

## PREJUDICE TOWARDS AFRICAN AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE* FILM

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### ABSTRACT

Prejudice is a thought or assumption that is not necessarily true of a person or group based on their membership background. There are some hostile actions in prejudice, namely: (1) Antilocution, (2) Avoidance, (3) Discrimination, (4) Physical Attack, and (5) Extermination. With Allport's theory of prejudice, the researcher analyzes a film called *12 Years a Slave*. The film is analyzed more deeply to find subtitles and scene pieces that contain elements of hostile actions in prejudice. To get the elements of prejudice in the film, the writer uses character theory and characterization to find elements of prejudice that occur in the characters in the film. This study used a qualitative method because it requires a deep understanding of a phenomenon that occurs. In the results of this study, the researcher found that there are four types of acts of prejudice, namely: (1) Antilocution, (2) Discrimination, (3) Physical Attack, and (4) Extermination. The most frequently used act of prejudice in this film is a physical attack. Based on the research in this study, the physical attacks in the film occurred because of the lack of self-control of white people over African Americans. More deeply, another reason is because of the mode of justification for the violence that white people against African Americans through the Bible. Lastly, because of the legalization of the sale and purchase of slaves, there was a sense of ownership that allowed white people to do anything to their slaves.

**Key words:** African American, hostile action, prejudice.

### ABSTRAK

*Prasangka adalah pemikiran atau dugaan yang belum tentu benar terhadap seseorang atau kelompok berdasarkan latar keanggotaannya. Terdapat beberapa aksi buruk dalam prasangka, diantaranya: (1) Antilokusi, (2) Avoidance, (3) Discrimination, (4) Physical Attck, and (5) Extermination. Dengan teori prasangka dari Allport, penulis menganalisa sebuah film berjudul 12 Years a Slave. Film tersebut dianalisis lebih dalam untuk mendapatkan dialog dan adegan-adegan yang mengandung unsur-unsur perlakuan buruk dalam prasangka. Untuk mendapatkan elemen-elemen prasangka di dalam film, penulis menggunakan teori karakter dan karakterisasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif karena membutuhkan pemahaman yang mendalam terhadap suatu fenomena yang terjadi. Hasil dari penelitian ini, penulis menemukan bahwa terdapat empat jenis aksi prasangka, antara lain: (1) Antilokusi, (2) Discrimination, (3) Physical Attck, and (4) Extermination. Aksi prasangka yang paling banyak terjadi dalam film ini adalah physical*

*attack. Berdasarkan penelitian pada kajian ini, serangan fisik dalam film tersebut terjadi karena tidak adanya kontrol diri dari orang kulit putih terhadap orang Afrika Amerika. Lebih dalam, alasan lainnya adalah karena adanya modus pembenaran kekerasan yang dilakukan orang kulit putih terhadap orang Afrika Amerika melalui alkitab. Terakhir, karena adanya pelegalan dalam hal jual beli budak, sehingga ada rasa memiliki yang membuat orang kulit putih bisa melakukan apapun terhadap budak mereka.*

*Kata kunci: Amerika Afrika, tindakan permusuhan, prasangka.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In life, there are certainly many problems faced by society. One of them is prejudice. Prejudice is a problem that people who like to think badly of someone or more without any clear reason for other humans. One clear example of the prejudice that still exists today is against the Papuan people. Among the government and the police, they think that Papuans often create problems. They consider all Papuan students to be political activists working for separatists, especially for the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM). Therefore, the government and police feel that they are carrying out control until sudden raids on Papuan students in their dormitories. The incident occurred on August 17, 2019, at the Papua Dormitory in Surabaya (Koman 37-38).

