

ABSTRACT

African Americans have been receiving racial oppression from white Americans for a very long time. White oppression towards people of color undoubtedly affects the life of African Americans in many aspects. The perpetuating oppression towards people of color eventually causes psychological effects. Internalized racism is one of psychological effects people of color experience. In Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*, internalized racism is depicted through Jefferson, a 21-year-old black man. He is wrongfully accused and sentenced to death by electrocution. During his trial, his white public attorney claims that killing Jefferson is like killing a hog. This study explores the portrayal of internalized racism experienced by Jefferson and the way he deals with it. Basic tenets of critical race theory proposed by Delgado and Stefancic as well as patterns of internalized racism by Suzanne Lipsky are applied to investigate the issue. This study reveals that everyday racism and social construction of race are present in the novel, and they influence Jefferson to develop several patterns of internalized racism, such as the pattern of individual relations in which Jefferson expresses his feelings of anger, fear, frustration and powerlessness towards people who are close to him. This study also reveals that it is the black community who provides support for Jefferson to gain his confidence and die with dignity. This study concludes that togetherness is the key for people of color to fight back racial oppression, and through writing they can speak up the unspoken things.

Keywords: *identity, institutionalized racism, internalized racism, racism*