



Racial Discrimination Portrayed in *The American Society of Magical Negroes* (2024)

Arya Maulana¹, Yuli Wahyuni²

aryamaulanaaaa159@gmail.com

dosen02313@unpam.ac.id

^{1,2} English Department Faculty of Letter, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

Article Info

Abstract

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Delgado & Stefancic (2001), Discrimination, Exploitation, Racial discrimination, Stereotypes

This study focuses on racial discrimination in *The American Society of Magical Negroes* (2024) movie directed by Kobi Libii. This is a satirical movie about a secret society where black people, like the main character Aren, are expected to solve white people's problems while neglecting their own needs. Aren begins to question this role, challenging the idea that black people exist only to serve others. This study aims to analyze racial discrimination portrayed in this movie, it also aims to analyze how the main character deals with it. A qualitative analysis method is utilized in this study, with a focus on interpreting the movie's narratives and characters. The theory used in this study is Critical Race Theory by Delgado & Stefancic (2001). The study's findings show two types of discrimination such as stereotypes and exploitation, this study also identifies three ways character resist such as acting as Magical Negro, counter-storytelling, and rebellion.

✉ Corresponding author:

B3 Building, Kampus Viktor, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan Indonesia 50229

E-mail: aryamaulanaaaa159@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination is a pervasive issue that has profoundly shaped societies worldwide. Understanding its complexities is essential for recognizing its impact and striving for a more equitable world. Racism is a belief system that attributes inherent differences in behavior and abilities to racial groups, often resulting in prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory practices. Racial discrimination, on the other hand, refers to actions taken against individuals based on their race or ethnicity, manifesting in various forms, from interpersonal interactions to institutional policies. Schaefer (2008) explains that “racism generally means believing that a person’s behavior is determined by stable inherited characteristics deriving from separate racial stocks.” This perspective suggests that individuals from different racial backgrounds possess fixed traits that influence their behavior—traits perceived as unchangeable due to their racial heritage. Consequently, racism involves making assumptions about people’s abilities or actions based solely on their racial background.

To gain a deeper understanding of racial discrimination, Rebecca (2004), in *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, describes it as encompassing actions of exclusion, restriction, and preferential treatment based on ethnicity, religion, race, color, descent, or national origin, with the intent of undermining or abolishing fundamental human rights. Furthermore, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) emphasize that discrimination extends to treating individuals differently based on attributes such as gender, race, and nationality. This means racial discrimination occurs when individuals are treated unfairly or differently due to their racial or ethnic identity. Such treatment may involve exclusion from opportunities, restrictions on personal and professional growth, or preferential treatment granted to others based on racial characteristics. The ultimate aim of discrimination is often to marginalize individuals and deny them equal rights and freedoms.

Discrimination can be based on various factors, including race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, physical disability, and even physical attributes such as height or weight. Each of these factors represents an aspect of human identity that can become a basis for unfair treatment and bias. Racial discrimination, for example, can manifest in social exclusion, unequal employment opportunities, or biased treatment within the justice system. Gender discrimination frequently results in wage disparities, limited career advancement opportunities, and societal expectations that restrict personal freedom. Historically, racial discrimination has been a significant issue in many societies, particularly in the United States (Mokodongani & Laya, 2022). The concept of racism has evolved over time, influenced by socio-political contexts and cultural narratives. During colonialism and slavery, racial hierarchies were established to justify the exploitation and oppression of African Americans and other non-white groups. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s brought significant attention to racial injustices, leading to legal and social reforms. However, the legacy of historical racial injustices continues to affect contemporary society, perpetuating racial disparities and discrimination.

Racial discrimination remains a pressing social issue, as exemplified by the personal experience of Oprah Winfrey. Despite being one of the wealthiest women in the world, Winfrey became a victim of racial discrimination while shopping in Switzerland. During her visit to an upscale handbag store, a sales assistant refused to assist her, implying that a particular handbag was “too expensive” for her based solely on her appearance. This incident illustrates how Black individuals are often subjected to stereotyping and underestimated due to their race. Winfrey later recounted the experience, emphasizing that, despite maintaining a calm and amicable demeanor as she exited the store, the incident was a stark reminder of the persistence of racism. She highlighted how such encounters, though seemingly minor, underscore the everyday prejudices and discriminatory attitudes that people of color face—even those who have achieved financial success and global recognition (BBC News, 2013). This case study reinforces the idea that racial discrimination is not limited by social or economic status; even the most successful individuals can still face prejudice based solely on their race.

