



**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLAVERY AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
ILLUSTRATED ON *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (2016) MOVIE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on analyzing the relationship between slavery and racial discrimination illustrated in *The Birth of a Nation* movie by Nate Parker. This paper has two purposes, the first purpose is to explain how slavery happen to all black characters. Meanwhile, the second purpose is to analyze how racial discrimination was experienced by all black characters in the movie. In analyzing, this paper used the qualitative research method. The movie script *The Birth of a Nation* was to be the primary data. Furthermore, several supporting data taken from books, journals, e-journals, and internet sites were to be the secondary data. Whereas, the result of this study has proved that all black characters in *The Birth of a Nation* movie were enslaved such as be planters, carpenters, laborers, and servants by white people. Not only were enslaved, but they also experienced racial discrimination treatment such as injured, tortured even killed, and raped. The racial discrimination that happened to them was indicated as the effects of slavery or as the consequence to be slaves.

Keywords: *Slavery; Racial Discrimination; Blacks*

ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini fokus pada analisis hubungan antara perbudakan dan diskriminasi rasial yang diilustrasikan pada film *The Birth of a Nation* yang di sutradarai oleh Nat Parker. Penelitian ini memiliki dua tujuan, tujuan pertama yaitu menjelaskan bagaimana perbudakan terjadi pada semua karakter kulit hitam. Sedangkan, tujuan kedua yaitu menganalisis bagaimana diskriminasi rasial terjadi pada semua karakter kulit hitam di film. Di analisis, penelitian ini menggunakan metode qualitative. Skrip film *The Birth of a Nation* menjadi data utama. Selanjutnya, data pendukung yang diambil dari buku, jurnal, jurnal digital dan situs internet menjadi data kedua. Sementara itu, hasil penelitian ini membuktikan jika semua karakter kulit hitam di perbudak seperti menjadi penanam, tukang kayu, pekerja dan pembantu. Tidak hanya diperbudak, tetapi mere juga menerima tindakan diskriminasi rasial seperti di dilukai, disiksa bahkan dibunuh dan diperkosa. Tindakan diskriminasi yang terjadi pada mereka terindikasi sebagai efek dari perbudakan atau konsekuensi mereka menjadi para budak.*

Kata Kunci: *Perbudakan; Diskriminasi Rasial; Orang Kulit Hitam*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature consists of novels, stories, letters, biographies, and history (Junaid, 2013). It is also a communication tool to express or convey an idea, imagination, and thought in a form of literary works. It is made beautifully by the originator (Isariyawat et al., 2020). Reading literary works more than understanding the meaning will open the reader's point of view. It happens because the literary works were created to describe human life, including cultural, political, and

economic situations. At the same time, it can also revive the emotions and feelings of readers that arise when understanding literary works.

Discussing literary works will always be related to sociology because literary works created by authors will always reflect social and cultural issues. Sociology deals with human phenomena as well as literature. In other words, an image of the author was resulted from a human's life expressed through literary works (Mursalim 2019) so that both of them could not be separated. Thus, it means that sociology and culture are part of literature. They have a mutual relationship about human life.

Because of that mutual relationship, there are many studies using literature to analyze social phenomena in human life. This study also took social issues reflected in literary works. The topic of this study is slavery and racial discrimination. The world knows slavery and racial discrimination are social issues, that happen in real life. The historical notion tells some stories about Negro slavery as recorded in African American history books. Born as slaves are like a curse for them that makes Black's life is full of struggles. They fight to get freedom from hatred, antagonism, and harm from Whites.

Several facts are revealed about the status of black existence at that time. In the reality, the Whites colony never assume that Negroes have a similar status to them. They are always treated differently and considered lower than white. Even, the black status in English colonies exists inside of circle discrimination (Degler 2009). In the 1600-1630s emergence of slavery in the laws and at the same time black people start distinguished getting discrimination by white colonies whereas they are a servant or free. Those indications proved blacks are mostly treated inferior by whites although their statuses are freemen or not a slave. Degler (1959) also said if that black status exists inside discrimination. It means that discrimination happens caused effect from slavery.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that slavery and discrimination are related to each other. In order to analyze that relation, this study took *The Birth of a Nation* movie as the object of this study. This movie is about slavery and the action of discrimination toward the black race in the United State. *The Birth of a Nation* is a movie that tells about black and white people who live in Southampton, Virginia. They were enslaved and got discrimination because of their status as slaves. Thus, this study was intended to analyze the interconnection between slavery and racial discrimination depicted in *The Birth of The Nation*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Slavery

Slavery began from 1619 to 1865 so that it lasted for 246 years (Feagin 2020). In the 1620-the 1630s when the first arrival of slaves in Virginia, at that time the blacks were not called slaves but rather called Negro servants or free. In 1640-the 1650s, they were already called slaves (Vaughan 1989). The word "Slaves" was be accepted and spread largely in Whites colonies. According to Paul Finkelman the Spanish and Portuguese, who were to be the first to recognize slavery in the New World, the first shipping of Columbus in 1492 spread slavery to other colonies. The first slave trade departs from west to east, at the same time Christopher Columbus took 500 Carib Indians to Spain in 1495. Spanish early enslaved Turks, Arabs, and Africans. The Indians were the last brought into the New World. When the Indians were being enslaved, their populations decreased drastically. Most of them die, attacked by disease, tiring of overwork, and brutality. As an impact, they brought Africans to become their next colonies to be enslaved (Finkelman 2012).

