

## THE ACTS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION TO THE BLACKS AS SEEN IN STOCKETT'S THE HELP

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the actions of racial discrimination committed by white people against black people in *The Help*. This research used qualitative method, in terms of using words or text. In conducting this research, the data are collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the novel entitled *The Help* written by Kathryn Stockett. The second sources are some related books and articles from the internet, that are supporting this research. The result of this study is presented descriptively. As the result of this research, the researcher found that there are many actions of racial discrimination reflected in *The Help*. It can be seen in some several sections. First, there is a Discriminatory Law namely Jim Crow Law of the Southern United States. Second, the Discriminatory Stereotypes that the white people created about the black people such as, Blacks are dirty, Black people are Thieves, Black People as Diseases, and Black People are Dumb. And the last is the Discrimination in Public Services, that can be found in residential area, library, education, health services, voting, and public transportation.

**Key words:** *Racial Discrimination, Jim Crow Law, The Help, Kathryn Stockett*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many forms of discrimination, including racial, gender, nationalism, religion, and sexual orientation, have had to be recognized. In this world, racial discrimination is an ongoing issue, which causes numerous conflicts and undermines humanity's ability to reconcile. "Discrimination is a treatment which is not balanced against an individual or group, based on something which usually categorial,

or distinctive attributes, such as based on race, ethnic, religion, or social classes.” (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969, pp. 115–116). In general, racial discrimination is a different treatment of individuals or groups, and this action tends to differentiate humans based on their races. Racial discrimination developed its beginning in the sixteenth century.

In the 1870’s Jim Crow laws were implemented in the Southern United States. This law promoted the concept of “Separate but Equal” which means that all races are equal, but should be in separate locations and use separate facilities. In reality, this law encouraged discrimination and inequality between Blacks and Whites. This law had a significant impact on the lives of African-Americans because there was no equality or justice for them, as Maru in Harlem Renaissance; A Glance on its Rise. Movements and Figures stated, “The poor Situation in the South drive the blacks to migrate. They try to get rid of low quality of life, the rise of Jim Crow, the segregation of the Black voters, and the spread of lynching and violence.” (Maru, 2012, p. 1413). Because of this Law, the white people thought that they had rights to discriminate the black people.

*The Help* is an examination of how racial discrimination how racial discrimination pervaded almost every aspect of life in Jackson, Mississippi in 1960, from Jim Crow Laws that sanctioned segregation as policy to casual conversation between middle-class women. This novel focuses in particular on how white housewife rationalized their black maids’ exploitation and mental abuse. In this research, the researcher revealed the Acts of Racial Discrimination between black people and white people that occur in the novel *The Help*. It focusing on the white people’s treatments to the black people based on the Law the created, discrimination in public service, also their discriminatory stereotypes about black people.

## RESEARCH METHOD

According to Rorintulus, "Method refers to operational ways in conducting a research. This study is a qualitative research which collecting qualitative data by doing library research." (Rorintulus, 2018, p. 141) this research is classified as a qualitative research, it means that the data in this research do not deal with number, diagrams, or formulas, but in form of words or quotations. "Qualitative method is most suitable method to be used in analyzing novel." (Arisudana et al., 2018, p. 430).

According to Bogdan and Biklen statements, "Qualitative Research is descriptive. The data collections are in form of words or picture rather than numbers. The written result of the research contains quotations from data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation." (Bogdan, 1997, p. 28). Based on this statement, in analyzing the topic, the researcher should collect the data from some related books and articles that deal with the topic.

### *Data Collection*

In collecting the data, the writer will use two sources, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the novel entitled *The Help* written by Kathryn Stockett. The secondary sources are taken from some books, articles, and internet references, which are relevance, to gain more detail information to support the content of this research.

### *Data Analysis*

According to Griffith in his book *Writing Essay about Literature*; "Analysis means breaking something down into its components and discovering relationship among them that give unity and coherence to the whole." (Griffith, 2011, p. 30). In other words, analysis is an especially valuable tool for gaining thorough understanding of literary works. In analyzing the data, the writer used Mimetic Approach. In general, Mimetic can be interpreted as an approach that views literary works as an imitations or images from the real life. According to Abram, "Mimetic Orientation is the explanation of art as

essentially an imitation, but the writer's imagination. The whole aspects of the universe, means the whole aspects of human's life just like social, culture, religious, history, and so forth." (Abram, 1971, p. 8). The definition that implies Mimetic Approach used in order to reveal the social condition in Southern United State as reflected in the novel *The Help*.

