

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Racism is the doctrine which emphasized the importance of main characteristic of race which is used as a standard to make an interaction between individual or groups (Soekanto, 1985: 411). This is the popular problem in the country that is inhabited by many kinds of races such as in America usually racism is used to differentiate between black and white skins.

One of movie that gives imagery of social lives is *The Great Debaters*. It is one of the most popular racial movies in America. It was released in 25 December 2007. The film is based on a true story taken from the article written about the Wiley College debate team by Tony Scherman for the 1997 spring issue of *American Legacy*. This is directed by two-time Academy Award winner Denzel Washington. *The Great Debaters* is produced by Harpo Productions and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer The Weinstein Company. The film runtime is 126 minutes. *The Great Debaters* was released on DVD on May 13, 2008 on 1-disc and 2-disc editions. In the 2-disc edition, the first disc includes no extra material, but the second disc includes an audio commentary, a making-of documentary, deleted scenes, featurettes, and a still gallery.

The Great Debaters got eight awards such as Freedom of Expression Award (2007), Stanley Kramer Award (2008), Teen Choice Award - Choice Movie

Breakout Female - Jurnee Smollett (2008), Image Award as The Outstanding Motion Picture (2008), Golden Reel Award as Best Sound Editing - Music in a Feature (2008), to be Nominated for Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture – Drama (2008), Image Award for Outstanding Director in a Motion Picture: Denzel Washington (2008) and a lot of nominations (Filmbug, 2008).

Denzel Hayes Washington, Jr. is an American actor, screenwriter, director and film producer who was born in December 28, 1954 in Mount Vernon, New York, United States. Washington made his professional acting debut is in the 1977 while his film debut is in the 1981. Washington was discovered by Hollywood when he cast in 1979 in the television film *Flesh and Blood*. On May 18, 1991, Washington was awarded an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, Fordham University, for having "impressively succeeded in exploring the edge of his multifaceted talent". He also was awarded an honorary doctorate of humanities from Morehouse College on May 20, 2007. In 2008, Washington came with a delegation of African American artists to Israel in honor of the Jewish State's 60th birthday.

Washington has been awarded three Golden Globe awards as Best Actor in a Supporting Role - Motion Picture (for *Glory*) (1990), Best Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama (for *The Hurricane*) (2000) and Best Actor in a Motion Picture (2002) and two Academy Awards for his work as Best Supporting Actor (for *Glory*) (1990) and Best Actor (for *Training Day*) (2002). He is notable as the second African American man to win the Academy Award for Best Actor (2002).

He directs and casts by him self in his movie. His movie are such as *Cry Freedom* (1987), *Glory* (1989), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Courage Under Fire* (1996), *He Got Game* (1998), *The Hurricane* (1999), *Remember the Titans* (2000), *Training Day* (2001), *Antwone Fisher* (2002), *Out of Time* (2003), *Man on Fire* (2004), *Inside Man* (2006), *Déjà vu* (2006), *American Gangster* (2007), *The Taking of Pelham 123* (2009), *The Book of Ely* (2010), and *Inside Man 2* (2010). He casts more than 42 movies (Filmbug, 2008).

The story takes place in 1935 when Jim Crow laws were common and lynch mobs were a great fear for blacks. There is a professor looking for a member of debate for debate contest between black skin and white skin. From 45 students Tolson got four students to be the college team, Samantha Boone, the first female in the college debate team, James Farmer, a precocious 14 year-old boy, Hamilton Burgess, hard-working and Henry Lowe, smart, handsome ladies' man. The team, trained well by Tolson, defeats most of the other debate teams from different colleges and enters into the first debate between U.S students from white colleges and black colleges and the winner is Wiley. Because there are so many accidents happen to black skin Hamilton Burgess back off because his father wants he to back off, so Samantha Boone is the next debater. One day, James' father, Mr. Farmer the first African-American who manages to get a doctorate degree in Texas, bumps white farmers' hog. They fear seems like bumps a man. Mr. Farmer asked apologizes to the owner but white farmers ask \$ 25 to pay their hog. Mr. Farmer only has a view in his wallet but one of them took a pistol out from

his pocket to show there are no more negotiations. To save his family live Mr. Farmer gave his monthly check \$ 17.36 to give it back.

