

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction of the study, which consists of the background of the study and research questions. Those sections are followed by the study's aims, the study's scope, the signification of the study, research methodology, clarification of related terms, and the organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

Humans have a few things that can be used to identify themselves. Race is one of many terms used to identify themselves in society. Smedley (1998) suggests that the definition of race has varied throughout time. Although many have claimed race as a biological inherited category, it cannot be denied that race is also a social category. Race has emerged as a dominant form of identity in societies where it functions to classify humans into social groups. This social construction has caused social groups to label themselves as groups with more or less power. With this kind of social system, the one who holds more power could establish and maintain privilege and power dynamics in society. Consequently, this social construction can cause many issues, including racial injustice and discrimination.

Discrimination occurs when a person or a group of people is not treated equally or not given the same chances because of their skin color, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or other categorical statuses (Fibbi et al., 2021). Individuals are supposed to be treated equally as human beings based on a given set of rules and procedures. As a result of the act of discrimination, people are treated unequally caused by a contrast distinction among the groups. This paper focuses on racial discrimination, where the act of discrimination is projected towards a particular race group. This kind of discrimination is a form of unequal treatment against any individual because of their skin color, racial or ethnic origin (Dayal, 2018).

In some cases, racial discrimination can lead to racial injustice, in which a person's rights or a group of people are violated by another race group who feels more

superior to others and has more power than others. In 2020, a case of racial discrimination happened in the U.S., and it provoked a lot of suppressed people to speak up, especially the Black community. On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old Black man George Floyd had to face death caused by mistreatment from police. Hill et al. (2020), in *The New York Times* article, stated that George Floyd was pinned down by the officer for 8 minutes, leaving him unable to breathe. A witness stated in the article that the execution time was long enough to kill and execute him. George Floyd died that day at the hand of irresponsible and racist officers. Many people tried and still are trying to speak up on behalf of the Black community. After the triggering case of George Floyd, a lot of racial discrimination cases were brought up again. One of the highlighted cases of discrimination was the case of Breonna Taylor. She is a 26-year-old Black woman who was shot by the police on March 13, 2020. Dungca et al. (2020) in *The Washington Post* stated that three police officers force to enter Breonna's house as part of a narcotics investigation. No drugs were recovered from the home, and the officers who murdered Breonna Taylor still have not been charged. These cases are pure acts of racial discrimination, and they were proof that this phenomenon is still happening, especially in the U.S.

Not only through some death and violence cases, but these acts of discrimination can also be seen through the data and surveys to see how African-Americans have been suffering a lot from the discrimination and injustice done by White Americans. In the *United States Sentencing Commission's Sourcebooks of Federal Sentencing Statistics* (2019), it is mentioned that Black Americans are more likely to be arrested than white Americans. Once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted and experience lengthy prison sentences. A report by Williams and Wilson in 2019 also proved that Black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers overall (6.4% vs. 3.1%). Even Black workers with a college degree are more likely to be unemployed than similarly educated white workers (3.5% vs. 2.2%). Pew Research Center (PRC, 2016) conducted a national survey from February 29 until May 8, 2016, to find profound differences between Black and white people's views on racial discrimination in the

United States. PRC (2016) stated that the analysis of the survey findings is centered primarily around the differences between Blacks and whites; and how Black people are treated in the U.S. In the survey, it is found that a majority of Blacks (71%) say that they have experienced unfair treatment or discrimination caused by their race or ethnicity. 11% of them say this happens to them daily, while 60% of them say they experience the discrimination acts occasionally. Among Black people, it is also found that men and women are both equal to experience racial discrimination with no significant gaps by age. The research center also found that the racial discrimination experienced by Blacks has a markedly negative impact on their lives. These few facts proved that the discrimination and injustice towards one group, in this case, African-American people that lived in the United States, is still happening, and they still suffer a lot because of those actions.

