Do the Right Thing

Inkshed

In Spike Lee’s most iconic film, Do the Right Thing, pop music is used to great effect. It helps to illustrate the setting of the film, establish scenic realism, characterize and distinguish different characters, and is ultimately a vital plot device that sets up the emotional climax. While I think its arguable that the outdated music might make the film feel dated, I don’t believe that’s true. The light hearted, almost retrospectively funny soundscapes in this film, merging jazzy sounds with early hip-hop like Public Enemy or R&B, helps to really make the neighborhood feel like a lively and fun environment, elevating the tonal shift in the film. Music is also used to implicitly inform us of characters – we learn of the ideology of Radio Raheem and the cultural identity of latinx characters.

A side note, a soundtrack like Do the Right Thing can truly make a film resonate with popular audiences to an extent it might not be able to otherwise. Contemporary fans of the fairly diverse soundtrack’s songs might check out the film because of that, and ultimately be more engaged than hearing about some random movie being good. I think it also gives it lasting power. Do the Right Thing being associated with certain music really helped cement its legacy in my view