Racial discrimination is not only experienced by Oprah Winfrey but also by Michelle Obama. As the first Black First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama made history and became an inspiration for countless women advocating for their rights. However, during her tenure in the White House, she faced racist attacks. At the Women's Foundation of Colorado's 30th anniversary celebration in Denver in 2017, she recounted being called an "ape in heels" and having a "gorilla face" by government officials. As reported by *The Denver Post*, she reflected, "The shards that cut me the deepest were the ones that intended to cut. Knowing that after eight years of working really hard for this country, there are still people who won't see me for what I am because of my skin color." She continued, "Women, we endure those cuts in so many ways that we don't even notice we're cut. We are living with tiny cuts, and we are bleeding every single day. And we're still getting up" (*Hello! Magazine*, 2020). This account illustrates how racial discrimination affects even prominent figures like Michelle Obama, demonstrating that racism persists at all levels of society.

METHODS

To conduct this study, the writer employed a qualitative research method. According to Flick (2009), qualitative research involves analyzing various forms of documents, including texts, images, movies, and music, or other traces of individual and group experiences. These experiences may relate to biographical life, historical events, or everyday and professional practices. They can be examined by analyzing knowledge, personal accounts, and narratives. Based on this definition, it can be inferred that a qualitative approach was suitable for this study, as it enabled an in-depth exploration of documents such as texts and images. This method facilitated a comprehensive understanding of complex social issues by interpreting the meanings and contexts embedded within qualitative data, which is crucial for capturing the nuances of human behavior and historical representations. In conclusion, qualitative research was employed to verify the events depicted in the film and analyze their implications, with a particular focus on the portrayal of the primary characters.

The primary data sources for this study were extracted from *The American Society of Magical Negroes* (2024), directed by Kobi Libii. The data were collected in the form of text and images from the film, specifically through dialogues between characters. Screenshots were taken using a laptop to capture relevant scenes that illustrate racial discrimination. As a comedy-fantasy film, *The American Society of Magical Negroes* follows the journey of its main character, Aren, and presents critical themes related to racial discrimination.

The data collection process followed several systematic steps. First, the writer carefully watched *The American Society of Magical Negroes* to gain a thorough understanding of the narrative. Second, key scenes and dialogues related to racial discrimination were identified. Third, relevant scenes were captured using screenshots, and the dialogues containing elements of racial discrimination were transcribed for further analysis.

For data analysis, the study incorporated multiple approaches. The writer provided selected screenshots and transcribed dialogues depicting racial discrimination, which were then analyzed using cinematographic techniques, Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and qualitative analysis methods. This comprehensive approach allowed for a detailed examination of how racial discrimination is portrayed in the film. By applying these analytical frameworks, the study aimed to highlight the pervasive nature of racial discrimination and foster deeper awareness and discussion of these critical social issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

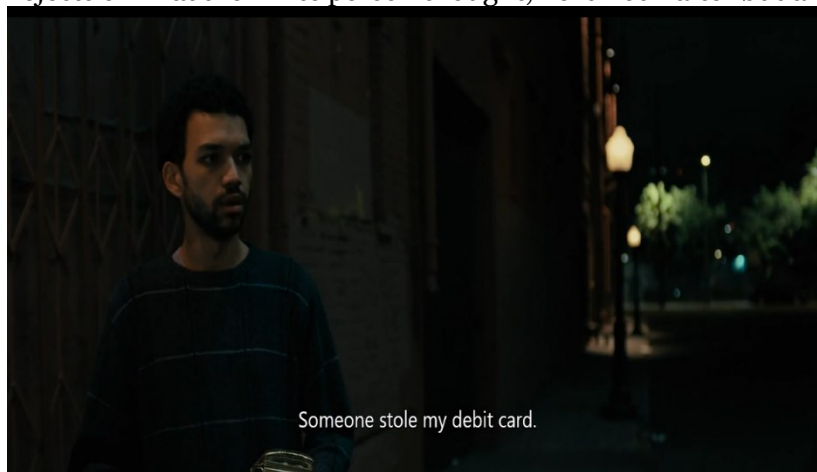
The racial discrimination and the effects on the character as victim are portrayed through

e-ISSN: 3047-8693

the dialogues between the characters. As is explained in the function of this study, racial discrimination is considered a serious case that can depress others. The movie portrayed stereotypes by satirizing the "Magical Negro" trope often seen in media. These stereotypes portray black people as wise, self-sacrificing, and existing primarily to help white people achieve their goals, while neglecting their own needs, dreams, and individuality. Not only that, but this movie also portrays the stereotypes of black people that often seen as person in lower-class society and criminals.



