

## **“Racism and Its Effect in Freedom Writers Film by Richard La Gravense: Sociological Approach”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purposes of the research are 1) to classify the types of racism that appear in “Freedom Writers” film. 2) to find the effects felt by the characters in the “Freedom Writer” film.*

*In conducting this research, the writer uses descriptive qualitative method, which is a research method that finds fundamental answers about racism and types of racism and explains the effects caused by racism's actions on the character of players in the film using the sociological approach.*

*From the results of this research, the writer found 21 data that divided into type and effect, there are data consist of racism that occur in Freedom Writer Films and they have been grouped based on their type based on Wilson's E Charles theory (2005), they are 10 data Overt/ Individual Racism and 6 data Institutional racism. The writer also finds three of the five fundamental effects of racism there are 5 data based on the theory of Allport (1991) they are Anticuotin, Discrimination and Physical attack.*

*From all the data given, it can be concludes that Individual racism is mostly appear in the film, and then followed by Institutional Racism and some effects that found in Freedom Writers film.*

**Key Words:** *Effect of Racism, Sociological, Freedom Writers*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Human is a creature that has brain and able to think about the good one and the bad one. It makes the human can control their life in social. Human was created in several race based on the skin color, body shape, hair etc. Many races in this world unconsciously make differential between one races to another. This diversity often caused by racial issue, because human state their race is the good one. The axis dispute is caused by ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group issues.

According to Castle (1993) “Racism is a deeply rooted racial problem in the middle the lives of multicultural communities in various parts of the world. Racism develops rapidly in a country as technology develops and trade which

results in a growing level of pluralism within the country”.

Castle (1993) has explained that the issue of racism is very vulnerable to occur in countries that have multi-cultural societies. Many countries have diverse cultures and one of them is Indonesia. Racist issues are very sensitive in these multi-cultural countries.

Field (1990) explained that “Although the belief that race is a biological construct is fundamental to racism, racism is actually a social construction that permits one group’s exploitation of another through the development of an ideology that justifies this action”. It can be seen in the country that has high level of racism, it also increases the social jealousy in the community, and have high crime percentage. So far, we can see it in several states in the United States. Almost

all lines in government and institutions are controlled by white people, even though the native populations are black people. A multicultural country that has been afflicted by racism does indeed have a detrimental effect on excluded groups. This is also worsened by the mass media. For example, in the United States, where reporting on crimes committed by black people tended to be exaggerated and favored one group. Racism and discrimination occurred in America in the colonial era in the 17th century. Legally and socially, rights and grants were granted to white people, this was certainly opposed by native Americans, and several other migrant races such as African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic or Latino American. White people were given exclusive gifts in educational materials, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land ownership, and criminal procedures throughout a period of time that stretched from the 17th century to the 1960s. At that time racism began to emerge in the United States.

This phenomenon becomes an idea for the peoples to display the situation in form of a literary work. Wellek and Werren (1948) wrote that "Literature is the human imaginative and creative idea that poured in a literary work". There are many kinds of literary work, fiction and non-fiction such as Novel, poem, short stories, drama, film etc. Authors poured out the situation in a literary work so that readers or viewers could have their own thoughts about racism.

The rapid development of the literary world elevates social phenomena such as the phenomenon of racism can be seen and found in various literary societies, such as the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee in 1960, 1978's Angel I "Still I Rise" Poetry, and especially seen in a film called *Freedom Writers*, a film by Richard La Gravense.

*Freedom Writers* is a film of Richard La Gravense that produced by Paramount Picture. *Freedom Writers* tells the story of the struggle of a white skin teacher named Erin Gruwell who never gives up in resolving racist conflicts that occur in between her students at Woodrow Wilson High School in the Long Beach area, California. This film is launched in the 1990s during that period Race-based riots are taking place in several cities in California. In the film, there are four prominent racial groups namely the Americans-Africans race (black), Americans-Asians, Hispanics and white race. But character they are described differently.

In general the White Race is described highly educated, courteous and always the victim of racist acts is black people, Hispanics are depicted as quietly immovable, Americans-Asians have a character that is almost same as the Hispanic race but it looks a little more relaxed, while black people are described as very anarchist, racist and totally lacking politeness. It can be seen in the beginning prologue of the film when a Latina girl named Eva tells about the way of people over race in Long Beach, California. White people, Black, Asian and Latina has a fight long time ago. They fight for the territory, pride and respect of their own race.