The simplest definition of prejudice is thinking badly about other people without valid facts (Allport 6). Based on this prejudice statement defined by Allport, it is further emphasized that prejudice initially originates from the thoughts of people who have a prejudice against the victim without a clear basis, or prejudice is just an assumption and opinion, not a fact of reality. In addition, Allport says that the definition of prejudice must contain two elements, the first is that there must be an element of being disliked and the second is that it must be related to beliefs that are too general and wrong (13). This statement describes the essence of prejudice itself. Prejudice comes from wrong thinking and inflicting harm on the victim. This statement is clear enough to explain the initial factors for prejudice that will have a big impact on the victims.

Many problems of prejudice are manifested in literary works, and one of them is in the form of films. As stated by Abrams (123), literary works are imitations of human actions. One example of media that can be used as a forum for literary works to be seen in society is film. As stated by Evison (148), a film is a story or event recorded by a camera as a collection of moving images and the results are shown in the theater or on television. Therefore, the way to enjoy literary works is not only by reading but also by watching them with pictures and additional sound. In literature work, the results that are displayed are usually a reflection of everyday human life, such as the problem of prejudice in the 12 Years a Slave film which is taken from a true story in America.

12 Years a Slave film tells the story of white people who often perform prejudice against African Americans and the prejudice causes treatments that are not comfortable for blacks. The prejudices felt by blacks are further clarified in the character of Solomon Northup, who is the main character in this film. This film explains what is felt by Solomon Northup and the other African American as black slaves. This film is a representation of slavery that happened in America in the past. The director in this film is quite great because he dares to raise this issue to the film by opening the world's eyes to slavery in America in

1841 and tries to give the audience an understanding that people should not repeat the same mistakes.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Prejudice**

Perhaps the briefest of all definitions of prejudice is thinking ill of others without a sufficient warrant (Allport 6). This utterance has explained most simply prejudice. Therefore, the reader can understand the prejudice of the opening understanding at the beginning of the introduction to the theory. In addition, Allport additionally explains a definition that similarly, that is, we need to expand the phrase "Without a sufficient warrant." A judgment is unwarranted whenever it lacks a basis. Another way of interpreting prejudice is as "being down on something you're not up on" (7).

This is a simple form of prejudice, namely by demeaning something that is disliked in the absence of a factual basis, even if there are facts that happen, that additionally cannot be the reason for someone to make it a general reason to look at others.

Not only Allport, but Abrams also defines prejudice as a bias that demeans people because of their perceived membership in a social group (Abrams 3). This statement explains that prejudice occurs against a group or its membership that is unliked by the perpetrators of prejudice, or it is usually done by the majority to the minority group..

#### **a. Antilocution**

Antilocution is the act of prejudice in the form of speech. These actions usually take the form of hate speech, humiliating speech, gossip, insults, hurtful jokes, and stereotypes. These utterances are usually said to an unwelcome individual or group (Allport 14). Antilocution is an initial act of prejudice that makes the victim feel insecure and uncomfortable in the majority environment with the words that the perpetrator of prejudice says. In this case, antilocution are words that white slave masters said to their Negro slaves as an expression of their resentment towards their Negro slaves, such as "black animals" who are represented as negro slaves.

#### **b. Avoidance**

Avoidance is an attitude of unliked group members. In this case, the perpetrator of the prejudice does not harm the group he does not like accommodation at all. Avoidance is the second level after the expression of prejudice through speech. If the prejudice is stronger, the perpetrator of the prejudice will choose to take action to leave the group he does not like rather than be in a group with members who are not liked (Allport 14). In this case, the perpetrator of the prejudice is not actively touching or giving harm to the victim. The perpetrator of prejudice has no desire to harm the victim).

