



**RACIAL PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION TOWARD
AFRICAN-AMERICAN DEPICTED IN TATE TAYLOR'S
"THE HELP" (2011)**

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fullfilment of the Requirement
For S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities
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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer states confidently that this project is made and compiled by herself without taking the results from the other research in any university, S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she did not take the material from other publication or someone else work except for the sources mentioned in references.

Semarang, August 14th 2018

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Live your life, live it right. Be different, do different things.”

Kendrick Lamar

*This paper is dedicated to
my beloved family, friends and everyone
who have supported me to finish this final project.*

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Praise be to Allah, the Almighty, the Beneficent and the Merciful who has blessed and given the health, strength and spirit to me, so this final project on “*Racial Prejudice and Discrimination towards African-American depicted in Tate Taylor’s The Help Movie*” came to a completion. In this occasion, the writer sincerely want to say thank you for all the people who have contributed to the completion of this extended essay.

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The writer realizes that this final project is still far from perfection. She, therefore, will be thankful to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this final project better.

Finally, the writer expects that this final project will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about racial prejudice and discrimination, especially in America.

Semarang, August 25th 2018

Rizky Safira Putri

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ABSTRAK

Rasisme dan diskriminasi merupakan isu sosial yang terdapat dalam masyarakat. Pesan mengenai isu-isu sosial dalam masyarakat dapat disampaikan melalui sebuah media. Film dapat menjadi salah satu media untuk menyampaikan isu-isu sosial yang ada di masyarakat dari berbagai pandangan seperti isu rasisme dan diskriminasi yang terdapat pada film Amerika berjudul The Help (2011) karya Tate Taylor. Peneliti tertarik untuk menjadikan film tersebut sebagai objek penelitian yang berjudul “Racial Prejudice and Discrimination toward African-American Depicted in Tate Taylor’s The Help (2011)”. Melalui penelitian ini, peneliti ingin mengetahui mengenai bagaimana representasi dan hubungan antara prasangka dan diskriminasi rasial yang dilakukan oleh karakter berkulit putih terhadap karakter berkulit hitam dalam film dengan menggunakan Teori Klasifikasi Prasangka Rasial dan Diskriminasi dari Robert K Merton. Dalam film ini terdapat beberapa isu rasisme dan diskriminasi yang dapat terlihat melalui konflik yang terjadi diantara para tokoh. Film ini dapat dijadikan sebagai bahan pembelajaran khususnya bagi masyarakat Indonesia yang masih rawan konflik mengenai SARA karena dalam film ini terdapat pesan moral mengenai kesetaraan, rasisme dan diskriminasi yang sering terjadi dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci; *Isu Sosial, Rasisme, Diskriminasi, Prasangka, SARA*

ABSTRACT

Racism and discrimination are social issues that exist in the society. Message about social issues in the society can be told by a media. Movie belongs to a media that can show the social issues in the society in several perspective as seen in the American movie “*The Help*” (2011) by Tate Taylor. Thus, the writer interests to use this movie as the object analysis with “Racial Prejudice and Discrimination toward African-American Depicted in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* (2011)” as the title of the project. In this study, the writer will analyze about how the representation and relationship between prejudice and discrimination conducted by the white characters toward the black characters in the movie using the “*Classification of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*” theory conducted by Robert K. Merton. In the movie, there are both racism issue and discrimination issue that can be seen in the conflict among the characters. In addition, this movie can be used as a learning material especially for the Indonesian citizen that is still prone to conflict about SARA considering this movie contains moral values about equality, racism and discrimination that occur in the society.

Keywords; Social Issue, Racism, Discrimination, Prejudice, SARA

I.

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that the United States is a country built on a number of different cultures coming together to live in a new land as Americans. People come from a mixture of immigrants all over the world with various social backgrounds and melt together to gain prosperity. Yet, regardless the unity, there is a white supremacy doctrine that centered the idea that all members of the white race are more superior or better than all members of the non-white races. The whites claim to possess higher superiorities. *“These higher superiorities do not depend on physical prowess or emotional sensitivity; they depend rather on intellectual abilities, such as reasoning, attention, foresight, and judgement”* (Tyler, 1965:300). The significant differences are between White American and African-American. There was an extremist organization named *Ku Klux Klan* that conduct white supremacy through intimidation and violence toward the African-American. Thus, in 1960’s era, racial discrimination towards African American was at its peak marked by the civil right movement act led by Martin Luther King Jr who had a key role to fight for equality and human rights in that era.