In this film, Erin Gruwell is played by Hillary Swank does other teaching methods than others. She involved a lot students directly as with the game that requires they were honest, Toast for Change (when Gruwell invited them to make changes by giving high-quality changes to them do and by distributing books as their diary), open debate, write their life stories in a diary and others. She is also willing to work part time as an employee in a hotel and lingerie shop for women.

It's all she did so that she can buy students for a number of books related to their current situation were like Diary of Anne Frank and so on. Gruwell also wants to invite them to the Museum of Tolerance and eat together with survivors of the Holocaust in the restaurant where she worked. They really understand what is called the Holocaust. It was the activity that later made Gruwell divorce by Scott (Patrick Dempsey), her husband. Since the students in room 203 read the book and understood about the Holocaust, they changed completely. They no longer questioned race. They began to know and close to each other.

This is an important and interesting object that has to know by all people about racism and the effect of racism. Finally, the writer interested in analyzing this film entitled **“Racism and Its Effect in Freedom Writers Film by Richard La Gravenese: Sociological Approach”**

## II. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

In making this research, the writer used descriptive qualitative method, these methods suitable, relevant with this research because the writer analyzing the social phenomenon. The writer collects the data in form of dialog, context and prolog in “Freedom Writer” Film. Qualitative method usually involves the use of qualitative data, such as interview, documents and also observation to understand and get the information that can be explain the social phenomenon. Hammersley (1992) state that “There have been many attempts to define qualitative research in the social sciences, and to determine whether or not it can or should be differentiated from something called quantitative research”

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that “A Qualitative research focus on interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings to make sense in terms of

the meanings people bring to these settings, The Qualitative research method involves data collection of personal experiences, introspection, stories about life, interviews, observations, interactions and visual texts which are significant to people's life”. In addition, Peshkin (1993) also wrote that “Qualitative research typically serves one or more of these purposes, description, interpretation, verification and evaluation”. For more information, “Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers.” (Punch, 1998).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Accordingly, qualitative research deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.

Mean while, in order to analyzing and presenting the data, the writer uses descriptive method. The writer displays the data by narrative text and describes all facts that focus and found in “Freedom Writer” film in a paragraph. As Vickie and Clinton (2012) in their journal “There are a number of researchers who believe and support the fact that ‘qualitative descriptive’ is a viable and acceptable label for a qualitative research design. While phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography also are descriptive qualitative approaches, by nature, they are not exclusively in the descriptive domain because they also tend to explain phenomena” and they also said that “the data collection of qualitative descriptive studies focuses on discovering the nature of the specific events under study”

It is clear that, descriptive qualitative method is a method that usually used by the other writers in doing this library research.

### III. RESULT

In this research, the data is presented in writing. The writer uses informal (conversation) method to present the research because the data that analyze in the form of word and phrase based on the finding. The writer presents as an introduction outlining the background of the problem that relates with racism and the social effect of society that found in Freedom Writers Film. Then, the writer classifies the racism into types of racism based on the Charles's theory. The writer has limit to discuss only about several problems in order to avoid excessively large discussions. The writer formulated those problems through two points as follows:

1. Types of Racism
2. The effect of racism

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Types of Racism that Found in Freedom Writers Film

##### 4.1.1 Overt/ Individual Racism

Datum 1. (Freedom Writers. 00:01:29)



Young Eva: In America, a girl can be crowned by a princess for her beauty and grace. But, an Aztec princess is chosen as her blood. To fight for her people, **as papi and his father fought against those who say we are less than they are who say we are not equal in beauty and in blessing.**

In that prologue, young Eva and her father are in toys store. Eva was interested by a Princess doll that displayed in a toy rack. But her father comes and gives a couple of boxing gloves and teaches Eva how to fight. The writer know that why her father did that because her father wants Eva be equal to the other people, beside that he wants his child can protect herself from another people because in that time, the racial conflict still occur in Long Beach, Los Angeles.