First, it shows at minutes [00:03:44-00:04:00]: ***“Aren is stereotyped as a waiter rather than an artist.”*** In this scene, Aren attempts to talk to the one who wants to buy his art, the previous dialogue Aren says the white person, “Uh, Excuse me” but instead of getting welcomed well, he is assumed to be waiter just because of what he looks like “Oh, thank you” while the white person giving his drink to Aren, the dialogue continues and Aren says “No I’m not...” he rejects of what the white person thought, he is not waiter but an artist. This scene

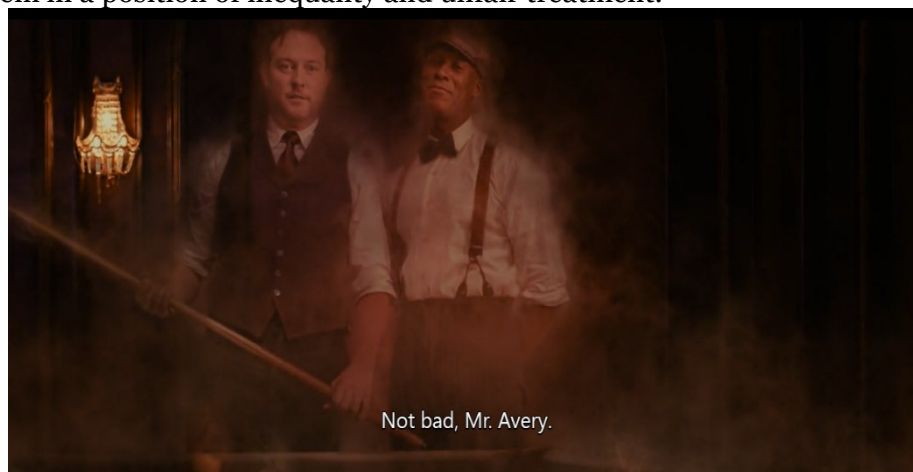


illustrates well how black people lives is unfair that they always got stereotype, unlike the other white people, black people always be judged and often seen as lower class of societies, making it hard for them to enjoy the equal treatment.

Second, it shows at minutes [00:06:47-00:07:55]: **“Aren is accused as a robber.”** In this scene, Aren tries to help woman for processing the ATM, but by the time Aren is there for her, the woman instead accusing him as a robber that steal her card by screaming out loud “Someone stole my card, he stole my card!”. This scene portrays vividly enough of stereotypes how black people often seen as criminals, they never be thought as a good ones. Black people often live in fear, they expect to be treated as equals but they instead getting threats from any other people just because of their racial background.



Third, it shows at minutes [00:08:00-00:09:18]: **“Roger attempts to calm down the intense moment.”** In this scene, Roger involved in the intense moment where Aren is accused as a robber, he attempts to use his way to calm down the white people from anger, in the previous dialogue “By any chance, are you all going to get some food?” Roger asked to white people so they can feel good. The dialogue continues “There’s barbecue spot that just opened in La Brea, you tell them Roger sent you, and they’ll bring out the good stuff” Roger said, by that time, white people put away their anger and turn out to feel happy. This scene clearly shows how the lives of black people are not as good or easy as the lives of other people. Black people are shown as having to do whatever it takes to make white people feel happy and satisfied. They are expected to put the needs and feelings of white people first and make sure they are pleased. By doing this, black people hope to avoid harm and live safely, even though it keeps them in a position of inequality and unfair treatment.



Fourth, it shows at minutes [00:12:30-00:14:20]: **“Black person helping white in playing Billiard.”** In this scene, black person helps white people to succeed with their Billiard “Not bad Mr. Avery, not bad” which means the black person successfully helps white person for doing his play. Black people live in this way to survive and not to be the next victims of white people when they feel discomfort, so they are forced to live in the unpleasant way. This scene vividly portrays stereotype of black people which is they often seen as the person who can do their ability to make white people succeed in their life and giving what they desire, because black people are often seen as helping white people succeed.



Fifth, it shows at minutes [00:15:13-00:14:20]: **“Black person encouraging white person.”** In this scene, white person feels scared to go home due to his unaccomplished job, but the white person encouraging him to feel confident because the white person actually done the good job “That took courage, that was done by a man” this done by person solely to survive in his misery life, the dialogue continues “So when Mr. Bossman look at you tonight, know that she looking at the greatest man in Kennebec County”. This scene clearly portrays the stereotype of black people that seen as the ones who always there for white people. Black talent is valued only when it helps white people, they are often treated as helpers for white privilege.



Sixth, it shows at minutes [00:16:20-00:16:38]: **“The community leader speech of their role for white people.”** In this scene, the community leader speech of their role for white people “We’re showing the client about the parts of ourselves, to make them feel good”, which conveys meaning that black people live solely to make white people comfort, because the discomfort of white people is a disaster for black people lives. This scene portrays well enough the stereotype of black people, they are seen as a helper of white people, they believe that their ability is made for white people in order to survive in their life, because black people

are often used to make white lives grow.

