

Institutional Racism and Black Resistance as Portrayed through Images and Narratives in American Graphic Novels

(Potret Rasisme Institusional dan Resistensi Kaum Kulit Hitam dalam Novel Grafis Amerika)

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Diterima: 30 Oktober 2020

Direvisi: 15 November 2020

Disetujui: 22 November 2020

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan membahas rasisme institusional dan resistensi kaum kulit hitam di Amerika Serikat sebagaimana tergambar melalui gambar dan narasi dalam dua novel grafis Amerika karya Octavia E. Butler yang berjudul *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* dan John Lewis yang berjudul *March: Book Three*. Kedua novel grafis berbeda dalam menggambarkan penindasan dan resistensi orang Amerika keturunan Afrika terhadap rasisme institusional. Selama berabad-abad diskriminasi dan ketidakadilan ras telah membuat orang Amerika keturunan Afrika berjuang melawan ketidaksetaraan ras. Meskipun demikian, perjuangan mereka tidaklah mudah karena rasisme terhadap kaum minoritas ini telah terlembaga. Dengan kata lain, segala jenis penindasan kulit putih yang meminggirkan, mendiskriminasi, dan mengasingkan orang Amerika keturunan Afrika tertanam kuat di dalam institusi formal, antara lain dalam bidang hukum, pendidikan, sosial dan politik. Studi ini menerapkan kritik Afrika-Amerika untuk mengungkap rasisme dan resistensi kaum kulit hitam dalam kedua novel grafis berdasarkan teori rasisme sistemik dan rasisme institusional dari Feagin dan Better. Karena penelitian ini berfokus pada novel grafis, analisis dilakukan terhadap unsur naratif dan non-naratif dalam novel grafis untuk memaknai penanda seperti kata-kata yang mendapat penekanan dan ekspresi wajah. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa orang kulit putih berhasil menindas orang Amerika keturunan Afrika selama berabad-abad karena adanya kerangka ras kulit putih beserta ideologi rasismenya yang memaksakan sistem segregasi. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa hanya dengan memberdayakan diri mereka sendiri, orang Amerika keturunan Afrika mampu melawan rasisme institusional demi mendapatkan kebebasan dan persamaan hak.

Kata kunci: *Kindred*, *March Book 3*, rasisme institusional, resistensi kaum kulit hitam, segregasi



Abstract

This study aims to reveal institutional racism and black resistance in the United States as portrayed through images and narratives in two American graphic novels, Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* and John Lewis' *March: Book Three*. These two American graphic novels depict how African Americans were oppressed by and resisted against institutionalized racism differently. To pursue the aim of this study, qualitative method was used together with Feagin's and Better's theories of systemic racism and institutional racism. As this study focused on graphic novels, the analysis combined both narrative and non-narrative elements in making meaning through cues provided in the graphic novels, including stressed words and facial expressions. The results of this study revealed that the whites have successfully oppressed African Americans for so long due to the white racial frame and its embedded racist ideology that enforced segregation system. Furthermore, the findings suggest that only by empowering themselves, African Americans are able to resist institutionalized racism in order to gain their freedom and equality of rights. Thus, it can be concluded that even though both graphic novels are set in slavery era and the era of civil rights movement in the United States, both can always serve as a constant reminder of the dark part of American history that has continuously put African Americans in a constant struggle to achieve racial equality.

Keywords: Black resistance, institutionalized racism, *Kindred*, *March Book 3*, segregation

INTRODUCTION

Slavery has officially been abolished in the United States for more than a century. However, racism against African Americans remains a major issue in American society today. A recent poll conducted by NBC News confirms this fact as 64 percent of Americans consider discrimination a major problem in American society and politics, 45 percent agrees that race relations in the United States are deteriorating, and 41 percent thinks that too little attention is paid to racial issues (Arenge, Perry, & Clark 2018). These discrimination and racial injustice against African Americans cannot be separated from the African American history in the slavery era. For more than two centuries African Americans had experienced slavery in order to produce millions of wealth for the whites (Feagin 2006, 4). Therefore, even after slavery ended, African Americans continue to struggle against social injustice that has been rooted in the social hierarchy dated back from the antebellum era (Gross & Hicks 2015).