Their reputation grew that they are invited to go up against a white school in Oklahoma. The subject of this debate is “whether blacks should be allowed to attend state universities”. The issues selected for debating are interesting. Long scenes are allotted to the young debaters expounding on school integration, civil disobedience and other big Issues. When they are in the way to the Oklahoma, they see a bad situation. There, they saw a Negro strung up by his neck and set his body on fire by more than fifteen white skins. When white man saw them, their car was pursued, pelted stone and fired the gun. Tolson's secret extracurricular activities trying to organize white and black sharecroppers introduce an intriguing dimension that isn't developed sufficiently to pay off, particularly since the consequences are muddled. The lynching aside, the dynamics of relations between the races, as well as the object poverty of the region and the difficulty of life in general, are superficially treated; the illiterate, unwashed masses on both sides of the color divide are largely invisible here, as is any sense of the larger community, the presence of the church in black life and that of institutionalized bigotry with teeth. Finally their letter was replied by Harvard University, they accept their debate challenge. But Mr.Tolson could not accompany them he was under restrictions by the Sheriff for his political activities and many other signs of black segregation and inequality in the liberal Democrat society of America. But when they were in Harvard, Harvard changed the topic, not about racial but specifically about social phenomenon; they have 48 hours to draw up their debate. After

discussion, Samantha Booke and James Farmer are debaters from Willey, and finally they win.

Critics gave the film generally favorable reviews. As of June 14, 2008, the review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes reported that 80% of critics gave the film positive reviews, based on 122 reviews. Metacritic reported the film had an average score of 65 out of 100, based on 32 reviews. Carrie Rickey of the *The Philadelphia Inquirer* named it the 5th best film of 2007 and Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* named it the 9th best film of 2007 (Answer.com, 2010).

From the reviews there are pros and cons about this movie. For the pro reviewers said that *The Great Debaters* falls into the category of “saving the best for last,” as it is the last movie watched and reviewed by New Movie Friday this year, but turns out to be the best all around movie of the 55 movies screened in 2007. They also said that it is great film because it told the real condition very clear about Texas and America in that time.

And for the reviewer that contra likes the feedback news said that his movie is not good, because not based on true story, they said that Willey never debated with Harvard. They said that Willey only debated with local university.

Then from the market, *The Great Debaters* debuted at No. 11 in its first weekend with a total of \$6,005,180 from 1,171 venues. The film has grossed domestically \$30,236,407 surpassing its budget of \$15 million. *The Great Debater* not only views in theatre but also sell in the DVD too, it was released in DVD at for the DVD in the first week it was sold 415,368 units. And now the number of selling the DVD *The Great Debaters* are 1,133,256 and consumer spending \$24,168,789. The

film has grossed domestically \$30,236,407 surpassing its budget of \$15 million (Answer.com, 2010).

The writer discovered four reasons why the writer chooses *The Great Debaters* as the research. The first is the character characterization, the second is the setting, the third is the plot, the fourth or the last is the subject matter.

The first reason, *The Great Debaters* has great character and characterization. The first is Melvin Tolson, and the second is James Farmer jr. The first, Melvin Tolson as the professor who teach a debate team, who support them to try fight by debate and the second, James Farmer, because he is the youngest student and he is the one of cause why the debate team win in Harvard.

The second reason is the setting of this movie. This movie has been made at 2007, but the setting is around 1930's. But when we watched this movie we can imagine that it was 1930's, the setting, environment, costumes, equipments was very closely like at 1930's, it is so interesting, it was difficult in a modern era, makes movie which take place at old era.

The third is that the writer wants to know more about plot in this film. The plot makes the writer so interesting, because it showed step by step Melvin and his debate team got win. It showed the problems which happened in every step they want to be a winner.

The last is the subject matter. *The Great Debaters* is a movie based on true story. The image that is based on true story makes this film felt more live and has real soul. It can give the writer and the reader more inspirations, awareness to social condition and think of problem solving to solve the social problems. The

reason of the director to make this movie is to show the injustice in America. Until 2000 America there in still injustice of jobs and education between black skin and white skin. (www.justfact.com/racialissues.asp.htm)

Based on the backgrounds above, the writer proposed to conduct the research entitled **AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN DENZEL WASHINGTON'S *THE GREAT DEBATERS* MOVIE (2007): A SOSIOLOGICAL APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

Actually there are no research paper studies about Denzel Washington's *The Great Debaters*, but the writer found criticisms of this film. The first criticism is conducted by Don Cane and Jacob Zorn (2008) and the second is Sherwood Ross (2007).

