



Racial Discrimination in Christina Hammond Reed's *The Black Kids*

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Abstract

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This study is aimed to analyzing the issue of racial discrimination represented in novel experienced by the main character in *The Black Kids (2020)*, a novel by Christina Hammonds Reed. Every problem experienced by the main character concerns the issue of racial discrimination. In conducting the analysis, this study uses qualitative research (Creswell, 2012) by identifying the issue and presenting the results in form of text and using concepts about race (Delgado and Stefancic, (2001). *The Black Kids* is about a seventeen-year-old girl who experienced racial discrimination and she had to experience living during a black rebellion in the city. As a teenager, it became an unfortunate reality, but the incident made her become brave and more understanding about who she was, thus making her become herself. The result of this research showed that the changing personality of the main character who initially ignore become aware of the surrounding to able coexist with whites. The author explores and describes social conditions, discrimination, and life experiences of black people.

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, issues of discrimination remain deeply embedded in social structures. Despite advancements in civil rights and multicultural discourse, racism persists across various societies, often stemming from entrenched stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings, and imbalances of power. Racial discrimination, in particular, involves differential treatment based on race or ethnicity and continues to impact the lives of marginalized groups. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), racism encompasses not

only overt acts of mistreatment or exclusion but also subtle, systemic practices that uphold racial hierarchies and marginalize non-dominant groups. This concept forms the foundation for analyzing racial issues in Christina Hammonds Reed's *The Black Kids* (2020), a novel that offers a timely and poignant exploration of racial identity and inequality through the experiences of a young Black protagonist.

The Black Kids is set in Los Angeles during the 1992 Rodney King riots—a pivotal moment in American history that exposed the volatility of racial tensions in the United States. The novel follows Ashley Bennett, a wealthy Black teenager who navigates the complexities of race, privilege, and identity during this chaotic period. Despite her social class, Ashley cannot escape the impact of racial discrimination. Her journey highlights the internal and external conflicts Black individuals face when attempting to reconcile societal expectations with their lived realities.

Ashley initially lives in a bubble of privilege, surrounded by white friends and distanced from the experiences of other Black youth. However, as the riots unfold and racial lines are drawn more sharply, Ashley becomes increasingly aware of how her racial identity is perceived by others and how it shapes her social interactions. Her transformation reflects what Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 154) identify as the pervasive nature of racism—even those with socio-economic privilege are not immune to racial stereotyping and exclusion. Ashley's struggle to fit in with both her white peers and her Black relatives illustrates the fragmented sense of belonging that many biracial or middle-class Black individuals experience.

The novel also exposes systemic racial discrimination in the form of police brutality, media bias, and social segregation. The 1992 riots, triggered by the acquittal of police officers who brutally beat Rodney King, symbolize the public eruption of long-simmering racial grievances. Through Ashley's eyes, readers witness how violence and injustice disproportionately affect Black communities, reinforcing cycles of marginalization. Hammonds Reed uses these events not only as historical context but as a means of highlighting the emotional and psychological toll of racism on youth.

Ultimately, *The Black Kids* offers a powerful critique of racial discrimination and its far-reaching consequences. Ashley's personal growth—from silent observer to socially aware young woman—illustrates a broader call to consciousness for readers. Her story encourages reflection on privilege, complicity, and the urgent need for solidarity across racial lines.

The Black Kids by Christina Hammonds Reed presents a compelling narrative of racial discrimination rooted in historical and contemporary realities. By examining Ashley's experiences through the lens of critical race theory, readers gain insight into how racism functions at both individual and systemic levels, and how personal identity is shaped by the intersection of race, class, and societal expectations.

Noviana Rusnalina (2019) on her thesis entitled "Racial Discrimination as Seen in *The Help* Film By Tate Taylor". In this thesis Noviana portrayed the social background of Aibileen's life as seen in *The Help* film. She attempted to portray racial discrimination Aibileen's experienced about personal life, education and job.

The second related study was conducted by Widyana (2006) as under graduated thesis Institut for Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah. Identify political values and living conditions experienced by black Americans in the twenty century. She emphasised more presenting the issue of racial dicrimination.