As slaves, African Americans were placed in the lowest rank of the American social hierarchy. They were oppressed and negatively stereotyped as compared to whites, which eventually led to discriminatory practices against them. The abolishment of slavery was supposed to end the oppression, remove all negative stereotypes, and eliminate the discrimination. However, in reality even today many African Americans are still treated unfairly in many aspects. Regarding race-based employment discrimination at the workplace, nearly 48 percent of African Americans claimed to experience discrimination at the workplace compared to 36 percent of Hispanics (Arenge, Perry, & Clark 2018). In criminal justice system, as of 2015, 76 percent of criminal cases favors whites in the United States (Sturyk 2017). Similarly, *The Guardian* also reported that in Philadelphia black Americans cannot confidently engage in without being treated as suspicious or having the police called (Lartey 2018). In political aspect, limitation of voting rights for African Americans had continued until the 1960s as the effect of the history of slavery (Better 2008, 178).

This systematic practice of racial discrimination can only occur when racism has become institutionalized. Institutionalized racism is the term used to define the incorporation of racist policies and practices in various institutions in the society, such as education, governments and

politics, the law, health care, and corporate world (Tyson 2015, 345). Hence, institutionalized racism can be seen as a failure of institutions to provide services for people because of their culture or skin color. Using the term systemic racism, Feagin (2006, xiii) states that Whites' oppression towards Black people in the United States becomes the system since it has been imbedded in major aspects of American society. According to Better (2008), institutional racism has restricted equal access to educational opportunities, employment, and housing, as well as having an impact on the criminal justice system. In short, institutionalized racism has similar meaning with systemic racism and structural racism but it is the extreme form of the institutions' system (Elias & Feagin 2016, 7).

Institutionalized racism as experienced by African Americans does not only emerge in real life, but is also frequently portrayed in American literature, including in contemporary fiction, such as graphic novels. The first graphic novel, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (2017), is adapted by Damian Duffy and John Jennings from an award-winning novel with the same title written by Octavia E. Butler. This graphic novel is very interesting for young adult since it raises racial awareness about white oppression against African Americans during slavery era. The story focuses on Dana, the main African American character, who experienced White oppression as she time travels from the present to the slavery era. The second is *March: Book Three* written by John Lewis, Andre Aydin, and Nate Powell (2016). This autobiographical graphic novel of John Lewis tells about unequal treatment towards African American manifested in the limitation of voting rights. Regarded as a living legend of the civil rights movement, this graphic novel was awarded with the National Book Awards 2016 for Young People's Literature and L. Printz Award 2017 in Young Adult Literature. Both graphic novels clearly portray institutionalized racism experienced by the African American characters and their resistance against the white oppression that become the main focus of this study.

Numerous studies on institutionalized racism have been conducted in different disciplines, such as psychology (Berard 2008), social welfare (Hill 2004), health care (Lukachkoa, Hatzenbuehlerb, & Keyesa 2014), and politics (Wight 2003). Even though these studies apply different methods, approaches, and process of analysis, they all deal with institutionalized racism experienced by African Americans. Aiming to help in controlling or eradicating racism, these studies also have varied findings, among others include understanding the contemporary racial inequality and race relations as a way to reform institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequality, and raising possibility that structural racism may not only harm the targets of stigma (the African Americans) but also benefit those who wield the power to enact stigma and discrimination (the whites).

