

# **Racial Prejudice to Black Americans in Social Life seen in *Higher Learning* Movie by John Singleton**

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## **Abstrak**

*Amerika adalah negara multiras yang didominasi oleh bangsa kulit putih. Secara otomatis mereka merasa bahwa bangsa mereka merupakan bangsa yang memiliki status sosial tertinggi diantara bangsa lain. Kondisi ini menimbulkan berbagai macam bentuk rasisme. Hal inilah yang terjadi dalam film *Higher Learning*: Penulis tertarik mengambil film ini sebagai objek penelitian karena film ini sangat kental dengan isu rasis yang terjadi pada bangsa Afrika Amerika. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan bahwa prasangka negatif terhadap ras Afrika Amerika belum bisa dihilangkan walaupun jaman telah berubah.*

*Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kajian pustaka dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosial untuk meneliti pengaruh masa lalu yang dalam sejarah bangsa kulit hitam adalah budak dengan pergaulan mereka pada tahun 1995. Dalam pendekatan ini penulis menganalisa setiap karakter utama dan konflik yang terjadi antar tokoh akibat prasangka ras.*

*Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa pada tahun 1995 prasangka negatif terhadap suatu ras di Universitas Columbus Amerika, khususnya bangsa kulit hitam masih sulit untuk dihapuskan karena stereotype bangsa kulit hitam yang menganggap ras Afrika Amerika adalah budak yang tidak pantas untuk bergaul dengan mereka. Hal ini memberikan dampak yang buruk bagi mental serta pergaulan mereka di kampus. Prasangka negatif tersebut adalah hasil dari kebencian rasial yang masih tersisa di daerah Texas sebagai akibat dari sejarah perbudakan di Amerika Serikat. Faktanya, pada tahun 1989 bangsa Afrika Amerika mulai membuktikan bahwa mereka dapat bangkit dan sejajar dengan bangsa kulit putih. Namun, keadaan tersebut tidak mengubah mindset kulit putih Amerika agar mau menerima bangsa Afrika Amerika sebagai bagian dari warga Amerika, sehingga prasangka ras yang dialami oleh bangsa Afrika Amerika tersebut masih tetap ada sekalipun pada tahun 1995. Pada akhirnya konflik antar ras tidak dapat terelakkan.*

Kata kunci: multiras, prasangka, konflik, Universitas Columbus, *Higher Learning*

### **1. Introduction**

It is known that America is a multiracial country, which is dominated by white Americans. Automatically, they feel as a

majority group that has the highest social status among other groups. This condition makes them think that the others especially black Americans have the social status below them. That fact is one of racism

forms shown by white Americans. There are two factors that cause the racial prejudice; those are stereotype and ethnocentrism. Stereotype can be interpreted as beliefs about the characteristics of members of a group, while ethnocentrism is a pervasive sentiment. Prejudice is a predictable consequence of this nature ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the view that one particular ethnic group is somehow superior to all others.

## 2. Methodology

In conducting the research, the writer uses library research method. Library research method is method in which the writer gathered the data by reading the script of the movie, looking for the reference books that are connected to the research and browsing to the internet to get some information and articles related to the topic.

Method of approach is a reference in looking at an object. As Wellek and Warren (1977: 58) say, since the majority of student can find their source materials in libraries, knowledge of most important libraries and familiarity with catalogues as well as other reference books is undoubtedly an important equipment of almost every student of literature. By using this technique, the writer collected data and information through the books and other materials that can support the writing process of this thesis. The writer also uses sociological approach as the method to dig the nature of discrimination and condition illustrated on the movie. Sociological approach considers literature in its relationship with society as well as tells about social status, education, and other social problems in the society. According to Wellek and Warren in their book *Theory of Literature* (1977: 94), Literature represents life, and life is, large measure, a social reality, even though the

natural world and the inner subjective world of individual have also been the objects of literary imitation.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing a film, theoretical framework is absolutely necessary to base the assessment process elements contained in it. Elements of a theoretical framework can be divided into two parts. The division is intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

### 3.1 Intrinsic Aspects

Intrinsic aspects include character, setting, and conflict while cinematography includes camera angle, camera distance, and *mise en scene*. Character is a person or animal or certain subject who appears in a story, poem, movie, or drama. As proposed by Michael Meyers in *The Bedford's Introduction to Literature* (1990: 61), character is important in a fine fiction because a character helps develop the story. Setting is the context in which the action of a story occurs. Time, location, and the physical features of a setting can be relevant to the overall purpose of a story. So too is the social environment in which the character is developed (Meyer, 1990: 107-108). Conflict is something that appears as a result of a contradiction between at least two sides of person's characteristics, such as good and bad or clever and stupid (Meyer, 1990: 45).

