

# Barbershop: The Next Cut (2016)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 52 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 2; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 5.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*

*Isaiah 11:6-9*

Sequels are notoriously made more for the money than for art. Not so this third Barbershop film, directed skillfully by Malcolm D. Lee, a cousin of Spike Lee (whose most recent film also deals with Chicago gun violence). Writers Kenya Barris, Tracy Oliver, and Mark Brown have plenty more to say about race, politics, sex, and violence—indeed, if anything, their film is even more relevant today than were the first two excellent films of the series! Although some of the language and sexual innuendos make this a questionable choice for youth group discussion, its themes of racism, anti-violence, reconciliation, and father-son relationships make it a great film for youth and adults to discuss. This is one film that both the socially liberal and the conservative can enjoy together—it deals with important social justice issues, and it stresses family values and the importance of a community

depending more upon itself to solve a problem than seeking government help.

The story takes place some twelve years after the second film. A lot has changed since then. Barbershop owner Calvin (Ice Cube) has joined forces with salon owner Angie (Regina Hall) to form a uni-sex shop. The place is still considered "a home away from home" where any topic can be raised and any opinion expressed, no matter how outrageous—and they will be, with the acerbic-tongued Eddie (Cedric the Entertainer) still on hand.

On the male side of the shop is Rashad (Common), a good friend of Calvin, and like him a father of a teenaged son. The younger barber Jerrod (Lamorne Morris) is a bit gullible and slow but still possesses strong opinions. Isaac, the lone white barber from the first two films is missing, but his replacement, Raja (Utkarsh Ambudkar), son of Indian immigrants, ably expresses opinions that call into question the accepted ideas of his black colleagues.

On the female side of the shop is of course, Angie, able to stand up to any of the guys foolish enough to cross her. Provocatively dressed haircutter Draya (Nicki Minaj) is perhaps the least sympathetic of the characters in that her play for the affections of Rashad comes close to breaking up his marriage to Terri (Eve). Hair stylist Bree (Margot Bingham) who always wears her Karam T-shirt is quick with her feminist opinions.

Some of the men who are in and out of the shop are as colorful as those who work in it. Smooth talking One-Stop (J.B. Smoove) is always promoting some deal with anyone who will listen. J. D. (Anthony Anderson) has a foodtruck and catering service he calls "Gangsta Grub." To draw customers he claims that his business is a nonprofit community service project. Thus it is very funny to watch his discomposure when near the end a TV reporter interviewing him invites on camera two representatives of the youth organization supposedly the

beneficiary to receive the money. For a few moments J.D. clings to his money pouch so strongly that I thought of the stingy Scrooge McDuck of comicbook fame. Another visitor to the shop is a burly gang leader from whom Calvin always extracts his guns and places them in a lock box. Violence almost erupts when there is a schedule mix-up, and a rival gang leader shows up for his haircut at the same time.

The world outside the shop has changed even more, with gang violence making walking the streets or working inside dangerous. In one scene when gunfire erupts outside, everyone dives to the floor—everyone but the portly Eddie, who says something to the effect that it's too difficult for him to get back up again. Despite the violence, the opinion prevails that this is the best time to be a black man—though it is Eddie, I think, who adds, “unless you're Bill Cosby.”

The daily gun violence provides the dramatic tension, centering on Calvin's deep concern for the safety and well-being of his son Jalen (Michael Rainey Jr.). Jalen and best friend Kenny (Diallo Thompson), son of Rashad, are drawn to the local gang because on one occasion the neighborhood gang saves them from a beating by a rival gang, afterward the leader even gifting them with some money. This latter act is especially appreciated by Jalen because his dad had turned him down when he had requested it, giving him a lecture instead on working at the shop for it.

When the friends get in trouble at school, Calvin voices his thoughts about enrolling his son in a private school instead. The school principal responds that she hopes he does not because the public school needs good students like Jalen. Although his wife Jennifer (Jazsmin Lewis) is ambivalent about this and also about moving the shop, Calvin starts dealing with motor-mouthed One-Stop because he has wide connections in the city. Inspecting a potential site on the safer north side, Calvin hands over a check, with One-Stop warning him that it is not refundable. Calvin keeps this secret from his partner

Angie and their employees. (Calvin's ambivalence toward the shop he has inherited from his father runs through all three of the films.)

The relationship between Calvin and Jalen grows more strained when the father orders the son not to pal around any more with Kenny, whom he thinks is drawing his son into the gang. (This also puts his friendship with Rashad in danger.) Calvin urges Jalen to cut his long dreadlocks that hang to his shoulders, as well as helping out more at the shop. It is another student (I think his name is Derek) who comes in daily to clean and sweep the shop so he can earn his spending money.

It is the death of Derek, caught in a spate of gang crossfire, that moves the staff to want to do something beyond just complaining about the violence. They had earlier been opposed to the plan that a member of City Council had informed them was being considered—the placing of barriers around the neighborhood to make it difficult for gang members to dash in and out of the neighborhood. This would also drastically cut into all of the local businesses, they argue back.

After a lot of discussion they come up with the idea of calling for a truce between the gangs, and in return they would provide free haircuts for all comers over the weekend. This will mean persuading the two heads of the rival gangs to agree to their putting away their weapons for the duration. The uniting of everyone behind their decision to do something themselves about their violent streets rather than hide and expect the government to do something makes for inspiring viewing. In a way they are attempting to form a barbers' version of Isaiah the prophet's great vision of peace among the warring animals and humanity.

However, during all the preparations for the experimental truce Calvin continues with his secret plan to move the shop. Matters also are coming to a head between father and son. Calvin was right to suspect that the two teenagers were on the

edge of joining the gang. The fearful boys see this as the means to stay protected. This part of the film reminded me of one of my favorite films of the early 90s, John Singleton's great [Boyz N the Hood](#), a major theme of which was a caring black father anxiously trying to keep his son from running with a group of gun-wielding friends bent on avenging the death of a friend. In both films a key moment is the son's decision of whether to get into the gang's car or not. Ironic in that Ice Cube, today playing the concerned father, played a lost soul in the 1991 film who would die by gun violence.

The agony of Calvin trying to decide what he should do is realistically portrayed—many a black parent has had to decide whether to abandon their beloved hood for the sake of their family, or whether to stay and work with the community to fight against violence and its perpetrators. This is akin to those black parents back in the 50s and 60s who had to decide about enrolling their children in a white school. Be a pioneer and put their children through the hell of insults and taunts hurled at them every day by hateful racists, or pull back and accept the status quo of segregated superior white schools and run-down black schools. These are dilemmas that our racist society has spared white parents from, so we are indebted to films like these that raise the issue.

One other theme worth pointing out is that of reconciliation—seen in many forms: between father and son; husband and wife; and even between the woman who almost broke up a home and the aggrieved wife.

There is so much humor and drama packed into this film that I cannot urge you too strongly to go out and see it soon. Many of the jokes will fly by white viewers, but there are enough that will connect with your funnybone that you will find yourself alternating between laughing and anxiously wondering how things will turn out. Be sure you go with friends because I don't think anyone can catch by her/himself all of the rapid-fire dialogue.

Each time that I have watched any of the *Barbershop* films I have been thankful for the filmmakers providing a window into the black community so that a white dude like myself can look in and catch a glimpse of what our black citizens are thinking and saying. It's a window well worth peering through.

*This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the May 2016 issue of Visual Parables.*