Institutionalized racism has also become an interesting issue in literary studies. Investigating institutionalized racism on Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*, Szulkowska (2017) examined black maid oppression by white Southern households. This study applied structural racism to reveal racial inequality rooted in the system of society and pays more attention to cultural and psychological aspects in society. In his study on the novel *Edgar Allan* by John Neufeld, Idris (2017) focused on effect of discrimination on both African American and white characters by using the concept of anti-locution prejudice, which is a form of prejudicial talk against individuals or society. By examining how education institutions classified students in America based on skin color that eventually had psychological impact on Edgar Allan, this study provides evidence that the racist practices in education system is one of the forms of institutionalized racism. Meanwhile, Jamieson (2018) also applied systemic racism to reveal the effect of negative stereotyping and violence towards African American female slaves in the social and political system in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

So far, literary studies on institutionalized racism mostly examined novels portraying white oppression and discriminatory practices against African Americans. To date, there has not been much research on this issue in graphic novels that rely on not only narratives but also images to reveal this practice of racism towards African American and their resistance. A recent study on graphic novels conducted by Moeller and Becnel (2018) focused more on the representation of race in graphic novels, and its finding showed that there has been a great number of people of color depicted in graphic novels produced mostly by white authors and illustrators. However, Moeller and Becnel's study did not specifically address the issue of institutionalized racism and black resistance. Accordingly, as there has not been much discussion yet on the issue of institutionalized racism in graphic novels, this study aims to examine the portrayal of institutionalized racism and black resistance in two American graphic novels, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (2017) and *March: Book Three* (2016).

METHOD

This study employs qualitative descriptive research in interpreting the objects of the study, namely two American graphic novels which consist of words in dialogues and images in frames. As the primary data were *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* by Octavia E. Butler, Damian Duffy, and John Jennings published in 2017 and *March: Book Three* by John Lewis, Andre Aydin, and Nate Powell published in 2016. The secondary data were obtained from various sources including books, journal articles, and other online scholarly articles related to the issue of institutionalized racism and black resistance. In this study, data were collected from the graphic novels through close-reading in order to sort specific narratives and images related to the issue. The selected data were further sorted to identify the key features of institutionalized racism.

Subsequently, the narrative and non-narrative aspects of the graphic novels were analyzed in order to obtain interconnected meaning of the issue in the graphic novels. For the narrative analysis, this study focuses on the formal elements, namely characters and setting, and relate them to the social, cultural, and political context of American society surrounding the period of time and place depicted in the graphic novels. For non-narrative analysis, this study followed Karin Kukkonen's method in *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels* (2013), employed to further support the narrative analysis by putting emphasis on facial expressions, speech bubbles, and deictic gaze. The analysis was conducted in two stages: first, examining the white oppression on African American characters through institutionalized racism in both graphic novels and second, investigating black resistance towards the racism as portrayed in the graphic novels, by applying Feagin's and Better's theories of racism.

Racism as perpetrated by the institutions becomes the main discussion in Joe R. Feagin's book entitled *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (2006), which contributes theoretical approach to analyze racism and oppression system between white and black in the United States. Feagin (2006, xiii) states that whites' oppression towards black people in the United States becomes the system since it has been imbedded in major aspects. This theory is different from mainstream racial approach because this theory does not ignore the centrality, social inequality, and Whites' power and oppression as a central problem (Feagin 2006, xiii). There are six key figures in Feagin's Systemic Racism, namely: (1) the white racial frame and its imbedded racist ideology; (2) alienated social relations (control vs. loss of control); (3) constant struggle and resistance: by all means available; (4) racial hierarchy with divergent group interests; (5) whites' unjust enrichment; unjust impoverishment, other costs for the oppressed; (6) Related racial Domination; Sexual Coercion; Discrimination in Government, Law, Housing, Education & Culture. These six features often occur at the same time and place, and are interrelated as they lead to one thing: white economic

domination. However, to analyze *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, this study focuses on the first and sixth features, i.e. white racial frame and related racial domination, which clearly portray discrimination towards African American in various aspects, and the second feature, i.e. constant struggle and resistance, which depicts African American struggle against the racism.

