



often based on what values were fashionable subscribing to, what behaviour was perceived to be acceptable in the given society. All three characters did what the larger elite class, Sicilian or Black community would have approved. However, doing the right thing extends beyond conforming to expectations of the larger community. The parameters of judgement on what is right should include review of consequences felt not only by the individual but the good of the community as well.

All films portray the socio-historical state of the times and conditions of society. However, it is important to note they also represent how filmmakers have interpreted what were the popular choices of the particular society at that time and their perceptions of what is right. The popular trend during the time of *The Godfather*, was to portray gangsters as charismatic anti-heroes. The film tends to put Michael in a positive light. Similarly, Spike Lee had an agenda – to portray racism and the plight of blacks. By doing so, he had already imposed a determined direction of what is right. Mookie's actions were made to appear as justified and the right thing to do.

Ultimately, what is considered 'right' in light of the given circumstances may be subjective, and there is no fix model to account for it. Personally, Archer's choice and actions evoke more empathy and were considered more valid. In conclusion, to evaluate who did the right thing would be unfair since we have pre-conceived notions of what is appropriately 'right'. Doing the right thing does not only mean conforming to what is expected, but also realizing the consequences and selecting the most beneficial consequence. Such a decision, unfortunately, hinges very much on discretion which evolved from one's personal experiences.

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The three films *The Age of Innocence*, *The Godfather* and *Do the Right Thing* are driven by the issue of choice – each of the protagonists had to make a decision which consequently influenced their own or others' lives. Given the impact of their decisions, it is apparent that the issue of whether they did the right thing is worth discussion. In my opinion, Newland, Michael and Mookie all did the 'Right' thing (to a certain extent), due to the inherent difficulty of evaluating right and wrong, and given the context that their choices were made and the consequences.

The act of judging right or wrong is difficult for several reasons. Firstly, right and wrong are relative descriptions and thus subjective; attributing right or wrong to something requires basing it on a particular value system or comparing it with something else. Hence, perceptions of right and wrong differ between society, groups and individuals. For example in *The Age of Innocence*, by choosing to stay with his legitimate wife May instead of eloping with Ellen, Newland did the 'right' thing from the society's point of view, as it was acceptable by the rigid social norms and rules governing NY middle class life in the 1890s. However, for Newland as an individual, choosing Ellen may have been the 'right' thing to do instead, as it represented an escape from that same cultural prison.

Secondly, the relationship between choices and their consequences is complex. 'Wrong' choices may lead to the 'right' consequences and vice versa and in such cases, it is difficult to quantify the whole action as completely right or wrong. *Do the Right Thing* appears to chronicle a series of individuals who fail to do the 'right' thing – each action leads to repercussions which eventually escalate into violence in the climax of the film. However, given the underlying racial ill feeling in the community (which reflected the reality of racial relations in NY in the 1980s), Mookie did the 'right' thing in triggering the riot as it gave the community an outlet for this racial tension. By doing so, Mookie may have prevented further needless deaths in that situation.

Lastly, choice is influenced by several factors, such as the time, place or historical and cultural context. As such, certain circumstances may respectively condemn or redeem a supposedly 'right' or 'wrong' choice or action. Michael Corleone's actions in *The Godfather* can be accounted for by his duty to the family – an influence of his Sicilian culture. External threats such as the attempted assassination of Don Corleone led Michael to use the Mafia's violent methods in order to

ensure the survival of the Family Business, and as such, his actions were arguably justifiable.

In conclusion, the protagonists in all three films have done the 'Right' thing, although the degree of 'rightness' in each case is a subject of debate. With regards to the study of history, this means that the evaluation of past choices made by people requires careful consideration of many factors and that 'rightness', in a way, remains a matter of the historian's choice.