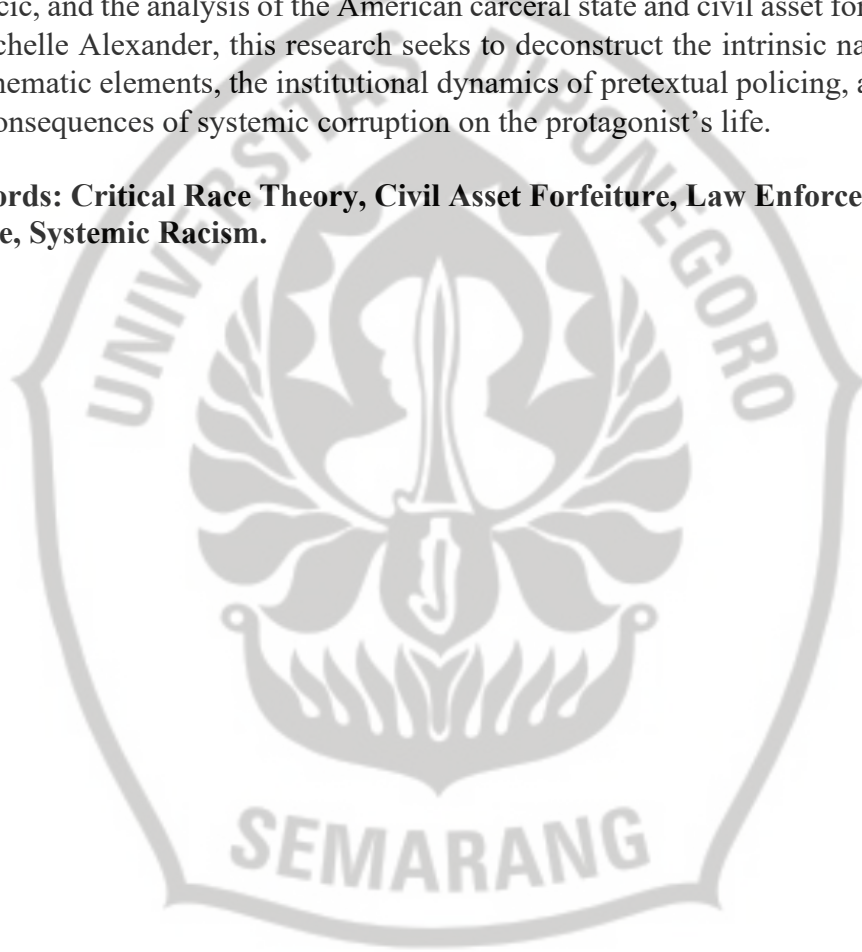


ABSTRACT

This thesis employs an objective approach to cinema and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze the failure of law enforcement and the representation of systemic racism in Jeremy Saulnier's *Rebel Ridge* (2024). In this research, an attempt is made to explore how the contemporary sociolegal landscape depicted in the film leads to the marginalization of minorities and the weaponization of administrative legal procedures. Based on the objective theory of literature proposed by René Wellek and Austin Warren, the foundational framework of Critical Race Theory developed by Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, and the analysis of the American carceral state and civil asset forfeiture by Michelle Alexander, this research seeks to deconstruct the intrinsic narrative and cinematic elements, the institutional dynamics of pretextual policing, and the fatal consequences of systemic corruption on the protagonist's life.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Civil Asset Forfeiture, Law Enforcement Failure, Systemic Racism.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

The United States population is characterized by significant diversity, comprising individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Within this demographic structure, minority populations, including the Black community, have historically faced systemic vulnerabilities that often lead to acts of discrimination. In contemporary academic discourse, this discrimination is understood through the framework of systemic racism. According to Feagin (2006:15), systemic racism is deeply institutionalized within the American social and political landscape, inherently racializing encounters between minority citizens and law enforcement. As a result, Black individuals are frequently subjected to institutional bias and experience limited access to equal legal protection during routine interactions with police (Epp et al., 2014:42). These encounters ultimately reflect unequal power structures embedded in broader society.

