

**Exploring Racial Discrimination in 'Black Brother, Black Brother' by  
Jewell Parker Rhodes**

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**Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the issue of racial discrimination contained in the novel entitled Black Brother, Black Brother by Jewell Parker Rhodes. In addition, the objectives of the study are to explain the kinds of racial discrimination experienced by the main character in Black Brother, Black Brother by Jewell Parker Rhodes and to describe how the main character struggles against racial discrimination. In conducting this study, the writer uses qualitative method. Furthermore, to answer the first statement of problem regarding to the kinds of discrimination, the writer uses the theory of Fred L. Pincus. According to Pincus (1996), there are three kinds of racial discrimination; (1) individual discrimination, (2) institutional discrimination, (3) structural discrimination. From the three kinds of discrimination, the writer found two kinds of discrimination contained in the novel, namely individual discrimination and institutional discrimination. Then, to answer the second statement of problems regarding the main character's struggle against racial discrimination, the writer uses the theory of Joe R. Feagin. He established the theory based on the history and actuality of anti-Black racism with the resistance strategies to overcome racism, those strategies including withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation & physical confrontation. However, the writer only found a resigned acceptance & verbal confrontation in the novel.*

**Keywords:** *Racial discrimination, Children literature, Novel*

**A. Introduction**

The novel "Black Brother, Black Brother" by Jewel Parker Rhodes, published in 2020, delves into the experiences of a dark-skinned biracial boy navigating a world marked by racial discrimination. Born to a multiracial family, with a black mother and a white father, the protagonist confronts racism that permeates various facets of his life, particularly within his school environment. The narrative unfolds as he grapples with the impact of racial ridicule and discrimination, ultimately finding his voice to combat the injustices he faces.

The study aims to address two key questions:

- What forms of racial discrimination does the main character encounter in "Black Brother, Black Brother"?
- How does the main character resist and confront racial discrimination within the narrative?

The scope of the study is centered on the analysis of racial discrimination experienced by the main character within the context of the novel. It seeks to explore the various manifestations of racism depicted in the story and the protagonist's responses to these challenges.

The objectives of the study are twofold:

- To delineate the types of racial discrimination experienced by the main character in "Black Brother, Black Brother" by Jewel Parker Rhodes.
- To elucidate the strategies employed by the main character in resisting and challenging racial discrimination within the narrative framework.

The study serves both theoretical and practical functions. Theoretically, it contributes to the evaluation and critique of literary works, particularly those addressing themes of racism and social injustice. Furthermore, it offers insights and information valuable to researchers exploring similar themes. Practically, the study serves as a resource for readers seeking to deepen their understanding of racism as portrayed in literature, providing a lens through which to examine and reflect upon societal issues.

## **B. Method**

The type of this study is classified as qualitative. As stated by Crossman (2021), qualitative research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the attitudes, behaviors, interactions, events, and social processes that comprise everyday life. In this way, social scientists can help us understand how social structure, social order, various social forces, and other social affairs affect everyday life. Qualitative researchers investigate not only the processes and connections in social life but also their meanings, interpretations, and signs. In studying literature, we must focus on the process of analyzing a literary work to produce a study result or analysis of a literary work with a good critical thinking process. Moreover, the result of analyzing or interpreting a literary work is written in words, sentences, or utterances; and also presented in an essay. Furthermore, in qualitative research, the reader or audience interprets a study. The data in this study were taken from a children's book entitled *Black Brother, Black Brother*, and the author is Jewell Parker Rhodes. The genre of this literary work is a fiction children's book and consists of 172 pages. Furthermore, the writer took the data from the dialogues in the novel which highlight the racism experienced by the main character throughout his everyday life, especially in the school environment. This part explained the data collection that was taken in writing this study. First of all, the writer read and understood the entire contents of the novel carefully. Next, the writer found what problems or issues could be discussed for the research study. Then, the writer conducted an in-depth analysis of the issues that

had been found in the novel. After the data needed to conduct study has been collected. The writer uses descriptive method to analyzes the children's book through the story conveyed in the novel by Jewel Parker Rhodes entitled *Black Brother, Black Brother*. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1993, p. 23), descriptive method is utilized to explain, analyze, and categorize something using a variety of approaches such as surveys, interviews, questionnaires, observation, and text.

### **C. Findings and Discussion**

The issue in this study is about racial discrimination was described in the novel entitled *Black Brother, Black Brother* by Jewell Parker Rhodes. Besides, the writer focused on explained the kinds of discrimination revealed in the novel and describe the struggles experienced by the main characters in the novel.

