

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

African Americans' history has become national history of America. Roger Daniels in his book entitled *Coming to America* year 2002 described that African slave trade existed for over four centuries. The history began with the slave trade in the past. African Americans were forced to leave Africa and move to New World or America by European colonization. From middle 15th century to 1870, about ten million people were kidnapped out of Africa; about 350,000 of them were sold in America (51).

The slave trade was a business entered into white people for profit. For Europeans colony, Africans were used as their property and forced to work and without being paid. Oftentimes, they were separated from their family members. At that time, cotton, sugar cane and slavery became the dominant commodities of Southern America economy. Africans lived in Southern America which was very rich of soil and fertile, full of large farms and huge plantations. *A History of U.S Families with a Focus on African American* showed the domination of White people in economy:

The political economy of slavery was characterized by segregation between whites and African Americans, the concentration of power

and wealth... The dominant economic activity in the region was production of agricultural products especially cotton to export to the North and to Europe (Iasewords 57)

African Americans are defined as the citizens of the United States of America who are also of African descendants. The year 1883 became the witness to the end of slavery practices to the African Americans in the United States. However, during the year of 1800s to the middle of 1900s, the practices of segregation were still commonly done to the African American people. "Jim Crow" is the popular name of the segregation policy in that era. Prior to 1888, segregated schools for African American and white children were established and African Americans were warned not to come to white school and vice versa. Segregation policy was not only applied in schools in America, but also in hotels, restaurants, parks, theaters etc (Markova 13).

In 1955, Rosa Parks was the one example of how segregated law discriminated African Americans (Friedman 32). Rosa Parks was employed as a seamstress at local department store. Rosa Parks was an African American woman who was banned to sit in the front seat of a bus because it was only white people who could sit there. However, Rosa Parks did not want to move to the back seat and stayed in the front seat and it caused her to be arrested and jailed. Her act would be set in motion a 381- day bus boycott (Friedman 46)

African Americans were against injustice by doing some acts. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 was led by Marthin Luther

King Jr. The Civil Rights Act banned discrimination in public accommodations and the Voting Rights Acts banned discrimination of African American to vote for presidential election (Friedman 52).

In 1960 African Americans did a movement called “Black Arts Movement” to reinforce their tradition in literature, music, painting etc. (Tyson 364). It was not easy to be an African American because in the United States because they lived in the place with the majority of white people who applied segregation and discrimination policy. African American did not have ability to read and write so it made them keep their tradition through oral tradition, like singing and storytelling. The contemporary documents generated about Africans were all written by slave traders, masters and other white observer (Daniels 55).

Experience as slaves and experience as the claimants of the rights made the African Americans get negative stigma from white people. African Americans did not only experience the problem of discriminations but also experienced stereotype addressed to them. The creation of stereotype about African slaves was dictated by slave owners. The slaves were banned to write and read so it created the stereotype that African Americans were uneducated people. The stereotype of African Americans is also found in children’s literature. Children’s literature is one of the media which tells about the experiences of African American children. This genre of literature lets children to know what they do not know before, especially regarding the knowledge about African Americans’ lives. Children’s

books are important to educate children with consequences across the culture, from language to politics (Norton 76).

One of the children's literature novels portraying about African American is *Sounder*. It is a story of a poor African American boy and his family. *Sounder* was written by William H. Armstrong and published in 1995. William H. Armstrong was born in 1944 in a farm in Shenandoah Valley. He became a history master at a school in Kent, Connecticut, and spent 52 years teaching ninth graders. In addition to teaching, he spent time working as a farmer, carpenter, and stone mason. He began writing self-help books for students, and in 1969, he wrote *Sounder*. His book was eventually translated into 28 languages and made into a motion picture (Scholastic). The novel received high praise from critics and won the Newbery Medal. Newberry itself is a medal awarded to American children's literature book. The award was named from John Newberry, a writer and publisher. John Newberry was interested in literature and all of his life was dedicated for children. Newberry Award was given annually to the outstanding author of children's literature (Norton 45).

Sounder is the name of the African American boy's coon dog. All of the other characters in this novel have no names. The African American family in this story is presented to start their life in difficult situation until the white people become their heroes. The main character in the novel deals with some conflicts associated with racism practices and his struggle as an African American boy. He needs helps from white people who are seen as superior than them. The main character in *Sounder* must submit to unequal treatment from the humiliations dealt

out by law officers to the life of hard labors. There is only a little hope that the parents have because of their lack of formal education. After a while the boy tries to find his father in town. All his life he only wants a book. On one of his journeys, there is a white school teacher who offers him an opportunity to live in his house and attend school.

The economic condition of the main character portrays how hard African Americans' lives in the Northern America. The African American boy's father was a sharecropper. Economic condition of a sharecropper was very bad because white people dominate what they plant so the sharecropper cannot gain their own economic power. To quote *Life in the "Promised Land": African-American Migrants in Northern Cities, 1916*:

“Most were sharecroppers, trapped in an economic system based on credit controlled by the landlords. The landlords advanced money for the supplies a sharecropper needed; the sharecropper in turn, was supposed to pay back the landlord at year's end with a portion of the crop (Eisendrath 1).