#### **c. Discrimination**

Discrimination is an unfair treatment received by victims of prejudice that causes active harm (Allport 14-15). Discrimination can be felt by victims very clearly, and many victims cannot feel the public facilities that are usually obtained by the community in general. For example, unfair treatment in employment opportunities, hospitals, education, and other public facilities. That is why the victim will feel isolated and feel that their existence is not wanted by the majority. The victim will also find the difficult to live a good life and survive the unfair treatment that the victim receives. In this case, prejudiced people will tend to pay more attention to their white slaves than to their black slaves. This discrimination directly affected the negro slaves as depicted in the 12 Years a Slave film

**d. Physical Attack**

A Physical attack is a form of threat or attack that is in direct physical contact with the perpetrator of prejudice against the victims of prejudice. The physical attack can be violent or semi-violent (Allport 15). Physical attacks against victims are often carried out for no good reason. The perpetrator of the prejudice sometimes physically attacks the victim because the victim does not want to follow the inhuman orders of the white master. With the slave master's sense of ownership of the slaves, the slave master would physically attack the victim whenever the slave master wanted to do so. In this case, the physical attack that slave masters often make against their Negro slaves are physical attacks in the form of lashes. The physical attacks received by the victim will usually cause deep fear and trauma, so the victim will choose to always obey his master's orders so as not to get physical attacks again.

**e. Extermination**

Extermination is the act of taking the life of an unliked group. It is the highest act of prejudice. This extermination includes lynchings, pogroms, massacres, and the Hitlerian program of genocide marking the ultimate degree of violent expression of prejudice (Allport 15).

In conclusion, prejudice is the bad views of a person or group without any clear facts. For example, when a white person thinks all African Americans are stupid and cunning. It is just a personal opinion and there is nothing that can prove that all African Americans are like that. Thus, prejudice will arise depending on how one views other humans. If the prejudice in thinking gets stronger, then unpleasant actions will occur for the victims of the prejudice or also known as hostile actions, as follows: (1) Antilocution is actions in the form of speech committed by perpetrators of prejudice, such as gossip, hate speech, insults, and hurtful jokes, (2) Avoidance is an act of avoiding individuals against unwanted or unliked group members, (3) Discrimination is an act in the form of unfair treatment of victims of prejudice in various ways, (4) Physical attacks are actions in the form of threats and physical attacks directly against victims of prejudice, and (5) Extermination is the highest act of prejudice in the form of the loss of life against victims of prejudice in groups. At this point, there is a loss of life by the perpetrator against the victim of prejudice.

## **2. Character and Characterization**

In this study, the writer focuses on the prejudices felt by the victims. To find the elements of prejudice in the film, the writer must analyze the character of the player using character and characterization theory, as follows:

**a. Character**

According to Aquino (112), characterization is a method used by the researcher to analyze the development of a character and personality related to the process of creating the image of a fictional person in a story. Usually, the researcher will show the characterizations of the characters in the plot, the themes, and how the characters convey ideas. In a story, characters and characterization are two things that cannot be separated and always work together. The characters can only be alive if there is a characterization insight into the characters. That is why, characterization gives, color to the character to be told in a literary work. According to Joseph M. Boggs (50), there are eight ways to recognize characterizations in a film, namely: (1) Characterization through appearance, (2) Characterization through dialogue, (3) Characterization through external action, (4) Characterization through internal action, (5) Characterization through reaction of other

characters, (6) Characterization through contrast: dramatic foils, (7) Characterization through caricature and leitmotif, and (8) Characterization through the choice of name which is explained, as follows.

**b. Characterization**

According to Aquino (112), characterization is a method used by the researcher to analyze the development of a character and personality related to the process of creating the image of a fictional person in a story.

- 1) **Characterization through Appearance**  
This type is the audience that can analyze the characterization of the player's appearance, such as the make-up and clothes worn by the figures.
- 2) **Characterization through Dialogue**  
This type is a way of looking at characterizations from the point of view of the dialogue that the characters say in a film.
- 3) **Characterization through External Action**  
This external action is an action in which the audience can analyze the characterization of a character from actions outside of what he/she usually does.
- 4) **Characterization through Internal Action**  
This characterization is the way that usually the purpose of the film is known only to the researcher and the players in the story.
- 5) **Characterization through Reaction of Other Characters**  
There is something in films that is usually happening is where information about a player's character has been previously revealed by other characters, even before the character appears or has a dialogue.
- 6) **Characterization through Contrast: Dramatic Foils**  
This characteristic is described by the director by showing two characters with contrasting characters in one story.
- 7) **Characterization through Caricature and Leitmotif**  
This type of characterization is depicted by exaggerating the character traits of a character with a specific purpose.
- 8) **Characterization through Choice of Name**  
This characterization is known as name typing. A researcher thinking of their character's name very carefully.