In the context of cinematic studies, a film can be analyzed as an autonomous visual literary form possessing its own internal structural logic. Following an objective approach, a creative work is evaluated primarily through its internal coherence and the complex relationships among its intrinsic components (Wellek & Warren, 1948:55). Rather than functioning as a passive historical document, cinema operates as an active narrative structure in which complex social issues such as institutional corruption or discrimination are artistically integrated into the text. By analyzing the work's internal elements, such as plot development, character

formation, setting, and conflict, researchers can deconstruct how the narrative structurally depicts dynamics of authority and the denial of justice to marginalized characters. In this context, the author chose to use the film *Rebel Ridge* (2024) as the main object of discussion because it depicts the failure of law enforcement and systemic racism against Black people. The film's narrative is set in the present day in a fictional small town called Shelby Springs, Louisiana, where institutional corruption and systemic bias persist. As an African-American former Marine, Terry Richmond faced various forms of discrimination, from baseless suspicion and intimidation by local police officers to the unjust confiscation of his property. Ultimately, his civil rights were violated through the use of legal regulations as a weapon, particularly civil asset forfeiture laws, which were used by the authorities to legitimize rights violations under the guise of official legal procedures.

Furthermore, his abilities and distinguished status as a military veteran are belittled and perceived as a dangerous threat solely because of his race. This dynamic highlights the institutional system that tolerates, and even legitimizes, the marginalization of minorities and veterans in society. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the depiction of law enforcement failure and systemic racism in the film *Rebel Ridge* (2024). This thesis examines how the protagonist, Terry Richmond, experiences administrative oppression and discrimination during his encounters with local authorities. Through in-depth analysis of key scenes, character interactions, and narrative themes, this study explores the mechanisms of overt and covert institutional racism depicted in the film.

1.2 Research Question

1. How are the depictions of the intrinsic aspects on the movie *Rebel Ridge* (2024)?
2. How are law enforcement failures and systemic racism against former veterans portrayed?
3. What are the impacts of racial discrimination on Terry Richmond's life in *Rebel Ridge* (2024)?

1.3 Objective of Study

Based on the question above, objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the intrinsic aspects of the movie *Rebel Ridge* (2024).
2. To examine the portrayal of law enforcement failures and systemic racism against former veterans as depicted in the *Rebel Ridge* (2024).
3. To investigate the impacts of racial discrimination on Terry Richmond's life and actions throughout the narrative of *Rebel Ridge* (2024).

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on *Rebel Ridge* (2024), a film depicting the impact of law enforcement failures and systemic racism. It examines how these discriminatory practices and institutional prejudices impact the main character, Terry Richmond, an African-American former Marine, during his encounters with local authorities. The scope of this study is limited to specific interpersonal and institutional interactions between Terry and the Shelby Springs Police Department, focusing on the manipulation of legal procedures such as civil asset forfeiture. Consequently,

secondary storylines or other character relationships that do not directly contribute to the discourse of institutional predation are excluded from this analysis.

1.5 Previous Study

The writer reviews some thesis and journals published. All the previous studies have the same topic with the current study, but have a different object and theory used.

The first one is a thesis from Diponegoro University entitled *Segregation Between Black and White People in the Film Pride* written by Sharita Fauziah Andnur (2015). This study aims to investigate racial discrimination, particularly territorial segregation, and understand the impact of physical separation between black and white individuals in 1974. Andnur's research shows that segregation in housing and employment significantly impacts the quality of education and socioeconomic status received by black people. However, her research focused on historical and explicit territorial segregation in the 1970s. This leaves a gap with the author's research, which examines how discrimination operates without explicit physical segregation but through subtle administrative laws in a contemporary context.

The second previous study is a bachelor's thesis from Diponegoro University titled *Racial Discrimination Against African Americans as Represented in the Film Devotion* (2022), written by Ade Agung Fatwa Rizaldin (2024). This study analyzes manifestations of racial prejudice, structural inequality, and institutional bias against Black individuals on screen. It explores how a Black

protagonist experiences systemic barriers and prejudice while serving within a historically segregated military institution.

The third related study, previously published in 2025, is a bachelor's thesis from Diponegoro University titled *Racial Prejudice in the 1970s as Depicted in John Ridley's Shirley* (2024) written by Eric Hidayat. This study examines the systemic racial barriers, political prejudice, and social stereotypes faced by African Americans in the American political landscape of the 1970s. It focuses on how gender and racial identities intersect to create institutional barriers for minority individuals attempting to access spaces of authority.

While previous studies have focused on historical territorial segregation, discrimination within historical military structures, and political racial prejudice in the 1970s, this study offers a different analysis. This study explores how contemporary systemic racism and the failure of law enforcement are depicted through the lens of modern administrative mechanisms, specifically civil asset forfeiture, in *Rebel Ridge* (2024). By exploring the experiences of the protagonist, this study aims to provide an understanding of why institutional racism persists in modern contexts, even when the victims are distinguished veterans.