Don Cane and Jacob Zorn (2008) in "*The Great Debaters - A Critical Analysis of the Movie And More- A Guest Commentary*" conclude that communists were in the forefront of fighting for black workers and farmers and against racial oppression and lynch law terror during the 1930s - putting this struggle on the agenda for the first time since the Populist movement in the 1890s and trying to link it to the newly formed industrial unions.

While Sherwood Ross (2007) in "Arguably, "*The Great Debaters*" Ranks With Greatest American Movies" conclude, that in *The Great Debaters* there are two sides to every question; that no one economic system has got all the answers; that no one race and no one nation is superior, and that, over time, a sophisticated analysis of all aspects of a situation by inquiring minds may generate an

understanding about, and a tolerance for, divergent viewpoints and lead to workable accommodations.

From those criticisms above it can be concluded that the similarity to the writer is have the same object, *The Great Debaters* movie. The differences are Don Cane and Jacob Zorn's criticism (2008) focuses in communism live in social background of *The Great Debaters* while Sherwood Ross (2007) analyzes in all aspects of the movie.

C. Problem Statement

From the background of the choosing subject above the writer takes the problem "How the racial discriminations is reflected in Denzel Washington's *The Great Debaters* Movie?"

D. Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are :

1. to analyze the movie based on its structural elements.
2. to describe the racial discriminations in *The Great Debaters* movie based on the sociology literature.

E. Limitation of the Study

The writer limits the study only the racial discriminations that happens in *The Great Debaters* movie.

F. The Benefits of the Study

The benefits expected from this research are as follows:

1. Theoretical benefit

To give contribution to the larger body of knowledge or the development of knowledge particular studies in Denzel Washington in *The Great Debaters*.

2. Practical benefit

To give deeper understanding in literary field as the reference to the other researcher and enriches the literary study particularly among the students especially on Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

G. Research Method

The type of this research is qualitative research which does not need statistic to collect, collecting, and to interpret data.

1. Type of the Study

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative method is a research in which the result of the descriptive data is in written and oral forms from observing people or behaviour. "It does not present data and research result in form of digits and statistic but it yields the data and the result in the form of phenomena description", (Moleong, 1995: 56).

2. Object of the Study

The object of this study is *The Great Debaters* movie directed by Denzel Washington and published by Harpo film production in 2007. It is analyzed by using sociological approach.

3. Type of Data and the Data Source

a. Primary Data

The primary data sources of the study are *The Great Debaters* movie directed by Denzel Washington from Harpo film production and the script movie written by Robert Eisele and Jeffrey Porro.

b. Secondary Data

The secondary data sources of the study are synopsis of *The Great Debaters* movie and all information about this movie from internet.

4. Technique of the Data Collection

The technique of the data collections are:

- a. note- taking
- b. picture- capturing

The step of collecting data:

- a. Watching the movie for several times
- b. Reading the movie script

- c. Determining the characters
- d. Taking notes of important parts in both of primary and secondary data.
- e. Classifying and determining the relevant data.
- f. Taking notes from the material and some other sources related to the movie and analysis.

5. Technique of data Analysis

The technique used in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis. It concerns with the structural elements of the movie and sociological approach. In addition, the writer also uses the structural analysis of the work. Firstly, the data arranged in list of data. Secondly, the researcher is looking for a selecting the relevant of data by using the chosen approach. Thirdly, all data from the second step are arranged. Finally, a conclusion is drawn.

H. Research Paper organization

The research paper organization of “Against Racial Discrimination in Denzel Washington’s *The Great Debaters* Movie (2007): A Sociological Approach” consists of six chapters. Chapter I is introductions that consists of Background of Study, Previous Study, Problem Statement, Limitation, Objective of the Study, Benefit of the Study, Research Method and the last is Research Paper Organization. Chapter II is Theoretical Approach that consists of Sociological of Literature, Type of Sociological Theory, Structural Elements of the Movie and Theoretical Application. Chapter III is social historical

backgrounds of American society in the nineteenth century. Chapter IV is Structural Analysis of *The Great Debaters* movie. Chapter V is Sociological Analysis. The last is Chapter VI contains of conclusion and suggestion of the research.