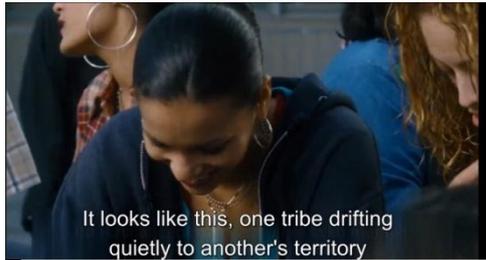
Datum 2. (Freedom Writers. 00:02:20)



Young Eva: It was the first day of school, and i was waiting for my father to take me to the bus. And i saw the war for the first time. They took my father for retaliation. **He was innocent, but they took him because he was respected by my people. They called my people 'A Gang' because we fight for our America.**

One day, when Eva was preparing to go to her school, she waited a bus in front of her house; she greets his neighbor who is also a Latin named Roberto. But suddenly, a car passes and shoots him to death. Eva was very shocked and traumatized; her father ran out and saved the neighbor but failed. One day, Eva's father was arrested by the police (White Skin) because Eva's father is considered responsible because it is highly valued by his group. Eva explained that her father was innocent, but her father was arrested because of retaliation.

Datum 3. (Freedom Writers, 00:13:21)



Eva: My PO doesn't understand that school is like a city, and the city is just like a prison. **All of them divided into separate sections, depending on tribes. There is little Cambodia, The Ghetto, Wonder Bread Land, and us, South of the border or little Tijuana.** That's just the way it is, and everyone knows it. But soon enough, you have little wannabes trying to hit you up at school, demanding respect they haven't earned. **It looks like this, one tribe drifting quietly to another territory without respect, as if to claim what isn't theirs.** An outsider looking in would never see it, but we could feel it. Something was coming.

In that prologue, Eva explained the situation of her school. They are live separate section based on their race. There are four races that have been mentioned by Eva, they are Little Cambodia (Students from Cambodia), The Ghetto (Black- American), Wonder Bread Land (White People) and little Tijuana (Hispanic/ Latin).

There is something interesting when Eva mentions the names of these races. Eva mentioned "Little" for Cambodia student that means that they are have a small body. "Ghetto" for the Africa-America people. The term of ghetto now refers to the settlements of minorities. In the United States, ghettos usually refer to parts of the city inhabited by black residents. Ghetto is often associated as a symbol of discrimination "Wonder Bread Land" for white people.

Datum 4. (Freedom Writers, 00:10:30)



Marcus : **That white boy hoping he's in the wrong room**

Ben Samuel: I gotta get out of here.

That racial appear when Ms. Gruwell was attendance her student, she mentioned the student's name one by one, but when her teacher mentioned the Ben Samuel's name (one of white skin student), Marcus talking in his heart and he stare with a cynical look at Ben. It shows that how hate Marcus to white people.

In other hand, Ben was very scared being in that classroom because he was the only one white skin student in that classroom. We can see when Ben says "I gotta get out of here". Based on Charles theory the writer identify that, what Marcus says is an individual racism. It can be seen from the way of Marcus stare at Ben. The writer emphasized here that based on Charles's theory about overt/ individual racism is a cynical attitude, prejudice and hatred towards an individual or group of different races.

Datum 5. (Freedom Writers, 00:33 :13)



Eva : **White people always wanting their respect like they deserve it for free.**

Miss G : I'm a teacher. It doesn't matter what color i am.

Eva : **It's all about color.** Its about people deciding what you deserve, about people

wanting what they don't deserve, about whites thinking they run this world no matter what. **You see, I hate white people.**

Miss G : You hate me?

Eva : Yeah..!

In that dialog, we can see that how Eva hates the white people. Miss G as one of the whites certainly felt that what Eva said was something silly. However, the reason Eva hates white people is not only based on prejudice, but something that once traumatized her as a result of a group of people who had arrested her father, the white police. This trauma changes someone's hatred of all people of the same skin color, because Eva thinks that white people can do whatever they want. Miss G has explained that not all white people like that, but the hatred that has been embedded in Eva was very strong so she rejected all explanation from Miss Gruwell.

#### 4.1.2 Institutional Racism

Datum 6.(Freedom Writers, 00:33 :57)



Briant : God, listen to what you're saying. How dare you compare them to Anne Frank? They don't hide, they drive around in the open with automatic weapons. I'm the one living in fear. I can't walk out my door at night.

Miss G : And you blame these kids?

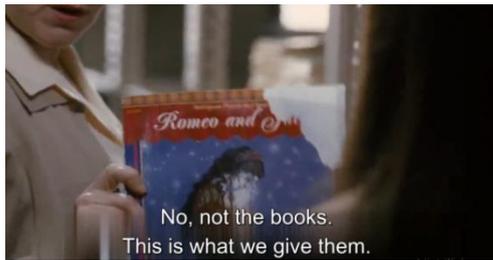
Briant : Look, **this was an A- List school before they came here and look what they turned it into.** I mean, does it make sense that kids who want an education should suffer because their high school gets turned into a reform school? Because kids who don't want to be here, and shouldn't be here, are force to be here by the geniuses running the school district? Integration's a lie.

