



RACIAL STEREOTYPES INFLUENCE CHARACTERS' RESPONSES TO THE RACISM IN DEAR MARTIN (2017) BY NIC STONE

Linda Amelia¹, Muhd. Al-Hafizh²

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: amelialinda26@gmail.com

Abstract

This research is an analysis of the novel by Nic Stone entitled *Dear Martin* (2017). The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of racial stereotypes on the response of characters in the novel. This study uses racial stereotype theory to analyze the novel. The data are taken from words, phrases, sentences, and quotations in the novel. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis with a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding, theory development, description of reality and social complexity. The results showed that racial stereotypes on black people have an influence on the response of the characters in them. The results show that characters who believe in certain stereotypes about black people respond to racism as if racism did not happen. Racial stereotypes also influence characters to commit racist acts. On the other hand, characters who do not believe in racial stereotypes think that racist actions are not right and respond to racism as something that should not be tolerated.

Key words: *Black people, white people, racism, racial stereotypes*

A. INTRODUCTION

America is a superpower country that upholds liberalism which is also one of the countries with a high level of racism. Even though America is a multicultural country, racism is a real situation that still happens and is considered normal. Alo Liliweri claims that racism is an ideology based on discrimination against a person or group of people because their race has even become a political doctrine. While in Alleyne's book (2006) entitled 'Race and Racism (2006:1)' said that racism is the belief that humans are grouped into races and then added the belief that these races have different intrinsic values.

In most cases of racism in America, the acts of racism on black people is something that has happened for a long time and continues to this day. Black people is a term used in certain countries, often socially based on a racial or ethnicity classification system to describe people who are black in comparison to the rest of the population. In America, white people are the main perpetrators of

¹ English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on September 2022

² Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



racist acts committed against black people. White is a racialized classification of people and a skin color specifier, generally used for people of European origin; although the definition can vary depending on context, nationality, and point of view. White Americans usually refer to black people as “African-American” to classify their race. This happens naturally because of their long history of happening. The timeline of racism in America begins in 1619. This period is known as “America's Chat Slavery” which lasted for 246 years.

Status as immigrants and slaves with low wages for hundreds of years made black people often viewed as human or a low group to the point of being discriminated against based on their race. This view is called a stereotype. In the research of this novel, the stereotype in question is racial stereotypes with means view or judgment of white people towards black people. They will compare races with each other according to their preconceived notions and stereotypes, and then claim that theirs is the best. In Longman Exams Dictionary (2006), racial is relating to the relationships between different races of people who now live in the same country or area. Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge in the book *Organizational Behavior* (2010) state that when we judge someone based on our perception of the group to which he/she belongs, we use a shortcut called a stereotype. Meanwhile, Mike Cardwell in the *Dictionary of Psychologists* (1999) says stereotypes are general beliefs about certain categories of people. Most white people have the belief that the black group is not part of the group so that there is racist treatment of black people, both towards teenagers and adults. For some individuals, communities, and other countries, "black person" is also considered a derogatory or other derogatory label, and as a result is used to mean it. Some people regard "black" as a derogatory, outdated, reductive, or unrepresentative label, and consequently do not use or define it, especially in African countries with little or no history of colonial racial segregation.

Racial stereotype is one of the themes that are often indirectly introduced and discussed in a literary work. *Dear Martin* is Nic Stone's first novel published in 2017 that carries racist acts and shows how the characters have racial views and how they respond to the racism that occurs in the novel. This issue is important to discuss because it will help people to understand what racism is and how the long history make a stereotype to the black race until they are discriminated.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The data source is the novel *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone (2017). The research instrument in this study is the author of the study itself. The primary data that will be used in this research are words, phrases, sentences, and quotes in the novel *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone (2017). Furthermore, the secondary data that will be used are several articles in several journals or certain books on theories related to the problem under study. In addition, *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone (2017) is based on a true story, so the things in it are quite actual.

