

Racial Discrimination in Ta-Nehesi Coates's *Between the World and Me*

Angger Cahya Ardinang^{a.1*}, Dra. Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, M.Pd^{b.2}.

^{a)} Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

^{b)} Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

¹⁾ anggercahyaardi@gmail.com ²⁾ anikcahyaning@untag-sby.ac.id

* Corresponding Author.

ABSTRACT

This study is about racial discrimination in Ta-Nehesi Coates's *Between the World and Me*. The objective of this study is to describe the types and effects of racial discrimination experienced by Ta-Nehesi Coates's and black people in the novel. Descriptive qualitative method is used as the research method. This study uses an sociology approach. To analyze racial discrimination, the writer uses Fred L. Pincus theory. Chen and Mallory's theory of the impact of racial discrimination is used to analyze the impact experienced by Coates and black people. There are two types of racial discrimination that occur, namely individual and institutional discrimination. Individual discrimination includes racial prejudice and acts of violence, while institutional discrimination occurs in the fields of education and law. Meanwhile, there are two types of impact on Ta-Nehesi Coates's and black people as victims of racial discrimination. The first is the impact on mental health, Coates feels fear, anger and anxiety. The second is the impact on physical health, in the novel it is only mentioned that the racial discrimination experience by Coates resulted in dizziness and vertigo. In the novel, it is found that individual and institutional forms of racial discrimination can have an impact on mental and physical health.

Keywords: *Racial discrimination, Individual discrimination, Institutional discrimination, Impact*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every year, the prevalence of discrimination grows, and it happens everywhere in the world. The western world, especially the United States, continues to debate racial prejudice and skin colour. Sociologists commonly define racial discrimination as unequal treatment based on race, which may or may not be driven by prejudice or animus and may or may not be intentional (Small & Pager, 2020:49). Individuals can discriminate against members of a specific group by rejecting to conduct business with, interact with, or share resources with them. Governments can discriminate overtly in the legislation, for example, through racial segregation policies, uneven enforcement of laws, or disproportionate resource distribution. Racial discrimination in America occurs between black people and white people. White-skinned people consider this race to be very great and more privileged than the black race. This is what led to discrimination in America that always differentiates between races.

There are cases or acts of discrimination in racial discrimination that have been considered to solely contain direct actions. However, there are other actions that are neither seen nor realized. Racial discrimination is classified into numerous forms based on the acts and attitudes of the majority. According to Pincus in Wiecek and Hamilton, there are three types of racial discrimination: individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and structural discrimination (Wiecek & Hamilton, 2014). Institutional discrimination describes how an organization's rules or practices disadvantage particular groups, individual discrimination refers to the prejudiced actions of a single person. These two types of discrimination can be connected even if they are unique from one another. Institutional policies can reinforce individual discrimination, and vice versa, which

creates a more serious, systemic problem. Structural discrimination means policies that purport to be apolitical or gender-neutral but have a negative impact on minorities.

Racial discrimination is an issue that harms the daily and long-term health of racial/ethnic minority groups. The impact of racial discrimination is divided into two, the impact on mental health and physical health. Racial discrimination is associated with a range of physiological responses that can impair physical health such as dysregulated cortisol secretion, higher C-reactive protein, higher systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and increased heart rate variability (Chen & Mallory, 2021:1). The impact of racial discrimination on physical health can include high blood pressure, obesity, inflammation, coronary heart and cardiovascular disease. While in mental health, there are post traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, depression, anxiety, fear, and low self esteem. The effects are also interconnected, for example, stress can raise blood pressure and weaken the immune system, which in turn, increases the risk of developing long-term health conditions.

Between the World and Me contains letters written by Ta-Nehisi Coates to his 15-year-old son. Coates describes his youth in the Baltimore ghetto, where he learns how to survive. Coates' father is strict with him, but he now realizes that black parents often do this to protect their children. Growing up black in Baltimore usually means being poor, disenfranchised, and trying to prove one's humanity. He experiences an intellectual awakening while studying black writers and black history and marvelling at the diversity of black students at Howard. When he is a student at Howard, he learns of the passing of Prince Jones, a classmate. Prince is a wealthy, attractive, and charismatic black man who is murdered by police. Coates has extreme rage, disillusionment, and resentment in the wake of Prince's passing. Even coming from a wealthy background cannot save a black person any worth in America and can be eliminated.