1.6 Method of Study

1.6.1 Data and the Source of Data

In order to obtain the data, the writer will watch, understand, and evaluate the movie *Rebel Ridge* (2024) repeatedly while focusing on the topic of law enforcement failure and systemic racism. After that, the writer will review the notes

taken from the movie and theories related to the movie, then analyze the results and organize the thesis.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

The writer's method of data collection is library research. Library research is a qualitative methodology used to gather relevant documents, texts, and visual materials to analyze a specific social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018:148). Both primary and secondary data are used in this method. The visual scenes, dialogues, and cinematic elements from *Rebel Ridge* (2024) movie serve as the primary source of data. In addition, the secondary sources include textbooks, academic journals, and articles related to Critical Race Theory.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

In this study, the writer applies the objective approach proposed by René Wellek and Austin Warren (1948). According to Wellek and Warren, a creative work should be analyzed primarily through its internal structure, coherence, and the relationships between its intrinsic components, regardless of external or extrinsic factors (1948:55). In terms of the intrinsic layer, the analysis concentrates on the intrinsic elements that make up the story, such as theme, character, plot, setting, and conflict. In the context of cinema, this objective framework is used to examine how these internal narrative components and visual structure work together to construct the entire work as a self-contained artistic unit. Furthermore, to fully address the socio-political dimensions of the narrative, the writer also combine an extrinsic approach through the American law enforcement system and Critical Race Theory (CRT). This extrinsic elements complements the objective analysis by connecting

the film's internal structural elements to real world institutional bias and law enforcement failures in the United States.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

This research is organized into five chapters to provide a systematic and comprehensive investigation:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, Previous studies, Scope of the research , research methodology, and organization of the writing.

CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC AND CINEMATIC ASPECTS

This chapter contains a description of the Narrative elements, Theme, Plot, Setting, Conflict, Setting, Cinematography, and Sound

CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC ASPECTS (THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK)

This chapter contains a description of the extrinsic element about : The American Law Enforcement System, and Critical Race Theory

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This chapter shows the result of the both Intrinsic elements and Extrinsic elements

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This chapter contains The Conclusion of the Thesis

CHAPTER II

INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Narrative Elements

According to Abrams (1999:173), a narrative is a story that presents a series of events, characters, actions, and dialogue. In drama or film, the narrative is not delivered by an external narrator, but develops through the direct presentation of the characters' actions and speech on screen. These internal elements are important for shaping the plot, building characterization, and establishing the central theme of a work. Therefore, the narrative framework in this study consists of several main intrinsic elements, including theme, character and characterization, plot, setting, and conflict.

2.1.1 Theme

A theme is a general idea or core concept that is conveyed explicitly or implicitly in a narrative (Abrams, 1999:170). Theme differs from plot because it focuses on the deeper meaning of the events, not just the chronological order of actions. Theme serves as a unifying element that connects other intrinsic components, such as character, setting, and conflict, into a cohesive work. Therefore, analyzing this concept is necessary to understand the main message or social commentary underlying a story.

2.1.2 Plot

The plot in a narrative work consists of events and actions deliberately arranged to produce a specific artistic and emotional effect (Abrams, 1999:224). A

well-developed plot emphasizes cause-and-effect relationships, focusing on the underlying motivations of each event rather than simply presenting them in chronological order. Furthermore, standard narrative structures typically follow a continuous sequence consisting of a beginning, middle, and end (Abrams, 1999:226). Therefore, analyzing this concept is crucial to tracing how conflict structurally develops and progresses throughout the story.

2.1.3 Setting

The setting in a narrative or dramatic work encompasses the general environment, historical time, and social context in which the events take place (Abrams, 1999:284). For a particular scene or episode, the setting refers to the exact physical location where the action takes place. The setting not only serves as a passive backdrop but also influences the characters' behavior and helps develop the plot's meaning. In general, these elements are divided into three main dimensions: time, physical place, and social environment. Therefore, analyzing this concept is necessary to evaluate how the surrounding environment shapes the central conflict in a story.