Another journal article from Jember University entitled "Racial Discrimination as The Representation Of American Social Life in the 1970s in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems" was presented by Mustavi, Sumargono, and Pujiati (2015). Emphasised the issue of racial discrimination, they expose mental experienced of black and depected intercation between white as a controller and black as a victim.

According to those studies mentioned above, there are some similarities between

Noviana, Widyana and Mustavi, Sumargono and Pujiati, and this study. The similarity lays in the topic that black people are discriminated against by white people. Each study analyses different types of literary works such as movies, poems, novels, and drama scripts.

In social relations, there is an imbalance of power, so acts of discrimination emerge. Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 155) state discrimination is practice of treating similarly situated individuals differently because of race, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, or national origin. It means racial discrimination happened to someone of a different race, skin color, ethnicity, class, and other. Black people always become victims of white people's bad treatment.

People who felt themselves and their races are better and at the top of the classification will racial discrimination against the other races. It was because they felt that they were more powerful and civilized than other races. Black people are usually treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity. This problem occurs because of the historical background of black people. Racial discrimination is become a classic problem in America and still happening today. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 43), "many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, or blame themselves for their predicament". This quotation portrays racial discrimination becomes a negative effect on health problem, as individual racial discrimination causes some bad effects on health.

In analyzing the object with the title is racial discrimination in christina hammond reed *The Black Kids* (2020) of this study, the writer aims to identify racial discrimination using the critical race theory by Richard Delgado. Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 155) define discrimination is practice of treating similarly situated individuals differently because of race, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, or national origin.

Using delgado and stefancic theory about race, the writer would like to portrayed racial discrimination. This study applies qualitative research in which data is analyzed by explaining descriptively this study also applies library research.

METHOD

1. Approach of the Study

In this thesis, the writer used qualitative approach to research the object. The writer decided to use this approach as it requires deep understanding in analyzing prose which the data is served in texts and essay. The data and material needed in this study are taken from books and other references. In this study research, the writer tried to analyze racial discrimination in the novel *The Black Kids*. This thesis also used library research and internet data collection from journals and data.

2 Data Source

The data sources were taken from *The Black Kids* novel, data sources in literary research are works in the form of words, sentences, and discourses as research data. The primary data sources in this study is in the form of a novel entitled *The Black Kids* by Christina Hammond Reed. This was first published in Great Britain in 2020 by Simon and Schuster UK Ltd consisted of 367 pages.

3 Technique of Collecting Data

There are several steps that were used by the writer in collecting data. The first is read a whole novel to get a deeper understanding of what the story tells about, the second writer identified the possible issues that can be analyzed. After defining the issue, the writer selected important information which is needed to support the analysis.

4 Method of Data Analysis

After the data were collected, writer analyzed the data by using expert's theory. Theory from Delgado and Stefancic (2001), is dominantly used as it is perceived as the most apt theory of related issue. After the analysis is done, the writer stresses the conclusion and the result of analysis process is presented in essay.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

1 Racial Discrimination Represented in *The Black Kids* Novel

In *The Black Kids*, Ashley Bennet is a black kid, although Ashley's life is fairly good, the unchanging reality that she is still a black person, being a minority among the majority makes her feel unpleasant treatment. Receiving racial discrimination treatment by those around her. *"Everything would've been fine if Ash wasn't with us," Kimberly says, laughing, as we walk back to her place. (Reed, 2020, p. 18).* This quotation portrays how Ashley got bad treatment from her friends because her skin is different from theirs, they assumed everything would be good if Ashley was not with them just because of the difference in skin color and it made ashley feel sad and disappointed.

Ashley got discriminated against by her friends, even her best friend, just because she is black is not directly visible, Ashley's school where most of the students are white. *"No, but she is black" Kimberly says and laugh (Reed, 2020, p.57).* The above quote explains that Ashley's identity as a black person nonetheless made her friend material to distinguish Ashley from them. As a black American kid, Ashley experienced racial discrimination, and she start to find that white always does racism toward black. Ashley began to feel that her life was starting to be abnormal, the Rodney King incident caused chaos in the city.