Meanwhile, Shirley Better (2008) in *Institutional Racism: A Primer on Theory and Strategies for Social Change*, proposes the concepts of institutionalized racism and African American resistance. She examines the operation of institutional racism within major social institutions to illustrate how they disadvantage members of minority groups. As the analysis on *March: Book Three* is focused on the practice of institutionalized racism manifested in voting rights, two concepts from Better is applied, namely the potency of social institutions racism and the strategies for combating racism. The potency of social institutions racism examines how establishment of institutions were initially unrelated to race matters. However, practices and procedures enable to create a decision on how they deal with the people around institutions (Better 2008, 40). This resulted in racism becoming embedded in the United States institutions, policies, practices, and procedures. Consequently, it enables the majority of society to control injustice and inequality based on race and ethnicity (Better 2008, 43-44). Meanwhile, strategies for combating racism refer to ways of confronting racism at the individual and group levels by addressing three pillars of its operation such as policies, practices, and procedures (Better 2008, 139). Understanding those pillars is expected to lead African American movement without violence to perpetuate widespread inequality (Better 2008, 140-142).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The White Racial Frame and Its Imbedded Racist Ideology

In *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, the depiction of white racial frame and racist ideology can be seen through the experience of the main character, Edana Franklin (Dana), a modern African American woman who time-travels to the slavery era. In her journey to the past, Dana had to face a lot of hardships because whites always stigmatized black slaves even though they had done good things for Whites (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 31). According to Feagin (2006, 25), white racial frame refers to a set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotion, and tendency to discriminated. The acts of discrimination include associating negative images to African Americans as portrayed through Dana whose action to help a white boy, Rufus Weylin, from drowning in the river was perceived negatively by the mother, Margaret who even accused Dana of killing her son (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Dana helps Rufus from drowning (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 12)

Being white, Margaret has stereotyped Dana as criminal and murderer. Without understanding the real situation, she shouted “*You killed my baby!*” and violently hit Dana from the back. Figure 1 also shows the facial expression and the speech bubbles in the bottom middle panel that clearly portray Margaret’s emotional state when she saw Dana, a black woman, was not only touching her son, but more than that, she was holding him on her hands. Hence, this scene shows how racial inequality in slavery era had helped to raise white suspicion towards black people.

In addition, Dana also heard the whites used “nigger” call towards black slaves. She learned from Rufus that his mother address her as “a strange nigger” (Figure 2). Using the word “nigger” is considered rude in Dana’s modern time for it has a pejorative connotation; therefore, Dana is depicted to have shocking expression upon hearing it. The term itself has a long history dating back to the days of enslavement (Kennedy 2003, 86), and it perpetuates the stereotypes that blacks are morally and intellectually inferior, animal-like, undeserving of humanity and other negative beliefs (Croom 2014). The whites use the words nigger to define the power differences that occur between whites and African Americans (Adegbembo & MacQuarrie 2017, 18). In *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, the whites call African Americans “nigger” to define their images and show their dominating power over African Americans. Accordingly, Foucault (1980, 101). argues that the naming of oppressed groups such as African Americans as nigger by those in power functions as an instrument for oppression and resistance to oppression.



Figure 2. Dana learned about being called ‘nigger’ (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 30)

The way Dana was perceived as criminal and addressed as nigger clearly reflects white racial frames employed by the whites to create stereotypes and negative images towards African Americans. These practices reflect the whites’ racist ideology that promote discrimination towards African Americans, which is difficult to avoid because the white racial frame has existed and been constructed for a long time (Feagin 2006, 27).

Related Racial Domination: Discrimination in Various Aspects

The existence of racial hierarchy between Whites and African Americans during the slavery era has resulted in white racial domination and discrimination towards African Americans in various aspects, such as education, economy, politics, and many others (Feagin 2006, 23). Accordingly, whites obstructed African Americans from receiving educational opportunities in early slavery era (Noltmeyer, Mujic, & McLouglin 2012, 5). In *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, when other African Americans knew that Dana was an educated nigger and a teacher, Luke said that Tom Weylin did not want niggers round his plantation talking better than him (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 79). This discriminatory act against African American in education also put restriction on Dana from teaching an African American boy, Nigel, how to read and write. Since

Nigel was very excited to learn upon knowing that Dana was a teacher, Dana had to teach him secretly. Figure 3 shows the contrast between Rufus' facial expression that is too lazy to learn as he was trying to spell the word "my business" and Nigel's expression that is very enthusiastic as he wanted to learn more and more.