2.1.4 Conflict

Conflict is a fundamental component of narrative that generates tension and drives the plot forward. Conflict represents a central struggle in which the protagonist is confronted with opposing forces, which can manifest as internal or external (Abrams, 1999:225). Internal conflict involves a character's internal psychological or emotional dilemmas, while external conflict occurs when a character faces resistance from external entities, such as other individuals or the

broader social environment. Therefore, analyzing this concept is crucial to understanding the dynamics of struggle that move a story forward.

2.1.5 Characters & Characterization

In narrative or dramatic works, characters refer to individuals who are understood by the audience as possessing certain moral, intellectual, and emotional traits (Abrams, 1999:32). These personal qualities are revealed through their distinctive speech and behavior throughout the plot. Meanwhile, characterization is the method used to establish and reveal these traits, either directly or indirectly through the characters' decisions and interactions. In a standard narrative framework, characters are conventionally categorized into protagonists, who act as the central figures facing the conflict, and antagonists, who act as the main opposing force. Therefore, analyzing these elements is very important to understand the different roles and motivations of individuals in a story.

2.2 Cinematography

Cinematography refers to the photographic and visual elements used to capture moving images on screen (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:160). It involves technical and creative choices made to shape how the audience sees and interprets the narrative world. This visual practice comprises several core techniques, including the photographic quality of the shot, the framing of the shot, and the control of camera movement (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:162). Rather than serving solely for aesthetic appeal, these elements work together to establish the mood of the scene and convey deeper meaning. Therefore, analyzing this concept

is necessary to evaluate how visual choices structurally reinforce the overall narrative.

2.2.1 Camera Distance (Shots)



Picture 2.1 Camera shots in Film Art: An Introduction by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson

Camera distance, commonly known as shot size, describes the relative proximity between the camera lens and the subject within a frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:187). This technique determines the size of the characters on screen and guides the audience's emotional response to a scene. Through different framing choices, it can establish either a sense of intimacy or physical separation between the viewer and the characters. Therefore, analyzing camera distance is essential to understand how shot scales convey visual information and emphasize specific narrative actions.

2.2.1.1 Close-up Shot

Close-up Shot (CUS) is a type of camera shot that isolates a portion of a human subject, particularly the face, to show their expression with maximum clarity and detail (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:190). This shot provides an intimate view of the subject, with close focus on facial features such as the eyes, mouth, and

expression, which are important for conveying emotion, intent, and psychological state.

2.2.1.2 Medium Shot

Medium Shot (MS) is a type of camera shot that frames a human subject from about the waist up (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:189). This shot provides a balanced view of the subject, showing the character's facial expressions and upper body movements while still showing the surrounding background. This shot is commonly used to depict normal conversation, interpersonal interactions, and body language during a scene.

2.2.1.3 Medium-Long Shot

Medium-Long Shot (MLS), historically known as the plan américain, is a type of camera shot that frames a human subject from about the knees up (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:189). This shot balances the character's physical presence with the surrounding environment, allowing the viewer to observe the character's posture, gestures, and movements while keeping the background clearly visible. This shot is commonly used to depict physical action, group interactions, or the spatial relationship between the character and the surrounding environment.

2.2.1.4 Long Shot

Long Shot (LS) is a type of camera shot that captures the subject's entire body from head to toe within the frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:189). In this framing, the human figure remains clearly recognizable, but the surrounding background, architecture, or landscape occupies a dominant part of the screen. It is commonly

used to show physical movement, establish the spatial setting, and depict the relationship between a character and their environment.

2.2.1.5 Extreme Long Shot

Extreme Long Shot (ELS) is a type of camera shot where the framing prioritizes the vastness of the landscape, geography, or setting, making human subjects appear extremely small or virtually indistinguishable (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:189). In this shot, the surrounding environment completely dominates the screen rather than the characters. It is commonly used to establish the large scale of a location and visually emphasize the isolation or helplessness of an individual within a massive physical space.

2.2.2 Sound

Sound is an important cinematic technique that actively engages the audience's senses and shapes how visual images are perceived. Sound serves as an interpretive medium that guides the audience's impressions and emotional responses to the scenes on screen. In film studies, auditory elements are generally divided into two categories: diegetic sound, which originates from sources within the story world such as dialogue or physical action, and non-diegetic sound, which originates from outside the narrative world such as background music or score tracks (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:266).

2.3 Mise-en-Scene

Mise-en-scene literally means "putting into the scene," a term originally used in theater directing. In film studies, it refers to everything that appears in front of the camera lens to be filmed. This practice includes four major components that overlap