For black people experiencing racism in their society are common problems in their community. Accepted racist acts prove that white people commit arbitrary acts against black people without any sympathy or tolerance. *"Now, we're going to play a mermaid. Except for Ashley. Because black people can't be a mermaid. (Reed, 2020, p. 109).* It had not even occurred to her yet that there was anything she could not be and the shame of the moment dug itself into my chest so deep that she could not breathe.

When I finally float back up to the surface, everyone started at me. Michael and Kimberly have gone who knows where. Nobody helps me as I struggle to hoist my body onto the deck. The hair Morgan spent hours doing has lost any pretense of straightness and is getting larger by the minute. My dress is heavy on me, but the weight of it pulls me down. My mascara strings my eyes, I am not crying, but I might as well be. (Reed, 2020, p. 184)

The above quote describing the incident that befell Ashley made her feel that she was just herself no one wanted to help her. It made her realize that stay alone. *"I cannot tell if loneliness is being black, or being young, or being a girl, or if Lucia is right and I need friends. I don't know (Reed, p. 92).* The quote illustrates that the desire to be able to have someone, both friends and loved ones, to be able to share the joys and sorrows.

1.2 Racial Discrimination experienced in the School

Ashley school at prestigious private school and is one of the only Black students who is not on a scholarship. Although Ashley is from a wealthy family and has the privilege of being able to attend school without scholarship, it does not change that she is still a black kid. Ashley has a black friend named Lashawn a Black kid at school who is a star athlete and smart but poor and he can school because of a scholarship.

LaShawn and I are the only two black kids in AP physics. This si the most we've said to each other all semester. I'm sure the rumors are staring already about two of us we're together. It wouldn't be sad, though, everyone thinking we're together. LaShawn id handsome and popular and girls fall all over themselves to talk to him. Not me, though. I don't fall. I make to pint to stay firmly on my feet as we speak. (Reed, 2020, p. 54)

The quote above explains that they were hit by dating rumors, and that would be a mockery of another white friend because Ashley and LaShawn are both black.

Ashley and La Shawn try to ignore what happened to them and continue their life as if nothing happened. They try to be silent, but by the end, they are tired of this. Pretend as if nothing happened, it does not mean they are okay, far from being a good word mentally they are not okay. *"This school is fucking bullshit," (Reed, 2020, p.122)* the above dialogue

describes disappointment, La Shawn looks like he is ready to burst out of himself and Ashley understands how he feels. What they go through and experience makes them feel insecure.

"Sometimes I feel like I can't even breathe here," he says to me in a near whisper once she is gone. "It is fucking black hole," he says. (Reed, 2020, p.124). This quotation identifies that Ashley and La Shawn are tired of what they have received and experienced all along in school, as a black child who was ostracized, and treated unkindly and fairly.

As a teenager, getting discriminated made them stressed, restless, and depressed, can also interfere with emotions and mental health. *"The only reason I'm going is the cause of the scholarship. We couldn't afford this shit otherwise". He sigh. (Reed, 2020, p.189).* La Shawn explained that he stayed at this school also because of the scholarship he got, to be able to graduate and get better, to be able to live and survive in the rigors of life.

2 The Main Character Dealing With The Racial Discrimination Occurred

2.1 The Changing Personality in The Main Character

2.1.1 Being Brave

As a black kids, Ashley experienced racial discrimination, she also felt the pain. Ashley as black girl with majority white friends lead her question her identity. *Likewise, Grandma Opal's words "when you go out there in the world, you're not just you, Ashley," (Reed, 2020, p. 13) at first Ashley did not understand a little until when Grandma Opal continued "you all of us, your family, black folks. You have to be better than those white kids around you. It is not fair, but that the way is it." (Reed, 2020, p.13)* these words made Ashley realize who she really was, about the reality of race because of minorities so whites look down on it because white is on top, about how she has to develop herself to be better to be able to compete in the outside world because the reality is that to be able to survive must have the ability to be able to compete.

The incident that happened to Ashley made her personality change from thinking it was okay to even ignoring what was going on, so now she's finally become braver because of circumstances that make her less afraid. Ashley dan Lashawn went out, Lashawn has the news on. It is fourth night rioting and the think are crazy.