### 3.2 Extrinsic Aspect

#### 3.2.1 Racial Prejudice

According to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: International Students Edition* (2007: 1036), prejudice is typically defined as a judgment of opinion formed beforehand or without due examination, especially when it is based on

race, religion, and gender. Meanwhile, Rupert Brown in his second edition book, *Prejudice: Its Social Psychology* (2010: 1), explained prejudice as a group process and as a phenomenon that nevertheless can be analyzed at the level of individual perception, emotion, and action. In a simpler word, racial prejudice is any action, practice or belief which share the same ideology that human beings are divided into separated groups because the color of their skin, with one group being inferior to the other. A range definition explains the terms of prejudice which are commonly stressed on the negative way.

Allport in his book, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1979: 6), stated that although prejudice can hold either a positive or negative valence, racial and ethnic prejudice in the United States has taken on primarily negative connotations. In fact, negative prejudice is the issues of multiracial society that have to face by any race members in a variety of ways. In some level, racial prejudice can be very harmful to an individual because it can damage self esteem and confidence.

Prejudice obviously existed in every individual. Scafer in his book, *Racial and Ethnic Groups* (2000: 112), states that people have a natural propensity toward prejudice. However, it affects people in a various level. This is due to the people's habit to characterize other with different race based on what they see. Beside that, one factor that causes prejudice is the ignorance of the person's real character and people often form their opinions based on stereotypical lines.

Scafer states that racial prejudice can be caused by stereotypes, which is an exaggerated belief or set of belief concerning the characteristics of the members of a racial or ethnic group (111:

2000), and ethnocentrism, which is the view that one particular ethnic group is somehow superior to all others (119: 2000).

### **3.2.2 Treatment to Black American in 1995**

In the 1930-1960s, the racial issues of black American are still dominating, but in 1989 the alteration of the constitution happened, which is post-civil right act. This act impacted to the social living of black American. For example, black American has made substantial strides during the post-civil right era. In 1989, Douglas Wilder became the first African-American elected governor in the U.S. Then in 1992, Carol Moseley became the first black woman elected to the U.S. senate. Since that time, the civil right of black American is being equal with white American. For example having the right to work, to say opinions, to get education, and admitted to be an American society (Unger, 1999: 83).

In this movie, the writer will analyze the treatment of white American who still intimidates black American in 1995 because the mindset of whites which considers blacks as an inferior race, whereas in 1989 the black American has the equal right. It is proven by a racist group, which represents whites, pioneered by Scott. Scott recruits Remy to join his group and provokes him to be a racist man. The impact is Remy always underestimating blacks.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Racial Prejudice**

Racial prejudice, which is explained in Chapter 3, is any action, practice or belief which shares the same ideology that human beings are divided into separated groups because of the color of their skin, with one group being

inferior to the other. Prejudice is supported by the used of stereotypes that usually is a negative, inaccurate, rigid, and unfair way of thinking about members of another group. The reason that makes a minority group less power in social life than a dominant group or majority group is unequal standing in society in relation to the dominant group; dominant group retains greater power, privilege, and status, which allows it to continue to discriminate against minority group.

In this movie, it is clear that there are majority group in Columbus University, which is white Americans. On the other hand, the minority group in the University is black Americans. This movie shows that blacks are difficult to get their right either when they are in the dormitory or in the campus because the stereotype of black Americans that caused a racial prejudice toward them as an inferior race. For example in this movie, whites are more dominant in the class than blacks. It is caused by the negative prejudice toward black Americans. In this movie, Malik sits behind because the front seats have been dominated by whites. Beside that, Malik Williams can not continue his study in Columbus University if he does not follow the system there. The system is Malik Williams just gets a partial scholarship in sport, which is run. It is caused by a negative prejudice of white American who limits black American to pursue their education in the classroom. As the evidence, all runners in Columbus University either women or men are coming from African-American race. Therefore, Malik has to be a runner to pay his tuition.

Racial prejudice is not only impacted in academic sector, but also in social intercourse in the Columbus University, for example the conflict that is caused by ethnocentrism which happened between Remy and Malik. The conflict between Remy and Malik starts when Remy points the pistol at Malik Williams and

then he insults Malik with abusive words. It can be seen that accident in 01:24:33.

**Remy** : *You damn Jews and Nigger stick together. You all work together to against me, the pure white. Don't you know he (Jewish) control you, nigger? You ain't nothing without them (Jewish). You're nothing. You're a slave. Get on the floor, you Jewish. You're not white. You're nothing. You're not me! What are you gonna do? Dirty nigger! Who's the man now, big man? Fucking hotshot ape. You're nothing Malik! You're nothing! You're dead! You're gonna die, monkey!*  
(Higher Learning, 01:24:33 – 01:25:53)

From the conversation above, it finds many abusive words are asserted by Remy to Malik Williams. Start from the predicate as a slave until indignity of Malik Williams' life as a black, Remy lets his statement fly disdainfully.