Figure 3. Dana is teaching Rufus and Nigel to read (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 92)

However, the way Rufus is pictured in the *mise-en-page* of Figure 3 denotes him as the dominant one compared to Nigel's face that is shown only from his right side in panel 2 and 6. This depicts Rufus, a white boy, as the superior and Nigel, a black boy, as the inferior. This also signifies that whites had more rights in receiving an education. The discrimination and the law which prohibited African Americans in receiving education during slavery era affected the system in the present day.

African Americans did not only face discrimination in education, but also in legal aspect. During the slavery era, the Fugitive Slave Laws had legally taken African American's power over their own lives since the laws provided the return of slaves who escaped from one state into another

without the master's consent. Being an African American woman back in the slavery era, Dana understood that if she ran away, Weylin as her master "could get help from his neighbors, patrollers, whatever police there was. But I had no rights. None at all." (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 179). With these laws, African Americans in Southern states had to return to their masters if they were caught by the whites along with officials and citizens of free states who used dogs that abolitionist called "Bloodhound Law" to track down the runaway slaves (Nevins 1947, 847). In *Kindred*, the bloodhound law was depicted as Tom Weylin tried to catch Dana who escaped from the plantation with other black slaves, Isaac and Alice (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 161).

White domination also caused discrimination toward African Americans, especially toward African American women. It happened because of the absence of legal institution to protect them from white oppression. The coercion of sexual oppression was experienced by female slaves, and in *Kindred* it was depicted through Alice and Tess experiences. Alice was oppressed sexually by Rufus (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 153). Rufus forced Alice to fulfill his desire and even separated her from her husband, Isaac, who was sold to another white master. Tess was also a slave whose job was fulfilling Tom's sexual desire. Seeing this injustice, Dana was angry because eventually "Weylin got bored, and handed Tess off to Jake Edwards" (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 145). It happened because the system in slavery era left African Americans women particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and violence (Gross & Hicks 2015, 359).

As depicted in *Kindred*, in reality many female slaves received sexual abuse from white masters, and yet the society never punished them for raping their slaves. As Feagin (2006, 19) states the coerced sexual oppression toward African American women contributed to the reproduction of enslaved people to sexual advantage for white American and to the economy. Thus, labor exploitation towards African American women eventually resulted in the white benefits. Slave breeding done by raping African American female slaves or forcing them to breed with African American male slaves became the machine for white's economic power and wealth. In other words, the practice of slaves breeding aimed to increase the wealth of slaveholders through the reproduction of slaves (Marble 2000, 72). The systemic racism as portrayed in the graphic novel denotes the gap between white and African Americans. White domination has made African Americans as targets to exploitation and oppression, and they are discriminated in all aspects and lose control over many aspects of their lives (Feagin 2006, 23).

Racism Imbedded in Social Institutions: Enforcing Segregation System

The system in the social institution has the power to give rewards and punishments for the citizen which then enables the sense of race and ethnicity involved as the part of discrimination in the governmental system (Better 2008, 40). In *March: Book Three*, the potency of social institutions racism was portrayed in the governmental system that restrict the rights of African Americans. Through the narratives and images in the graphic novel, the potency of social institutions racism is portrayed through the narrator's description on how the enforcement of segregation system was experienced by the main African American character, John Lewis, along with other African American characters. The segregation system mostly occurred in public places, such as restaurants, movie theaters, and government offices. During the 1960s, the segregation system also evoked violence as it created a clear barrier between African American and white people. Yet, discrimination occurred as white people were not arrested when they acted violently against African Americans, including John Lewis.