The data is analyzed using the theory of racial stereotypes. In Longman Exams Dictionary (2006), racial is relating to the relationships between different races of people who now live in the same country or area. Beside, Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge in the book *Organizational Behavior* (2010) state

that when we judge someone based on our perception of the group to which he/she belongs, we use a shortcut called a stereotype. The method that will be used in this research is descriptive analysis with a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding, theory development, description of reality and social complexity.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. White Characters Respond the Racism

Since the enslavement of black people during the colonial period, American society created stereotypes about African-Americans that developed in society. This stereotype has always been related to racial discrimination or racism against black or African-Americans. This stereotype of the black race is experienced by Justyce, the protagonist in *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone. It can be seen from the quote 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.8)
“You keep your mouth shut.” The cop squats and gets right in Justyce’s face. “I know your kind: punks like you wander the streets of nice neighborhoods searching for prey. Just couldn’t resist the pretty white girl who’d locked her keys in her car, could ya?” (p.8)

The quote shows the existence of negative stereotypes towards Justyce just from the clothes that he wears. Imani Perry of Princeton University's Center for African American Studies said that "Because of the pervasive and trenchant racial stereotypes associated with black young people, especially males, their styles are often singled out for criticism, as signs of criminality and misdeeds.". Black people often get bad looks just by the way they dress. Regan A. R. Gurung and his team proved through a study that white people have stereotypes about black people just from the way they dress. This is also supported by a quote from Justyce in his letter to Martin:

"...I don't come across as "threatening," you know? I don't sag my pants or wear my clothes super big..."

Black people are considered as a good person if they wear neat and formal clothes, are considered lazy and unintelligent just because they wear sports clothes, and are considered thugs or criminals if they wear a hoodie and baggy pants.

Officer Castillo's last sentence from the quote above also shows that he was racist towards Justyce. Castillo has a stereotype called Black Brute or Black Buck. According to the Jim Crow Museum, Black men are stereotyped to be savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal. Black brutes or black bucks are depicted as hideous, terrifying black male predators who target helpless victims, especially

white women. Castillo were engaging in racial profiling—that is, they are making assumptions about individuals based on stereotypes and then using that to inform their actions. Negative stereotypes attached to black people make white officer actually do institutional injustice just because of clothing and racial stereotypes.

The incident of the arrest of the innocent Justice by white officer led to a discussion in the Societal Evolution class about equality. Dr. Jarius Dray or Doc, as a teacher started the discussion "United States Declaration of Independence, ratified July 4, 1776". In Jared's dialogue quote below:

Jared: I'm not saying they don't, man. You just proved my point. Black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they are willing to work hard enough. Manny's parents are a perfect example. (p.24)

Jared: Well maybe if more people were like Manny's parents it wouldn't have happened. (p.25)

Black people and white people have economic disparities due to discrimination against black people. Jared doesn't think this racial discrimination stems from government policies, but only relies on racial stereotypes and thinks that black people are not enough to work hard to get an established job position. Jared indirectly states that black people are a race that does not want to try to change their lives regardless of that equality in their country is still not balanced.

Jared: Ah, here we go. Not every white person who kills a black person is guilty of a crime. Pretty sure the courts proved that yesterday.

SJ: All the courts “proved” yesterday was that a white guy can kill an unarmed teenager and get away with it if the kid is black.

Jared: Dude, the kid attacked the cop and tried to take his gun. And he had a criminal record.

Jared: Doesn't change the fact that the guy'd been arrested before. You don't get arrested if you're not doing anything wrong. Bottom line, he was a criminal. (p.27)

In the dialogue above, Jared also indirectly believes in the stereotype of Black Buck or Black Brute. Jim Crow Museum adds, "In the post-Reconstruction United States, Black Buck was used as a racial designation used to describe a certain type of African-American man. Specifically described as a black man who refused to submit to the laws of white authority and was viewed as a black man. cruel, violent, and depraved." Jared once again shows that he believes that racism is no longer the case in America. The murder of a white officer against Shemar Carson, a black youth, was purely self-defense against black people who were considered threatening because they had a criminal record.

Another quote that shows how white people respond to racism can be seen from the sentence below:

I swear I heard some girl ask “Why are black people so angry all the time?” as I left Blake's house, but how else am I supposed to feel?

