

**The Analysis of Discriminatory Discourses against African American in *When They See Us*  
Movie Series: A Critical Discourse Study**

**THESIS**

**Submitted as Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements to Obtain Strata One (S1) Degree**



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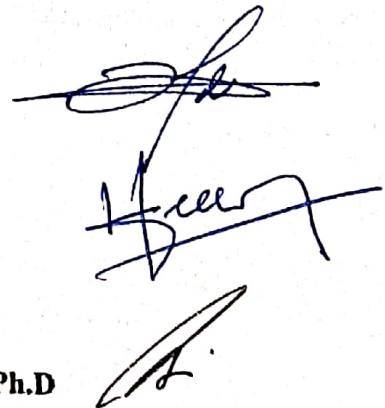
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## ABSTRACT

Melina, F. (2022). *The Analysis of Discriminatory Discourses Against African American in When They See Us Movie Series: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. Universitas Negeri Padang.

This study aims to determine (1) the topic of discourse and (2) the discourse strategy of the utterances produced by whites in the *When They See Us* movie series as discriminatory actors to reveal how they voice their ideology when discriminating against blacks in their discourse. The researcher used qualitative methods because the data is in the form of written texts and also understands the meaning attached by a group to a social problem. In particular, the researcher analyzed the discourse presented in the *When They See Us* movie series which is transcribed into written discourses. This study focuses on how whites describe themselves positively and how whites portray blacks negatively in their discourse based on their beliefs. From the movie series that have been analyzed, the research found 83 data consisting of the presentation of positive-self and negative-other. By using the Van Dijk's ideological square approach, the researcher found 10 discourse topics of blacks and 5 discourse topics of whites. In addition, there were 12 discriminatory discourse strategies used by whites to represent blacks negatively and 4 discourse strategies that whites used to represent themselves positively.

Keywords: Discriminatory Discourse, Ideological Square, Discourse Topic, Discourse Strategy.

## ABSTRAK

Melina, F. (2022). Analisis Wacana Diskriminatif Terhadap Orang Afrika-Amerika dalam Serial Film *When They See Us*: Analisis Wacana Kritis. Universitas Negeri Padang.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan (1) topik wacana dan (2) strategi wacana ujaran yang diproduksi oleh orang kulit putih dalam serial film *When They See Us* sebagai aktor diskriminatif untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana mereka menyuarakan ideologi mereka ketika mendiskriminasi orang kulit hitam dalam wacana mereka. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif karena data penelitian ini berupa teks tertulis dan juga memahami makna yang melekat pada suatu kelompok terhadap suatu masalah sosial. Secara khusus, peneliti menganalisis wacana yang disajikan dalam serial film *When They See Us* yang ditranskrip menjadi wacana tertulis. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana orang kulit putih menggambarkan diri mereka secara positif dan bagaimana orang kulit putih menggambarkan orang kulit hitam secara negatif dalam wacana mereka berdasarkan keyakinan mereka. Dari serial film yang telah dianalisis, penelitian menemukan 83 data yang terdiri dari penyajian positive-self dan negative-other. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan Van Dijk's Ideological Square, peneliti menemukan 10 topik wacana orang kulit hitam dan 5 topik wacana orang kulit putih. Selain itu, terdapat 12 strategi wacana diskriminatif yang digunakan oleh orang kulit putih untuk merepresentasikan orang kulit hitam secara negatif dan 4 strategi wacana yang digunakan orang kulit putih untuk merepresentasikan dirinya secara positif.

Kata Kunci: Wacana Diskriminasi, Ideological Square, Topik Wacana, Strategi Wacana.

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## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the Problem**

This study examined discriminatory discourses against minority racial groups, African American, which are represented in movie series. Historically, the relationship between African American and American has been framed around a black-and-white paradigm (Levchak & Levchak, 2020). Henceforth, African American is categorized as black people while American is categorized as white people.

The topics and discourse strategies created in discriminatory context of the discourse were examined in this study. The meaning of the topic of discourse is what the discourse is about. These discourse topics are created using discriminatory discourse strategies such as problematisation, blaming the victims, metaphor, prejudice, negative attribution, labelling mechanism, quotation, the use of personal pronouns to show indirectness, normalisation of prejudice as common knowledge, social demarcation, devaluation or exception of the good characteristics of others, disclaimers, and extensivisation.