Researchers found several previous studies that are relevant to this research. The first study answered two questions: the basis of racial discrimination in the novel and the types of discrimination (Chairi, 2020). The second study explored the different types of systemic racism depicted in the novel, as well as the characters' reactions to systemic racism (Hertriana, 2023). The third study discovered what caused segregation in America and the consequences of segregation (Diba, 2019). In this study, the researcher will explore racial discrimination in the novel *Between the World and Me*. This research aims to analyze the form and impact of racial discrimination. The difference between this research and previous research lies in the object, theory and focus of research. The researcher chose this novel as an object because it pulls back the cover and reveals the current state of blacks in America. Seeing how government and culture have steered people down an unjust horizontal trajectory.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach as a research method. Researchers used the theory of forms of racial discrimination by Fred L. Pincus. The theory of the impact of racial discrimination by Chen and Mallory is also used in this research. The novel entitled *Between The World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates written in 2015 serves as the research's data source. This research uses an extrinsic approach because it discusses the text in the novel which is connected to sociological theory. The primary research instrument is the researcher himself, with the novel serving as the data source for conducting this research.

The data for this study are gathered in stages. First, reading the novel. Second, identifying the important parts relating to the topic of analysis. Then, selecting the data and then categorising them as a type of linked discussion, based on the research questions. The analysis of the data involves these three steps: examining and describing the data relating to the problems formulated,

interpreting the data and analyzing them based on the theory used and concluding the result of the analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the novel, there are two forms of racial discrimination: individual and institutional. There is also the impact of racial discrimination experienced by Coates and black people. The following discussion will show the forms and effects of racial discrimination in *Between the World and Me*.

3.1 Form of Racial Discrimination in *Between The World and Me*

In the novel, Coates as the author often says white people, who refer to white-skinned people as dominant in his country, are also the perpetrators of discrimination. Meanwhile, black people refer to black people as a minority and as victims of discrimination. Coates as the author of the novel recounts many incidents of discrimination experienced by him, his family or other black people who experienced discrimination such as Michael Brown. There are two types of racial discrimination in the novel: individual discrimination and institutional discrimination. Individual discrimination occurs when one person or a small group of people acts in a way that disadvantages another person or members of a different group because of their race, ethnicity, or gender. Institutional discrimination is distinct because it refers to the policies of dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions, as well as the behaviour of individuals who control these institutions and implement policies that are intended to have differential and/or harmful effects on minority groups.

3.1.1 Individual Discrimination Reflected in *Between the World and Me*

Individual discrimination refers to the behaviour of a single person or a small group of people. Any person, regardless of color, ethnicity, or gender, is capable of discriminatory behaviour. Individual discrimination typically takes the form of overt acts, such as discrimination in speech and behaviour. Because it is a manifestation of specific personal negative attitudes toward others, individual discrimination is more prevalent in the context of everyday society. Prejudice, stereotypes, and violence are examples of individual discrimination that directly affects others. Violence is seen in the novel when Coates's mother is beaten by a young man. The young man is Coates' great-grandmother's boyfriend and when he is told to leave he hit Coates' mother hard. This shows that the white person is committing an act of violence based on race because Coates' mother did not do anything bad to deserve to be beaten. She just tells the young man to leave the house without any harsh words or violence.

Violence in racial discrimination can also be seen when a black man is killed because he refuses to turn down his music. It is individual discrimination because it is done by a white man and he does it alone. This is an injustice that occurs between white people and black people. White people are free to do whatever they want but black people are discrimination against by limiting their behavior. A black person in America has challenges and difficulties in living their lives. They are not only dissatisfied with their jobs or social situations, but they are also subjected to numerous forms of racism, including prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. Many African Americans, especially men, have been stigmatized as stupid, violent, and dangerous criminals. This statement demonstrates that white people's bigotry toward black people extends not only socially and professionally, but also physically and mentally.