Movie is a motion picture that can be a device to express ideas, opinions and critiques. There are several movies related to the racial prejudice and racial discrimination. In this project, the writer chooses to analyze an interesting movie entitled *“The Help”* directed by Tate Taylor that reflect the situation of racial discrimination towards African-American in 1960’s. This is an American movie

adapted from a best-selling novel "*The Help*" (2009) based on the true story of the writer Kathryn Stockett. Set in Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960's, the movie is about the life of the Black maids who face the discrimination conducted by the white people as their employer. All of the white family have a Black maid to help them take care of their children and their house. On the other hand, the main character Skeeter, a white person who has a dream to be a well-known writer do not execute a discrimination towards the black maids. Instead, she assists them to have the equality with the white people through her ability in writing. She decides to write a book about the life of the Black maids that raises several conflicts with a great plot.

In this research, the writer will focus on analyzing the behavior of the white characters toward the black characters that indicates racial prejudice and discrimination based on classification of racial prejudice and discrimination stated by Robert K. Merton. There are three reasons why the writer is interested in analyzing this movie. Firstly, *The Help* movie is a new movie analyzed by an English Department student of Diponegoro University. As far as the writer does the library research, there are no previous studies which have been analyzed by the students of Diponegoro University. Secondly, the writer is interested in writing about the racial prejudice and discrimination of the White People toward the African-American thus the movie is suitable to analyze. Thirdly, the movie has a good message towards the viewers because the outline of this movie is the role of white people to help the Black maids as the oppressed to get their right as the American citizen.

2.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to measure the presence of racial prejudice and discrimination in a particular social field, it is necessary to have a theory or concept of how a racial discrimination might occur in the society. The sociological approach in this research will adopt the issue of racial prejudice and discrimination which will be analyzed by using “*Classification of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*” by Robert K Merton. There are different definitions of prejudice. Gallup Poll says:

People, particularly those with a strong sense of identity, often have feelings of prejudice toward others who are not like themselves. For example, in 1945, 56% of the American public said they opposed a law that would require employees to work alongside people of any race or color (Gallup Poll, 1972).

Whereas, based on *Introduction to Sociology, 10th Edition* by Henry L. Tichler explains that:

Prejudice is defined as an irrationally based negative, or occasionally positive, attitude toward certain groups and their members. Prejudice is a subjective feeling, whereas discrimination is an overt action. Discrimination refers to differential treatment, usually unequal and injurious, accorded to individuals who are assumed to belong to a particular category or group. (2010:222)

In 1954, Gordon Allport, defined the form of racial discrimination as “*sequential steps by which an individual behaves negatively toward members of another racial group: verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination* (Allport, 1954).

Racial prejudice might affect everyone. At individual level, racism is expressed as prejudice. People are “pre-judged” based on their racial characteristic. Prejudice does not always obtain discrimination. People might have feelings of hatred without expressing them obviously. In the *Introduction to Sociology, 10th Edition* by Henry L. Tichler, Robert K. Merton stated the classification of racial prejudice and discrimination. He believes that there are four types of people as follows:

1. *Unprejudiced Nondiscriminators*

These people are neither prejudiced against the members of other racial and ethnic groups nor do they practice discrimination. They believe implicitly in the American ideals of justice, freedom, equality of opportunity, and dignity of the individual.

2. *Unprejudiced Discriminators*

This type includes those who constantly think of expediency. Although themselves are free from racial prejudice, they will keep silent when bigots speak out. They will not condemn acts of discrimination but will make concessions to the intolerant and will accept discriminatory practices for fear that to do otherwise would hurt their own position.

3. *Prejudiced Nondiscriminators*

This category is for the timid bigots who do not accept the ideal of equality for all but conform to it and give it lip service when the slightest pressure is applied. Those who hesitate to express their prejudices when in the presence of those who are more tolerant belong in this category.

