

Racial Stereotypes of African-American People in The Movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*

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Abstract:

This study aims to reveal on how the stereotype uttered by white Americans is directed towards African-American airmen in the movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*. In this study, the researchers used the critical discourse analysis approach by Teun A. van Dijk 1984 to analyze the stereotypes that exist in the movie. The researchers used a qualitative descriptive method to collect the data from movie scripts, history, and online sources that support this research, and several steps were conducted by the researchers to analyze the data. The researchers found how the power relations and social ideology created the white American stereotypes of African-American airmen, based on American social conditions during the 1940s for racial segregation of African-American people in America. The researchers found that the stereotype was not used to judge individuals only for social cases, but the researchers found that stereotypes were a way to attack the mental state and injure the dedication of African-American airmen in serving their country. Then, these social issues not only weakened the African-American social status in their common life but also how this case influenced the American military policy.

Keywords: critical discourse; racism; stereotype; African-Americans; movie

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana stereotip terjadi dalam konteks ketika orang kulit putih Amerika berdialog dengan penerbang kulit hitam Amerika di dalam film *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*. Dalam penelitian ini, para peneliti menggunakan pendekatan analisis wacana kritis yang dikemukakan oleh Teun A. van Dijk 1984 untuk menganalisa konteks stereotip yang ada dalam film tersebut. Para peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengumpulkan data dari naskah film, sejarah rasial orang kulit hitam Amerika yang terjadi di dalam periode tersebut, dan sumber-sumber online yang mendukung penelitian ini dengan beberapa langkah yang dilakukan oleh para peneliti untuk menganalisa data temuan. Para peneliti menemukan bagaimana relasi kuasa dan ideologi sosial menciptakan stereotip orang kulit putih Amerika terhadap penerbang kulit hitam Amerika, berdasarkan kondisi sosial Amerika pada tahun 1940-an yang merupakan produk dari krisis segregasi rasial di Amerika. Para peneliti menemukan bahwa stereotip tersebut tidak hanya digunakan untuk menilai individu untuk kasus-kasus sosial, tetapi stereotip adalah cara untuk menghancurkan mental dan mencederai dedikasi para penerbang kulit hitam Amerika untuk mengabdikan kepada negaranya. Kemudian, isu-isu sosial ini tidak hanya melemahkan status sosial kulit hitam Amerika dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka, tetapi juga bagaimana kasus ini mempengaruhi kebijakan militer di Amerika Serikat.

Kata kunci: kritik wacana; rasisme; stereotip; orang kulit hitam Amerika; film

INTRODUCTION

The social discrimination towards African-Americans in America continued for centuries, creating a negative effect on American social thinking and stereotypes. Even case within the American military, as the reader can see in the various American-made World War II movies, most of which have no African-American characters, whether in European or the Pacific theater. Generally, the American military is very restrictive and never accepts military enlistment for African-Americans; those who are desperate to enlist will only become non-combat units (Hunter & Rollins, 2015). However, history records several American combat units whose entire combat personnel are African-Americans, including the Mustang Squadron Corps, which belonged to the American Army during World War II. This corps is called Tuskegee.

Tuskegee is an American airmen unit with a personnel strength of 15,000 people. It is divided into fighter cadets, navigators, instructors, and aircraft mechanics, all of them are African-American soldiers. This program continued with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's responses to the growing war, especially in the European theater (D. Haulman, 2012). Another, America is a home of racial segregation towards African-American and even restrictive service regulations in civilian and military spheres, believing that African-American soldiers were inferior to white soldiers and showed poor results during combat. The Tuskegee program made its first debut in training war machines in 1941 at the U.S. Army's airfield in Alabama; all participants were African-Americans who were registered college and technical school graduates who fulfilled the call of duty during the war (D. L. Haulman, 2015).

America made the story of this fighter squadron into the movie series *The Tuskegee Airmen*, released in 1995. The movie was directed by Robert Markowitz and starred senior African-American actors. All of the plot shows the main character, a young airman named Hannibal Lee, is a young scholar who tours into Tuskegee, a military base in Alabama. Here, he joined his fellow African-American cadets trained to become fighter pilots under white leadership: Colonel Noel Rogers as the base chief and Major Sherman Joy as the training officers. Both officers had their views on the African-American cadets during their training; Colonel Noel was more optimistic about the success of the training, while Major Joy was more dismissive of the abilities of the African-American cadets as a general American society at the time. He underestimated these African-American people would

never be able to complete the training (*The Tuskegee Airmen* (1995) Script, n.d.). Major Joy, on his manner towards African-American airmen cadets, portrayed stereotypes.