## FINDINGS

The acts of racial discrimination in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* has reflected the condition of the society between blacks and whites in the South America in 1960s. The researcher divided the acts of racial discrimination that occur in *The Help* into three parts.

### *The Discriminatory Law*

The lives of Whites and Blacks in Mississippi, as described in *The Help* are controlled by a law called Jim Crow Law. This Law states "Separate but equal". But this law promote discrimination and increasingly support discriminatory actions that occur between Whites and Blacks. "*Separate but equal.*" Miss Hilly say back to Miss Leefolt. "*That's what governor Ross Barnett says it right, and you can't argue with the government.*" (Stockett, 2009, p. 185). This quotation shows that Hilly Holbrook is a character that really support Jim Crow Law, and she also remind her friend, Elizabeth Leefolt, about this law. The text below is showing how the Jim Crow Law are written in the story.

*"I read through four of the twenty-five pages, mesmerized by how many laws exists to separate us. Negroes and whites are not allowed to share water fountains, movie houses, public restrooms, ballparks, phone booths, circus shows. Negroes cannot use the same pharmacy or buy postage stamps at the same window as me. We all know about these laws, we live here, but we don't talk about them. This is the first time I've ever seen them written down. Lunch counters, the state fair, pool tables, hospital. Number forty-seven I have to read twice, for its irony. (Stockett, 2009, p. 173).*

There are some explanations about the Jim Crow Law and its existence, such as from Phillips in the New Jim Crow Law Materials; “Jim Crow has been a derogatory slang term for the black people for a long time, making it a suitable name for the laws that prevailed in the Southern United States, and some border countries from 1877 to the mid-1960’s. Jim Crow Law was a set of laws and social customs requiring racial segregation, from 1881 to 1964. Jim Crow Law separates Americans by the race in 26 States. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institution to keep their black and white clients separated. However, Jim Crow Laws covered almost every possible area of human contact.” (Phillips, 2012, p. 1).

### *Discriminatory Stereotypes*

In *The Help*, most of white people are having discriminatory stereotypes or bad judgements about the black people and of course they think that they are not the same, even though they are all humans with the same feeling and rights to live peacefully. According to Williams, Gooden, and David in African Americans and Pathological Stereotypes, “In psychology stereotypes are defined as beliefs that all people within a particular group, poses the same traits or characteristic. Stereotypes may be held regarding ethnic groups.” (Williams et al., 2012, p. 26)

*“Hilly and Miss Leefolt both look at me. I look back down at the kids. “But Aibileen” – Miss Hilly smile real cold – “colored people and white people are just so... different.” She wrinkle up her nose. I feel my lip curling. A course we different! Everybody knows colored people and white people ain’t the same. But we still just people.” (Stockett, 2009, p. 186)*

### *Black People are Dirty*

*The Help* shows that almost all the White people think that Black people are dirty. They also teach their kids who still “colorblind” about the Racial Discrimination, that Blacks are dirty. Aibileen as the main character in *The Help*, she had a very bad

experience as a black maid, who raised many white children. At first, it was easy for her to teach her white children to see that Whites and Blacks are the same and deserve the same love and to be treated properly. But as the time goes by, these white children started to acting like their white adults, because their society teaches them to hold the principle that Blacks are different from them.

The quotation below showing how Aibileen has to face a bitter truth that her last white baby that she raises with love has to be taught by her mom Miss Leefolt, that Blacks are dirty in front of her face. *“On the ride home, I don’t see the big white house painting outside the window. I don’t talk to maid friends. I see baby girl getting spanked cause a me. I see her listening to Miss Leefolt call me dirty, diseased.”* (Stockett, 2009, p. 96)

According to Williams, Gooden, and Davis, “as a historical example, throughout the greater half of the twentieth centuries, African Americans were stereotyped as dirty and contaminated. Although it is easy to imagine that lower-income individuals may not have had sufficient money for cleaning supplies and might be less concerned about cleanliness, this was simply never true about African Americans. Stereotypes about African-American do not correspond with reality. For example, historically Blacks have been stereotyped as dirty/smelly.” (Williams et al., 2012, p. 30)

