

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The film industry is on the way to being inclusive and diverse, where before is a (and somewhat, still) a white-dominated industry. African-Americans and Asian-American may already have representation for a while, nevertheless, most of the time, of roles that non-white actors get are either borderline racist or super stereotypical. Back in the 1900s, way before people of color were widely accepted in most industries, film productions still used white actors for non-white roles, which forced them to use blackface for supposed black roles and yellowface for supposed Asian roles. An example of the use of yellowface in a movie is *The Good Earth* (1937), where white actors were painted “Asian features” to look Asian, and the film was mentioned and is a significant role in the limited series that this study analyzes. Now, inclusivity and representation of races other than white are almost essential when done the right way of course (Brunn-Bevel 2019).

Hollywood is a white-dominated industry, filled with white producers, directors, and actors, it produces white-centered movies (Brunn-Bevel 2019). Even with non-white actors, most Hollywood movies are still made by white people. Does ‘racism’ still exist though in this day in age? if the lack of representation, countless whitewashed movies, and non-white actors struggling to get roles counts as racism, then yes, it still exists. It may not be as prominent as it was in the past, where African-Americans, in general, were not yet entirely accepted in a lot of

places. White-only hotels, diners, shops, still existed for African-Americans from 1849 to 1950s after the laws got overthrown by the civil war act (Butler 2010). While in the film industry, it was not expected (or not at all) for African-Americans to get lead character roles, instead, it was common for African-American actresses to get roles as nannies or housemaids for the white actors. Even the first Academy Award for an African-American actor was for a nanny role in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Sometimes, even with non-white actors, it is still a white-produced movie. An example is *Mulan* (2020), a live-action remake by Disney that stars only Asian actors as it should be since it's a Chinese story, but the producers and directors are still all white. An infamous movie that is not about racism but is all about confronting the lack of Asian representation in Hollywood is *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), a Hollywood movie with a full Asian cast (and writer and director!). A film that is an example of the lack of representation said is the film *Aloha* (2015), a film based on a true story. The movie received backlash saying it was "whitewashing" since a main character in the story that is supposed to be Asian, was played by a white person. However, white people being the creators of 'Asian' movies may not be the main problem as long as they make sure that they are portraying Asians correctly, the issue is that because white people are given the jobs of creating the 'Asian' movies, it removes the chance for actual Asian filmmakers to earn their place in the filmmaking industry (L. Smith, Pieper and Choueiti 2017). With a movie as close as 2015, this proves that the representation of people of color in Hollywood is still lacking and is still a long way to go.

In this study, the writer analyzes a Netflix limited series, *Hollywood* (2020). It was released worldwide in June of 2020 on the streaming service with 7 episodes, each episode being 45 minutes. Its recognition initially started because it was produced and written by Ryan Murphy, infamous already for his creations such as *American Horror Story* (2011-2020), *Glee* (2009-2015), and *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010). Since its release, the response has been mixed, considering it is not entirely fiction. Some say it is a great feel-good show, while some say it is “too good to be true”, and almost offensive to the actual reality. It has since been nominated for 12 Primetime Emmys and won 2 of them. *Hollywood* (2020) centers the Hollywood industry post World War II, so imagine Transatlantic accents and actors in vests and fedoras. It is a reimagined reality, so it is fiction but with a touch of historical accuracy, which is what makes this show interesting to analyze. Some infamous actors that have pioneered the representation of people of color in Hollywood have appeared in this show, such as Anna May Wong, who was the first Chinese-American actress to have gained international recognition, and Hattie McDaniel who was the first African-American actress ever to have won an Academy Award, the biggest awarding event for the film industry, who are notorious for rarely nominating African-American actors (Bhat 2020).

Many films in the past are similar in the sense that it tries to tackle the subject of racism. *Moonlight* (2016), an Academy Award-winning movie about an African-American boy struggling with his sexuality while also dealing with racism, among other things, is an example of so. *Loving* (2016), a biographical film about Richard and Mildred Loving who were arrested in 1958 for their interracial marriage, which

ended with the Supreme court declaring that the law of prohibition of interracial marriage as unconstitutional. But if you may realize, most of these movies only focus on one certain race, it's either just African-American or just Asians (not to discredit them with the word 'just'). While *Hollywood* (2020), focuses on both African-Americans and Asian-Americans, and how both races struggle in the industry.