Many researchers have used various methodologies and tools to investigate discrimination against black people from various perspectives. The previous research has discussed black discrimination in the discourse of racism conducted by Wulandari (2017) in *12 Years A Slave* movie to find out the types of racism. Another previous research conducted by Ikawati (2018) using Fairclough's CDA to analyze discrimination against blacks in *Hidden Figures* movie. There is one previous research that examined the same movie as the

present research conducted by Favour (2020), he analyzes *When They See Us* movie using Critical Race Theory (CTR).

Other previous studies discuss discrimination against black in the context of movie conducted by using Sociological approaches (Adam, 2019; Pakaya et al., 2021; Rambe & Asnani, 2021; Yulinarni et al., 2020). First, Adam (2019) analyzes the *The Help* movie to find out the type of racism. Second, Rambe & Asnani (2021) examine racial discrimination in the *Lincoln* movie. Lastly, Yulinarni et al. (2020) classify the types of racism that appear in the *Freedom Writers* movie.

Moreover, there are several previous research examined racial discrimination case by using Van Dijk's CDA in context of movie and novel (Alviniyanti, 2019; Mahbub et al., 2020; Nurwahyuni & Samelia, 2020). The first is the research conducted by Alviniyanti (2019). She reveals how the characters in the *Blackkkklansman* movie represent elements of racist scenes. The next is the research conducted by Mahbub et al. (2020), they analyze *The Help* novel to find out the ideological construction of anti-black racism. The last is the research conducted by Nurwahyuni & Samelia (2020), they investigate the *Green Book* movie to look at the stereotypes and discrimination that the main character faces. These previous researches and the present research both use the CDA approach from Van Dijk. However, the previous researches and the present research use different Van Dijk's approach. These previous researches focused on the dimensions of the text, the dimensions of social cognition, and the dimensions of social context in identifying acts of

racism. Meanwhile, in the present study, the Van Dijk's ideological square approach is used.

Based on several previous studies that have been briefly described, it can be seen that there is not a single research that discusses discrimination against black people using Van Dijk's ideological square in the context of the movie. As it is known that since the early years of their arrival in America in 1502, black people have been made slaves to replace the Indians (Abu-Jamal, 2017, p. 3). For generations, these dark-skinned Africans and their descendants slaved to feed, house, serve, and enrich profit-driven white people. In the 1950s and '60s, white people agree on the civil rights movement to change racial politics in the United States (Kiuchi, 2016). Through the civil rights movement, whites and blacks should be treated equally, but the reality is far from the promises that have been offered. Socially, they are still discriminated against just because of differences in skin color where blacks are considered much lower than whites. Therefore, this issue still needs to be raised. Moreover, studies that analyze discrimination against blacks are still rare using Van Dijk's ideological square to find out how black people are discriminated against with various discourse strategies made by whites.

Van Dijk's ideological square focuses on positive-self presentation and negative-other presentation. In this case, the researcher used this approach to reveal how whites present themselves positively and how whites present blacks negatively.

## **1.2. Identification of the Problem**

Discrimination is a social phenomenon in the form of ostracizing, harassing, and cornering the majority group against minority groups due to differences in ethnicity, language, customs, race, religion, gender, and social status. Fiske et al., (2016) state that “discrimination is still alive, pervasive, dangerous, and sometimes fatal”. One form of discrimination is racial discrimination, which is a term for discrimination based on racial differences. Racial discrimination is the most common case of discrimination in the world. This issue is caused by not recognizing or not accepting differences in physical appearance such as skin color, hair color, body shape, and other biological elements.

Racism is a behavior that feels dominant and superior which can cause discrimination in other groups of different races. Racism is also the concept of thinking that some races are innately superior to others. According to Reisigl & Wodak (2001, p. 10), racism is both a syncretic ideology and a discriminatory social (including discursive) practice that can be institutionalized and supported by dominant social groups. Racist ideologies are primarily built on disparities formed by ingroups who simply "prefer their own" or believe themselves to be superior to outgroups, and exhibit themselves in all social forms of problematisation, marginalization, or exclusion of others (Van Dijk, 1998).

This racism has existed for a long time where the white race thinks that their race is more dominant than the black race. Therefore, they think that they have the right to do anything to the black race. Talking about racism, we are

reminded of the common cases that occur between blacks and whites, especially in America. In America, black people seem to be treated so unfairly, white people so cruelly treat them unworthy just because of their racial identity. It seems so easy for white people to humiliate, oppress, and even kill black people. White people who are the majority group consider racial differences between blacks and whites as a symbol of hostility and a reason to discriminate against blacks who are a minority group.