Jared, Blake and their friends commit racist acts when they are at Blake's party. This racist act by Jared and his friends is a color-blind racist act. Ware (2015) also discusses the ongoing color blind racism. In his research, he discusses color blind racism in France with the problem of prejudice or bias against immigrants who have ethnic minorities. Minimized racism is a type of color blindness who thinks racist words are just a joke and doesn't think about whether the victim of racism has been hurt or not. But the perpetrators are not aware and do not want to admit that what they are doing is a racist act.

A quote from the letter Justyce wrote to Martin shows how whites responded to Jared and his friends' racism. The "Some Girl" that Justyce referred to in his letter showed racial stereotypes. This stereotype is referred to as the Angry Black Woman. According to Melissa Harris-Perry (2011), in the 21st century, the "angry black woman" is depicted as loud, aggressive, demanding, uncivilized, and physically threatening, as well as lower-middle-class and materialistic. Not only women, this stereotype can also apply to black men to describe the emotions of black people who are not calm and like to explode. This racial stereotype affects how white people respond to racism by Jared and his gang. "Some Girls" also thought that racist jokes were not a big deal and did not feel any racist actions by Jared and others. They still believe that Black People are temperamental people.

Another racist act experienced by Justyce and Manny in this novel is when they are insulted and cursed as black people by a white police officer named Tison. Unfortunately, Tison's actions with racist elements of shooting and killing are considered innocent by most people. From the news transcript below:

“The man was defending himself from thugs,” said Tison’s neighbor April Henry. “I’ve known Garrett for twenty-five years. If he says those boys had a gun, they had a gun.” A fellow police officer, who asked to remain anonymous, claims the indictment is nothing more than a publicity stunt at Tison’s expense. “They’re out to make an example of him. Prosecutor pulled the race card, and the grand jury bought it hook, line, and sinker.” And many agree. At a solidarity rally held in Tison’s honor, picketers wore T-shirts that read “Race-Baiting Should Be a Crime” while holding signs featuring Tison’s face and the words “Protector not Poster Child.”

“We’ve heard about his grades, SAT scores, and admission to an Ivy League school,” the anchor says, “but a picture speaks a thousand words. This kid grew up in the same neighborhood as the young man accused of

murdering Garrett Tison's partner more or less on a whim." (p.148)

"I mean it's obvious this kid was leading a double life," the guy is saying. "You know what they say, Steven: you can remove the kid from the thug life...But ya can't remove the thug life from the kid." (p.148)

Pundit: It wouldn't surprise me if both boys had ties to Banks. Who's to say Officer Tison didn't see them on the scene the night his partner was murdered right before his eyes? You have to put the pieces together, Steven: Garrett Tison and Tommy Castillo respond to a complaint about loud music, there's a Range Rover parked in the driveway of the offending domicile, and some thug kid pops out of the backseat with a shotgun. Now that we're learning about all these connections, who's to say it wasn't the same Range Rover Emmanuel Rivers was driving? Officer Tison says these boys pointed a gun at him, and after seeing this picture, I can't say I'd put it past them. (p.149)

This shows how white people respond to the racism that is so obvious and perpetrated by their race. They don't care about the victims who are black people. They don't want to know the opinion of black people as victims. They are not looking for the truth that actually happened. They just believe the stereotypes they hold. That black people are dangerous human beings should be avoided. Supported by William J Drummond (1990) stated that in the 1980s and following decades, emerging stereotypes of black men depicted them as drug dealers, crack addicts, hobos, and subway muggers. This stereotype leads whites to believe that blacks dominate crime and the criminal underworld.

2. Black Characters Respond the Racism

The first part of Dear Martin's novel points out the injustices Justyce endured simply because of the way he dresses and the racial stereotypes that Castillo officers believe. And here are quotes when Justyce respond to the racism that he experienced:

The cop shoves him to the ground beside the police cruiser as he asks if Justyce understands his rights. Justyce doesn't remember hearing any rights, but his ears had been ringing from the two blows to the head, so maybe he missed them. He swallows more blood.
"Officer, this is a big misundersta—" he starts to say, but he doesn't get to finish because the officer hits him in the face. (p.7)

So the hood was a bad idea. Earbuds too. Probably would've noticed he was being trailed without them. "But, Officer, I—" (p.8)
"Officer Castillo, I mean you no disresp—" (p.8)
"I told your punk ass to shut the fuck up!" (p.8)

In this quote it can be seen that black people are not given the opportunity or right to speak up and defend themselves when they are mistreated. Racial stereotypes affect racist acts that occur. According to Jewell (1993) said that racial stereotypes are constructed beliefs that all members of the same race share given characteristics. Castillo officers believed in the stereotype that all black boys had dangerous backgrounds and bad traits and thus considered them a 'threat'. This racial stereotype made Castillo officers stubborn to mistreat others. Justyce lost his right to protest and defend herself against the racist accusations he experienced just because of the stereotypical race that Castillo believed in.