4. *Prejudiced Discriminators*

These are the bigots, pure and unashamed. They do not believe in equality, nor do they hesitate to give free expression to their intolerance, both in their speech and in their actions. For them, attitudes and behavior do not conflict. They practice discrimination, believing that it is not only proper but in fact their duty to do so (Berry and Tischler, 1978).

In this research the writer will classified the behavior of the character in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* that indicates racial prejudice and discrimination based on the conflict between the white character as the majority group towards the black

character as the minority group which are the maids based on the classification of racial prejudice and discrimination stated by Robert K. Merton. According to Perrine, “*Conflict is a clash of action, desire, ideas, or goods in the plot of a story or drama*” (1988:1408). Conflict usually happens between major character with other characters or element in his own nature. Moreover, James L Potter stated that “*characters are basic elements in literature so that they get such a substantial attention. If critics talk about characters, they mean the figure in the work of literary*” (Potter, 1967:170). Character is a part of intrinsic elements. Character has an identity to show the audience by their action, appearance and conversation. There are two types of characters which are major and minor. “*Major character is the main figure who create the story line while minor character is the supporting figure who help the major to create the story*” (Potter,1967:176-177). To support the identification of the conflict between the character, the writer uses the other intrinsic elements of the film named cinematography. Cinematography is an elements that is related with visual technical in a film. Pratista states that:

Cinematography consists of shot angle and camera distance. Shot angle is a position of the scene is taking. The Shot angle consist of straight on, high, and low angle. The camera distance is the length of camera takes a shot. Camera distance consists of extreme long, long, medium long, medium, medium close up, close up, and extreme close up (2008:190).

Thus, the writer chooses to develop this theory because this theory match with the purpose of the study.

RESEARCH METHOD

Tate Taylor's "The Help" movie produced by DreamWorks Pictures is an object and primary data in this research. In order to support this research, the writer applies the library research. According to Marry W. George "*a library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point*" (2008: 6). The writer uses secondary data to support the research, such as library books, journals, newspapers, and electronic sources such as e-books and websites.

In analyzing racial prejudice and discrimination aspect of the movie, the writer applies the approach of sociology to literature. It is an approach from literature branch which used to analyze the social issues inside the literary work.. Wellek and Warren (1976: 94) stated that "*literature and society are put more narrowly and externally. Questions are asked about the relations of literature to a given social situation, an economic, social and political system.*" In this research, focus will be paid on the social situation in the movie that is the behaviour of the white characters toward the black characters using Robert K. Merton's *Classification of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*. Thus, comprehensive analysis toward the major and the minor characters in the movie can be created.

4.

DISCUSSION

4.1 Racial Prejudice and Discrimination in “*The Help*”

Usually racial prejudice lead to discrimination. Discriminator might be motivated by prejudice but sometimes people can be prejudiced and not discriminate also sometimes people might not be prejudiced and still discriminate as seen in Merton’s concept of *Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*. *The Help* movie shows the relationship between racial prejudice and discrimination at individual level. The relationship of prejudice and discrimination can be seen in the conflict between the white characters toward the black characters using the *Classification of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination* by Robert K Merton as follows:

4.1.1 Unprejudice Nondiscriminators

Unprejudiced Nondiscriminators in this movie is reflected by Skeeter towards the maids. Although she is white, she does not do the discrimination and has a prejudice towards the black character. Instead, she helps the maids to have the equality with the whites. Here is the proof that she does not have prejudice towards the maids:

SKEETER : “I’ve never seen you out of uniform before. You look really nice.”

AIBILEEN: “Thank you. I ain’t never had no white person in my house before. Miss Skeeter, what if you don’t like what I got to say about white people?”

SKEETER: “This isn’t about me. It doesn’t matter how I feel.”



