing the words "hate" and "love", a smooth camera movement places the viewers in Mookie's perspective, without interrupting the continuity of the scene. This shot establishes the possibility for Raheem to speak his following monologue undisturbed. Lee thereby breaks the imaginary barrier between the actors and the audience, the fourth wall, which allows Raheem to communicate directly with the viewers (Film-Drunk Love). Therefore, Raheem's monologue is not only addressed at Mookie but also the audience. In his speech, Raheem describes the

ongoing battle of love and hate, which love eventually wins. By breaking of the fourth wall as a stylistic device, Lee allows a character to speak to the audience to convey the message that love will win against hate, which in this context of racial hatred emphasizes that a progress towards equality should be approached. The directly addressed viewers consciously take in this message, which is another main theme of the film.



Figure 1: Raheem speaking directly to the audience

Raheem's soliloquy reminds of a similar monologue of Robert Mitchum's character in Charles Laughton's "Night of the Hunter" (Film-Drunk Love). Here, the character has the words "love" and "hate" tattooed on his knuckles and is a fake-preacher and serial killer.



Figure 2: Mitchum's character giving a similar speech to Raheem's one

The speeches in the two films are filmed very differently. In “The Night of the Hunter”, Mitchum’s character is talking to a group of people, who are also at times shown during the scene. In contrast, Raheem is not only talking to Mookie, but to the audience and Mookie is not shown during the soliloquy. This establishes Raheem as a street-preacher. Other than Mitchum’s character who uses his speech to lie, Raheem is an honest supporter of change for love and equality. This is a possible reason for him constantly playing “Fight the Power” on his boom-box: he wants everybody around him to listen to it and comprehend the message rather than playing the song just for himself (Sabo).

This reference to the “Night of the Hunter” also evokes the question, whether Raheem shares similarities with Mitchum’s character, whose murders contradict the claims he makes about love. While Raheem is not a murderer, some of his claims still do not correspond to his actions, like Mitchum’s character. Raheem has good intentions, displayed in his speech, but is at the same time misguided by his violent peers in the neighborhood, as seen later when he strangles Sal. The influence of the violence of the society around him is also conveyed, when Raheem starts boxing. It shows that the battle between love and hate can also be a physical one and possibly end in violence (Film-Drunk Love). It thus hints at the violent climax at the end. Furthermore, Tina is shown boxing during the opening credits, also foreshadowing the end of the film.

As Raheem speaks, houses in warm colors are shown in the background.



Figure 3: The resident houses in the background have warm colors on their facades

Such warm colors and especially the color red are a motif throughout the movie, which emphasize the heat of the summer day (Beggs). They represent the anger and tensions, which are underlying and increasingly come to a head. The stifling heat adds to the general message of the film by increasing the tenseness of each character, thus stoking the racial conflicts, which end in the violent climax. The use of warm colors therefore supports a main theme, namely the underlying racial conflicts. Raheem's speech is essential, as it addresses the struggle to progress towards love and equality instead of keeping racial divisions in hatred. As the film as a whole deals with this topic, this scene is crucial.

As Raheem finishes his speech and continues his way to Sal's pizzeria, he raises the volume of "Fight the Power" before entering. Sal feels that the loud rap-music disturbs the atmosphere of his pizzeria. He refuses to take Raheem's order until he turns the music off. Thereby, Sal ignores what Raheem's blasting of the song is really about, namely to make everybody around hear his message conveyed in the song. Turning it off, when entering a white man's business, would be against that message.

Just as Raheem turns the music off, it becomes even more noticeable that it has been playing before, also during Raheem's speech. The boom-box and the song "Fight the Power" are the most important features of Raheem's character, as Lee employs the accompanying sound to enforce the theme of racial conflicts throughout the film. The song is a leitmotif and its lyrics call for African Americans to unitedly fight institutional racism, which further shows their discontent throughout the film (Film-Drunk Love). As the song is loud and seems aggressive, the underlying racial tensions, anger and conflicts are enforced through Lee's use of sound.

Raheem's and Sal's verbal conflict is filmed in a shot-reverse-shot sequence, which is a technique that establishes continuity editing (Thompson). It is further supported by Lee employing an eyeline match, thereby creating spatial continuity. By filming the dialogue from both perspectives, Lee allows the audience to take on the point of view of both characters and experience their perception of the counterpart. Therefore, Lee's idea that racial conflicts have two sides to them and not only one is to blame is transferred to the audience by forcing them to take on the perspective of both parties through editing, as the continuity enforces the idea, that both parties contribute to the conflict (Unknown).

During the dialogue, Raheem is shot from a low angle, which is typically used to make a person seem powerful, intimidating and strong. Lee achieved exactly this effect here. In

contrast, Sal is shot from a high angle, which shows him as a small and weak character. This juxtaposition thus establishes who is in the position of power in this scene, namely Raheem. He holds the power over the volume of the music, while Sal has to endure it and can only request him to turn it off. The loud sound makes him a domineering figure against Sal, therefore Raheem feels shortly undermined, as he has to turn his music off. Nevertheless, he remains the character in power, as Sal has to serve him like a regular customer, although he is not pleased with him after the argument. Sal knows however, that not serving Raheem could have serious consequences, because the racial conflicts already present could come to a head quickly, as Bugging Out provoked him earlier. Both characters feel a lot of anger in this situation. This is emphasized through the tilt of the camera, which is representative of the characters' emotions (Film-Drunk Love). The sharp tilts for both characters show that their level of anger is high. The use of close-ups supports this, as the audience can closely observe the characters' facial expressions. The use of camera angles and tilts combined with juxtaposition allow Lee in this scene to enforce the theme of racial conflicts

Additionally, Lee uses Dutch angles. Firstly, these make the dialogue more dynamic than an eye-level shot. Secondly, these canted shots give the audience the feeling that something is off or not right. This reinforces the concept that something is wrong in society, namely the racial conflicts, which are represented throughout the film. Additionally, this inspires the audience to think that the characters view the members of other races as physically grotesque (Thompson).



Figure 4: Low and high angles, a sharp tilt of the camera and Dutch angles can be observed in these close-up shots

The use of camera angles and tilts combined with juxtaposition and canted shots allow Lee in this scene to establish a tense verbal conflict which is loaded with racially charged anger. Lee therefore establishes the theme of racial conflicts through the use of interesting cinematography here.

The analyzed sequence is of high importance, as it encompasses the central themes of racial conflicts, violence and the juxtaposition of love and hate. Raheem's speech adds to the audience's understanding of his character significantly and should be especially considered when looking at the film's ending, when racial conflicts and widespread hate cause violence and thus Raheem's death. Sal's and Raheem's dialogue additionally shows the conflicts between the residents, again enforcing major themes. Although Lee transmits the message, that one should support the progress of society towards equality, he also asks the audience a question with no definite answer. Through Raheem's speech in front of a background of racially charged conflicts, the question arises how one can live inside the struggle of love and hate and not which side will eventually win. Therefore, this film promotes a discussion about society's progress to end racial inequalities and how to end them.

1744 words

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