

Towards Freedom Writers: Racism in Education (2007) Film

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Abstract

The discussion of racism in education in relation to the Freedom Writers (2007) film is the focus of this study. This research aims to examine a teaching method that can alter the nature and personality of a teacher's students so that they do not continue to face discrimination and racism, as depicted in the film Freedom Writers (2007). Based on the scene and dialogue between the characters in the movie Freedom Writers (2007), this research uses qualitative data. The data came from a number of journals, books, and the movie itself.

Key words: *Discrimination, Education, Racism, Teaching System*

INTRODUCTION

Racism is the belief that people of different races have different cultural (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021) or personal accomplishments (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020). Racism also assumes that if one race is more powerful (Septiyana & Aminatun, 2021b), it will be able to control others (Afrianto et al., 2021). Racism can occur anywhere (Kasih, 2018) and can cause mental disturbance (Fadilah & Kuswoyo, 2021), resulting in racial inferiority (Qodriani, 2021). Racism, according to (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021b) has an impact not only on the workplace (Sinaga & Oktaviani, 2020) but also on social life (Handayani & Aminatun, 2020). Racism is the belief that one race (Aminatun, Ayu, et al., 2021) is better than another (Suprayogi & Eko, 2020) because of their ancestry (Qodriani & Wijana, 2021). Racism is the idea (Puspita, 2021) that people are divided into different races (Kardiansyah, 2021) and that people of different races are considered inferior (Ambarwati & Mandasari, 2020). Since the beginning of time, racism has existed in various forms (Septiyana & Aminatun, 2021a). People can rise or fall from certain social (Rahmania & Mandasari, 2021) strata depending on their label power (Simamora et al., 2022). The problem of racism is still present today (Kuswoyo et al., 2022). In America, poverty (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019) and racism continue to be major issues (Qodriani & Wijana, 2020a).

Film is one of the media used for mass communication (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018). As a part of popular mass culture (Muliyah et al., 2020), film is present as a mass culture

(Qodriani & Wijana, 2020b) that emerged with urban society and industry (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). Film is not neutral as a medium (Purwaningsih & Gulö, 2021) parties must have a dominant or represented interest in the film (Ngestirosa et al., 2020). Film is an art (Fithratullah, 2021) form that is frequently packaged and sold as a commodity (EWK, 2018) because it portrays the society in which it was made (Samanik, 2018). A moving image is film (Amelia, 2021). Because we are able to see the actual image (Fakhrurozi & Puspita, 2021) or reflection in films (Kuswoyo et al., 2021), they can also be referred to as the transformation of people's lives (Nuraziza et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Danny DeVito, Stacey Sher, and Michael Shamberg produced the American drama film *Freedom Writers* (2007) (Al Falaq & Puspita, 2021). The story of the movie is about Erin Gruwell, a white teacher who was given the job of teaching students at Woodrow Wilson High School (Nababan & Nurmaily, 2021). Students at this school come from a variety of backgrounds (Heavenly & EWK, 2020), including Asian, Latino, and black children (Sartika & Pranoto, 2021). However, these kids are not like other kids (Pranoto, 2021). They are accustomed to seeing gang violence and racial tension (racism) presented to them (Fithratullah, 2019). They are accustomed to carrying sharp weapons like pistols or knives for self-defense (Kardiansyah, 2019), so they are familiar with sharp weapons (Kuswoyo et al., 2020). Due to the emergence of the integration policy (Oktavia & Suprayogi, 2021), Woodrow Wilson High School must accept students from a variety of backgrounds (Asia & Samanik, 2018). Students at Woodrow Wilson High School developed differences in race as a result (Istiani & Puspita, 2020), which led to racial tensions (Hamzah et al., n.d.).

They are accustomed to engaging in violent behaviors at that school (Pradana & Suprayogi, 2021), such as class fights (Suprayogi et al., n.d.). Erin Gruwell, who had never dealt with a situation like this before (Maulana & Suprayogi, 2022), became extremely unmanageable with these students (Amelia et al., 2022). She makes a concerted effort to alter the nature (Suprayogi et al., 2022) and character of her students rather than respect each other (Mandasari et al., 2022) and eradicate racism at the school and neighborhood levels (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2022), despite her feelings of depression and confusion (Arini & Wahyudin, 2022). After that, Erin began looking for a method to select the appropriate teaching strategy (Hamzah et al., 2022). Because of the lack of facilities at the

school (Wahyudin & Wahyuni, 2022), he even looked for extra work to earn money (Oktaviani et al., 2022) to buy books for his students. Erin gives them a book about racism and discrimination with the intention of making the students cry and forget their bad habits (Maskar et al., 2022). Additionally, Erin provided the individuals tasked with filling them in as diaries with blank books (Kasih et al., 2022). Erin persevered until she finally got her students (Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022) to appreciate each other's differences (Aminatun, 2021) and begin to develop a sense of solidarity with one another (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021).