We were going to La Shawn's house. We're black kids in a car that is noy ours, and there a riot's going on, and this is a reckless behavior on both our parts, but Trevor is rolling on E, and his car won't be reported. Plus, LaShawn wants to check on his family, and I kinda owe him big time. (Reed, 2020, p. 188)

The above argument explains that the actions taken by Ashley and LaShawn are a bold nowhere to be that the situation they will face is very dangerous, especially since the riot is still ongoing. They did not wear their own vehicles but instead used Trevor's car and without permission. The actions they take are big decisions because they can endanger their safety.

2.1.2 Being Herself

Ashley has friends at her school besides Courtney, Kimberly and heather. Lana Hankins is Ashley's new friend. When Lana is dating Ashley gets comfortable with their companionship.

Lana Hankins sits down next to me again on the stairs at the front of the school where all us losers without cars wait for us rides. Apparently. I have managed to make a new friend, four weeks before the end of our high school career. She pauses her hair back from around her face, pulls out a pack of American spirits, and starts to light one. My world is doing that thing is does when you have smoked too much and it is so big and bright and brilliant and you could touch your fingertips to everything and not feel enough. (Reed, 2020, p. 92)

From the quote above describes Ashley's first friendship with Lana, where Ashley begins to get to know and begins to open up to each other. So that made Ashley better understand and know who she was from not caring about what happened making her be herself.

2.1.3 Being Aware

From what happened and experienced Ashley made her realize that no matter what the circumstances she was still a black person. What she is experiencing now make Ashley become aware of who she really is, especially about her as a black child, where her movements are limited and get a bad view. *"We have to walk around being perfect all the time just to be seen as human. Do not you ever get tired of being a symbol? Do not you ever just want to be human?"* (Reed, 2020, p. 118) quotation above explain Ashley think of what Jo said once during one of her fights with our parents, right after they found out the she had dropped out of school. Tired of having to look good so they do not discriminate like having two masks one she's actually in and the second pretending to look good.

2.2. The Rebellion by The Main Character

Their race was always looked down upon and even if white people looked at them it was like seeing a criminal cause most white people are having discrimination stereotypes or bad judgments about black people and they think they are not the same. Jo ignores me and continues, *"It's not just about Rodney. It's about all of us. About all black and brown brothers and sisters struggling to make ends meet in a system set up for them to fail. We have to change the system."* (Reed, 2020, p. 88). from the quotation above, it means Jo wants Ashley to survive in the current situation where many riots put her life in danger and realize about her situation is not the same as then, the change in the existing situation must have had a bad impact on the black race.

"That's the whole reason for the rebellion. That's the whole reason for taking one of my stands. Protesting isn't supposed to be easy. Revolution isn't easy. Not when you're trying to dismantle an entire system." (Reed, 2020, p.148)

This quotation portrays how the situation is going, the attempt to voice and defend race. Courtney says. *"there're really scared. They think Los Angeles is getting to dangerous."* (Reed, 2020, p. 120). The quote explains that the bad situation that occurs due to the rebellion makes it a dangerous area. It describes the efforts and efforts made to defend and require what they have (race) cannot be underestimated, to get justice in need of hard effort. *"sometime people, they see your skin, and all they know of you is war."* Pham says to me (Reed, 2020, p.137). That's how white people look at black people. Think of them differently, feeling like they are above them.

"I thought about what you said. You're right. Flyers are not enough. People throw them away. You gotta do something more permanent" (Reed, 2020, p.149). Ashley tries to digest what Jo has said, about the situation, about what they have been through to date and Ashley is aware that Jo's words are true.

CONCLUSION

In *The Black Kids*, the racial discrimination portrayed by the main character is where Ashley is a black child who experiences it. Living in the midst of rebellion of Rodney riots made him have a hard time. They also have to feel the effects of Rodney's riots where their movement is very limited. Even though Ashley has a wealthy family but still she gets less good treatment. Having friends Lashawn and Lana allows her to get through a difficult situation. From this incident, Ashley experienced a change in character that made her become bolder and stronger than before ignoring the surrounding situation now becoming more aware of herself and her surroundings.

This study is not perfect, yet the writer expects that this research could provide new knowledge for the readers and could be used as references or secondary source. The writer would like to aa suggestion to the readers who are interested in conducting research or similar issues related with the theory used. By reading recent theory about racial discrimination, it may help other research in finding new information related with condition in recent years.

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