## **C. RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative method in this study to procedure and detailed manner as a way to collect research materials analyzed because this study describes data analysis in the form of subtitles and scene pieces to see the social phenomena which were prejudiced behavior shown in the literary work of the film entitled *12 Years a Slave*.

The stages carried out by the researcher in the data collection steps are by observing subject: the researcher watched the *12 Years a Slave* film to find out the formulation of the problem, taking notes: the researcher took notes of the data related to the prejudices and the last is verifying data: the researcher sorted some data to be analyzed.

### **1. Research Design**

Research design is planned and the procedures for research to detailed method of data collection and analysis (Creswell 3). Based on this opinion, the researcher employed a qualitative method in this study to procedure and detailed manner as a way to collect research materials analyzed. Moreover, Bogdan and Biklen (14) state that qualitative research is the collection of data in the form of words or pictures that are descriptive, not in the form of numbers. In connection with this statement, this study describes data analysis in the form of subtitles and scene pieces to see the social phenomena which were prejudiced behavior shown in the literary work of the film entitled *12 Years a Slave*.

## **2. Data and Data Sources**

Data is the smallest or lowest entity that results from some experiences, observations, experiments, and or other similar situations (Yin 130). Data is an important thing in a study because data is the material that the researcher employed to obtain results from analyses related to prejudice. In this study, the researcher employed subtitles and scene pieces related to hostile actions as data. While the source of the data used in this study is the *12 Years a Slave* film that was directed by Steve McQueen and aired in 2013.

## **3. Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, based on Taylor and Renner (2-5), the researcher analyzed the data into several steps.

### **a. Focus the analysis**

The researcher focused on noting the important things related to prejudice and the research questions discuss in this study.

### **b. Categorize the information**

This is the core step in finding the data. This step aimed to categorize which data can be used for analysis and which data cannot be used by the researcher, and the researcher also sorted the data based on the types of cases of prejudice to be analyzed.

### **c. Identify patterns and connections within categories**

In this step, the researcher identified the relationships between the data that have been differentiated based on the categories associated with prejudice for analysis.

### **d. Interpretation - bringing it all together**

This is the last step that serves to connect the data that has been collected with the theory used.

## **D. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the data that have been obtained are shown, also the researcher analyzed and discussed the data. The data are analyzed with prejudice theory by Gordon Allport. This theory correlated with the research question which was mainly about the performance of prejudice that happened to African American slaves in the *12 Years a Slave* film:

### **1. Prejudice**

The researcher analyzed the prejudices in *12 Years a Slave* film, wherein that film there is the main character, named Solomon Northup, represents a true story in life and is shown in a film. Solomon was one of many African Americans who were victims of prejudice, and he was the only one who dared to fight for his freedom. In the course of his

life for *12 years as a slave* and his struggle for freedom, he and his fellow slaves often get bad treatment from their landlords. On his way to achieve his freedom again, there are many moments where he and other African American get bad treatment from their master. Based on that film, the researcher found four types of bad treatments, as follows:

## a. Antilocution

Antilocution is the first type that is categorized as the lowest level of bad treatment in prejudice. The first data in antilocution is related to hate speech, as follow:

Table 1. Antilocution Presented by The White Overseer

Time	Name	Conversation
00:36:39	Mr. Tibeats	<b>Are you an engineer, or a nigger?</b> Are you an engineer, or a nigger?
	Mr. Ford	Let the man says his piece.
00:36:57	Mr. Tibeats	<b>It's a scheme. Plenty of engineers have schemed similarly.</b> The passes are too tight.
	Solomon	I reckon them at more than 12 feet at their most narrow.