This journal was written with the intention of learning more about the issue of racism in education in relation to the *Freedom Writers* (2007) film (Yudha & Mandasari, 2021). The struggle of a teacher to alter the nature and character of his students so that they become more aware of their collective responsibility to refrain from deviant behavior like racism (Candra & Qodriani, 2019). The writer was interested in analyzing the *Freedom Writers* (2007) film because she observed that racism is one of the actions that is frequently carried out by several groups in this era (Suprayogi et al., 2021), for example, among teenagers who frequently distinguish one race from another in school or college (Rido et al., 2021).

In the research entitled “Institutional Racism and Black Resistance as Portrayed through Images and Narratives in American Graphic Novels” was published on November 2020 (Aminatun, Muliyah, et al., 2021). The researchers try to examine the institutional racism and black resistance in the United States as portrayed through images and narratives in two American graphic novels (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021a). The findings of this research shows that there has been a great number of people of color depicted in graphic novels produced mostly by white authors and illustrators (Oktaviani et al., 2020). The result of this research is that whites have successfully oppressed African Americans for so long due to the white racial frame and it is embedded racist ideology that enforced segregation system.

Racism Towards African American in Peter Farrelly’s *Green Book*: A True Story

In the research entitled “Racism Towards African American in Peter Farrelly’s *Green Book*: A True Story” was published on October 2020. The researcher, Nensia, tries to examine the racial discrimination towards African-American in *Green Book*, a movie by Peter Farrelly. The finding of this research is about the distinctive places, areas, facilities,

quality of goods between American and African American which tragically against racial discrimination. The result of this research is the racial injustice plot was climb up in every states were the concert was held. They went to one region to the last one, the discrimination kept on increasing from bad to worst form of racism.

The Reflection of Racism Towards African American in *Selma* Movie

In the research entitled “The Reflection of Racism Towards African American in *Selma* Movie” was published on January 2020. The researchers, Yusrina Rahmatillah, Singgih Daru Kuncara and Nasrullah, try to examine the level of racism that happened to African American in *Selma* movie. The findings of this research is there are three levels of racism that have appeared, there are institutionalized racism, personally mediated racism and internalized racism. The result from this research is racism only gives a negative impact because it makes the victim of racism can feel unworthy, disbelief towards themselves and insecure.

Education in America

In the world of education in America, they must complete school within 12 years, starting from elementary school (elementary school) or commonly referred to as primary school and then continuing to secondary school level including middle school, junior high school, and senior high school. Assessment in schools in the United States uses a system known as GPA (Grade Point Average). This assessment begins with calculating the student's overall score which will later be calculated and converted into letters. Teachers in America use several strategies in teaching such as using demonstration, experiment, case study, collaborative group works, project work, field trips and practical on activities. The strategies focusing on engaging students, constructing practical skills, developing leadership, and inclusiveness of learning. Success comes in different ways and it is connected to gain education.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative data method, where the data collected in the form of scenes and dialogues from the *Freedom Writers* (2007) film. Qualitative research is focuses from explanation and analysis situation, qualitative analysis is based primarily on a constructivist perspective or a participatory perspective or both involving individual

experiences. Qualitative approach focuses on comprehension, description, and narrative analysis. Real phenomena in communities found in several studies were considered in qualitative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *Freedom Writers* (2007) film, there were mass riots throughout Los Angeles. More than 120 murders in Long Beach in the months following the Rodney King riots. This incident had a negative impact on the environment of Long Beach, America. As a result of the violence and riots that often occur in their environment, it has a bad impact on them and the rebellion begins to carry over to them. Many Woodrow Wilson High School students carried sharp weapons as their own protection when a rebellion broke out. When at school they are friends only with their fellow races, like Latinos are friends with Latinos, Asia is friends with Asia and so on.