Manny is also a victim of racist acts committed by his own friends. The racist actions that Jared and the others have committed are color-blind racist acts. In the novel quote below:

Jared: And of course SJ jumped right on it. I think the fact that her mom has to constantly defend all those thugs is starting to screw with her head.
Blake, Kyle, and Tyler: [Laugh.]
Manny: [Laughs belatedly.] (p.31)
Jared: Exactly! This is a color-blind society, my brethren...people are judged by the content of their character instead of the color of their skin.
Kyle: Right, dude. Like I totally don't even see you as black, Manny!
[Manny laughs at this, but Justyce can tell his heart isn't in it...] (p.33)

And another quote that show how Manny respon the racism:

Jus: These dudes disrespect you—disrespect us—all the time, and you never say anything about it. You just go along with whatever they say.
Manny: These are my friends, Jus. You're way too sensitive, man.
Jus: Lemme guess: that's what they said when you took offense at some racist joke, right? (p.93)

Color-blind racism is one form of hidden racism, invisible and does not look racist. The quote above shows that the color-blind racism carried out by Jared and his friends formed Manny's thinking that what his friends were doing was not racist. According to Amy E. Ansell (2008), "Color Blindness" and the opinions of

several other researchers, color-blind causes sociologists and historians to debate the validity of claims that racial equality has been achieved. This periodic racist color-blind that is often done by Manny's friends affects the way Manny thinks and responds to racist actions that occur. Manny was clearly a passive person.

There are two forms of response of black people characters to the racism they experience in the novel. However, the Black People's different response to racism is found in the following quotes:

“There's this fine-ass black girl here from Decatur Prep, and I was thinking you guys could wingman it up for me and shit. Homegirl's got the fattest ass I've ever seen, and I think if she meets my niggas, I'll have a good chance of getting' her upstairs. You feel me, dogs?” He nudges Jus and grins. Manny's smile collapses. He looks over at Justyce. Almost like he knows everything's about to go to hell.

“Is this fool serious right now?” Jus says.

“Hell nah, I'm not 'bouta chill. Ya boy's got racist lawn gnomes and white people in blackface hanging on the walls, now he pulls this shit, and you want me to chill?”

“You coming over here asking us to help you use a black girl IS a big deal, Blake. That's not to mention you tossin' the n-word around like you own it.”

Justyce: It's already outta hand, Manny. Your boy Blake is a racist.

Jared: (Laughs.) Better watch out, B. You know Justyce grew up in the hood. He's gonna call up his gangsta homies to ride through on your ass and bust some ca—
By the time Jus is seeing colors other than red, his left hand and right jaw are throbbing, and there's something warm running down his chin. Jared's scrambling up from the floor with a split lip and a swelling eye, and Blake is on his hands and knees with blood pouring out of his nose and onto the carpet.

There's a set of arms around Jus, pinning his arms to his sides. “Let me go,” he says, twisting out of the grip of whoever's holding him. (p.90-93)

And another quote that show how Manny respon the racism that occurred in Dear Martin (2017) :

“Saturday night, I went to a festival with those clowns. our times, man—four—I had to grit my teeth to keep from knocking Jared's punk ass out. Every time he made fun of somebody, it was like sandpaper being dragged over my eardrums.”

“When we saw this black lady with four kids, and this fool called her Shaniqua and made a joke about baby daddies, I couldn’t take any more, Jus. I called him on it, and he rolled his eyes. Told me to ‘stop being so fucking sensitive.’ ”

Manny smiles. “This morning I went in to tell Coach I quit—” “Anyway, Jared was in Coach’s office. When I said I was quitting, he made a ‘joke’ about how I couldn’t until Massah set me free. I lost it.” Manny falls back on the bed. “He clipped me once, but I can’t even tell you good it felt to pound that dude.