Picture 1
The Help : 42:12
 (Interview in Aibileen's house)



Picture 2
The Help : 42:21
 (Skeeter answers Aibileen's question)

Unprejudiced Nondiscriminators is performed by Skeeter. Skeeter is the major character in this movie. As seen in the picture 1 and 2 there is a scene when Aibileen is being interviewed by Skeeter. With a medium shot that focuses on the character it can be seen that Aibileen as the black character and Skeeter as the white character are having an interview in Aibileen's living room. Before starting the interview, Aibileen asks to Skeeter about her feeling when Aibileen talks about white people in her house. In this scene Skeeter explicitly shows that she does not have a racial prejudice towards the maids. Not only does not have a racial prejudice but Skeeter also does not conduct the racial discrimination, here is the proof:



Picture 3
The Help : 37 : 20
 (Skeeter and Aibileen in the city park)

SKEETER: "My car's here. I could take you home."

AIBILEEN: “No, ma’am.”



Picture 4

The Help 43 : 26

(Aibileen is being interviewed in her house)

SKEETER : “Is it your son?”

AIBILEEN: “Yes, ma’am. Can we move on to the next questions?”

SKEETER: “Aibileen, you don’t have to call me ma’am. Not here.”

Skeeter also does not do the discrimination, as seen in the picture 3 with a medium shot that shows the environment, she is offering Aibileen to take her home although she is rejected because according to *The Laws Governing the Conduct of Nonwhites and other Minorities* showed in the movie stated that:

No person shall require any white female to nurse in wards or rooms in which Negro men are placed. Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools but shall continue to be used by the race using them black people are not allowed to accept the equality with white people. (The Help, 37:18)

Besides in the picture 4 with a medium shot, it shows that Aibileen is in the same position as Skeeter because she doesn’t wear her uniform as the maids but she wear casual clothes in her house. At this scene, Skeeter do not want to be called ma’am because she is not Aibileen’s employer. In this conflict, Skeeter shows that she also does not do racial discrimination. Thus, it is right to classified Skeeter as Unprejudice Nondiscriminators based on Merton’s theory. (see page 3)

4.1.2 Unprejudiced Discriminators

Based on Merton's concept, this type refers to those who are free from racial prejudice but they will also keep silent when the bigots speak up. Cambridge dictionary defines Bigot as *“a person who has strong, unreasonable beliefs and who does not like other people who have different beliefs or a different way of life”*. This type of racial prejudice and discriminators is presented by Mrs. Leefolt who are Skeeter's friend and she is Aibileen's employer.



Picture 5
The Help 15 : 21
(Gathering in Mrs. Leefolt's house)

HILLY: “If Aibileen use the guest bath, I'm sure she use yours too, they are dangerous, they carry different disease than we do”
Mrs. LEEFOLT: “She does not”



Picture 6
The Help 34:23
(Aibileen's new restroom inside Mrs. Leefolt's house)

MOBLEY : That's Aibee's bathroom, Mama. Hey Aibee!”
Mrs. LEEFOLT : “No, no honey. Promise me you won't go in there, ok?”
MOBLEY : “Yes, mama”

Mrs. LEEFOLT : “Isn’t it so nice to have your own Aibileen?”

As seen in the picture 5 that taken with a close up shot, it shows Mrs. Leefolt’s emotions and reaction toward the other character. It is a scene when Hilly as a bigot has a prejudice towards Aibileen. In this scene, can be seen that Ms. Leefolt refuses Hilly’s slurs toward Aibileen. And when Hilly is talking about the right to have the separate restroom between whites and colored, Mrs. Leefolt keeps silent. This conflict explicitly tells that Mrs. Leefolt is unprejudiced but in picture 6 that taken with a medium shot she does the form of discrimination that is segregation because she finally builds the separate restroom with Aibileen in her house since she is pressured by Hilly. Thus, it is right to say that Mrs. Leefolt has a character as Unprejudiced Discriminators.

4.1.3 Prejudice Nondiscriminators

According to Gallup Poll, People, particularly those with a strong sense of identity, often have feelings of prejudice toward others who are not like themselves. It is depicted by the white character who is Hilly’s mother, Mrs. Walters. She can be classified as Prejudice Nondiscriminators because of her behavior. Here is the proof:



Picture 7
The Help 15 : 05
(Mrs. Walters’s prejudice toward The Maids)

Mrs. LEEFOLT: "Hilly, I wish you'd just go use the bathroom."
Mrs. WALTERS: "Oh she just upset because the niagra uses the guest bath and so do we."