#### **1.1 Kinds of Racial Discrimination Experienced by the Main Character**

After the writer reads and observes the contents of the novel, there are two kinds of discrimination found in the novel, namely individual and institutional discrimination. In this section, the writer focuses on the racial discrimination experienced by the main character, which is Donte Ellison.

##### **A. Prejudice**

Prejudice is frequently perpetrated by a majority of people who believe that their race has a stronger majority than other racial minority groups. This may result in unjust and unequal treatment (Pincus, 1996). The following is an excerpt taken from the dialogue in the novel, "Girls laugh and point at me. Why can't you be like your brother? Can your brother find you in the dark?" (Rhodes, 2020, p. 14). Donte has a brother named Trey, they are of different race because they come from a multicultural family. Trey was born with a white race while Donte was born with a black race. The racial difference they have becomes a strange thing in their school environment, because the majority of the people there are white races and for them brothers with different races it is a strange thing. People in their school environment often compare Donte and Trey, as if Donte is much worse than Donte just because Donte's race is different from his brother's. It was just unfair for Donte. According to Pincus (1996), prejudice includes any actions and speeches of a person that is done consciously to humiliate other race. The quotation above which taken from the dialogue in the novel is one example of prejudice discrimination as described in the theory, that prejudice is unfair and negative behavior that is done by someone to exclude people from different racial backgrounds.

##### **B. Stereotype**

Stereotype refers to a typical picture that comes to mind, regarding certain differences within each group (Pincus, 1996). Based on this quotation, "In my old neighborhood, my friends were multiracial. Middlefield Prep makes me feel alien." (Rhodes, 2020, p. 26). Donte revealed that where he lived previously, their neighbors also came from multiracial families. That's why Donte did not expect to be treated badly and experienced a racial discrimination when he moved to Middlefield. The

word “*alien*” was interpreted as a symbol of something foreign. That was because in Donte's current environment he is a minority.

### C. Verbal Violence

First of all, there are two kinds of violence, namely verbal violence, and physical violence. However, what is found in the novel is verbal violence. This section contains the analysis taken from the dialogue in the novel entitled *Black Brother Black Brother*.

#### 1.2 The Main Character’s Struggle Against Racial Discrimination

This part describes the struggles experienced by the main characters in fighting racial discrimination, based on Joe R Feagin's theory, the forms of struggle in dealing with discrimination found in the novels are resigned acceptance and verbal confrontation. The quotation above shows that Donte's success in winning the fencing competition opened up opportunities for other students that they too could have the same opportunity. Without having to be seen from different race and other cultural diversity. The words “Alan’s exclusive magic” is a sarcasm that refers to the discriminatory treatment that has been carried out by Alan, which so far has made Donte ostracized by the majority people at his school. However, when Donte fought against the racism, now things changed and the people at his school began to appreciate also accept Donte's existence, and the school admits Donte's victory over the fencing competition. According to Feagin (2006), resigned acceptance means ignoring the discrimination while continuing the interaction. So far, he seems to be silent about accepting discrimination from people at his school, even though he is preparing strategies to fight discrimination by showing achievements and skills. So that no one can underestimate him anymore.

### D. Conclusion

Related to the issue that discussed in this study, discrimination occurs because there is a thought in a person or society of something that they think is not good. Of course, these thoughts do not have a strong reason, because they only judge from their outward appearance, or only see from a different skin color from the majority social circle. Afterwards, this study found two kinds of racial discrimination that depicted in the novel *Black Brother, Black Brother* by Jewell Parker Rhodes. The first kinds of discrimination were individual discrimination regarding of prejudice, stereotype, and verbal violence. The three subtypes occur because Donte and Trey were having a different races. Many people do not have insight into what multiracial family is and there are people who cannot accept it so that racial discrimination occurs just because Donte has a black race. Besides, the second kind of discrimination that found in the novel was institutional discrimination. Donte experienced institutional discrimination because the teachers, principals, and police in the place where Donte lived participated in discriminating against him. It shows the teachers and the headmaster easily call the police and make Donte a suspect on charges that have no evidence. They even immediately reported Donte to the police. Moreover, Donte as the main character was

struggle against racial discrimination with the responses of resigned acceptance and verbal confrontation. In the first responses, Donte devised a strategy in such a way as to fight against one of the perpetrators of discrimination at his school, namely Alan by participating in a fencing competition. While, in the second responses, Donte shows verbal resistance by telling the truth that he has been hiding for a long time that he is not as bad as people think, he does not fight with physical violence at all but he fights in a smart way.

E.

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