Seventh, it show at minutes [00:09:14-00:20:25]: **“Roger explains of what *Magical Negro* is.”** In this scene, Roger explains well how *Magical Negro* works, he thinks that he needs to effort keeping the joy of white people lives, in the previous dialogue Roger said, “White people feeling uncomfortable precedes a lot of bad stuff for us, white cop sees a black man, feels uncomfortable: another shooting”, because if they are in anger, so it is a big threat for black people lives. The dialogue continues “That’s why we here as The American Society of Magical Negroes, fight white discomfort every damn day” this dialogue highlights the background of why this society exists. Roger said in the end “We are the vanguard of white relaxation” deriving meaning the role of black people as “Magical Trope” or a helper for white people, the dialogue continues “Because the happier they are, the safer we are”. This scene shows clearly how black people are often seen in a way that makes white people feel comfortable and appear as heroes or deserving of praise. At the same time, it keeps black people in a lower, less important role, showing them as dependent or needing help.

CONCLUSION

Racial discrimination in *The American Society of Magical Negroes* (2024) by Kobi Libii highlights how Black individuals resist exploitation through various methods, including counter-storytelling, rebellion, and adopting the role of the "Magical Negro." The main character, Aren, challenges racial discrimination by engaging in counter-storytelling and rebellion. His actions demonstrate resistance to an unjust system that expects Black people to serve white individuals without question. He employs counter-storytelling when he speaks out against the misuse of the group's magical powers for the benefit of others while neglecting their own needs.

Through his struggle, Aren illustrates that stereotypes and exploitation can be resisted. His actions prove that challenging systemic injustice is possible and that everyone deserves to be seen as more than a stereotype. The movie uses Aren’s journey to inspire audiences to reflect on the fight for equality and fairness in their own lives. *The American Society of Magical Negroes* (2024) effectively portrays racial discrimination through Aren, who faces stereotyping and exploitation simply because he is Black.

The findings of this study suggest that future researchers explore critical race theory with additional references from updated journals and books to deepen the analysis of racial discrimination, particularly in relation to exploitation and marginalization. While this study focuses on critical race theory as discussed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), it is highly recommended that future scholars investigate further aspects beyond what has been covered in this study.

REFERENCES

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice* (Vol. 10). Wesley Publishing Company.

BBC News. (2013, August 13). Oprah Winfrey “was victim of racism” in Switzerland.

Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2008). *Film art: An introduction* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

- Brown, B. (2016). *Cinematography: Theory and practice: Imagemaking for cinematographers & directors*. Routledge.
- Carmichael, S., & Hamilton, C. V. (1992). *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Constantakis, S., & Barden, T. E. (2010). *Short stories for students: Presenting analysis, context & criticism on commonly studied short stories* (Vol. 28). Gale Research Inc.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory*. New York University Press.
- Dise, J. (2016, September 20). Filmmaking 101: Camera shot types. *B&H Photo Video*.
- Fazriyah, Z. Z. (2021). Racism and resistance strategies in Amma Asante's movie *Where Hands Touch* (2018). *Litera Kultura: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Hello! Magazine*. (2020). 10 celebrities open up about their heartbreaking experience with racism.
- Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. One World.
- Kite, M. E., & Whitley, B. E., Jr. (2009). *Psychology of prejudice and discrimination* (2nd ed.). Wadsworth.
- Libii, K. (2024). *The American Society of Magical Negroes* [Video recording]. Universal Pictures, Focus Features.
- Mackie, D. M., & Smith, E. R. (2002). *From prejudice to intergroup emotions: Differentiated reactions to social groups*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Maimunah, S. (2021). Combatting racial discrimination against African Americans in the film *Just Mercy*. *Morphosis: Journal of Literature*, 3(1). <http://openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/MPS/index>
- McIntosh, P. (2010). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *National SEED Project*.
- Mokodongani, I. Y., & Laya, R. (2022). Blacks' point of view on discrimination in the movie *The Hate U Give* (2018). *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 1(1), 81–95. <https://eresearchjournal.transbahasa.co.id/index.php/er>

- Quillian, L. (2006). New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 299–328.
- Rebecca, J. (2004). *Measuring racial discrimination*. The National Academies Press.
- Said, E. W. (1975). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books India.
- Schaefer, R. T. (2008). *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society* (Vol. 3). SAGE Publications.
- Sowell, T. (1978). *Discrimination, economics, and culture*. Hoover Institution.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Zestcott, C. A., Blair, I. V., & Stone, J. (2016). Examining the presence, consequences, and reduction of implicit bias in health care: A narrative review. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 19(4), 528–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430216642029>