The urge to resist these discriminatory acts towards the minority group leads some people to create a literary work and interpret those actions related to racial discrimination into a book, poem, film, and other literary pieces. Films are often seen as the representation of reality (Heintz & Stracey, 2006). As a literary work that both can be seen and heard, films are able to carry an important message through a carefully made representation. Gillard (2005) discussed how film is seen as a text. The notion of this term is a metaphor drawn from the idea of reading a book. It suggests that, in many ways, reading a book is like watching a film. Reading a film as a text is necessary so the readers can evaluate, analyze, and enjoy the story by interpreting the message of the text through its elements. Reading a film as text can be differentiated into the story and the style. Gillard mentioned that the story in the film includes what type or ‘genre’ of the film and the meaning, theme, or ideology of the story. The second is about the style of the film, including cinematography, editing, sound, acting, costumes, and production design, also known as ‘mise en scène. Most writers support their interpretation of the film by adding elements into the style of the film and discussing the ways with the filmmakers to construct the meaning out of its element.

The case of racial discrimination was also experienced by the five main characters in the television series entitled *When They See Us* (2019). Five teenagers who are the main characters in the series are falsely accused and forced to confess to the case of a woman who was beaten and raped in Central Park, New York, in 1989. The five teenagers have to endure the result of things they did not do due to the manipulation of the truth done by the authorities.

Many researchers have studied the issue of racial discrimination. A study entitled “Racism against African American Slave in Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years as a Slave*” by Adawiyah (2015) studied the issue of racism in the *Twelve Years as a Slave* novel by Solomon Northup. The study aims to find the forms of racism and the relation between racism in the novel with racism that happened in the nineteenth century using literary criticism. Rusnanila (2019) conducted another study about racial discrimination issues entitled “Racial Discrimination as seen in *The Help* by Tate Taylor.” In this study, the author divided the racial discrimination types in the film using the theory of racial discrimination by Pincus (1996) and sociological approaches. The issue of racism is also discussed in the study written by Riyani (2020) entitled “Racism in Duncan Tonatiuh’s *Separate is Never Equal* (2014).” The research analyzes the form of racism depicted by the characters and the illustrations using the theory of racism’s types by Jones (1997). Yanti (2021) also studied the issue of racial discrimination by showcasing the discrimination that happened in the novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas using the sociology of literature proposed by Swingewood and Laurenson and systemic racism by Feagin. The last related study is written by Yuniarsih (2018) entitled “Racial Discrimination Against Black People in *The Blind Side* Film,” which studied the types of racial discrimination experienced by the main characters.

Few related studies mentioned above discussed the same issues, which are racism and racial discrimination. Despite the fact that these studies discussed the same topic, this research gives a breath of fresh air as it offers an insight into the issue of racial discrimination by not only identifying the types of discrimination but also

uncovering the portrayal of discrimination in the television series *When They See Us* using the film aspects. The data used in this study represents an actual racial discrimination event that happened in 1989, highlighting how the authorities employed the discrimination acts. According to Wellek and Warren (1994), the content of literary work related to actual conditions is often viewed as a social document or a picture of actual social conditions. The writer feels that it is necessary to analyze the series because it represents how the Black community genuinely experiences racial discrimination, especially against the authorities. Hence, this study highlights racial discrimination and injustice experienced by African-Americans in the United States as portrayed in Ava Du Vernay's *When They See Us* using the types of discrimination by Pincus (1996) to explore the types of discrimination and film theory by Heintz and Stracey (2006) to give an insight of how the discriminations are portrayed in the series.

1.2 Research Questions

In conducting the study, the researcher provides a few questions that guide the study:

1. What kinds of racial discrimination are experienced by the main characters, as seen in Ava Du Vernay's Television Series *When They See Us*?
2. In what ways are those racial discriminations portrayed in the series?

1.3 Aims of the Study

This research aims to describe what kinds of racial discrimination are experienced by the main characters and how racial discrimination is portrayed in Ava Du Vernay's Television Series *When They See Us*.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study of racial discrimination in Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us* (2019) analyzes the racial discrimination acts experienced by the main characters in the episode. The study focuses on analyzing the scenes and dialogues containing the racial discriminations experienced by the main characters and how the racial discriminations are portrayed in the episode.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is expected to make the readers more aware of the racial discrimination issue and the type of discrimination experienced by the main characters in this series. The awareness and understanding of the issue in this series, practically, will result in having the knowledge and gaining the behavior or action to refuse the acts of discrimination. Readers may also be more concerned about the situation and how the discrimination itself is constructed in the movie. Theoretically, this research will also help give additional information and knowledge to the writer, the readers, and the other researcher who wants to analyze the same data used in this research or the same topic of this study.