Stereotypes are an individual's thinking to other individuals or groups by judging them, especially in their appearance and character "Stereotypes are ubiquitous. Among other things, they cover racial groups 'Asians are good at math,' political groups 'Republicans are rich,' genders 'male drivers are aggressive,' demographic groups 'Florida residents are elderly,' and activities 'flying is dangerous.'" (Bordalo et al., 2016). Human beings are generally visual creatures who are easy to judge based on their appearance and character; it would be easy to say that a man who wears luxurious clothes is rich while a man who wears simple clothes is poor.

In addition, a person's character also influences our thinking when judging a person based on his family or race. In America, African-Americans are always considered of weakened mentality for white stereotypes. Taylor et al. (2019) found that stereotypes of African-Americans have existed ever since the American Revolutionary Era; they state that the stereotype conducted a negative sign, especially in males. This negativity impacts their social life aspect like education, employment, social economics status, and the justice system. Dukes and Gaither (2017) confirmed that differences in skin color and race affect public attitudes against victims of abuse. African-Americans predominantly do not receive public sympathy when they are victimized, especially by white people; this is due to the negative stereotypes rooted in African-Americans who must be responsible for causing the violence themselves.

Williams (2012) found that the stereotyping of African-Americans is a social crisis in America. The movies *The Red Tails 2012* and *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995* illustrate the growing racism in America that influenced the War Department to create social inequality in the American military. Sandler et al. (1996) found in their research of the movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995* that the African-American airmen not only completed their training camps, but they also had to complete the challenges of social immorality due to long-drawn racism in America, stereotypes are clearly depicted in this movie as a moral dysfunction to African-American airmen. Gooding (2023) found in his thesis that the Tuskegee airmen have been a problem for racist parties in America; they developed a defective stereotype of African-American soldiers for their value as no more valuable than Japanese Kamikaze airmen.

Based on the previous studies that have been studied by the researchers, the researchers found that racial issues in the American military in the 1940s were not given a significant understanding of how the social gap happened; most of the previous studies only explain the stereotypes of American society in general ways in the movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995* without giving examples and explanations with historical relevance. Thus, in this article, the researchers found ideology and power relations to be contributing factors to the stereotyping of white soldiers towards African-American soldiers in the American military as a product of social discrimination in the movie by the true history of racism in America in 1939-1945. Therefore, the problem study of the current research is how these stereotypes uttered by white Americans to African-American airmen are portrayed in the movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical discourse analysis aims to influence, argue, refute, or react to something disclosed as someone who speaks or writes has a certain intention, understood as something spoken consciously and controlled. In addition, the context that shapes discourse must also be understood, such as history, social class, ethnicity, or education. A certain social background is important in shaping this discourse; place and time can determine that discourse can happen (Fairclough, 2013). Power relations and ideology of the social culture influence stereotypes; critical discourse analysis can be used to reveal how stereotypes are formed in social issues. The researchers used a mimetic approach by Girard (2008). This approach is about how art is influenced by real life, true stories, and events illustrated by humans into artistic. The researchers used this approach in analyzing the stereotypical scenes that occurred during the movie with the historical relevance of African-American racism in America in the 1940s.

The researchers focused on Van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive scheme in critical discourse analysis that explores how stereotypes are presented in the social context; this strategy is used in the text to play an important role in forming stereotypes. Van Dijk (1984) focused on cognitive mechanisms to support the discourse process; this approach confirmed that a social ideology and power strength dynamic influence the discourse and then interpreted through cognitive scheme and mental model components. Van Dijk (1984) provides three-dimensional models of socio-cognitive;

Cognitive scheme

Van Dijk states that mental structure helps a person receive, categorize, and interpret information. In discourse, this scheme allows individuals to process the text based on their knowledge and experience.

Mental model

A mental model is the main focus of Van Dijk's theory approach, conducting dynamic representation, personality, and situational created an individual in the discourse process. This model allows an individual to connect discourse through the individual experience, emotions, and social understanding to influence how the discourse is understood and remembered.