Prejudice is also part of individual discrimination, in the novel a group of children use the word "nigger" to address an elderly worker. "I measured them against children pulling out in the 7-Eleven parking lot, against parents wielding extension cords, and "Yeah, nigger, what's up now?" (Coates,

2015:24). Racial discrimination acts are typically performed by white people who are prejudiced against persons of color. Inappropriate examples of cruel words are frequently employed. Nigger (also nigga, N-word, or negro) is an English phrase with a negative connotation use to disparage African Americans or Black people in general. When the word “nigger” is used by a fellow black person, it means a kind greeting to another black person. When the word is used by white people, it means that white people mock them using the word. This is a dreadfully nasty, racist word that should never be says by anyone, according to many individuals. Others, especially younger African-Americans, use this phrase casually and it now has a meaning like to “man” or “buddy”. The n-word is frequently used while talking about nigger since it is a dangerous word. This word originates in ancient times during the era of slavery in America. At that time, black people are a minority whose existence is not valued. They are made slaves because they are considered to be quite resilient when compared to other people, especially white people. They were taken by force and treats inhumanely by their masters. From there, the words ‘nigga’, ‘nigger’ ere often thrown out of the mouths of the masters and other majority communities in America to mock and distinguish them from the whites.

3.1.2 Institutional Discrimination Reflected in *Between the World and Me*

Institutional discrimination is distinct because it refers to the policies of dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions, as well as the behaviour of individuals who control these institutions and implement policies that are intended to have differential and/or harmful effects on minority groups. This sort of discrimination is likewise deliberate, but is perpetrated by a broader range of practitioners. Because institutional discrimination is carrying out by the government and policymakers through both law and those who carry it out. As a result, this type has a broader impact on minority populations. Institutional discrimination can occur in the area of law. As in the novel, many police officers commit injustices and even result in death but the police are left free without punishment.

There are many victims of institutional discrimination perpetrates by the police. Just for trivial reasons such as asking for help or just looking in a shop they are killed. (Coates, 2015)The victim of the police brutality was black, which shows that the police treat white and black people differently. The first incident of Eric Garner's death is killed by strangling him, an impermissible way of arresting him. This is because Eric Garner is suspected of selling cigarette bars without an excise tax, but Garner denied the allegations and says he does not sell cigarettes. The medical examiner rules Garner's death a homicide. The court decides not to charge Eric Garner with murder which sparks public protests over police brutality. Eric Garner's killer is only fired from his job as a police officer. This shows the injustice of the law between the black and white races. That the law is blunt towards white people and sharp towards black people. The next incident is John Crawford who is killed by the police for looking while holding a pistol sold at the store. The grand jury declined to indict both officers on criminal charges. The grand jury decides not to charge either of the officers involved with murder, manslaughter, or negligent homicide. The Guardian reveals in December that immediately after the shooting, police aggressively interrogates Crawford's girlfriend, Tasha Thomas, and threatens her with jail time. The interrogation leaves her sobbing uncontrollably, with hostile questions suggesting that she is drunk or on drugs when she state that Crawford has not enter the store with a weapon. This shows the law does not affect white people who come from institutions.

Samori witnesses an announcement about the case of Michael Brown who is killed by police officers and his body is left on the street. Samori hopes that Michael Brown would get justice but the killer is acquitted. "That is the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free" (Coates, 2015:10). Institutional discrimination is the deliberate differentiation of each institutional system. Differences in criminal punishments, employment, environment, and education, for example, exist between the majority and the minority. As in a conspiracy that forces the minority to become subservient. At this level, the concept of discriminating is carried out by a broader spectrum of practitioners. Thus, institutional discrimination is a type of legal discrimination perpetrated by institutions or institutions (Pincus, 1996:190). Some laws discriminate against black and white people in all aspects of life. This approach has far-reaching consequences for minority communities. By separating the two, the purpose is to maintain the difference between the dominant and minority groups. The law directly contradicts the interests of a society's less powerful subordinate group (minority). Discrimination is unavoidable under this system. To preserve control, the more powerful, elite organizations must make a persistent and systematic attempt to deny minority or less powerful groups access.