History records many cases of human rights violations that associated with differences in skin color. The unfair treatment that black people received is still carried out by white people. These cases are so important to pay attention to because they are related to human rights. Everyone deserves the same treatment regardless of skin color. Every life is precious, including the lives of black people.

Racism is a global issue that never ends. Many people think that their race is the most superior compared to others. Starting from this negative prejudice, the problem of racism occurs which can pose a danger to a group of people. Social issues like this are considered interesting by the media as a discourse that needs to be presented as a form of criticism and rejection of the existence of racism. One of the mediums for delivering messages on this issue is through movies, because movies usually depart from a phenomenon that occurs around us.

Movies have made a significant contribution in exposing this phenomenon in society. The increasing awareness of the importance of

representation of minorities in the media, has made stories about them more raised on popular platforms. *When They See Us* is a movie that raises the issue of racism and the superiority of whites over blacks, featuring many scenes that reproduce and emphasize the differences between whites and blacks. *When They See Us* movie is the object of this research. This is an interesting movie to study because it depicts legal injustice for black people based on a true story, the controversial Central Park jogger case that occurred in 1989. In general, this movie tells the story of legal discrimination cases experienced by five black teenagers who were accused of raping and assaulting a woman in Central Park, New York City.

Looking at the things that are conveyed in *When They See Us* movie, there is a separate object of study seen from the conversation in the movie which shows the existence of acts of social discrimination. In this research, the researcher used a CDA approach from Van Dijk named 'The Ideological Square', positive-self and negative-other presentations. This study aims to determine the discourse topics and discourse strategies used against the black race represented in *When They See Us* movie.

### **1.3. Limitation of the Problem**

Since the focus of research is discrimination against black people, the analysis is limited on the utterances used by the characters in *When They See Us* movie series that show positive presentations for whites and negative presentations for blacks. This research focuses on CDA research by using the

analytical approach introduced and developed by Van Dijk, namely ‘Ideological Square’; positive-self and negative-other presentations.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

Based on the background and identification that has been written, it can be concluded that the problem to be raised by the researcher is formulated as follows:

1. What discourse topics are contained in the *When They See Us* movie series?
2. What discourse strategies are contained in the *When They See Us* movie series?

#### **1.5. Purposes of the Research**

Based on the formulation of the problem, the purpose of this research are as follows:

1. To find out the topic of discourse in the *When They See Us* movie.
2. To identify the discourse strategies in *When They See Us* movie.

#### **1.6. Significances of the Research**

This research contributes both theoretically and practically. The following are the expected outcomes of the study:

1. Theoretical Contribution
  - 1) This research is expected to Van Dijk's ideological square theory of critical discourse analysis in discriminatory discourse in the context of movie especially when analyzing and identifying discriminatory discourses based on racial prejudice against black people.

- 2) This research can be used to demonstrate the application of racism and similar theories.

## 2. Practical Contribution

The findings of this research are important for English learners, future researchers, and readers.

- 1) This research is expected to shed a new light the studies of racism representation for English learners by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to discover racism in the movie.
- 2) This research is expected to produce accurate data that can be analyzed as a reference for examining racism in the movie as well as helpful knowledge for understanding Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for future researchers and readers.
- 3) This research can be taken as an ethical stance in confronting power imbalances, injustices, and the social justice agenda in order to motivate readers to engage resistance and corrective social action.

### 1.7. Definition of Key Terms

The common terminology used in this study are defined as follows to avoid misunderstandings.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a research organization that examines the relationship between language and society critically.

**Discourse Topic:** Discourse topic is what the discourse is about that generated through positive self-presentation and negative-others presentation.

**Discriminatory Discourse:** Use of language that contains discriminatory context.

**Ideological Square:** The ideological square is arranged around a broad strategy that consists of two parts: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

**Positive-Self Presentation:** A positive self-image to create a good impression for others who hear it and also at the same time maintain the image of a group (in-group).

**Negative-Other Presentation:** A negative depiction of a particular group to create a bad impression of them (out-group).

**Discrimination:** Discrimination is a social phenomenon in the form of ostracizing, harassing, and cornering the majority group against minority groups due to differences in ethnicity, language, customs, race, religion, gender, and social status.

**Racism:** Discrimination is based on race.

***When They See Us* Movie Series:** *When They See Us* is a four-part Netflix criminal drama miniseries produced, co-written, and directed by Ava DuVernay that premiered on May 31, 2019. This movie series is based on the controversial Central Park jogger case that occurred in 1989. In general, this movie tells the story of legal discrimination cases experienced by five black teenagers who were accused of raping and assaulting a woman in Central Park, New York City.