It is undeniable that racist acts or racial discrimination stem from racial stereotypes that are believed by people who commit racist acts. Various negative stereotypes about black people make their victims experience inequality and injustice in any environment. The racist treatment that black characters get in the novel on a regular and continuous basis produces a not very good impact on white people or black people themselves. The quote above shows that black characters can also respond to racists with emotions that explode to violence.

3. Differences Between Teenager and Older Characters Respond the Racism

There are some differences between teenagers and older characters in responding to racism that occurs. This difference is influenced by racial stereotypes whether the characters believe in it or not.

As did Jared, Blake and his friends. They tell racist jokes and commit racist acts based on the negative stereotypes of black people they know. On the other hand, not all whites discriminate against blacks. In *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone there is a white girl character named Sarah-Jane a.k.a SJ who does not support racism at all and always supports Justyce. As in the quote below:

SJ: Fine. Bottom line, it's been over two centuries, and African Americans are still getting a raw deal.

SJ: I know you'd prefer to ignore this stuff because you benefit from it, but walking around pretending inequality doesn't exist won't make it disappear, Jared. You and Manny, who are equal in pretty much every way apart from race, could commit the same crime, but it's almost guaranteed that he would receive a harsher punishment than you. (p.27-28)

The quote above shows that not all white people believe in the negative stereotypes directed at black people. SJ as a white is aware that racist acts are not justified. SJ's attitude stems from the upbringing of her parents, the Friedmans, who did not instill racial stereotypes in their daughter. Mrs. Friedman as an attorney certainly knows more about the existing laws and policies and is wiser in

responding to existing racists. This can be seen from an excerpt from Justyce's letter to Martin:

Mr. Taylor wound up calling my friend SJ's mom, Mrs. Friedman—an attorney—and she had to come bark a bunch of legal hoo-ha in the cops' faces before they'd undo the cuffs. By the time they finally let me go, the sun was coming up.

There's a difference between SJ's parents and Officer Castillo or Officer Tison. This once again shows that racist acts and how a person responds to racists is influenced by existing stereotypes. SJ and his parents did not instill stereotypes in their family so they were aware of the inequality and racial injustice that occurred. On the other hand, Jared and his gang and white officers did the exact opposite.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Dear Martin (2017) by Nic Stone is a novel that brings up the issue of racism that is still happening in America. Racism that occurs as a result of a long history of slavery that occurred over hundreds of years. This history creates various negative stereotypes against black people to define the boundaries between white people and black people.

This analysis tries to reveal how racial stereotypes affect the thoughts of the characters in the novel and show how they respond to racism. The analysis was carried out using descriptive analysis method with a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding, theory development, description of reality and social complexity. In this analysis, the researcher shows several responses from the characters in Dear Martin (2017) by Nic Stone to the racism that occurs.

Characters in novels who believe in negative stereotypes about black people tend to act racist and respond to racism like something that didn't happen. The white characters in the novel still believe in the stereotypes that show that black people are lowly people, lazy, not smart, thugs, or even criminals.

Racial stereotypes are one of the causes of racist acts. This stereotype is very detrimental to the black characters in Dear Martin (2017). Analysis shows that black people can only contain their feelings when they are treated racist. Their rights were taken away by white people so they were not given a chance to speak up or defend themselves. Continuous racist treatment has a bad impact on its victims.

There is a difference between the response of the teenager and older characters in this novel. But this again shows the influence of racial stereotypes on the responses of these characters. The Friedman family and their son, SJ, do not believe in any stereotypes about black people so they realize that racial discrimination is wrong and should not be done. They actually helped Justyce in his case. It's different with Jared, and his gang or officer Castillo and officer

Tison. They are white characters who believe in negative stereotypes about black people and unknowingly commit racist acts.

In conclusion, racial stereotypes have an influence on racist actions or racial discrimination that occur in *Dear Martin* (2017). Based on Jewell (1993) said that racial stereotypes are beliefs that are built that all members of the same race have the same characteristics. These associated characteristics are usually negative. How the characters in it respond to racism depends on the stereotypes they believe in.

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