Ideological square

Van Dijk was grouping how the discourse supports the group or individual perspective for discrediting other groups or individuals, Van Dijk claimed this condition is a mechanism root of a social condition that reflects and reinforces a social power in a society. The researcher must observe how discourse develops in constructing society, events, and experiences about a person or group, thus influencing individual mindsets for marginalizing a group.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers used qualitative description in this research; Sandelowski (2000) stated that the descriptive qualitative method has its direction of comprehension summary, and the researchers conducted this method should have been staying close to their data because qualitative descriptive methods are a coherent combination of sampling techniques, data collection, analysis, and re-presentation. The researchers collected the data source from the movie script through online sites and conducted several steps in analyzing the data. The first was watching the movie *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995* more than 3 times. The second was understanding the history of *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*. The third was identifying the contexts of stereotypes in *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*. The last was finding and discussing the data in *The Tuskegee Airmen 1995*. Research Procedure: Explain in detail the steps of the research preparation, data collection techniques, and data analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Data 1

Major Joy: “You people. Well, don't you know how bad we treat you people? Serving your country. This ain't your country. **Your country's full of apes and gorillas, malaria, missionaries.**” (The Tuskegee Airmen (1995) Script, n.d.)

Explanation: The dialog occurred between the cadets People and Major Joy, who asked about the motivation of the soldiers to join the American army squadron; in his statement, one of the soldiers answered that he wanted to serve his country, but the statement was immediately refuted by Major Joy who said that this is not your country, your country is full of Gorillas and Apes, malaria, and missionaries. The researchers found that the context of the discourse uttered by Major Joy stated about the land of Africa that where the ancestors of African-Americans came from, he considers the world of negroes to be a wild world, full of epidemics, so made it unfit for life and required the missionaries to fix what needed fixing in the lives of the negroes.

Data 2

Major Joy: “To my knowledge, the Germans aren't sparing the coloreds. To my knowledge, **the colored aren't up to fighting the Germans, let alone beating them.** Max Schmeling found out differently, sir.” (The Tuskegee Airmen (1995) Script, n.d.)

Explanation: Major Joy's statement to the Cadet People that Germany would not fight against African-Americans was a stereotypical action thrown at all black people. It shows Germany's ambition to exterminate the blacks in mainland Europe. This discrimination is then used as Major Joy's statement to insult the cadets who think that the Germans will feel insulted fighting against black people (African-Americans) and they will respect white people more as their opponents because they (Germans) consider African-Americans more as craps.

Data 3

The first white officer in the missions briefing: "Lift-off time is 0700. Lieutenant?"

The second white officer in the missions briefing: "What have we got here? **It's the buffalo soldiers.**" (The Tuskegee Airmen (1995) Script, n.d.)

Explanation: This conversation happened when the briefing mission was over, and Officer Benjamin O. Davis entered the room with the African-American soldiers, one of the white

officers uttered to them, 'Buffalo Soldiers.' The word 'Buffalo Soldiers' was the name of the logistics company of the United States Army during World War II that was responsible for the logistical needs in the frontline; the men who served in this company were mostly African-American soldiers who were used for logistical supplies. The researchers found that the statement of 'Buffalo' here refers to African-American soldiers who were considered as logistics services and nothing more than combat soldiers even though the one speaking to the officer is an African-American army pilot, the word 'Buffalo' symbolizes that African-American must obey the orders of white people.

Data 4

Senator Conyers: **“In terms of character, the negro has been observed to be both childish and impulsive.** Now, gentlemen, you must agree that this report is highly inflammatory...” (The Tuskegee Airmen (1995) Script, n.d.)

Explanation: The conversation above happened in the scene of the Parliamentary Congress; the discussion is about the success of the experiment of African-Americans to become pilots. Senator Conyers makes a statement about African-Americans being mentally defective, timid, and inefficient as soldiers, especially when it comes to flying fighter planes. This statement refers to all negroes (African-Americans) in the world that do not deserve military education because it will waste unnecessary energy, and negroes (African-Americans) will not be able to complete the education given by instructors, especially as fighter pilots of the American army.