Coates says that American criminal justice policy cannot be said to be imposed by a repressive minority. The abuses that occur as a result of this policy include the random detention of black people and the torture of suspects. Coates even says that their country is ruled by a majority of pigs. Institutional discrimination is also seen in that quotation. This explains that legal justice is not easily available to black people as a minority. As in novel *Between the World and Me*, many of the deaths of people caused by police officers will be decided by the courts to let them go free. America itself still uses a jury system in its judiciary, which refers to the common law. Where the outcome or decision is determined not by the judge but the jury as a legitimate judge. Based on existing evidence and testimony. This causes controversy with various parties who are considering worthy of deciding. The jury is also not required to be absolutely sure of its decision. They only need to analyze with a logical reasoning system which of course does not rule out the possibility of influence from various parties by kinship and other psychological factors.

Institutional discrimination can also occur in the field of education. Coates says that schools are not places to learn but to escape death and prison, and 60 percent of all young black men who drop out of school will go to prison. That would be an embarrassment to the country but it is not. Black students who drop out of school will go to jail shows the number of black students who drop out. This could prove that the black group is considered intellectually inferior and therefore unfit to be educated to a high level. Society taught Coates that going to school is the best way to prevent going to prison. Coates struggles at school, which seems contradictory given his obvious curiosity. However, schools seem indifferent with the curiosity of black boys and girls.

3.2 Impact of Racial Discrimination in *Between the World and Me*

Racial discrimination has identified as a primary driver of health disparities in the United States between racial/ethnic minorities and Whites. Racial discrimination is a complex web of interconnected systems in which structural inequities prohibit racial/ethnic minority groups from fully participating in society and harm their health. However, racial discrimination remains a concern in each structural location, endangering the day-to-day and long-term health of racial/ethnic minority groups. Racial discrimination prohibits people of color from accessing resources and opportunities, and it has a negative impact on their general health and well-being. Centuries of racist policies and discriminatory behaviors have created inequitable, needless, and

avoidable health barriers for communities of color. This sort of institutional discrimination includes discriminatory policies and behaviors. It has an impact on many aspects of our lives, including where we live, learn, work, and play. These locations or surroundings can have an impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. In the novel, there are two impacts experienced by Coates and black people, namely physical and mental health impacts.

3.2.1 Impact on Mental Health Reflected in *Between the World and Me*

Discrimination based on race or skin tone can result in a wide range of issues, including racial trauma, chronic stress, anxiety, and depression, which can influence daily quality of life. Those who experience discrimination frequently - at least several times per month - are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental disorder and twice as likely to experience severe psychological distress than those who do not experience discrimination or experience discrimination less frequently. Mental health impacts can be seen when Coates asks how he can live freely in a black body. "How do I live free in this black body?" (Coates, 2015:11) The sentence shows Coates' fear of being free while he is black where the freedom he gets is determined by white people. The fear that Coates feels is a response to a certain stimulus that occurs in the present, or as an anticipation or expectation of a future threat that is considered a risk to oneself. Anxiety, a feeling that results from risks that are seen to be inescapable or unavoidable, is closely related to fear. The fear response aids in survival by triggering the right kinds of behavioural reactions. According to sociological and organizational studies, people's anxieties are influenced by their social networks and cultural norms as well as by their nature, which affects how and when they feel dread (Gill & Burrow, 2018:64).

Coates has felt fear since he is young because at that time the only people he knew were black and they all had powers that contained complete fear. That fear is always in front of Coates. It reminds him of the children in his neighbourhood who fortified themselves against the ugly past that haunts them. When the Mississippi mob gathered around their grandfather so that the branches of the black body could be burned, then cut off. This shows that Coates is always afraid from a young age because he sees discrimination around him. By participating in or witnessing a terrifying traumatic mishap, one can learn to be afraid. Studies have looked at the parts of the brain that are impacted by fear. It suggests that when examining certain regions (such as the amygdala), a person learns to dread regardless of whether they have personally experienced trauma or have witnessed the fear in others (Olsson et al., 2007). Fear is an essential emotional and physical defense mechanism that has played a crucial role in human evolution, particularly in prehistoric times when men and women frequently confronted life-or-death situations.

