



## **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM IN AMERICAN POST-CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN *DEAR MARTIN* BY NIC STONE (2017)**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis is an analysis of a novel written by Nic Stone entitled *Dear Martin* (2017). It explores the issue of institutional racism in the post-civil rights era. The concept of systemic racism by Joe R. Feagin is employed to analyze this novel. This analysis focuses on four issues of systemic racism as seen through several African-American characters. This analysis also depends on the narrator to determine which parts of the novel are used as the data. The result of the study shows that African-American characters experience four forms of institutional racism which are The White Racial Frame and Its Embedded Racist Ideology, Alienated Social Relations, Racial Hierarchy with Divergent Group Interest, and Related Racial Domination: Discrimination in Many Aspects. In conclusion, in this post-civil rights movement era, African-Americans still face institutional racism.

**Key words:** *institutional racism, systemic racism, the white, the black*

### **A. INTRODUCTION.**

In 1954-1968 period, African-American who do not get their rights, who are treated unfairly, do a big demonstrations which called African-American civil rights movements. It is a part of a multifaceted freedom struggle with deep historical roots. Martin Luther King Jr, a Baptist minister with a doctorate in systematic theology, leads the movement aim to get the equality and end the racism. Martin Luther King Jr delivered his speech to a massive group of civil rights in 1963 and convey his dreams towards racial relation in the future.

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After decades of civil rights movement, the lives of African-Americans in the United States are changing. Many people believe that African-American's life is much better than before. They are claiming the election of Barack Obama signified America has truly become a post-racial society. According to Dawson and Bobo (2009), this view is also consistent with beliefs the majority white Americans have held for well over a decade that Afro-Americans have achieved racial equality in the US. However, this situation does not necessarily support to declare that the United States has reached the stage of post-racial society. It means racism still exist in this modern era. According to Hughes and Kroehler (2010), racism is the belief that some racial groups are naturally superior and others are inferior. It can be said that it leads to an action from someone or a group towards others by humiliating and underestimating other race or group. For example police brutality against African-Americans.

The presence of black president cannot reverse centuries of racial injustice. According to Horowitz (2019), the legacy of slavery affects the position of black people on American society. He conveys that America has not gone far enough in giving blacks equal rights with whites. This quote from Horowitz shows that the civil right movement led by King is impotent. The author of the book *Racism in the 21st Century : An Empirical Analysis of Skin Color*, Ronald E.Hall (2008) states that:

*Skin color has come to replace race as an important cause of discrimination. This evidenced in the increasing usage the term "people of color" to encompass people of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds*

Racism is a common thing in multicultural societies. This quotation shows that the racist treatment occurred because of differences that human beings have. Differences in skin color that is very visible often leads to bad assumptions from whites that claimed themselves as superior. Institutional racism transpired when set of assumptions, behaviors, and procedures of country institutions such as the society groups, police, education, the media, the government, and the housing sector advantage one side while disadvantaging another based on race. The novel that was written by Nic Stone entitled *Dear Martin* (2017) is one of the literary works that exposed the issue about institutional racism. The novel shows the life of some African-Americans characters that are experienced institutional racism.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of novel *Dear Martin* (2017) written by Nic Stone based on Feagin's theory which is systemic racism. This research is descriptive research. The data is identified based on the issue about institutional racism that experienced by African-Americans. The based on preliminary reading of the novel, elements which will be looked closely are character and narrator. The third person narrator helps to narrate the situation that is happened to the characters.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of institutional racism experienced by an African-American from the novel *Dear Martin* (2017). The analysis is structured based on systemic racism theory by Joe R. Feagin. The analysis also relies on the third person narrator which narrates how events present in the novel.

### 1. The White Racial Frame and Its Embedded Racist Ideology

The white racial frame is discriminating action through an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions and inclination. The protagonist of this novel, Justyce, is the character who get negative stereotype. The white racial frame through negative stereotype also can be seen in Dr.Jarius Dray's case. It can be seen on the quotations below:

“Don't you say shit to me, you son of a bitch. I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on.” (p.11)

“Long story short, I tried to do a good deed and wound up on the ground in handcuffs. And despite the fact that my ex-girl was visibly drunk off her ass, excuse my language, I apparently looked so menacing in my prep school hoodie, the cop who cuffed me called for backup.” (p.13)

From the quotations above it can be seen that for making racial assumption, people not only use the attributes such as skin tone, facial features, and hairstyles but also the articles of clothing. Ray (2015) explains in his article that black men in hoodies are most likely to be assumed as a threat. It can be said that black man is associated with criminality, deviousness, and violence, which means a person who should be feared. He has done nothing to threaten the cop but he acts as if the protagonist is a dangerous person. It can be seen that the cop is framing black man as a criminal, he draws a conclusion only by looking at the color of the skin the protagonist has. In short, the cop as White Americans has negative stereotype towards Justyce as African Americans. This stereotype based on the fact that the Western worldview includes White Americans' view is considered supreme and preminent (Egleton, 2016). As Schiele (2000) called this concept “Eurocentric Cultural Universalism” which its features are broadly applicable even across groups, it also places African Americans at the bottom group and at a great disadvantage.