1.6 Research Methodology

The descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the data in this study. The descriptive method is used to understand the research problems. In this research, the author also employed the qualitative method to identify relevant issues and themes to analyze them for further evaluation. Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative research refers to an approach used to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups due to social or human problems. The data, which are in the form of dialogue and scenes, were analyzed using textual analysis and film analysis to interpret the message in both dialogue and the scenes through its elements. The writer chose these methods to uncover the study's problems: what types of racial discrimination are shown in this study and how they are portrayed in the series. These methods help the writer focus on describing the events that happened using the descriptive approach and examining the data by identifying the features in the data qualitatively.

The study used a series titled *When They See Us* by Ava DuVernay as the data to be analyzed. The data can be found in a streaming platform Netflix. The writer uses the scenes from the first episode out of the four episodes of the series because the first episode showcases the story of how the main characters experience acts of discrimination. *When They See Us*, released in 2019, is a Netflix series about an actual event in Central Park, New York, in 1988. The series retells five teenagers who were

falsely accused of rape and assault of a woman in Central Park. The data is collected and analyzed by a few essential steps to find the answers to the research question. The details of the methodology, source, synopsis, data collection, and data analysis will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.7 Clarification of Related Terms

1. Racism

Racism is believed to be an idea that human beings are divided into distinct groups that are different not only based on their race or inherited attributes but also in their social behavior and traits. Racism is used to show that distinct groups can be ranked as superior or inferior (Newman, 2010).

2. Discrimination

Discrimination is a practice and action of a dominant racial and ethnic group that has a diverse and negative impact on other racial and ethnic groups or under them (Feagin & Eckberg, 1989).

3. Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Pincus (1996) proposes that there are types of racial discrimination. Those types explain how each of the racial discrimination types is different. There are three types of racial discrimination proposed by Pincus; individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and structural discrimination. For further details, see Chapter 2.

4. Portrayal

Portrayal refers to the act of drawing a portrait of someone. The portrait itself is a representation of a particular thing. This definition suggests that even though a portrayal needs to be as close as what is portrayed in reality, there is still a gap between

the real person and the depicted one. The portrayal concept indicates agency, someone in charge of creating the image (Dijck, 2002).

1.8 Organization of the Paper

This research is organized in the following structure:

1. CHAPTER I: Introduction

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2. CHAPTER II: Literature Review

The topic of racism as used in this study is already studied by several researchers before. Hence, this chapter provides the same prominent theories, concepts, and theoretical frameworks to create this study. It consists of the definition of racism, racial discrimination, and the theory of racial discrimination proposed by Pincus (1996). It also consists of a perspective from film study proposed by Heintz and Stracey (2006). This chapter also covers the previous related studies.

3. CHAPTER III: Methodology

This chapter provides the methodology process in creating the present study. It elaborates on the design of this research, data source, synopsis of the data, data collection, and data analysis.

4. CHAPTER IV: Findings and Discussions

This chapter provides the answer to the research questions. Hence, this chapter shows the findings gathered from the data and the elaborated discussions from the findings that answered the research questions.

5. CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendation

This chapter elaborates and explains the conclusion of the present study's findings and its discussion. This study also includes suggestions and recommendations for further studies.

1.9 Concluding Remark

This chapter covers the introduction and the background of the study, which is the study of racial discrimination by analyzing the television series entitled *When They See Us* by Ava Du Vernay as the data. This chapter also explains that this research aims to answer the research questions: the types of racial discrimination experienced by the main characters and how those acts of discrimination are portrayed in the series. The study's literature review, which included the theoretical frameworks, the theories, concepts, and previous studies related to the current study, will be prominent theories, concepts, and theoretical frameworks related to creating this study will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.