In this movie, Remy is one of the racist skinhead members who are very proud of their race, usually called ethnocentrism. It is the factor that causes a racial prejudice toward other races, especially black Americans. The pictures above show that Remy considers his race as a superior and other race such as black Americans and Jewish are inferior. In his dialogue, he mentions abusive words that make Malik offended. It can be seen that Remy says "you damn Jews and Nigger stick together". From his statement, it proves that he does not any respect to other race because he feels that his race is superior. In 01:23:16, Remy says "I don't wanna to talk to you! I don't need to talk! Do you know I'm superior to you? Don't you

*know I came from the master race? You're nothing! Don't tell me what...*" it proves that he admits that his race is superior. In this case, ethnocentrism which appears in Remy's mind has already made him underestimate another race. It causes racial prejudice of white Americans toward black Americans still hard to remove. Automatically, racial conflict between blacks and whites cannot be avoided.

#### 4.2 Treatment to Black American in 1995

In the Fudge's case, the racial prejudice has not happened because of ethnocentrism from white Americans. It is caused by stereotype of whites toward blacks that consider them as troublemakers who are immoral and cannot be trusted. Billy, who gets angry at Kristen, insulted Monet without any permission such as thought that Monet is a woman or someone who does not ever meet him before. He just talks wildly to Monet with abusive words. Then, she reports this accident to Fudge in order Billy can respect her as like other white women. Automatically, Fudge who is an idealist man, take action directly to clear this problem. However, Billy's friends in his dormitory consider that blacks always make trouble every time. This judgment also happens in the security of campus who considers that blacks are troublemaker.

As Scafer states in chapter three, racial prejudice that happens in society is not only caused by ethnocentrism, but also caused by stereotype toward its race. From the examples above, it can be categorized that the racial prejudice which happens in those situations is caused by stereotypes of whites toward blacks that consider them as a minority group that become the troublemaker for whites life. In fact, that mindset still exists in every aspect as long as white American does not try to blend with black Americans and still consider them as minority.

Then, the racial prejudice which happens in this movie because of the ethnocentrism has been felt by Malik William. In the dialogue with Deja, Malik talks about his anxiety about his race. It can be seen in 01:18:52.

**Malik Williams** : *As a black man in America, my stress comes from everywhere. Recognize. Take a look around you. Look at this. Columbus disgusts me. Fool wasn't nothing but a thief, mass murderer. Slaughtered Native Americans, we got a holiday and a university named for him? We're supposed to be learning their westernized thoughts... only to learn that in their eyes, we're lower class. Always.*

**Deja** : *Class is a state of mind.*

**Malik Williams** : *History's proven you can be the smartest, run the fastest... they still think we inferior. (Higher Learning, 01:18:52 – 01:19:27)*

From the conversation above, it can prove that Malik has already felt inferior. It caused by the mindset of white Americans who always consider black Americans are slave. Because the history of blacks in the past is as slave, until 1995 they still get the predicate as slave who has bad attitude, cannot be trusted, uneducated, crude, and inferior. This mindset make black Americans has no right to be equal and get the same treatment like white Americans, not only from the students but also from the part of the Columbus University like the security of campus. In fact, they have no change to go out from the racial problem as long as white Americans do not try to blend with them. Black Americans are still being minority group in 1995 in Columbus University.

Either whites or blacks in Columbus University cannot melt together. They have their community. The community of whites feel enjoy with the daily activities in the campus, while the community of blacks feel depressed because they get unequal treatment from their environment. Although they try to be better than white Americans, in the social life they are still underestimated and considered as the lower class.

Because of that evidences, the writer concludes that racial issue still appears although it has been 1995. In fact, prejudice towards black Americans are difficult to remove because the mindset of white Americans who consider them as a slave, a minority group, and an inferior race who has no power than white Americans. Because of that, the racial conflict between whites and blacks cannot also be avoided.

## 5. Conclusion

Domination of white group to the black group is the beginning of racial conflict happened between those groups. White Americans in this movie is irresponsive to black Americans. Their mindset is not changed yet. They predicate black Americans as slaves and inferior race. Moreover, physically white Americans and black Americans have a clear skin color differences. It makes the distance between whites and blacks in Columbus University become longer. Whereas, in Columbus University all race are united into one area so the multicultural atmosphere is very close there. However, white Americans do not gather with black Americans because there is a negative prejudice in their mind, such as blacks are immoral and can not be trusted. That example makes white Americans treat black Americans unequal.

As the consequence, black Americans have to accept unequal treatment from white Americans. For example, Monet is insulted

by Billy, Malik Williams is underestimated by Remy, and Deja is shot by Remy. These unequal treatments in social life are caused by the background of black Americans in the past as slaves. Then, the effect of those unequal treatments after that era is a racial prejudice toward black Americans. Therefore, the impact of this racial prejudice is a degradation of black's self confidence in the environment of Columbus University.

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