### 2. Alienated Social Relations

After claiming themselves as the top race, white people have begun to segregate black people. For centuries, institutional racism in the United States housing system has contributed to stark and persistent racial disparities in welfare,

especially between black and white households and also in education. Because of the lack of civil rights legislation, African-Americans relatively segregated and excluded from the dominant society. Riphagen (2008) mentions that no group in the history of the United States has ever experienced a sustained high level of residential segregation that has been imposed on blacks in large American cities for the past fifty years. It is in accordance with the quotation below:

“...And despite growing up in a “bad” area (not too far from your old stomping grounds), I have a future ahead of me that will likely include an Ivy League education, an eventual law degree, and a career in public policy.”(p.13)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist lives in the segregated African-American neighborhood. It reinforces inequalities between blacks and whites. Feagin (2006) states that the systemic racism system aggressively separates those defined and elevated as the “superior race” from those defined and subordinated as the “inferior race”.

### **3. Racial Hierarchy with Divergent Group Interest**

Racial hierarchy in the United States is established into a group in which the whites stay on top. The people of color especially African-Americans still stay on the bottom of them. Feagin (2006) also reveals that firmly at the top of the US racial hierarchy are individual whites of all backgrounds and families which hold the top position in terms of racialized privileges and power. As the top-positioned group, whites American have a higher income than blacks. In 2020, Joint Economic Committee states that Blacks Americans take home less income, are far less likely to own their homes and live shorter lives than White Americans. Therefore, the existence of racial hierarchy comes from the belief that some races are more superior to others. It can be seen on the quotation below:

“Jared: I’m not saying they didn’t, dude. You just proved my point. Black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they’re willing to work hard enough. Manny’s parents are a perfect example.

SJ: Seriously? You really think one example proves things are equal? What about Justyce? His mom works sixty hours a week, but she doesn’t make a *tenth* of what your dad ma—

Justyce: S, chill with that, man.” (p.25)

From the quotation above it can be seen that a black who has a job in the United States is not well-paid. It also shows white character states that despite someone’s race, place of residence and economic status, hard work will enable a person to move up the social ladder and establish a better life. Yet, in several of instances

seems to be used to blame blacks living in poverty as exhibiting a lack of motivation and being lazy. It can be seen that White Americans took profits as much as possible by oppressing African Americans for their desire and their wealth.

#### 4. **Related Racial Domination: Discrimination in Many Aspects**

Anti-black discrimination is a matter of racial-power inequality institutionalized in a variety of economic and social institutions over a long period of time. Feagin (2006) mentions that while anti-black discrimination is illegal, institutionalized racism in employment, law, policing, housing, public accommodations, and other major areas is still widespread and is perpetrated by or tolerated by the whites. It can be seen from the excerpt:

“Let me tell you when I learned: my second time in juvie, I was fourteen. There was this seventeen-year-old rich white boy there, Shawn. Dude had got up in the middle of the night and stabbed his dad like eight times.”

“Damn!”

“Right? They tried to get him on an attempted murder charge, but homeboy’s lawyer got some doctor to come in and say dude was sleepwalking. And the shit worked! Judge dropped the charge down to simple assault. Guy got sixty days at a youth development campus, then got to go home.”

“You serious?”

“Yup. Meanwhile, they locked my ass up for a year on a petty theft charge cuz it was my ‘second offense.’ Prosecutor actually referred to me as a ‘career criminal’ at the hearing.”  
(p.125)

This discrimination act is experienced by Quan Banks. He lives in the segregated African American neighborhood similar to Justyce’s mother. At some point in the novel, Quan Banks was arrested because he was accused of murder. From the quotation above, it shows that the law has sided on white American’s favor. The boy named Shawn was doing the dreadful murder, worse than what Quan Banks previously did. However, Judge alters Shawn’s big case into a simple offense. Meanwhile, Quan Banks, the African American boy was being punished a one-year sentence after a petty theft. According to Merriam-Webster petty theft is the crime of stealing something that does not have a high value. Yet because this young man has colored skin, he is labeled a dangerous criminal and deserves a harsh punishment. It can be seen that there are exceptions to the charges that law enforcement institution have for individual suspects based on race. It is

accordance with Schmitt et al. (2017) that states black male offenders continued to receive longer sentences than similarly situated White male offenders. Because of this, what Quan Banks has faced is considered to be a form of institutional racism over black in the law sector.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

A novel entitled *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone depicts institutional racism which include stereotyping, segregating, controlling and discriminating the African-Americans. This analysis is analyzed with the theory of oppression by Joe Richard Feagin. This novel shows about several acts of institutional racism which done by people who are tied to important institutions.

The racist acts toward African-American cost them a lot as a minority group. Furthermore, even though society has struggled and staged massive protest, institutional racism in America is still happening nowadays. African-Americans still cannot live peacefully in a multicultural country like America.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that most white Americans still hold racist ideology in their lives. They do not see African-Americans as their human equal because of the difference skin color they have. Although America has entered the post civil right era, some even say that America has entered the post racial phase, novel *Dear Martin* (2017) shows that racism towards African-Americans still exist. It can be seen from institutional racism as told in the novel

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