**Yeah, we teachers, we can't say that or we lose our job for being racist.** So please, stop your cheerleading, Erin. You are ridiculous. You don't know the first thing about these kids. And you are not qualified to make judgments about the teachers. Who have to survive this place?

This is a kind of institutional racism based on Charles theory that racism can occur within the scope of the institution. Briant clearly said that *"They don't hide; they drive around in the open with automatic weapons. I'm the one living in fear. I can't walk out my door at night"* and he blamed the students. That is a prejudice from an institutional teacher for their student. Briant also said that *"They shouldn't to be here"* because he thinks that the student in class 203 is a bad students. He also said that "Yeah, we teachers, we can't say that or we lose our job for being racist".

Briant admitted that he could not say that because he could lose his job by being racist, and he asked Miss G to stop being a hero because he thought the student would never be good because it was filled by the Africa-America and other races. The writer looks in more detail at the figure of the Briant itself. He is a senior teacher who has white skin. He really dislikes students in class 203 because in that class is only filled with 1 white student and the other is another race. The writer thinks that could be the reason why Briant does not support Miss G to get Anne Frank book for her student. Based on Charles theory about institutional racism, the writer sure that what Briant said to Miss G was one of the institutional racism.

Datum 7. (Freedom Writers, 00:37)



Miss G : What about this? We were discussing the Holocaust.

Chambell : **No, they won't able to read that.**

Miss G : We can try; the books are just sitting here.

Chambell : **Look at their reading scores, and if i give your kids these books, i'll never see them again. If i do, they'll be damaged.**

Miss G : What about these? Romeo and Juliet. That's a great gang story.

Chambell : **No, not the books.** This is what we give them. It is Romeo and Juliet but it's a condensed version. But even these, look how they treat them. See how torn up they are? They draw on them.

Miss G : Miss Chambel, they know they get these because no one thinks they're smart enough for real books.

Chambell : Well, i don't have the budget to buy new books every semester. When these kids don't return them.

One more, Miss Gruwell get no any support from the head of library to borrow the Anne Frank books, even just a Romeo and Juliet books. Miss Chambell sure that the student will treat the book badly and the kids will not return them back. But, the writer found the fact that, give the student a book in short version of Romeo and Juliet become a trivial treatment for the student. Miss G sure that they are ready for the real books, but they never get that. That's why they broke the book because they think that the school mock on them. The writer assumes that what Miss Chambell does is to protect the book but she does not care and underestimate the capability of these students. Same with Briant, Miss Chambellis a white people who always

underestimate the students from that class. And in another class, there are a lot of white students and they support fully by the school for resource.

Datum 8. (Freedom Writers, 01:09:16)

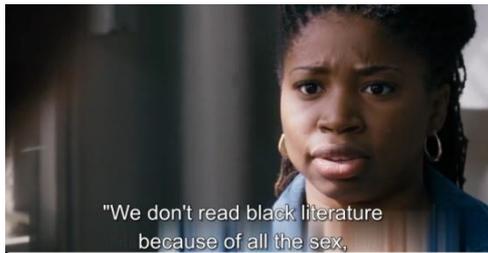


Briant : So, you had all summer to read and consider this book, and you know? **I thought it would be most valuable to begin with Victoria to give us the black perspective. Victoria?**

Victoria : (Talking in heart) **Do i have a stamp on my forehead that says, "The National Spoken person for the Plight of Black People"? how the hell should i know the black perspective on The Color Purple?. That's it. If i don't change classes, I'mgonna hurt this fool. Teachers treat me like I'm some kind of Rosetta stone for African- American. What? Black people learn how to read, and we all miraculously come to the same conclusion? At that point, i decide to check out my friend Brandy's English class.**

In that scene, Briant as the professional and experience teacher who teach in superior class ask his student to read a book with the title "The Color Purple". For more information, The Color Purple is a novel created by Alice Walker a white people who tells about a story of a Black people named Calie. "The diary was written by Cellie, a black girl who from birth has experienced violence from men in her life.

Datum 9. (Freedom Writers, 01:15:16)



Miss Campbell: But, you're an honors student, if you transfer to Ms. Gruwell's class, think how that will reflect on your records.