Figure 4. Discrimination against John Lewis and other African Americans in a fast-food restaurant in Nashville on November 10, 1960 (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 10)

Figure 4 shows the scene of African Americans coming to a white place trying non-violent sit-ins to end segregation which had successfully ended at the lunch counters downtown before. The same non-violent act was done in Nashville as the narrator stated “by respectfully insisting to be treated fairly, we would draw attention to the **UNFAIRNESS** of segregation” (panel 1). The word unfairness was written in bold with bigger font size from other words to emphasize the African American intention to end the unfair segregation system without violence in order to be treated fairly. Those words were also written on the top of the panel 2 to illustrate white people’s reaction towards African Americans.

Tragic facial expression was shown in the faces of the African American characters which were covered with white flour. It signifies that white people were allowed to give harsh response even though John Lewis and his fellow African Americans started a nonviolent campaign. Moreover,

the way the white woman was pictured in the *mise-en-page* in Figure 4 shows the dominance of her character especially since her face shown clearly starting in panel 2, 3, 4, and 5 compared to those of African Americans which were recognized only in panel 2, 3, and 4 while receiving bad treatment from the white woman. This depiction clearly signifies the superiority of the white, thus, the inferiority of the African American.

The presence of enforcing segregation system experienced by John Lewis and African Americans is considered as an ideology of racial political system in institutionalized racism, in which according to Better (2008, 40-41) treats African Americans as the inferiors due to the restriction, isolation, and treatment given to them unequally by the social institutions. This ideology of racism also constructs people of color to have no rights against white people since they have been indoctrinated through the segregation system that God mandated His servants to be submissive to their masters. Therefore, John Lewis and other African Americans started non-violent movement to fight against the segregation system, yet, they received more violent treatment from the white. They were arrested when they tried to resist white violence, while the white remained not guilty as they were protected by the law based on the segregation system. Hence, the potency of social institutions racism imbedded in the segregation system has enabled white to legally discriminate African Americans.

Other than separating white and black in public places, the segregation system is also applied in voting rights. The segregation system which was created to separate whites from African Americans has developed into the limitation of African Americans' rights. According to Better (2008, 51-52), segregation system which was embedded in social institutions resulted in white people gaining political power through block voting and establishing the political district. In John Lewis' autobiographical graphic novel *March: Book Three*, the potency of racism in social institutions is also depicted through the limitation of voting rights by the government in the 1960s caused by segregation system. Through the narrator explains, it is illustrated how John Lewis as African American and the leader of SNCC keep staying in Selma until every African Americans can register and vote because, in John Lewis' hometown, Selma, Alabama all of African Americans were restricted from exercising their voting rights. Figure 5 shows the differences between African American and white people when registering to vote in Dallas County were shown. Even in Dallas County where African Americans could register to vote, only 2.1% were registered. This condition occurred because white people provided many different ways to stop African Americans to do their voting registration, such as allowed white registrar in the government institutions to create many strict rules arbitrarily to stop African Americans from registering their votes.

The graphic novel narrates that "*the registrar of voters held ALL of the power, and could decide to waive, or strictly enforce, ANY of the rules, at ANY time, for ANY reason*" (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 32). Both of the words "all" and "any" were written in bold with a different font size to emphasize that white people have much power to decide who can register to vote. This phenomenon is related to white supremacist that is resistant towards racial equality between white and African American (Bruckmann 2019, 2). The white people's faces are dominant characters in the background of the *mise-en-page* in Figure 5. In panel 1 and 3, the registrar who is white was pictured as pleasant and friendly to the white registering their votes. Meanwhile, the same registrar was pictured having unpleasant expression upon facing African Americans coming to register their votes as shown in panel 2, 4, and 6. The way the white registrar was pictured with

different facial expressions further emphasizes how the white discriminates against African Americans.



