

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of The Study

Racism is inequality based on one's skin color, race, ethnicity, and origin that limits one's rights and freedoms. Racism is also often interpreted as the belief that humans can be divided into separate groups based on biological characteristics called "race". This idea also holds that there is a causal relationship between the physical characteristics of a race and personality, intelligence, morality, and other cultural and behavioral traits, which makes some races 'innately' superior to others. Racism is not a trivial matter, "Racism" means a belief system or doctrine which states that the inherent biological differences of the human race determine cultural or individual achievement, that a particular race is superior and has the right to rule over others. (Rofifah, 2020)

Racism in the United States has been rampant since the colonial era. The arrival of Europeans as immigrants to Newland also resulted in the elimination of Native Americans (Indians). Some wars against the Indians took place and many of them became victims. In addition to the arrival of European immigrants to America, the development of industry and trade was also the cause of slavery. As the industry grows, more and more workers are needed. As a result, slavery returned. The spread of slavery led to the emergence of racism. There are various forms of racism. The racial segregation of railcars, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, recreational facilities, employment, inaccessible suffrage, and poverty are examples of racism among black people. For Native Americans, land loss, displacement from cities, and poverty are commonplace. For Latinos (Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Central Americans) finding a decent life is very difficult. The existence of racism gave rise to the civil rights movement who wanted to fight for their rights as Americans. In this movement, the attitude of anti-racism is visible. Legally and socially, rights and gifts were granted to white Americans but denied to Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics or Latino Americans. European Americans (particularly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) were given exclusive grants in educational materials, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land tenure, and criminal procedures throughout the period spanning from the 17th century to the 1960s. However, non-Protestant immigrants from Europe; especially Irish, Poles, and Italians, who experience xenophobic exclusion and other

forms of ethnic-based discrimination in American society, are still considered racially inferior and not considered completely white. In addition, Middle Eastern American groups such as Jews and Arabs face ongoing discrimination in the United States, and as a result, some of the people belonging to these groups are not identified as white. Southeast Asians also face racism in America. (Yulia Shinta K, 2010)

Like what happened to Obby Kogoya, a Papuan student who was dropped to the asphalt and continuously stepped on by the police in Jogjakarta on July 15, 2016, when he participated in a Papuan student demonstration that commemorated the undemocratic referendum in 1969 which resulted in the integration of the region Papua to Indonesia. According to CNN Indonesia, Obby was arrested and dragged on the asphalt, he was also kicked and beaten. Another officer stepped on Obby's head and repeatedly stepped on his back. Obby is an unarmed student, does not threaten officers or people around him but in fact, he is treated like a criminal. Obby eventually managed to survive but he was sentenced to four months in prison on charges of resisting and assaulting two police officers, even though he was the victim. KBR, Yogyakarta reported that the Panel of Judges at the Yogyakarta District Court sentenced Obby Kagoya to four months in prison. This happened because Obby was accused of fighting the police when there was a siege by the police at the Papuan Student Dormitory in Yogyakarta in July 2016, and it violated Article 212 of the Criminal Code which had an impact on disturbing the community. Emanuel Gobay as Obby Kagoya's attorney questioned the basis of the judge's decision. According to him, the verdict that was decided showed a bit of a humanitarian side to the fact that Obby had never done what he was accused of. Meanwhile, according to Yogyakarta, SUARAPAPUA.com, assessing that if the verdict was handed down to Obby Kagoya, a victim of persecution who was criminalized and found guilty in the trial of the Yogyakarta District Court, the Legal Aid Institute rejected the decision. This is because the Legal Aid Institute considered that the decision was not based on the facts of the trial after all the evidence presented by the public prosecutor was not proven. In fact, the public advisor explained that Obby Kagoya did not fight against the two policemen. The acts and behavior of racism experienced by Papuans in Indonesia also occur in many fields of life and the state. The existence of racist behavior towards Papuans in Indonesia can also be seen in the mass media. Bad stigma is often attached to Papuans by the media, one of which is the stigma of "troublemaker" which is often used by the media in positioning Papuans in a news report. The problem of racism

against Papuans in Indonesia has also penetrated the legal field, as in an article published by Tirto on June 9, 2020. Racism in Indonesia can be seen through court decisions against Papuans. Actions and behaviors of racism are also experienced by Papuans in everyday life, especially Papuans who live on the Java island. It's like the frequent jokes that tend to lead to skin color discrimination. The discrimination is usually in the form of jokes and the assumption that white people are considered beautiful people, while black people are often considered ugly people. The problem of racism experienced by Papuans is the same as the problem experienced by black people in the US, both of which are problems of structured racism. What is meant by structural racism here is the actions and behaviors of racism that are already rooted in the society in various fields of life such as social, economic welfare, education, and law.