Victoria: It doesn't matter to me. My grades will still be the same. Look, Ms. Campbell when i first transferred to the school. I has a 4.0 average. But when i applied for advanced placement at English and Math, i was told it would be better for me to be in a class with my own kind. Now, when i did get in, my teacher said **"Victoria, it's not every day one finds an African- American student in A.P and honors courses"**. As if i didn't notice and when i asked another honors teacher why we don't read more black literature, **he said "We don't read black literature because of all the sex, drugs, cussing and fornication!" I though a simple "It's inappropriate" would have sufficed.**

In that scene, Victoria met with Miss Campbell to get a chance to change her class. She told that her teacher treat her like a Rosetta stone for African-American. Rosetta stone means that an artifacts or as concrete evidence of the black people behavior. Victoria also explains that in the previous class they never read about the black literature because their teacher said that **"We don't read black literature because of all the sex, drugs, cussing and fornication!"** We can see that how come a teacher can be such that racist to their student in that class. That prejudice of black people that it has become a belief that all black people always do things that are not good so they do not want to read literature about black people. This hatred has taken root even in an educational institution such as a school.

According to Charles theory, such treatment is included in the category of racism that occurs within an institution. The other people always think that all the black people did are bad, such as about sex, drugs, cussing and fornication and make a bad image to all blacks' people. All the data that found in that film contain of racism in form of verbal or action.

## 4.2 The Effect of Racism that Found in Freedom Writers Film

### 4.2.1 Anticutin/ Prejudice

Datum 10. (Freedom Writers, 00:14:16)



In this stage, the effect of racism is still a prejudice in the environment in which a race itself. This is still limited to the thought of an individual or group that incites hatred and prejudice towards other groups.

One day, the Latin students were sitting together in School Park. They talk each other in their group. Suddenly, a black student was walk pass where the Latina students sit. They felt that the black students deliberately entered their territory and were challenging to fight. This is where the initial stage of racism occurs where the presence of other groups in their area is considered to be a threat or a kind of deliberate purpose to challenge their groups. The writer sure that, this scene is one of the effect of racism because even just walking pass the other group become a prejudice that this is a challenge or a sign for fight.

#### 4.2.2 Discrimination

The next stage of racial effect that found in Freedom Writers film are discrimination. Racist and discrimination are cannot be separated because discrimination is a real effect of racism. When a group is involved in racism, the group will get discriminatory treatment from other groups. One group will prioritize their own group and get rid of the interests of other groups. Many of us encounter discriminatory acts in social life. For example in the film Freedom Writers, when Victoria asks her teacher, why not discuss black literature, while white literature is always discussed in class. His teacher said they did not read black literature because black people were always associated with Sex Drugs, sexual abuse and abuse. This is a discriminatory act experienced by Victoria in a class of white students.

Mostly, the discrimination can be occurs to groups without power. While the group that has the power is the party that can discriminate against minority groups. In the film Freedom Writers, this discriminatory treatment occurs between educational institutions at school to students in class 203 which contains many students from Black, Latin and Cambodian.

#### 4.2.3 Physical Attack

Datum 18. (Freedom Writers, 00:15:47)



In this scene, SindyNgor and Eva were fight. A chaos happened at school. It happens because a black student already walks into the Latin's territory. The Latin's student assumes that it is a sign for

fight and finally Eva called her boyfriend and other friend to fight in her school. But, this chaos not only between Black and Latin student, and the Cambodian also got involves in it.

The writer does not know why the Cambodian students involved but the writer thinks that it is can be a reason for take down the Latin students, because Cambodian and Latin students like having a grudge and its own sentiments since the beginning of the film between Eva and SindyNgor (Cambodian Girls).

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing and discussing the problem in previous chapter, the writer would like to give conclusion.

Through analysis, the writer finds that many scene of racism in this film. There are four races that mentioned in this film they are White People, Black People, Latin people and Cambodian People. The writer uses the Charles theory in analyzing the type of racism that appears in this film. Based on Charles, there are two types of Racism they are Overt/ Individual and Institutional Racism. Based on that theory, the writer concludes that there are many racial acts that happened in this film. This racial appear because of the past experience and keep going and it is felt by students in schools. From the five stage of racial effect based on Allport's theory, the writer only finds three stages they are Anticoutin (Prejudice), Discrimination and Physical attack. After finishing this research, the writer found 10 data of Overt Racism, 6 data of Institutional racism, and 5 data of the racial effect.

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