

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Racism may manifest itself in a variety of ways, from personal experiences to institutional/structural conditions and practices (Lukachko, Hatzenbuehler, and Keyes 2014). Personal experiences refer to individual's encounter with people who are prejudiced, whereas institutional conditions are the rules, laws, culture embedded in the system that give rise to racism. Unequal treatments among African Americans often occur in the United States, embedded in the institutions that we encounter every day (Pumariiega and Rothe 2020). This unequal treatment is known as *institutionalized racism* or *systemic racism*, in which institutions that society operates hold racist policies and practices (Tyson 2006). First coined by Carmichael and Hamilton, institutionalized racism "relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices."

Institutionalized racism can shape in many forms. Gooden (2014) highlighted what she referred as "saturation of racial inequalities" consisting intergenerational effects of structural racism in six areas; housing, environment, health, education, criminal justice, and economic well-being. For example, it can be visibly seen in housing areas where Black people and people of color are likely to experience lower homeownerships for decades in the United States (Solomon, Maxwell and Castro 2019). According to Passy (2021), the percentage of African Americans who own a home has decreased to 40.6 percent, dropping seven percentage points from a decade ago. Meanwhile, white ownership is significantly greater, approximately

74%. Even though any actions of racial discrimination in institutions are declared illegal, racial disparities are still widespread in major areas and tolerated by most whites (Feagin 2006).

In the 21st century, institutionalized racism is still a prominent issue in the United States, especially during Donald Trump's presidency who rejected the fact that African Americans often receive unequal treatments, specifically police misconduct (Peters 2020), which can be referred as which inappropriate acts by police officers on the part of any law enforcement that is illegal or immoral (Champion 2001), and told the police to injure suspects during arrests (Berman 2017). Police officers in cities across the United States participate in unjustified killings, extreme beatings, lethal shocks, and unnecessary harsh physical treatment towards people of color (Collins 1998). The rate of African Americans are likely to be killed by police is 2.5 times more than the Whites (Mock 2019). Even though there have been demands for equal rights, black people are often targeted by police officers. In their study, Johnson, et al. (2019) state that "increasing diversity among officers by itself is unlikely to reduce racial disparity in police shootings."

This unfair treatment leads to a movement as a means to oppose racial discrimination against institutions and police brutality, known as "Black Lives Matter" (BBC News 2020). The rise of "Black Lives Matter" movement, which began as a hashtag on social media, was created and circulated in response to the George Zimmerman is acquitted in the case of fatal shooting to Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American who was unarmed (Hillstrom 2018, CNN Editorial Research 2021, Daley 2021). In the present, Black Lives Matter has developed into

a force in the United States that is demanding reform (Lebron 2017), becoming an important voice in the fight for racial equality. According to Campbell (2021), Black Lives Matter protests have proven impacts in the fall in lethal use-of-force, leading to the declining of police killings from 2014 to 2019 for about 15% to 20%. However, despite the movement's significance, it does not stop police brutality to come to an end.

The depiction of institutionalized racism, specifically police violence can be seen from the movie *See You Yesterday* (2019). Directed by Stefon Bristol and produced by Spike Lee, this film (2019) is an adaptation of a short film under the same title released in 2017 (Robertson 2019). Packed with the combination of science fiction and social documentary racial issues, *See You Yesterday* (2019) tells about two New Yorkers teenagers, C.J. and Sebastian, who are experimenting on the invention of time-travel machine using backpacks as a means to apply scholarships in the future. When her brother was wrongfully convicted and killed by a cop, C.J.'s motive changes, in which she becomes determined travel back in time with Sebastian to save her brother from being killed. The journey, however, does not go smoothly; the pair encounters challenges and more conflicts, putting their lives in jeopardy. Ultimately, the movie points out a bitter truth that turning back in time cannot change the reality black people have to face.

Upon writing the storyline with Fredrica Bailey, Stefon Bristol asked himself, "If I was a brilliant young person who lost a loved one, what would I do?" (Anderson 2019). The reason behind of the creation of *See You Yesterday* is solely to raise awareness about institutionalized racism, specifically police brutality,

happening among young bright Black teenagers (Guest Writer 2019), that is two teenagers who are intrigued in science. Stefon Bristol stated that he wants to portray “a different side of young Black teenagers” that has never been depicted on film (Wojnar 2020). He also said, “every time you see young Black teens on screen, it’s always a basketball or football player or someone in sports or they are a gang member or doing drugs and I wanted folks to see something different” (Guest Writer 2019). Bristol also mentioned how the cycle of police brutality is still prone to happen even in the 21st century.

The movie *See You Yesterday* marked Bristol’s first movie debut as a movie director, in which earned him Best First Screenplay on Independent at the 2020 Film Independent Spirit Awards with his co-writer Fredrica Bailey (Rosario 2020). It is listed as one of the “Best Non-Theatrical Releases” in 2019 by Online Film Critics Society (Online Film Critics Society 2019). This film has also created sparks to movie critics. Benjamin Lee, a film critic gave a critical acclaim, ...a smart, often ingenious, new film that takes a depressingly familiar scenario and then adds some time travel to the mix.” Another film critic, Luke Whiston (2019) also sees the film *See You Yesterday* as “an ambitious sci-fi in its own right, and a worthy entry into the canon of black representation.”

This film *See You Yesterday* (2019) is worth to be discussed because of its racial discourse institutionalized racism and African Americans’ struggle as a part of the minority, and how police officers have prejudice especially among teenagers. Moreover, this film takes on flash-forward narrative technique in which the characters are repeatedly traveling back to the past with various racial

discrimination experienced by the characters on each time-travel journey. Therefore, the film *See You Yesterday* (2019) comprises the struggles experienced by African Americans and how the institutions are still attached to racism.