Fig. 1. Mr. Tibeats condescending Solomon as a Nigger.

This was a moment when Solomon tried to give good input to his master Mr. Ford, the African American overseer at Mr. Ford's lands, named Mr. Tibeats that hated Salomon so much that it felt like African Americans should be stupid, ignorant people and even if they had any knowledge they shouldn't tell their Master. Mr. Tibeats tries to influence his master with his evil question to Solomon, "**Are you an engineer, or a nigger?**" This question brought down the African American badly, even though he had a brilliant mind. He would still be considered only an African American, who was born to be a slave in life. With Solomon's intelligence, of course, Mr. Tibeats is offended and feels challenged. That way, he tried to knock Solomon out with another sentence, "**It's a scheme. Plenty of engineers have schemed similarly.**" With a background as a Negro, Mr. Tibeats took the opportunity by demonizing Solomon directly to Mr. Ford. He slandered Solomon working with engineers to trick his master, even though Solomon wanted to help to give ideas so that the job could be completed quickly in an easier way. This case is included in the antilocution because the character of Mr. Tibeats talks through the dialogue with words aimed at bringing down Solomon.

## b. Discrimination

This is the third level of bad treatment in prejudice. Discrimination will usually harm victims of prejudice. Because, usually victims of prejudice will be treated unfairly in terms

of public facilities, jobs, schools, and so on. The researcher found one scene was used as data to be analyzed in the *12 Years a Slave* film that relates to the discrimination of prejudiced offenders against victims of prejudice which will be explained, as follows:

Table 2. Discrimination Presented by Solomon




Fig. 2. Discrimination Against Solomon

Time	Name	Conversation
01:42:19 - 01:42:40	Mr. Epps	<b>No shame in taking respite from the heat.</b>
	Mr. Samuel Bass	Drink, shade. It's ungodly for travelers, hearty or otherwise.
	Mr. Epps	What's funny?
	Mr. Samuel Bass	Epps, I merely mean to finish the work at hand, as requested and as paid for.
	Mr. Epps	<b>If something rubs you wrongly, I offer you the opportunity to speak on it.</b>

With this conversation, it is very clear that there was discrimination in that film. The discrimination occurred when the only white slave named Samuel, received special treatment from his master. On one hot afternoon, Samuel was visited by Mr. Epps at his workplace. At that time, Samuel was working on building a pavilion together with Solomon. Casually, Mr. Epps said to Samuel, “**No shame in taking respite from the heat.**” The remarks were only addressed to Samuel, while in the same place Solomon was working. This trait was discriminatory towards Solomon because, only Samuel was allowed to rest and drink, while Solomon must continue his job.

Even Mr. Epps also offered Samuel the opportunity to talk to him about what he disliked while working for Mr. Epps. The offer was given because Samuel always refused his master's invitation to rest at this time. His master felt that there were things that made Samuel uncomfortable, Mr. Epps also said, “**If something rubs you wrongly, I offer you the opportunity to speak on it.**” Even then, he took advantage of the question directly with his restlessness toward his master, who always acted badly to his African American slaves. However, his restlessness was not taken seriously. Meanwhile, Solomon was silent and listened to their conversation. So far, Solomon and the other African American slaves were never allowed to rest prematurely. It is the same as giving input to the master. If they are caught being able to read and write they will be whipped by their master, especially if they dare to criticize their master. Moreover, Mr. Epps and his wife were very cruel masters to their slaves.




Based on the character through the dialogue, this scene falls into discrimination because the character of Mr. Epps a conversation in talk with Mr. Bass through the dialog in discriminating against Solomon by not inviting him to rest at the same time as Bass.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a type of discrimination in the *12 Years a Slave* film, namely differences in attitude treatment in terms of democracy and equal rights at work.