Meanwhile, anti-racism is beliefs, actions, movements, and policies adopted or developed to fight racism. In general, anti-racism aims to promote an egalitarian society in which people do not face discrimination based on their race, but are defined. Anti-racism attitudes also grow along with the times.

*"Freedom Writers"* is an American movie directed and written by Richard LaGravenese. The movie was produced by MTV Films, Jersey Films, and 2S Films, and distributed by Paramount Pictures. This film raises the issue of racism in America in the 1990s. At that time there was rioting and looting everywhere.

The story begins with the arrival of a female teacher named Erin Gruwell who has an idealistic nature and a high level of intelligence to Woodrow Wilson High School, in the Long Beach area, California, United States. Where at that time the issue of racism in America was very hotly discussed by the public. Erin's arrival is based on her sincere, passionate intention to teach her students which Erin thinks requires special attention in handling. At Woodrow Wilson High School, Erin served as an English teacher for class 203 which contains children who tend to form gangs due to the impact of rampant gang fights in America whose atmosphere also carries over in the classroom, such as the Cambodian race, Black, Hispanic, and a White. The problem is that each race gang is always at odds and cannot be reconciled. In the first days of Erin's existence in class, the students were not at all interested in her presence, even when Erin tried to get closer to her students, there were occasional clashes between gangs in the class that made Erin

confused about what to do. Erin's presence in the classroom is often ignored by her students because her students think that there is no point in going to school. After all, the main priority right now is the struggle against other gangs who are their enemies so that they can survive. In addition, one of her students named Eva said that she did not like Erin's presence in class, because according to her, Erin only spoke full of advice as if Erin was the wisest human being, even though Erin did not know what was going on in their lives. Eva and several other students also thought that white people, including Erin, were the ones who caused many other races to be killed and convicted. But Erin still keeps trying to reach out and understand the condition of her students.

So that one day one of her students named Tito drew a picture of one of the racial groups in her class, which made the whole class laugh at the race that was drawn and made fun of by Tito. This incident made Erin angry and began to advise them by relating it to a historical event, but the students instead were not accepting what Erin had said, because Erin was just a new teacher trying to teach them without knowing what had happened to them before. But as time goes by Erin keeps trying to get closer to her students, without knowing the word give up Erin keeps trying. Erin tried to ask other teachers and the head of the foundation where she teaches to discuss solving racism in their students, but both from the school, who were racist and father, and the husband, who had been supportive, turned around to not support Erin's noble intentions because Erin was too obsessed with her students compared to her family life. Discrimination by the school, such as; Class separation, as well as the obvious difference in facilities between the white race and the outside races, made Erin sad.

Erin started her business by getting closer to her students who tend to form groups based on race by making games, from there the students who were previously reluctant to get closer to other gangs gradually forced themselves to be close to other gang members who indirectly can change and reduce the distance between them a bit. After that, Erin gave a kind of diary to her students to fill in every day. From there, Erin can understand the lives of her students. But since Erin has been busy with approaching her students and working part-time to finance her efforts to create a sense of community among her students, a new problem arises, she is divorced by her husband. Until in the end, her father, who was originally not supportive, turned to support Erin's work. By reading the diaries of her students, Erin began to understand the condition of her students

who were always in groups with their respective races. Eventually, she found a way to “reach out” their lives by giving them books to read. Even when the school discriminated against book facilities, Erin gave a new book about gang life that was closely related to their daily lives. Since reading all the diaries that tell about their hard life, Erin is increasingly eager to change the lives of her students, and erase the invisible boundaries that culturally separate them in amazing and amazing ways, even Erin is willing to pay for everything herself. Her efforts to bring her students closer together, ranging from reading books, visiting museums, having lavish dinners with former victims of gang violence in the past, and making peace events through festivals in Long Beach.