William H. Armstrong is a white but he wrote story about African Americans. There would be some speculations to suggest if we read books about African American written by white authors. To note, white people might not really understand how an African American's life actually was and how they faced racism directly. One group cannot write books about another group (Steward 184). Many white authors while writing about African Americans have a tendency to portray African Americans as bad people. This phenomenon happens

because white people subconsciously or even consciously feel that they had power to control African Americans in various aspects. They depict African American from their own perspectives and show it through literature. African American novelist, Tony Morrison, said that there is no one better than African American to talk about race and racism because African American experiences it directly (Tyson 391). Similar thing is suggested in the research conducted by Broderic. She researched how black characters are portrayed in children's literature books:

“The image of Black in children's book has historically been negative, as documented by Broderic. Her analysis was about the portrayal of Blacks in children's fiction from 1827 to 1967. She presented numerous examples of the negative and demeaning images of Blacks that had been perpetrated up to that time, making it clear that even many Blacks did appear in children's book, they were primarily to be ‘talked about’. (Sims 37)

In examining the novel, the writer uses the theory of ‘Stereotype’ and this study is hoped to be able to elaborate how an African American boy character faced many problems during Discrimination era and how he and his family are represented in the novel.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

After reading the novel and determining the topic of the study, there is one major question to rise:

How are African American characters stereotyped in children's literature entitled *Sounder* by William H. Armstrong?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In connection with the statement of problem the objectives of the study can be formulated as follows:

To elaborate how African American characters are stereotyped in children's literature entitled *Sounder* by William H. Armstrong.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The aim of this research is to increase people's attention on how white people tell a story about African Americans, especially in children's literature. This study attempts to give contribution toward the study of literature, especially for the English Department of Universitas Airlangga. The study is expected to be a motivation for further researches on other children's literatures especially to widen their understanding about African American people. As we know that children's literature has many functions, one of which is educating children.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

Scope and limitation are needed to apply in the analysis to keep on the line, focusing which issues to be analyzed so that the discussion will be thoroughly efficient. First, the issue will be limited by the novel itself or only on what is written in the text. Second, when talking about stereotype, it should be limited in a relevant sense to the stereotypes faced by the main characters in the novel. In *Sounder*, there are several issues which can be analyzed through various perspectives such as racism, i.e. unequal treatment by the white people to the

African Americans, such as white people did not give African American a chance to get education like white people, etc. After doing close reading, the writer will mainly discusses about the representation of African Americans in the novel as it was written by a white author. The writer hopes to find how the African American characters are stereotyped throughout the story in the novel. Not only focused on how African American characters are stereotyped, but this study also focused on the how white people and African American's dog are portrayed in the novel

1.6 Theoretical Background

The writer would like to use Stuart Hall's theory on stereotype. The representation of racial difference is the central of stereotype practice (Hall 257). Stuart Hall mentions several points of stereotype, they are 1) stereotype gets hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics' reduce everything about the person of those traits, exaggerated and simplify them and fix them, 2) stereotypes tends to occur where there are gross of power. Power usually directed against the subordinate group (259). White people give a value for African American people without understanding their culture or behavior first. They give value that African American are bad, cruel and so on. In other words, stereotype is how non-white people are constructed by white people. Based on Stuart Hall's, there are four points in stereotype practice: 1) The construction of 'otherness' and exclusion; 2) Stereotyping and power; 3) Power and Fantasy; 4) Fetishism. Those theories are very useful as a tool to analyze the novel which is about how white author represents the African American characters which are of different races from him/her.

1.7 Method of the Study

The primary source of the study is William H. Armstrong's novel entitled *Souder*. In the process of writing the study, the writer uses qualitative research with the following steps:

1. Doing close reading. It is very useful to help the writer find an interesting issue which will be used as the main issue for her thesis. The writer reads the novel more than once to understand about the issues, such as racism and segregation, containing in it. The writer finds out that the stereotype issues are the most interesting ones, especially those experienced by the African American character in the novel.
2. Gaining further knowledge about the topic/issues in the novel. The writer reads books, journals and articles which are related to the issue of African American stereotype. The most suitable theory to use in conducting the analysis is Stereotype Theory by Stuart Hall.
3. Analyzing the parts of the novel which is related with African American stereotype in order to answer the statement of the problem. The writer chooses important details quoted from the text to be used as evidences of her findings. The collected data is read and analyzed to support the analysis and to make a deeper understanding which is useful to answer the statement of the problem. In conducting the analysis, the writer searches for every part of the story related to the issue by reading the book,

highlighting the parts, and also taking notes and then relate them to the Stereotype theory. The writer decides to use Stereotype theory by Stuart Hall as an approach to analyze the novel. Because the issue is about the stereotype of African American characters which contains in the children's literature written by a white author, the writer has to find out the binary position between African American characters and Sounder – their dog. After finding all of the supporting parts, the writer relates those parts to the theory and other related sources. From these methods, the writer would be able to analyze the text.

4. Drawing conclusion. After the analysis is completed, the writer writes conclusion of the study and gives more understanding about the analysis conducted by her.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Children's Literature : All books written for children to be literature—excluding works such as joke books, cartoon books, and nonfiction works that are not intended to be read from front to back, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference material. Literature for youth from birth through age 13 is categorized as children's literature (Sims 15)

Stereotype : Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasp and widely recognize characteristics about a person, in this case African American's characteristic. In other words, stereotyping is how non-white people are constructed by white people (Hall 264)

African American : Citizens of the United States of America who are also of African descendants

White Author : Author who had more privilege because he/she came from white race. White race is better than all other races and should have control over all other races