This phenomenon could be caused by many reasons, but the most possible reason could be the systemic racism, a system that has negatively affected non-white Americans whether socially or economically. This of course does not only apply to the film industry, as non-white Americans have been struggling in other institutions such as academic and government institutions for centuries (Hennekam and Syed 2018). As it is important to understand the history and the reasons behind it, the theory that the writer uses to analyze *Hollywood* (2020) is Joe R. Feagin's Systemic Racism: The Theory of Oppression. Feagin's theory of systemic racism is to interpret the racialized character, structure, and development of this society (Feagin 2006), especially in the United States, where *Hollywood* (2020) was set in. According to Feagin's theory, the United States is almost notorious for having very distinctive racial oppression, considering it is a country built on racial oppression. *Hollywood* (2020) is set after slavery, but of course, racism is very much still prominent, maybe much more for African-Americans than Asian-Americans. The reason why this theory fits with this research is because the main issue in *Hollywood* (2020) is racism for colored Americans, which is caused by systemic racism. Another theory that may be similar is Orientalism by Edward Said, which is

generally the theory of how white Europeans feel superior to the non-whites, such as the Middle Eastern and other Eastern countries.

Many studies explore the racism and lack of representation of colored people in films, especially African-Americans, given their history in the country. Mahayoni (2019) analyzed the systemic racism towards Hispanics in the movie *McFarland, USA* (2015) using the same theory as Joe R. Feagin, the writer found that the movie promotes the American Dream as a solution to racial inequality for the Hispanics, and it concludes that through hard work, racism can be fought. Almost similar to *Hollywood* (2020), where the whole point of the mini-series is to fight racism and discrimination to achieve their dreams - no matter the cost. *Institutional racism in the film industry: a multilevel perspective* (2018), a study by Hennekam and Syed, studies the institutional racism that happens in the film industry using a multilevel perspective. While this study is out-of-text research, it is still to note its findings that the racism that happens behind the scenes is in some cases because of the high-power structures and castings through networking instead of pure talent scouting.

Though the writer argues that the racism that happens in the film industry does not just stop at that, through *Hollywood* (2020), the writer sees that discrimination comes from many factors, even though most are systematic, a lot of racism comes from a white person's ignorance and feel of superiority, which is the case for the racist characters on the mini-series. In some cases, the lack of representation and racism could be because of the fear of change, and the

consequences that come with it. But of course, with the change, there are bound to be pros and consequences.

To conduct this study, the writer collects the data by watching and sampling each of the 7 episodes of *Hollywood* (2020). Each scene that corresponds with the issue of racism towards African-Americans and Asian-Americans, especially the selected characters that will be the main scopes, will be selected and marked as evidence for the further analysis of this research.

Through this study, the writer hopes to understand more about the background of the events that occurred to the African-American and Asian-American characters in *Hollywood* (2020). As the time frame of *Hollywood* (2020) was post World War II but created in very recent times, this study focuses on both events in the 21st century as well as the time frame of when *Hollywood* (2020) was placed to emphasize the not-so-different reality African-Americans and Asian-Americans still experience to this day.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background, the problems to be asked are:

1. How is the racism towards African-Americans and Asian-Americans portrayed in *Hollywood* (2020)?
2. How do the African-American and Asian-American characters negotiate the racist treatment?

1.3 Objective of the Study

From the statement of the problem, the writer would like to:

1. Examine the racism towards African-Americans and Asian-Americans as portrayed in *Hollywood* (2020)
2. Analyze how African-Americans and Asian-Americans deal and conquer with the challenges they have to face in the film industry as portrayed in *Hollywood* (2020)

1.4 Significance of the Study

While many other studies focus on racism in communities, government institutions, and so on, this study focuses on the racism within the film industry, a huge industry, and a very big role in creating the movies that many English Department students use to analyze. Using Joe R. Feagin's theory of oppression, the findings of this study will contribute more perspectives about African-Americans and Asian-Americans, and how they are/were treated in the film industry. The writer hopes that this study will inspire to open up new ways to analyze race for further studies in the future.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Racial discrimination : The discrimination against a certain racial group
(Feagin 2006)

Film Industry	: The industry that consists of a group of filmmakers that distribute films technologically and commercially (Corrigan and White 2012)
Systemic Racism	: A centuries-old system that oppresses non-white Americans (Feagin 2006)
Oppression	: The belittling of a group of people that denies them from freedom(Feagin 2006)
Hollywood	: The American Film Industry (Merriam-Webster n.d.)