Picture 8
The Help 31 : 37
(Inside Mrs. Walter's house when heavy rain)

MINNY: "Uhm miss hilly" with rattling.
Mrs. WALTERS: "You go on ahead and use the inside bath, Minny, it's alright"
HILLY: "Oh, for crying out loud it's just a little rain, she can go on up and get an umbrella"

Basically, Mrs. Walters has a racial prejudice. She conducts casual racial slurs in the Mrs. Leefolt's house as seen in the picture 7 that taken with a medium shot. Mrs. Walters only shows the racial prejudice but not behave as discriminator evidenced in the picture 8 that also taken with medium shot, it shows that Mrs. Walter's as the white character is more tolerant toward Minny as the black character. There is a scene when Minny (The Maid) wants to go to the bathroom while it is a heavy rain. Minny's bathroom is on the outside of their house. In this case, Minny become the victim of segregation conducted by Hilly. Although they have a separate bathroom because of Hilly, Mrs. Walters allows Minny to use

the inside bathroom. She is more tolerant than Hilly who is the real bigot.

It is right to classified Mrs. Walters character as Prejudice Nondiscriminators.

4.1.4 Prejudice Discriminators

Robert K. Merton defines Prejudice Discriminators as the pure and unashamed bigots (see page 4). This type of racial prejudice and discrimination is presented by Hilly. She behaves both racial prejudice and discrimination. Here is the proof:

Mrs. LEEFOLT: “Just go use mine and Roulegh.”

HILLY: “If Aibileen use the guest restroom, she will use your restroom too, ugh it’s just plain dangerous, they carry different disease than we do.”



Picture 9

The Help : 15 : 40

(Playing card in Mrs. Leefolt’s living room)

HILLY: “Minny, minny are you in there?”

MINNY: “Yes, ma’am”

HILLY: “And just what are you doing?”

MINNY: “(Flushing)”

HILLY: “Get out of my toilet! Argh, You are fired Minny Jackson!”



Picture 10
The Help : 32 : 57
 (Minny is being fired in front of Hilly's bathroom)

As seen in the picture, Hilly reflects that she is the real bigot and can be classified as Prejudice Discriminators. Picture 9 is a scene in Mrs. Leefolt house when they are playing cards on the table that taken with a medium shot. Hilly is talking about his prejudice toward the black maids (*The Help*, 15:21-15:41) and on their conversation, Hilly always push her friends to separate their restroom from the maids that cause segregation between the whites and the maids. Besides, as a real bigot she also behaves as a discriminator and also conducts segregation. As seen in the picture 10 that taken with a medium shot, it defines the expression of an emotional temper of the character. In this scene she fired Minny emotionally after knowing that Minny uses her bathroom although the rain is heavy outside. She barking the door to ask Minny to go outside and after that she asks Minny to leave her house. In several conflict showed in the movie, Hilly conducts both the racial slurs and segregation. Thus, it is right to say that Hilly is a character that categorized as Prejudice Discriminators.

CONCLUSION

The reflection of racial prejudice and discrimination between white people toward African-American in the 1960's can be seen in Tate Taylor's *The Help* movie. The movie contains racial prejudice and discrimination issues depicted by the white character toward the black character that can be classified using the classification theory of racial prejudice and discrimination by Robert K. Merton.

In general, prejudice and discrimination have a relationship that can overlap and intersect in several ways. There is a causative relation that prejudice can trigger the cause of discrimination but not all of the individual that conduct prejudice will do discrimination. As seen in Tate Taylor's *The Help* movie, there are four relationships between racial prejudice and discrimination at individual reflected by the white characters toward the black characters based on Robert K. Merton's *Classification of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*. There are Unprejudiced Non-discriminators reflected by Skeeter towards the maids, Unprejudiced Discriminators reflected by Leefolt towards Aibileen, Prejudiced Non-discriminators reflected by Walters toward Minny, and Prejudiced Discriminators reflected by Hilly towards Minny.

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