It is not to be a public secret again if all people assume that slavery in the United States is a legal institution of human trade. The brutality of African slavery has been recorded in historical

traces. The south plantation prosperity develops rapidly in the 18th century which make the number of Negroes increase. It opens bigger access that slaves exist in South colony (Farley 1968). He also stated that the main factor increasing slaves are supported by farming production and the plantation that rapidly develop. In the beginning, rice plantations indeed need many slaves to be the gang labor that will be employed. Subsequently, in cotton planting season the total slaves are more needed again to be cotton pickers in a large field.

A slave is defined as a person who must comply with the domination of other people (Finkelman 2012). This means that there are two groups with different social classes, the upper class who are the Whites, and the lower class who are the Blacks as slaves. Finkelman also said that slavery is considered as a system of ownership such as property and they are also employed with full of coercion and oppression as labor exploitation.

Spanish and Portuguese were the colony that takes slavery and spread this culture to the other colony. In the beginning, they took Arabs, Turks, Africans and the last is Indians as their enslavement mainland. Many Indians died which is caused by brutality, or diseases. The Africans were brought to replace the Indians. Many reasons why Africans are chosen to replace Indians. It is caused Indians to have a small population and have fewer skills to survive. Thus, Africans had better health than Indians. Even though both of them were easily attacked by diseases but Africans were still able to survive their life from death. Hereafter, Indians understood the white land so well, that they were afraid that Indians will be back in their native land. They also assume who had the darkest skin color must be enslaved. In addition, the African government also support the practice of slavery by collecting women, men, and children who will be sold in the slaves' trade (Tubbs 2020).

The African slaves were taken and transported with an American ship, they would be used for labor exploitation in tobacco, coffee, sugar, and cotton plantations. The profit from the slave trade was used to help Denmark, The United States, Britain, Netherlands, France, and Europe's economic growth. The journey was famous because the brutality traversed the Atlantic Ocean known as Middle Passage. African slaves were tied together in chains were placed in the cargo hold of wooden ships and carried across the seas. The slaves sat and were chained up for weeks on the ship, some of them were sick and had a bad condition, mostly 15% of slaves were dead in the journey. Arriving in America slaves were brought to plantations to be auctioned off, they were stripped naked and their bodies examined to determine their selling value (Hammond et al. 2019). The slave trade was considered as a trade-in good where goods had to be traded. The consequences they received from slavery were that they were whipped, beaten and chained, separated from their families, or deprived of their real names and even all slaves who had passed through the Atlantic would not be able to return to Africa (Kaye 2015).

2. Racial Discrimination

Race can be interpreted as human classification becoming some groups based on their differences. The classification of a racial group is divided based on hair, skin color, face shape, genes, etc. The most striking difference is in the human skin color.

In the first census in 1790, The United States divided humans based on their population into four types: Native Americans, free women, free men, and slaves. In 1890 they had a new classification as white, black, Indian, Japanese, Indian, Chinese. Furthermore, Carolus Linnaeus categorizes humans into four: Asian (yellow, low spirits, greedy), American (red, emotional, dominated), African (black, weak, lazy), Europa (white, critical, powerful). Africans are contrasting differences from Americans. This also happens in real life that Americans confidently prefer their position and status is higher than Africans. Americans create a stereotype against

Africans that they are lazy, stupid, and lowly race (Kartika et.al 2017). Those stereotypes made Africans discriminated against and became the biggest race who experienced it.

Discrimination is always related to the black race. The meaning of discrimination itself is. Discrimination is generally defined as treating someone differently from the other depending on ethnicity and race that they are having (Pager 2008). Whereas, another definition defined racial discrimination as an action of limiting someone's access and an action classified humans based on color, race, nationality, ethnicity, and descent. Those indications happen to intend to destroy, eliminate and oppress someone's human rights in the context of social, economic, cultural, and political (Bharat 2003).

In general, racial discrimination is defined as unequal treatment by a group of people based on race and ethnicity owned by a group of people who have a different race. While more specifically, racial discrimination can be interpreted as a bad attitude, judgment, and unfair treatment that is intentionally done to someone based on race and person's skin color (Chang and Tan 2017). Black female slaves had twice the burden of accepting discrimination by whites. They are not only employed and tortured like male slaves but they are also getting sexual crimes and rape (Bharat 2003).