It's like there are multiple territories within the school, they can't enter each other's groups that are there. If one of their groups starts to rebel, a fight begins. But all that changed when a teacher named Ms. Erin Gruwell came and changed the way their learning system made a change in the school environment and there was no longer racism and discrimination. Ms. Gruwell uses an easy and fun learning method then the students in class 203 who are notoriously disobedient to obey and respect and appreciate one another. Here are the teaching methods that Ms. Gruwell's made:



1. Line Game

Ms. Gruwell: *"We're going to play a game, okay? This is very fun. I promise. Okay, it's called a line game."*

Firstly, Ms. Gruwell made a small game for her students. There was a line of tape prepared by her and she glued it to the floor. She will give questions to students and if the question refers to them then they have to approach the line and if not then they have to stay in place or retreat to their place for the next question. Starting from easy questions, questions related to their hobbies and interests to serious questions about their lives such as about losing someone due to gang violence and so on.

Then the teacher told them to pay respects to them and say his name. The purpose of this learning system is to increase their sense of solidarity to respect each other and start introducing them in a positive way. Ms. Gruwell uses a way of approaching her students first so that his students can respect her and eliminate the sense of racism in them.

2. **Writing in a Journal**

Secondly, another way that Ms. Gruwell in classroom education is to give them a blank book or journal that they have to fill in. Ms. Gruwell told them to write in the book about anything like the past, present and future. They can also make the book as a diary or a place to write poetry, songs, good things or bad things that happened. They had to fill out the book every day and the teacher would not read the story unless the student gave it permission. Ms. Gruwell told her students to put the books in a cupboard if the books were allowed to be read by her. The educational goals given by Ms. Gruwell's mission is to teach her students to be able to express the content and anxiety that is in their hearts so they don't continue to be sad about their lives and also change the way their students think and they don't continue to be discriminated against between races and ethnicities.



Ms. Gruwell: *“Everyone has their own story and it is important for you to know your own story. So, what we gonna do is ... we are going to write everyday of our story in this journal.”*

3. Making a small tour



Thirdly, Ms. Gruwell organizes tours outside Long Beach for her students. The purpose of the tour is not only to take them for recreation and to other areas, but also to introduce them to the history of discrimination or Holocaust in the area. They visited a museum containing stories of people affected by discrimination or Holocaust. They study and pay attention to the stories of these people and begin to understand that it is important to maintain mutual respect between people. The welfare of the existing races and ethnicities is a very important thing and must be done by human beings to harmonize their races and ethnicities, but don't let this become a boomerang to cause conflicts or racism between races and ethnicities.

In addition, they visit the hotel to dine with the Holocaust victims of the museum to meet their students and tell them more about their stories. Learning by inviting victims of discrimination is able to make them all slowly begin to realize that racial and ethnic discrimination is a very detrimental thing for everyone. Furthermore, to harming yourself, it can be detrimental to others. They will be miserable and unable to live their lives in peace. They can not live freely like humans in general. After meeting with victims of discrimination, these students began to change their attitudes such as immediately throwing away sharp weapons or pistols that they often carry as a means of self-protection, starting to get used to respecting each other and so on and stopping selling drugs and illegal drugs from hand to hand.

4. Providing a good book



Ms. Gruwell: *“I want each of you to come forward and grab one of these Borders bags of the four books we’ll be reading this semester.”*

Next, Ms. Gruwell create a learning system by providing them a bag containing a quality book for her students to read. The goal is to ask students to understand from what they have read and apply it in their daily lives and she hopes that the book can change the mindset of her students. It is also intended to eliminate the riots that often arise in their environment so that they have a mutually respectful personality. Many of them like Anne Frank’s book, because the book tells the story of a girl named Anne Frank who was a victim of genocide due to racial hatred and the content of the book is the same as the life they are living. With their very significant changes, they asked Ms. Gruwell to bring in the writer Anne Frank to inspire them even more. The purpose of this lesson is to teach them to appreciate something by writing or creating stories that can be published.

5. Watching a documentary film



From this scene, Ms. Gruwell give them a documentary film entitled *Freedom Ride* which tells about a group of interracial civil rights. *Freedom Ride* is a film that tell a story about a group of people who are fight for racial equality. This film also contains some moral values that students can learn. The purpose of giving them a documentary film is to teach them not to be trapped in an environment of violence and discrimination. They must learn not to discriminate between race and ethnicity in their environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the real story from *Freedom Writers* (2007) film, it concludes that this film teaches us the importance of education in schools to teach morals and personality to students that can be applied in everyday environments. Then, with education, students at school become more disciplined and aware to respect each other. This film also teaches not to do racial and ethnic discrimination or racism. As human beings, we must respect each other's differences and work together to resolve the riots that arise in the environment. With the quality of education, it can change the mindset of students who previously had high emotions and egos, will turn into children who have good personalities and become a useful people.

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