### c. Physical Attack

In this action, the researcher gets more data to study than other types of bad traits. There are several events in the film that are in direct physical contact. This is a bad trait that not only hurts the feelings of African Americans, but also hurts them physically. This case was the most data found by the researcher in the *12 Years a Slave* film. The researcher found 12 scenes were used as data to be analyzed in the *12 Years a Slave* film that relates to the physical attack of prejudiced offenders against victims of prejudice which are explained below, as follows:

d. Table 3. Physical Attack Presented by Solomon in a Room

	
<b>Time</b>	<b>About the scene</b>
00:14:50	The moment occurred when Solomon was kidnapped and put into a room away from the crowd. At that time, he was visited by two white people. Solomon explained that he was a free African American, but he could not show his letter. Then, they didn't believe it at all and were so annoyed that they hit Solomon with a stick.

This picture was of an incident where Solomon was brought to Washington with the trick that he would be invited to work as a violinist in a large circus for very high pay by white men named Hamilton and Brown. Solomon was only tricked and he was kidnapped to be sold into slavery. His letter as a free African American from Saratoga, New York was destroyed to make him look like other African American slaves who wanted to escape. Before being taken to the slave trade, Solomon was locked, his hands and feet were chained with iron. He also received harsh treatment. The picture above shows the study of Solomon being hit with a stick just because he tried to defend himself and tell the guards there that he was an independent Nigger. He was beaten so many times that the wood broke and his back was bleeding.

Based on the character through the external action, this scene includes physical attack action because, in this scene, the white character performs physical attacks on Solomon.

## e. Extermination

In the image below, the researcher found one scene related to the loss of life of African American people. This scene was the only data in extermination found by the researcher in the *12 Years a Slave* film which is the explanation, as follows:

Table 4. Extermination Represented by Black Slaves in the Forest

	
<i>Fig. 4. Two African Americans Hanged to Death</i>	
Time	About the scene
01:05:17	This scene of the film shows two African Americans being hanged by two white men. The murder occurred when Solomon was ordered by Mistress Epps to shop in town. While on the way, he saw the killing process firsthand.

Solomon did not know the exact reason why the murder occurred because he only caught a glance at the incident. He did not dare to say or do anything so that he was safe and could continue to walk to his destination. But clearly, this scene falls into the category of extermination action because the character through the external action at that time was hanging two African Americans until their lives were lost.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a type of extermination in the *12 Years a Slave* film, namely loss of life by hanging the victim's neck.

## E. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of the findings, using Allport's theory of prejudice, the researcher concluded that *12 years a slave* film is a film that contains elements of prejudiced actions. Where, the researcher found four types of prejudice were found by African Americans as a victim, including: (1) Antilocution, (2) Discrimination, (3) Physical attack, and (4) Extermination. The most common prejudice found is in the physical attack action, where the researcher finds five scenes that contain elements of physical attack in the film.

Based on the results of the data analysis above, the researcher concluded that the prejudice that occurs in that film is dominated by the view that white people are better than African Americans. Moreover, the government had legalized the sale and purchase of slaves in the United States at that time. Later, African Americans were thought to be born only to be slaves for life. They are forbidden to be smart people who can read, write, and think well. They are only allowed to remain silent and follow their master's orders. Based on the researcher's opinion, these are some of the reasons that trigger acts of prejudice in the *12 Years a Slave* film.

After the researcher analyzed the *12 Years a Slave* film as an object of research using the action theory of prejudice from Allport, the researcher realized that this research is still far from perfect. Therefore, the researcher hopes that the next researcher s can explore the other side of this film that has not been touched on this study.

The researcher also hopes that readers can take positive values from this study. By understanding the issue of prejudice in this study, the researcher hopes that the readers can prevent the occurrence of prejudice around, at least within the reader's environment. In addition, other researcher s can use other theories in analyzing this film, such as racism and discrimination. Conversely, the next researcher s can use Allport's theory of prejudice to use other films that contain elements of prejudice.

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