Someone who experiences racial discrimination seems stressed and has a feeling down. Overstress which is having by someone can harm their mental health (Mays et al. 2007). This thing happens caused so many bad attitudes that were experienced by them. Thus, mental health disorders such as depression are dangerous for human life. It can motivate someone to do self-harm. Some effects are received from discrimination on mental health such as always feeling down, less happiness and less pleasure in life, overstress, depression, and anxiety disorder (Chang & Tan, 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative method in which the data were not in numbers but they were in the form of sentences. The qualitative method used descriptions and sentences to analyze human experiences based on the subject's perspective (Mohajan 2018). In this case, the qualitative research method was used to answer the problem formulation and produce a result from *The Birth of a Nation* movie analysis.

The data organizing in this study divided into five steps, those are: 1) Watching the movie, the purpose is to achieve the deep meaning of the movie, 2) Reading the movie script, the purpose is to make sure the movie action with a script written is similar, 3) Identifying the data, this step used to answer the problem formulation so, the data on the object matched with supporting references data. 4) Classifying the data, this step was classified all the data into an appendix table. 4) Reducing the data, the data were not needed better reduce to make the reader easier in understand the paper.

The last method is analyzing the data. This study used a descriptive technique in analyzing the data. The descriptive technique is supported by using descriptions, statements, and citations. This final project analysis resulted from a case in the movie and the supporting references. The result was put in Chapter IV. Meanwhile, the supporting data was put in the Appendix table.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses the issue of slavery and its relation to racial discrimination in *The Birth of a Nation* movie. The movie told about African-Americans who were slaves and got

discrimination because of their status. Discrimination was experienced as a consequence to be slaves.

1. Slavery

The followings are data depicting the slavery issue in the movie.

On Nat's small hands as they feebly pick cotton, following them as they stuff blood speckled cotton into the long sack (00:15:40-00:16:00).

In this quotation, it was explained that Nat, a ten years old boy who was born from a slave family, should pick up the cotton every day as ordered by his master. Here, Nat was picking the cotton under the hot sun in the very wide field. Nat picked the cotton till his finger was punctured by thorns on the cotton tree. Even though Nat felt pain, he did not stop picking up the cotton until the cotton sack was full of cotton. It is because he would get punishment from his master if he did not do his job.

Another situation depicting slavery is when some African Americans were so busy in the morning. Some of them were shaping a piece of metal with hammer, fed a donkey, cooked in the kitchen, and worked on the farm. They were exploited for working without having enough time to take a rest. This depicted is aligned with what Finkelman stated that slavery is a system of property ownership or labor exploitation (2012).

2. Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is defined as equal treatment which did by a group of people to the other different grub person because of the differences in race and ethnicity (Pager 2008). Based on Pager's statement, he stated that racial discrimination referred to differentiated attitudes towards others based on racial and ethnic differences. Related to the definition of racial discrimination based on Finkelman. Here is a movie action that illustrates that definition.

Just then, Randall's daughter Lilly (9) emerges from inside. She dons a white dress with a matching ribbon in her hair. As she gleefully descends the stairs, we notice a tweed rope in her grip. We follow its length to the opposite end to find. It is tied around the neck of a nine years slave girl. The slave child giggles as she follows Lilly to the front yard where they frolic through a game of following the leader. Angel on Nat who watches on, abashed (00:42:06-00:42:16).

In this part of the movie, Nat was being in a white's home with Samuel (his master). When Nat was waiting for Samuel, he looked around and found a little girl (a white kid) who was playing with a little black girl. Their age was looked similar. Nat was so sad to see how a white girl treated the black girl. The white girl run while holding a rope that was tied to the black girl's neck. The black girl was considered a horse and followed the white's order. It was probably, a white girl who saw how white people around treated black people badly or her family taught her to treat black people as she liked because they were slaves. Related to the data above, what the white girl had done showed an unequal action to the black girl. The black girl did not treat as a normal human who had the same status as her. This action indicates racial discrimination as racial discrimination is defined as the negative attitudes, judgment, or unfair treatment by others due to one's racial identity or skin color (2017).

Another example of discrimination in the movie was when Nat accompanied Samuel, his master, to buy something. He left Nat alone and suddenly he saw a white boy fell down his doll. He tried to help him pick up the doll. However, when he handed it to the boy, the boy's father cursed him and asked him for not talking with them because he thought Nat was going to commit crime to his son and wife because he was black. According to Chang and Tan (2017), racial discrimination is an act of false accusations to an inferior racial group, limiting their access and the number of minorities, and neglecting the contribution of minorities. Related to this definition,

the father made a false accusation to Nat because he was black. Even he did not give chance for Nat to speak. Based on the explanation above, it is supported that slavery is closely related to racial discrimination as stated by Taufik and Husniar (2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in this study, there are two points concluded. First is the African American characters in the movie experienced slavery in which they were exploited to work based on their master's order and did not get sufficient time to rest. Second, the fact that they were African Americans that was closely identified as slaves makes them get discrimination. Slavery and discrimination are indicated as a cause-and-effect relation.

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