It turned out that Erin’s approach succeeded in eliminating the boundaries between her students, but there were still a few conflicts that occurred in the classroom, one of which was a shooting case involving one of Erin’s students, and the victim was a close friend of one of the students. Erin’s protégé also comes from the Cambodian race. But Erin did not give up, and kept trying, and kept trying to unite them. At that time, Erin assigned her students to read the story about Anne Frank, this was greeted enthusiastically by her students and also aroused their students curiosity. After reading the story about Anne Frank, her students wanted the author of a book about the true story of Anne Frank to be brought to their school. At first, Erin refused because of the cost and the condition of the writer who was too old, but seeing the enthusiasm of the students, Erin finally agreed to the request of the students. Erin’s efforts to bring Mrs. Miep Gies is a helper for Anne Frank, a Jewish child who lived during the time of Hitler and her Holocaust. She brought Mrs. Miep Gies to share stories with her students about a “disaster” that occurred because of racism, as well as Erin’s other efforts that were challenged by the school authorities. Erin’s efforts bore fruit that made the students aware and dispelled their racist thoughts. Now they want to merge into one and remove the invisible walls between them, now they want to greet each other and even joke with each other. They are like a family in the classroom. This is all thanks to Erin’s extraordinarily hard work being a teacher. A story from Mrs. Miep Gies about the story of Anne Frank and the efforts and hard work of Erin Gruwell has taught the children there about the meaning of honesty, especially to Eva who was the sole witness to the shooting case a few weeks ago, and Eva was honest when in court which made the perpetrator (her lover) Eva was imprisoned. The harmony and kinship in class 203 Wilson High School, makes the students feel comfortable and happy if they have to

continue to be with Mrs. G—Erin, throughout the year. But when they were about to go up to high school level (grade 3), Erin couldn't teach them anymore because she was still a new teacher who did not have permission to teach grade 3 high school and made the students disappointed and kept trying to be taught by Mrs. G. After going through several complicated processes finally, Mrs. G, are allowed to follow the development of their students even up to college level. This of course made the students extremely happy because they were taught by teachers like Mrs. G.

With Mrs.G being allowed to follow the progress of her students up to the college level, most of the students went to school up to the college level. As a result, the student's enthusiasm for learning re-emerged. In the end, many of the students in Erin Gruwell's class were the first in their families to go on to college. The diaries they wrote were published into a book called 'The Freedom Writers Diary.' "The Freedom Writers Diary" was published in 1999, Erin Gruwell and the freedom writers founded a Freedom Writers foundation dedicated to repeating the success of the 203 classrooms in classrooms across the country. This film is packaged very nicely and interestingly and also not monotonous. Strong character and development that looks natural. She's very opinionated and impartial nature coupled with her anti-racism makes her character in this film seem very strong. The plot is back and forth like when at the beginning of the film which explains the mass riots that occurred in Los Angeles in 1992 with 3,500 free shootings and the occurrence of more than 120 murders in a month caused by racial conflicts and this is the beginning of racism there, so this makes this film so worth it to miss. So it is very natural that this film gets great awards, from the film and the cast and director. The director, Richard LaGravenese managed to lure 2 Oscar winners (2000 and 2005), Hilary Swank, to play the main character in Freedom Writers. LaGravenese's work has received a lot of praise from the audience even though it only won 2 awards, namely the 2008 Golden Camera in the Best International Actress category and the 2007 Humanitas Prize (feature film). Data from the Rotten Tomatoes website shows Freedom Writers got a score of 87 percent from more than 250,000 viewers.

This film is very suitable to be seen to motivate a teacher in teaching and provide ideas about effective ways and methods in conveying knowledge to students so that students can understand even if they have to take it slowly. But this film is not suitable for viewing by children because there are some acts of violence and scenes that are not

allowed to be seen by children.

The story of Erin Gruwell, who devotes her life to teaching her students, is the film's main draw, attracting researcher to study it. Furthermore, the characters in this film are fascinating. The personalities of the characters in this film are all quite strong. And because this film addresses many examples of prejudice that occurred at the time, the researcher is eager to dig deeper into it. Because racism is a topic that is frequently discussed in numerous areas. Erin Gruwell becomes anti-racist as a result of it. And it's just too difficult to be anti-racist like the protagonist. Her life appears to be challenging as well, as evidenced by the fact that she was divorced by her spouse. Nonetheless, she remained courageous and upbeat.

With the explanation above, the researcher is interested in studying anti-racism in the film *Freedom Writers*. The researcher wants to examine more deeply about the characters and issues of anti-racism in this film. So the researcher gave the title for this research; "COUNTER RACIAL PREJUDICE REFLECTED IN FREEDOM WRITERS MOVIE."

## **B. Research Question**

The problem of the study is dissected further into the following research questions:

- a. What kind of anti-racism is displayed in the movie?
- b. How are anti-racism reflected in the movie?
- c. Why does Erin Gruwell support anti-racism in the movie?

## **C. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

- a. To identify the types of anti-racism that occur in the movie.
- b. To describe the anti-racism depicted in the movie.
- c. To reveal the reason why Erin Gruwell is being anti-racism in the movie.

## **D. Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to be beneficial both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, researcher hope that this research can contribute to science in general and literature studies, especially in the *Freedom Writers* Movie (2016). Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide information to researchers and readers about data analysis in the literature.