### *Black People as Diseases*

The Novel shows that almost the Whites think that Blacks can spread many kinds of disease. The diseases are caused by the black color of their skin. This problem makes the Whites really worry with the Black diseases and it becomes a problem for both whites and Blacks. When Aibileen works in Elizabeth Leefolt’s house, she has a separate bathroom because her employer worries that she will cause diseases to their White family if she uses the same bathroom as them. *“My teapot starts fussing on the stove, bringing me back to real life. Law I reckon I just go ahead and put Miss Skeeter on the list, but how come I don’t know. Which reminds me about, that Miss Leefolt’s building me a bathroom because she thinks I’m diseased.”* (Stockett, 2009, p. 24)

The quotation above explains about how bad the situation that Aibileen has to get through when she cannot use the same bathroom as her White employer, because they think that she is a disease. Also, it shows how Elizabeth Leefolt, her employer, also have the same belief that she diseased and she really want to make sure that Aibileen use the separate bathroom. According to Wailoo in *Stigma, Race, and Disease*, "African-Americans were often portrayed as a key disease vector, capable of infecting other parts of the American population." (Wailoo, 2006, p. 531). It can explain that one of the reasons why the segregation existed is because the stereotype the black people were carrying diseased and white people are too afraid about it.

### *Black People are Dumb*

A teacher who teach in White children school teaches their students to discriminate against Blacks. Not only taught her students that Black people are dirty, Mae Mobley's teacher Miss Taylor, also told her student that Black people are stupid. *"Miss Taylor says, kids that are colored can't go to my school cause they're not smart enough." I come round the counter ten. Lift her chin up and sooth back her funny-looking hair. "You think I'm dumb?". "No". She whispers hard like she means it so much. She looks sorry she said it.*" (Stockett, 2009, p. 156)

The quotation above is a conversation between Aibileen and Mae Mobley, the White child that she raised with love, and who always love Aibileen even if she is Colored. Mae Mobley told her that her teacher taught them that Blacks cannot go in their Whites school because they are not smart enough.

According to Plous and Williams in *Racial Stereotypes from the Days of American Slavery: A Continuing Legacy*, "National public opinion survey do not measure racial stereotypes, yet these authors found some research that indicated that there has been a steady decline in the beliefs that whites are more intelligent than blacks." (Plous & Williams, 1995, p. 795). From this, it can be seen that there ever been a stereotype assumed that white people are more intelligent than black people and it also

make them think that they are superior and black people are deserved to be treated inappropriate.

### *Black People are Thieves*

In *The Help*, the story tells that Black maids are often accused of being thieves. When they were working for White employers, they were often accused of being thieves when something was missing. Minny, one of the black maids, has never been accused of being a thief at the house of her employer, Hilly Holbrook. Hilly even spread rumors in town, that Minny is a thief, so that no one else wants to hire her, even though Minny never stole anything from her.

*"She telling everybody in town I'm stealing! That's why I can't get no work! That witch done turn me into the smart-mouthed criminal maid at this country. Before work this morning, I go to the Renfroes' over on Sycamore and Miss Renfroe near bout chase me off the property. Say Miss Hilly told her about me, everybody know I stole a candelabra from Miss Walters. I ain't done nothing but feed that old woman good food and look after her." Minny, I know you're honest. God knows you're honest." (Stockett, 2009, p. 21)*

Relating to this stereotype, a 1997 study conducted by Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman indicated that white people who hold negative stereotypes of African Americans judge them more harshly than they do other whites when making hypothetical decisions about violent crimes, and welfare benefits. It can be seen that white people have a bad stereotype that black people are more criminal than their people and that's what made them so easily to think that black people are thieves who steal their stuffs. As we can see in the quotations above, Minny Jackson and Yule May have been accused for being thieves in Hilly Holbrook's house.

### *Discrimination in Public Service*

Based on the story of *The Help*, it can be seen that Black people in the Southern United States become victims of racial discrimination, because of the Jim Crow Law. As the researcher has explained before, this law promoted the idea "Separate but Equal" but



this law is not equal and fair. This law separates Black and White people and the Blacks became the victims, while whites discriminate them. The discrimination to the Blacks can be seen in many aspects, especially in Public Services such as, Residential area, Store, Hospital, Public Transportation, Education, and Recreation Area.