Discussion

Discrimination in America harmed African-Americans, especially in military service. The researchers found the data that describing the stereotypes of white people towards African-American soldiers in the movie The Tuskegee Airmen 1995, the ideology of racism towards African-American soldiers still exists in the American military service, creating verbal violence towards African-Americans to weaken their mentality in the American military purpose on World War II. In the previous study, Williams (2012) explained the color and racial disparities that happened through the two films studied, but there is no information on how the impact of this ideology injured the morale of African-American soldiers in the American military service in the 1940s. The researchers found that white soldiers' stereotyping of African-American soldiers is an issue that continues from the social context. For example, the statement expressed by Major Joy towards the cadet People is an implication of the ideological discrepancy used to undermine the



dedication of African-American soldiers. This is one of the factors that led to the cadet People being killed in his training at Tuskegee. The researchers found that the information about African-American pilots was true, According to Percy's (2003) articles, there were more than 2 African-American pilots who were killed in their training due to nervousness caused by the pressure exerted by white officers and the negative stereotypes they were exposed to during the training.

The military services did not change anything in response to this racial divide. In the Sandler et al. (1996) articles explained that this racism growing up in the American military had a significant impact on the development of military morale in their dedication during World War II, but he does not explain the products of racism itself. Researchers found that stereotypes as a product of racism affected not only the ideology of white soldiers but also their power relations. The word 'Buffalo Soldiers' was a popular stereotype during World War II; in this scene, Lieutenant Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. must accept the word with his rank as a lieutenant of African-American soldiers. This stereotype illustrated the power relations within the American military from the 1940s to the Vietnam War. In the facts of American history, these 'Buffalo Soldiers' known as logisticians, provide a fairly understandable picture of how African-Americans became truck drivers for the front lines, making them dirty laborers who worked for whites and not the country (Black & Thompson, 2012). With the army uniform, the fact that they were not equal to white soldiers, Lieutenant Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. is the son of General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., one of the top brasses of the American military; in this case, it does not eliminate white supremacy in stereotyping him.

Power relations and ideology in American society are generally a strong influence on the American military. Racism finds its place in every individual American, distinguishing individuals with discriminatory actions, no matter if they were also American citizens. In Major Joy's statement to African-American soldiers, Germany will not fight against African-Americans; the researchers discovered the true history through the book *Triumph: Jesse Owens And Hitler's Olympics* by Schaap (2007) regarding this condition, in the evidence of Jesse Owens, who was an African-American athlete for America at the 1939 Berlin Olympics, he confirmed that Hitler did not shake his hand because he did not shake all of the athletes in the Olympics, but he knows that Hitler waved and smiled warmly at him, while Roosevelt did not demand him at the White

House to fete his dedications. Owens's information provided evidence to the researchers that America was home to racial segregation; Germany did commit the genocide. However, racism in America was a serious problem in the genocide of African Americans.

CONCLUSION(S)

The social discrimination towards African-Americans in America continued for centuries, harming African-Americans in their social identity and making it difficult for them to officiate a respectable profession, such as a career in the military. During World War II, America contributed to the Pacific Theater and the European Theater, which required the country to have a large of armed personnel, thus forcing America to recruit all citizens, especially African-Americans. If we pay attention to American war films, almost all of them do not feature African-American characters; this refers to historical events in America in the 1940s about racial segregation; those (African-Americans) who are desperate to enroll in the military will be non-combat units such as 'Buffalo Soldiers' or as kitchen assistants, this condition illustrates the discrimination. However, America has a combat unit whose personnel are African-American; this unit is called Tuskegee.

This combat unit belonging to the American Army was immortalized in a movie called *The Tuskegee Airmen*, released in 1995; telling the story of African-American airmen who gave their dedication to the American state. They not only experienced the raging world war but also the social war that happened due to the issue of racism in America. Discrimination produced the stereotypes conveyed by white people towards African-Americans; this is the problem study taken by the researchers on how the stereotypes happened in American military during the movie. The researchers used a qualitative method by collecting source data that would be used to conduct this analysis. In addition, the researchers used the discourse approach by Van Dijk (1984) to analyze the stereotypes that happened and the mimetics approach by Girard (2008) to analyze the film with historical facts in America. The researchers found and discussed the power relations and ideology to be factors that build stereotypes towards African-Americans and found historical facts about the racial context of African-American characters in the film by the conditions of American society in the 1940s.

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