Figure 5. African American's rights to vote were restricted in 1960s (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 32)

Further discriminatory act was experienced by African Americans upon registering their votes. They were required to take literacy tests applied only for African American applicants in order to be counted as voters. Still, even though African Americans could register their votes, they still received violent treatment from the white.

Even if a black citizen were ABLE to register, their name would be printed in the local paper- - making them a TARGET. The white citizen council could pressure their employer to fire them. Their house could be burned down by the KKK or WORSE (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 32).

The words “able”, “target”, and “worse” were written in bold with bigger font size to highlight how African Americans including John Lewis experienced violent acts as the effect of voter registration. African Americans were an easy target to be treated violently by white people. The violence sometimes included much more terror such as death threat as narrated in the graphic novel, “...the three missing civil rights workers quickly reached the staffers...they were killed” (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 71). The narrator words were also written on the bottom of the page to emphasize that African Americans are under the control of white people. This condition happened because the idea of white privileges appeared due to whites’ understanding of African Americans as inferior (Gillborn 2006, 320). The white also did a lot of violence to pressure African Americans and stop them from exercising their rights. The caption also states, “their house could be burned down by the KKK” (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 32) or Ku Klux Klan along with the beliefs of white supremacy system was spread in all levels of government institutions. This indicates that the government was also involved in limiting African American rights.

In order to maintain white power to limit African American voting rights, it is required to relate the potency of social institutions to gain power in the political system (Better 2008, 41). When white people involved in the governmental institutions, they would have the authority to provide different treatment towards African Americans. It was possible for white people to do a lot more things outside the written rules. The requirement for African Americans to fulfill the literacy test provided by the registrar in Dallas County during the voting registration could be taken as an example. At this point, it can be assumed that the government treatment encouraged the occurrence of limitation of voting rights. According to Better (2008, 122-123), there is a relation to how social institutions react to discrimination of the minorities, such as African American in political power.

Constant Struggle and Resistance: By All Means Available

African Americans in both graphic novels have been portrayed as victims of institutionalized racism. Both Dana in *Kindred* and John Lewis in *March: Book Three* had to experience oppression and discrimination from the white due to racist policies and ideology imbedded in the institutions in American society. Still, as portrayed in both graphic novels, the African American characters did not stay quiet upon experiencing this injustice. African Americans had struggled and resisted racist practices by the white. The resistance sometimes becomes one of African American expressions of freedom. Resistance is done by people who fight to defend their freedom, humanity, and democracy (Keith 1997, 1).

In *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, black resistance is depicted through Dana’s experiences when she pretends to be a slave in Weylin’s plantation (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 78). As a modern African American woman, Dana represented her resistances in the slavery era in two ways, which were oral resistance and physical resistance. Oral resistance can be expressed through literacy and speech (Fulton 2006, 34). Dana resistance against racism in education was shown through her secret attempt to teach a slave boy, Nigel, to read (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 92). Even though she knows that her action is subversive, her will to teach the slave boy overrules her concerns about being punished. By doing so, Dana has shown her resistance toward the institutionalized racism denying black access to education. In the 1800s, the increasing of state laws prohibited African American child in the South from learning to read and write (Reef 2009, 53). As a result, Dana was punished by Tom Weylin. As seen in figure 6, Dana is whipped repeatedly by Tom Weylin. Her facial expression in panel 1, 2, 3, and 5 shows us that she has no power against Weylin’s oppression. In contrast, Weylin’s facial expression in panel 3 shows how he looks at Dana with such an angry face and he has power over Dana. Tom Weylin used a whip

symbolizing white's dominating power. During slavery era, the whip denotes the justification for slaveholders to claim their rights of ownerships and exert their power to suppress deviant slaves (Schwarz 1988, 8).