#### *Residential Area*

The first kind of racial discriminations in public service is the Residential Area. Whites and Blacks have to live in separate residential areas. They don't live together. White people live in the larger area than Black people. The Black people only have small area to live.

*"Down the road from Belhaven is white Woodland Hills, then Sherwood Forest, which is miles is a big live oak with the moss hanging down. Nobody living in it yet, but it's there for when the white folks are ready to move somewhere else new. Then it's country, out where Miss Skeeter live on the Long-leaf cotton plantation. She doesn't know it, but I picked cotton out there in 1931, during the Depression, when we didn't have nothing to eat but state cheese. So, Jackson's just one white neighborhood after the next and more springing up down the road. But the colored part a town, we one big anthill, surrounded by state land that ain't for sale. As our numbers get bigger, we can't spread out. Out part a town just get thicker. The bus crosses the bridge and make the first stop in the colored neighborhood." (Stockett, 2009, pp. 12-13)*

The quotation above is Aibileen's description about The Blacks Neighborhood where she lives. The maids, Aibileen and Minny lives in the same area with their community, far away from their white lady houses. According to Kellogg (1977) in Negro Urban Clusters in the Post Bellum South, "In the emerging cities of the New South, Black urban clusters tended to be small and scattered in the late nineteenth century. Cities such as Lexington Kentucky, Durham, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia, did not exhibit the backyard pattern of segregation. Nevertheless, black district formed in narrow zoned characterized by undesirable living conditions or depressed land prices. In lieu of tertiary streets, these zones were defined by other features of local

topography or land use, such as railroad tracks, cemeteries, city dumps, factories, and land with steep slopes or poor drainage.” That’s explain the condition of black people residential area in the late nineteenth century.

### *Health Service*

Black people and white people have separates hospitals. Black people can’t come to the whites Hospital, and they have their own hospital for their race. *“I look out the window at the colored hospital go by, the fruit stand.”* (Stockett, 2009, p. 14) This quotation is Aibileen’s description when she was on her way with her maid friends inside the bus. She passes the “colored hospital”. This quotation means that the black people have their own hospital, separated from the white people. Not just the buildings, the blacks and whites also have different doctors to take care of them. The white doctors do not want to take care of the black people.

*“Minny, that’s bleeding. I think you need some stitches. Let me get Doctor Neal over here.” She grabs the phone from the wall, then bangs it back. “Oh, he’s up at the hunting with Johnny. I’ll call Doctor Steele, then.” “Miss Celia, I don’t need no doctor.” “You need medical attention, Minny,” she says, picking the phone back up. Do I really have to say it? I grit my teeth to get it out. “Them doctors ain’t gone work on colored person, Miss Celia.”* (Stockett, 2009, p. 304)

According to Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad in remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South, As far as institutional care, there was, up up until 1965, a black hospital reffered to as Mercy Hospital which was understaffed and underfunded and was just a second-rate hospital. Nevertheless, that was the hospital for black citizens and the only hospital for black citizens.” (Chafe, William H, Gavins Raymond, 2011, p. 22) From these sentences, it can be seen that the black people had their own hospital which was a second-rated hospital at that moment.

### *Public Transportation*

Whites and blacks can get a same bus but still, they are separated. They have separate seats. White people can sit in front of the bus, and black people in the backside of the bus. When there's no seat left, they must stand if the white people don't get seat in the bus. *"I get on the number six bus that afternoon, which goes from Belhaven too Farish Street. The bus today is nothing but maids heading home in our white uniforms. We all chatting and smiling at each other like we own it – just cause it's a friendly feeling."* (Stockett, 2009, p. 13) This quotation is how Aibileen explaining her and her black friends feeling when they can sit peacefully, and they don't have to move to the backside, or give their seat and stand, because the passengers of the bus on that moment were only black people.