Coates' father is very afraid of losing his son. Coates feels it in the black belt punch he uses with more anxiety than anger. Although they are not the same thing, fear and anxiety are frequently used interchangeably. Fear is a proper, in-the-moment reaction to a clearly recognized and precise threat, but anxiety is a long-lasting, broadly focused, future-oriented response to a diffuse threat. The anxiety felt by Coates' father is triggered by fear and discomfort as a normal reaction to stress. However, when anxiety is excessive and difficult to control, it can lead to anxiety disorders. This is triggered by the discrimination that must be faced around them. Coates' father punched him as if someone is going to steal him, because that is what is happening around them. Many children are lost in jail, on drugs or guns. That loss leaves them terrified. It shows the anxiety and fears that Coates' father experiences about losing his son. Coates' father is aware that it would not be much for Coates to suffer major injury at the hands of the cops. He can lose his life if he makes the wrong move, says the wrong thing, or is just in the wrong place at the wrong moment. In order to

physically demonstrate to Coates how simple it is to lose the security of one's body, his father, acting out of both fear and love, pelts Coates.

3.2.2 Impact on Physical Health Reflected in *Between the World and Me*

Racial discrimination can cause high blood pressure, obesity, inflammation and hypertension. All types of discrimination can have an impact on physical health. For example, individual discrimination can lead to physical injury and premature death. Whereas, institutional discrimination negatively impacts access to healthcare and healthy lifestyle choices by creating environments or districts where people cannot thrive. Racial discrimination makes people more stress out, which raises their blood pressure and weakens their immune systems by contributing to high blood pressure. According to a study, discrimination can make people's bodies more prone to inflammation, which can worsen chronic diseases like kidney and heart disease (Thames et al., 2019:112). Discrimination is also associated with greater rates of smoking, drinking, using drugs, and unhealthy eating food.

Coates explains the burden he feels as a black person. The burden he feels is painful and physically exhausting, Coates says that he enjoy the dizziness and vertigo he feels in his wanderings in a country which is full of racial injustice. "True, I was coming to enjoy the dizziness, the vertigo that must come with any odyssey" (Coates, 2015:40). Coates' dizziness and vertigo are caused by stress and anxiety. Hyperventilation can happen when someone is anxious. The process of breathing alters the blood's gas composition and renders the brain weak and dizzy. One of the main types of dizziness, light-headedness, is frequently brought on by hyperventilation, which is connected to anxiety disorders.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded based on the results of the discussion there are two kinds of discrimination that occur, namely individual and institutional discrimination. Individual discrimination includes racial prejudice and acts of violence, while institutional discrimination occurs in the fields of education and law. Individual discrimination in the form of racial prejudice occurs when white people address black people as "nigger". The word has a negative connotation in a derogatory context to demonize African Americans or black people in general. Meanwhile, individual discrimination in the form of physical violence occurs a lot, such as Coates who tells a story about his mother and grandmother. Her mother lets a man into the house who claims to be her grandmother's boyfriend, and when her grandmother comes home, her grandmother tells the man to leave and then he beats her mother violently.

In institutional discrimination, Coates talks a lot about the laws in his country that do not provide justice for black people, like the killer of Michael Brown who is left free. The police as agents of the government also brutally discriminate and even cause death. A black person's body can be harmed or destroyed at any time for any reason, yet the perpetrators are rarely held accountable. Furthermore, in the field of education, according to Coates, schools and the streets are both parts of the same beast. Coates learns from society that black people may stay out of trouble by attending school. Coates has academic difficulties, which seems paradoxical given that it is obvious that he is a very curious boy. However, the schools are uninterested in the interests of black boys and girls.

In *Between the World and Me*, it is found that individual and institutional forms of racial discrimination can have an impact on mental and physical health. There are two types of impacts

on black people as victims of racial discrimination. The first is the impact on mental health, Coates experiences fear as the main impact he feels. Coates' fear comes from the threats of discrimination that might victimize him or his family. Furthermore, Coates feels angry as a kind of transformation of pain, and a category that includes feelings of fear. Uncontrolled fear also causes anxiety as experienced by Coates' father. The second is the impact on physical healthy. In the novel, it is only mentioned that the racial discrimination experienced by Coates resulted in dizziness and vertigo.

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