Other movies that display racism within police institution is *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), a film based on a true story, about the first African American detective in Colorado Springs Police Department who joined Ku Klux Klan. In the movie, it can be seen how the cops looked down on black people, falsely accusing them for crimes they did not do. *Queen and Slim* (2019), directed by Melina Matsoukas, a drama/romance that takes on a black couple, Slim and Queen, who had to defend themselves when the police officer started to use brutality for minor traffic by shooting him. This movie portrays how black people have no chance to speak up and reveal the effort of black people to defend their race.

To analyze *See You Yesterday* film, the writer will apply theory of oppression from Joe R. Feagin. According to Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. Feagin states, “For a long period now, white oppression of Americans of color has been systemic—that is, it has been manifested in all major societal institutions.” He also argues that police brutality is a problem that rarely experienced by white Americans of any background, and the officers are often involved in brutality against blacks. In other words, officers in the United States abuse their power to perform violence towards the minority – African Americans. Black people are often falsely accused by the law enforcement, stereotyped that they are “most atrocious acts of... rape, assault, and murder” (Feagin 2006).

There have been several studies focusing on institutionalized racism, specifically on police brutality within various media. The writer collects articles and theses that can be used as related studies that have similar issues to *See You Yesterday* (2019). In the article “Police Brutality, Over-Policing, and Mass Incarceration in African American Film” by Ryan Westerbeck, the study examines the role of police in African American films by using five examples: *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), *Set It Off* (1996), *Training Day* (2001), and *Get Out* (2017) by analyzing the accuracy of the depictions of police officers. This research suggests that African American men are often more oppressed in comparison to women in the films. The writer suggests that in the movie *See You Yesterday*, there is still a significant issue that oppression towards black community is often targeted towards men rather than women.

The second article entitled “R Is for Race, Not Rocket: Black Representation in American Science Fiction Cinema” written by Adilifu Nama revolves around black representation in American science fiction movies. The study found that American sci-fi films have minor issues regarding to race, and racial issues are considered non-existent. This is because issue of race is not believed as the prominent event. However, this study argues that in the movie of science-fiction, *See You Yesterday* (2019), race films can be combined with science-fiction genre.

In the thesis written by Wayan Swari Mahayoni, “Negotiating Systemic Racism through American Dream in *McFarland, USA* (2015) movie” unfolds how the movie *McFarland* depicts racial oppression experienced by Mexican American characters and the idea of American Dream to people of color. The study discloses

that economic domination is the key of racial oppression by using J. R. Feagin's theory of oppression, which reveals racial inequality can be resisted by accomplishing and putting their effort. Another study from Ary Satyasmoko titled "Institutionalized Racism Portrayed In Nic Stone's *Dear Martin*" (2019), the writer discusses how institutionalized racism is portrayed through the novel and how African Americans react to the treatments using similar theory from this study, J R. Feagin's theory of oppression with different media. The result of the thesis concludes that African American still encounters institutionalized racism, often put in inferior positions. African Americans respond to the oppression in various ways ranging from subtle to violent. The existence of studies about institutionalized racism along with the production of media speaking of racism from year to year indicates that discrimination in institutions still occurs in the United States.

By using qualitative method, the writer explores the institutionalized racism within the film *See You Yesterday* (2019). The writer will break down the narrative structure by applying A. J. Greimas' narrative structure and analyze the portrayal of institutionalized racism through the actions, speeches, and thoughts of the characters, whereas the non-narrative elements indicating hidden messages of the movie will be elaborated by looking at the cinematography perspectives, such as camera shot and movement, angles, lighting of the highlighted scenes based on the theory of oppression from Joe R. Feagin. The supporting theory for this study is using A. J. Greimas' *Narrative Structure* to unfold the issue that lies within the film.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

Based on the background, the problems are:

1. How is institutionalized racism narrated in *See You Yesterday* (2019)?
2. To what extent does the narration of institutionalized racism in *See You Yesterday* (2019) signify the problem of police violence in the United States?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

From the statement of the problem, the writer explores to:

1. To identify the narrative structure and the portrayal of institutionalized racism in *See You Yesterday* (2019).
2. To reveal how *See You Yesterday* (2019) signifies the problem of police violence in the United States.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings will reveal additional knowledge on institutionalized racism towards Africans Americans. Racism has been continuously occurring in the United States for a long period, and there have been numerous expressions through movies as a sign of protest and the reality happening in the United States. However, even in the present, racism does not cease to keep existing, shown by the unequal treatment African Americans receive from the racist institutions that create lines between them and the Whites or the privileged ones. Police brutality is among one of the examples of unjust treatment conducted by law enforcement that leaves the

minority living in fear. Therefore, institutionalized racism remains an essential issue in the United States.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- Racial discrimination: Any “distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference” based on ethnicity, color, descent or national or ethnic origin designed or intended to nullify or obstruct the equal recognition, enjoyment or exercise of basic human rights in the areas of political, economic, social, cultural or any other area of public life. (Lerner 2014).
- African Americans: A person with “origins in any of Africa's black racial groups” (United States Census Bureau 2020).
- Narrative structure: Greimas' narrative organization to develop a literary-critical method based on Vladimir Propp's narrative theory and Sausurrian linguistics (Adams 2016).
- Institutionalized racism: Laws, customs and practices have been created that systematically represent and generate racial disparities in American society. (Jones, Dovidio and Vietze 2013).
- Police brutality: Police brutality refers to a broad spectrum of actions and activities, from verbal abuse to violence. In addition, Peak (2000) states that there is a literal concept of violence in which there is physical abuse, but verbal abuse, such as racial slurs, can also occur (Greene 2007).