Stetson stated *"If a Black person rode in a car driven by a White person, the Black person sat in the back seat, or the back of a truck. That's the rule for the black people to sit in the backside of the bus and white people on the front. Also, black people have to give their seat to the white people if there are no more seat left."* (Stetson, 1990, p. 1)

Relating to this case, there's a story about Rosa Parks a black woman who refused to give her seat to a white passenger. According to Parks in *Rosa Parks Redux: Racial Mobility Projects on the Journey to Work*, *"The iconic image of Rosa Parks sitting at the front of a bus documents the most famous commute in history. Rosa Parks was traveling home from work when she refused to give her seat to a white passenger in 1955, an act of civil disobedience that set the Montgomery bus boycott in motion and propelled civil rights onto the national stage.*(Parks, 2016, p. 1). From this historical story, it can be seen that the racial discrimination in public transportation has been around for a long time and since 1995 there was a person like Rosa Parks who tried to fight it.

### *Education*

As we know, everyone deserve education for a better life and to have a lot of knowledge is very important to help our life in the future. In this case, Whites and

Blacks get different services, facilities, and access for education. The buildings of the Black people school and White people school are separated. The children study in different schools. The Black people can only enter certain schools and Whites won't allow them to be in the same school with white children.

*"Aibileen, you wouldn't want to go to a school full of white people, would you?" "No ma'am, I mumble. I get up and pull the ponytail holder out a Baby Girls's head. I really want to do is put my hands up over her ears so she can't hear this talk. And worse, hear me agreeing." (Stockett, 2009, p. 185) "Elizabeth." Hilly cross her arms up. "I'm not talking about pots. I am talking about the laws of this great state. Now, I want you to ask yourself, do you want Mae Mobley sitting next to a colored boy in English class?" (Stockett, 2009, p. 290)*

The dialogue above is Hilly Holbrook's perception about supporting the law about the separations between Whites and Blacks, especially about the school, which is explain that the White people don't want the Black people to enter their Whites school and they don't want their children to sit next to a black child.

According to this, there is a book about black people telling their story about their memories living under Jim Crow Law era. As one of the black people stated inside the book, "Well, what we really wanted, we wanted good schools and good principals, and at that time we were not pushing so much for integration in the beginning. We were asking for good facilities. Those were not open to us in those days, and it was pretty hard to climb." (Chafe, William H, Gavins Raymond, 2011, p. 114). It can be seen that the black people really want to go to the better school with the same facilities as whites, but the Jim Crow Law aren't allowed them to.

### *Library*

The other kind of discrimination in public services is library service. White and Black people have different libraries. Just like the other services, the Blacks library is not as complete as White's library, and the facilities are not as good as Whites library. Black

people are not allowed to enter white's library and of course they can't use their better facilities

*"Aibileen gives me a dry cough, "you know colored folks ain't allowed in that library." I sit there a second feeling stupid. "I can't believe I forgot that." The colored library must be pretty bad. There was a sit-in at the white library a few years ago and it made the papers. When the colored crowd showed up for the sit-in trial, the police department simply stepped back and turned the German Sheperds loose. I look at Aibileen and am reminded, once again, the risk she's talking to me. "I'll be glad to pick the book up for you."(Stockett, 2009, p. 157)*

The dialogue above is Skeeter conversation with Aibileen. Aibileen is a smart woman, and she wanted to read some books but those books only available in Whites library. She cannot go in there and Skeeter said that she will help her. Skeeter also explain her thought that Black People library must be bad and not as good as their Whites library.

Black people ever been denied to use some public libraries under the Jim Crow Era. And it's illegal for them to enter the white's library building. Their library building is smaller than the whites' library, and the facilities are not the same as whites because they were segregated. "The practice of separate but equal governed the establishment and operation of public accommodations, including libraries" (Wheeler et al., 2004, p. 42)

### *Voting*

The Black people are not allowed to go in the voting station. This is a serious problem, because as a citizen everyone have a right to elect in politics. Black people have to struggle to go to voting station to use their rights as the citizen. *"And my cousin Shinelle in Cauter County? They burn up her car cause she went down to the voting station."* (Stockett, 2009, p. 103). This quotation is a conversation between Minny and Aibileen when they were discussing about the bad things that White people have done to their

Black people. White people burn up Minny's cousin car, because she went down to the voting station.

“For much of twentieth century, Africans-Americans in the South were barred from the voting booth, and walled off from many of the rights they deserve as American citizens.” (Chafe, William H, Gavins Raymond, 2011, p. 306). It can be seen that Whites didn't want the Black People to get involve in the political, even if it was their rights too. From this statement, it can be seen that black people were not abled use their rights as citizens.

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