Figure 6. Punishment as the consequence of black resistance (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 98)

Even though she has to go through hardships after resisting the white oppression, Dana still continues her resistance. Not only through oral resistance, Dana also demonstrates physical resistance by running away from the Weylin's plantation. During slavery era, running away without the master's consent was considered breaking the law. After Dana's whipping incident, she returns to 1976 from her third time-travel trip. Then, she came back to 1819 in the plantation. She told Rufus that she wanted to find her husband, Kevin (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 124). As Dana always helped Rufus many times, Rufus was nice to her and provided some paper for her to write letters to Kevin. However, Rufus was lying to Dana by not mailing the letters. Thus, Rufus implicitly controlled Dana's emotional resources as related to her husband. It makes Dana run away from the plantation. However, her first attempt was a failure as she was caught and punished. The second physical resistance happened when Dana stabs Rufus because Rufus tries to rape her (Butler, Duffy, & Jennings 2017, 232-234). Dana stabbed Rufus with a

knife because she needed to protect herself from the rape. Dana had no intention to kill Rufus as her facial expression shows that Dana is crying and looks at Rufus with such a sad look. Thus, black resistance in a form of escaping slavery is in accordance to Feagin’s statement (2006, 14) that most of African Americans constantly runaway as their way to be free.

As Dana has to struggle during slavery era through oral dan physical resistance, John Lewis in *March: Book Three* opposes segregation system through non-violent actions. Along with other African Americans, John Lewis responds to white violent actions represented by the government and police institutions that restrict African American voting rights. In Figure 7, John Lewis and African Americans proposes a summer project asking African American teachers or volunteers to teach in freedom school to spread the idea of voter registration and letting four congressional candidates to be elected. John Lewis wanted to challenge the bill of rights signed by President Johnson in Mississippi (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 62). In Figure 7, the caption says “*they will teach in FREEDOM SCHOOLS, staff community center, register as many as 400,000 negroes on mock polling list, and will do the often–dangerous work of VOTER REGISTRATION*”. The words that were written both in bold with different font size emphasize the school which targeted by African Americans as the location to expand the supporters, including white volunteers, and they can help to register as many as African Americans to vote. Therefore, the word “voter registration” is written with different font size only to emphasize the goal of the summer project itself.



Figure 7. John Lewis held the press conference for the summer project (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell 2016, 62)

Paying attention to those narrative and non-narrative aspects in Figure 7, it can be assumed that John Lewis applied non-violent action by utilizing educational institutions to achieve freedom to vote for African Americans. Spreading the concept of human rights, especially in voting rights through education strengthens the respect for freedom and consider it as a crucial role to change the unequal system (Barton 2015, 49). Similarly, Better (2008, 25-26) states that education can adjust, eliminate stereotype towards African American, and build the knowledge of human rights' importance. Education becomes the only institution to channel black resistance in John Lewis' case because other institutions, such as legal and political institutions at that time did not respond to the African American struggle since they are mostly represented by the white.

In the end black resistance against institutionalized racism in *March: Book Three* results in the signing Voting Rights Act in 1965 allowing African Americans access to all public facilities and government areas. It surely reduces the amount of public violence and give African American government protection from discriminatory practices from institutions (Better 2008, 161-162). However, it does not eliminate all practices of institutionalized racism towards African American that has existed for several generations since once racial hierarchy is engrained, racism is permanent (Bowser 2017, 14).

CONCLUSION

This study on *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* and *March: Book Three* reveals that the practice of institutionalized racism experienced by African Americans is not just a thing of the past. Even though both graphic novels are set in slavery era and the era of civil rights movement in the United States, both can always serve as a constant reminder of the dark part of American history that has continuously put African Americans in a constant struggle to achieve racial equality. Both graphic novels show that institutionalized racism is detrimental as it is imbedded in the white racist ideology and penetrates into various institutions in the society. This study also reveals that African Americans can only free themselves from white oppression if they are willing to resist the racism, whether through oral or physical resistance as well as non-violent action, as depicted through the African American characters in the graphic novels. Even though it may seem impossible to eliminate institutionalized racism once and for all, African Americans can demonstrate their resistance by empowering themselves in order to gain equality.

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