

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is an aesthetic work that presents the imitation of human life. By literature, people know how to behave and learn many values that do not seem exist in their daily life. Moreover, the most important is the valuable message that can be found in it. In other hand, the most important thing is the message that can be found in literature. In Outline of Literature, Jones (1968:1) states that literature is simply another way we can experience the world around us through our imagination. It is an ideal thought of the author's opinion of social conditions. Furthermore, we can briefly conclude that there is a strong relationship between literature, life, and society. Many people say that literature is a reflection of social condition. As the reflection of social condition, an author creates literature, for instance novel, to express and to reveal the certain society with its phenomenon and problem.

Racial discrimination has a very long history in the United States. Especially when it comes in the Jim-Crow Era. For example in this novel, which entitled *The Nickel Boys*, written by Colson Whitehead, which is the Pulitzer Prize winner in 2020, it can be seen that blacks are facing a greater degree of discrimination. This occurrence is often to be occurred by looking on skin color. The United States of America is known as a country that prioritizes the principle of individual freedom for all people. The phrase “*Freedom in America*” and the

phenomenon of the American dream already spread around the world and become a quality highly desired by many non-Americans. However, in contrast with the condition of America as a country of freedom, the history of United States cannot be separated with the history of enslavement. In addition, the United States of America is a symbol of white supremacy. Its history started with genocide of another race and enslavement of people of color. The enslavement happened for a long time period in the United States of America until the end of 19th century. The end of slavery ends with union victory in the Civil War. In the middle of 19th century, many Americans agree that slavery is the cause of the war. From the statement above, African Americans believed that if the Northern States won the Civil War, slavery would be ended. This belief has made many African Americans joined Northern States Military Units.

In this paper, the Philomena Essed's (1991) concept of Everyday Racism will be used as a theoretical framework to introduce racial criticism perspectives in understanding the concept of racism which happens among the African Americans. Everyday racism that occurs from a capable perspective is indeed considered not good, this has been valued as a complex social phenomenon. There were many forms of racism in America at that time either openly or covertly felt by black people. Racism that occurred in Jim-Crow Era was induced by the deeply embedded history of racism in the country.

Tolerance, equality, and justice are almost nonexistent. Blacks have begun to feel ordinary about racism that has occurred so they choose not to fight back and surrender to be discriminated. These occurrences must have attracted a major

impact on the mental health of those who are the victims of racism. In everyday life, racial segregation is surprisingly something that must be stopped. Racism segregation should not be entered and accepted into our daily lives. Destructive actions that destroy the social order and carve deeper divisions between ‘us’, are considered normal by white people. These actions need to be stopped because of differences in skin color, race and ethnicity should be accepted.

Related to the history of African American literature in the Jim Crow-era explained above, racism, discrimination, and racial hatred still become a major issue in America. The cultural practice of White people dominate the people of color still happening until today. Thus, from the explanation above, the researcher is interested to examine about racial hatred and inequality as the result of cultural racism to African American as represented in the novel *The Nickel Boys* (2019). This novel takes setting in Jim-Crows Era and tells about Nickel Academy which contains many racism problems. This novel contains cultural racism issue between African American and white people.

In addition, there are some sources provide explanations related to the racial discrimination, also explain that many things that occurred in literature might not be expected to reflect a variety of races or ethnicities. The main thing to be feared is whether victims immediately report the discrimination that has occurred, and whether the best steps have been taken to end the forms of discrimination that have occurred. For a long time the United States has a long history of racial discrimination, this occurs in several ethnicities or races. For example in some movies and novels, we can see that black people are facing a greater degree of

discrimination. Black people are considered more dangerous than white people. This is related to the assessment of degrees based on skin color. In this article, we use Philomena Essed's (1991) concept of Everyday Racism as a theoretical framework to introduce critical perspectives in understanding racial discrimination among the African diaspora in America. Everyday racism that occurs from a capable perspective is indeed considered not good, this has been valued as a complex social phenomenon.

This study will discuss the racial inequality that happens in *The Nickel Boys*, especially the issues of discrimination that occur with black people. Using the African American theory *everyday racism* to analyze the racial discrimination experience of the main character in *The Nickel Boys* can explain more clearly about the discrimination that occurred in American at that time. Discrimination that occurs every day always happens repeatedly because of the same things. This is due to whites who feel they are indigenous and have more strength than black people. Based on previous research, black people are the victims of the most discrimination compared to whites. To raise the awareness of all races or ethnicities to respect each other and not feel the strongest is an obligation, so that equality is intertwined.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

In order to examine the racial discrimination issues experienced by Curtis Elwood in *The Nickel Boys*, the writer formulates the following question :

1. How is the racial discrimination towards Curtis Elwood expressed in the novel?
2. How is the oppression of Curtis Elwood experienced in the novel?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

From the statement of the problems above, it could be stated that the study aims to:

1. To analyze how the racial discrimination is expressed through its main character, Curtis Elwood.
2. To analyze how the oppression of Curtis Elwood is experienced in the novel.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer hopes that through this study, the readers can understand more about the meaning of racial discrimination issues as depicted in Colson Whitehead's *Nickel Boys*. The writer examines the illustration of the contrasting view point that occurs in the main character's experience of *everyday racism* that leads to the character's behavior, so the reader will understand more about the meaning of the text and the pedagogical aspect related to *everyday racism*. Through this study, the writer also expects to give an obvious vision to adolescence to be inspired by the moral values contained in the novel. This study is also expected to make a contribution to Universitas Airlangga, especially for students of English Literature, Faculty of Humanity focusing on the African American Study. This study can provide inspiration for other students who also would like to conduct research on the same issue, theory, or object.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

African-American : An American of African and especially of black African descent.

Racial inequality : A disparity in opportunity and treatment that occurs as a result of someone's race.

Everyday racism : A racist practice, meaning racism as common societal behavior. (Philomena Essed, 1991)

Racism : The unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discrimination practices (Tyson 2006, 360).

Racial discrimination : An occurrence when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or immigrant status