



**THE ANALYSIS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
AND INEQUALITY IN CHILDISH GAMBINO'S
*THIS IS AMERICA***

A FINAL THESIS

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Sarjana Degree Majoring American
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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly confirms that he compiled this thesis entitled “Discrimination of Racial Equality in Childish Gambino’s *This is America*” by himself and without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3 and in diploma degree from any university. The writer ascertains also that he does not quote any material from other publications or someone’s paper except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, January 2021

Rangga Widhiarso Prakoso

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“With great power, comes great responsibility.”

(Benjamin Parker, *Spider-Man*)

“Responsibility has a cost, and there is no such thing as a perfection.”

(Tom Hardy)

This thesis is dedicated to my family and my friends

who makes me believe in myself,

and never surrender.

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THIS IS AMERICA

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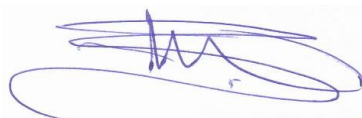
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes a western popular song, entitled *This is America* which was composed by Childish Gambino. The aim of this study is to examine the lyrics, as well as the intrinsic and extrinsic elements, in the song *This is America*. The textual method is applied by the writer to focus on analyzing the metaphors, dictions, and themes that implied on the lyrics of the song *This is America*. Meanwhile, the writer relies on sociological and historical approach where Racial Discrimination is found in Rebecca Blanks: *Measuring Racial Discrimination* (2004: 40) as the main concern in analyzing the song *This is America*. The conclusion of the analysis proves that the song *This is America* has discrimination elements of racial equality as explained in the signs of explicit discrimination including verbal antagonism, avoidance, and segregation found in the lyrics of the song.

Keywords: Childish Gambino, *This is America*; Racial Discrimination; *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, R. Blanks.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

People were basically going through life as an individual who was born and grow through their life phases. Yet, they need each other to survive through the lifespan. Human as imperfect being needs to cover each other weaknesses to achieve what they want. This kind of circumstance binds people to work as a collective being, like a circle, a party, or a group.

Human being needs each other to survive. The necessity to communicate for any particular goal, that what makes people a social being. In most cases, people are together for common goals; or we usually call a 'group'. This kind of circumstance leads to social equality where everyone is treated fair and square despite of any differences that might exist. According to Miller (1998), "Social equality, which identifies a social ideal – 'the ideal of a society that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories.'"

To establish social equality, people have to overcome many differences. Culture, religions, groups, and races are considered to be a solid social interaction. As we know, races are the earliest part of our life that makes us different since it can be determined by the looks of human color and body parts. This is also the first stage of life where we undergo pride and prejudice as human beings. Encyclopedia Web defines that, racial equality is the belief that individuals,

regardless of their racial characteristics, are morally, politically, and legally equal and should be treated as such. Taken cited from Encyclopedia, accessed on September 19th, 2019 (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/racial-equality>).

On the opposite, people are treated differently due to characteristics of their group; or as a form of social inequality – discrimination. Meanwhile, the discrimination between races is considered to be the most frequent conflict since it might be triggered by physical attributes such as; skin color, body shapes, and many other factors; resulting in racial discrimination.

“Racial discrimination as defined in international law is "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. Taken cited UNESCO web accessed on October, 10th 2019 (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/discrimination/>).

According to poll made by NBC news, racism is still a major issue in America nowadays. The Articles published on NBC news website stated that “64 percent of Americans say racism remain a major problem”. The poll comes after black minorities who appeared to have been racially profiled while doing something innocent. Such as sitting in a coffee shop, barbecuing in a park, or just taking a nap in a common room. Another fact is forty percent of black people said that they are treated unfairly in a store or a restaurant based on their race (NBC news, 2018).

This is America by Childish Gambino is a popular song that defines what kind of circumstance that might happen around the country. His song is interesting because it describes the irony of being the one who got discriminated against in a big modern community. The norms and values got blurred by modern pop-culture entertainment which can be seen from the song lyrics, the singer's gesture, and the chaotic background from the music video. Based on the condition, this thesis is entitled "Discrimination of Racial Equality in Childish Gambino's *This is America*". It represents many supporting elements that involve discrimination as the main theme. Therefore, the writer is interested in analyzing it.

1.1.1 Scope of the Study

There are many aspects of the song lyrics, representing many kinds of social values. Therefore, the writer needs to limit the aspects, while focusing on the discrimination which is portrayed in the song lyrics.

1.1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purposes are:

1. To analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of *This is America*.
2. To examine the depictions of racial discrimination and racial inequality in *This is America*.

1.1.3 Methods of the Study

To analyze and interpret objects in this study, the writer applies two types of methods. The first one is the method of approach and the second one is the method of research.

1.1.4 Method of Approach

The writer uses the historical and sociological approach to analyze the song lyrics in *This Is America*. Historical approach is applied to focus on the broader historical and cultural events that might influence the author whose work is being considered. (eNotes Web, Literary Criticism:2019). Meanwhile, sociological approach is adapted to examine the author's connection to their society and their position in the society. (Lumen Learning Web, Boundless Sociology:2019). These approaches will be used to analyze both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects, such as theme, figurative language, and the author's background. Afterwards, the writer applies some components that are the causes of racial prejudice and discrimination supported by with theory of Racial Discrimination by Rebecca Black et al.

1.1.5 Method of Research

Data were collected by listening to the *This is America* song music while thoroughly reading the full-verse song lyric. Books, articles, journals, and internet related to the song and the theory of the study is collected as the secondary sources of data.

1.2 Organization of the writing

Chapter I INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, the writer will explain the background of the study, the scope of the study, methods of the study, and the organization of writing.

Chapter II BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR AND SUMMARY OF THE SONG

Chapter two contains the biography of Childish Gambino as the song writer of *This is America* and the summary of the song. a simple definition of terms for both intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

Chapter III THEORITICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter clarifies the theoretical frameworks of this study. It also gives brief explanation for both intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

Chapter IV DISCUSSION

Chapter four is the main chapter of the thesis, discussing both intrinsic and extrinsic elements related to *This is America*.

Chapter V CONCLUSION

This chapter contains the summary and result of the previous chapter.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY REVIEW

2.1 Biography of Childish Gambino

American artist Donald McKinley Glover Jr. was born in Los Angeles, California, on September 23rd, 1983. He is a talented person who has a wonderful career as an American actor, comedian, writer, director, record producer, singer, songwriter, rapper and DJ. Donald Glover first known as the brain behind FX TV comedy series *Atlanta*. The beginning of his music career started as rapper, releasing his first three albums; *Camp* (2011), *Because the Internet* (2013), and *Awaken My Love!* (2016). All of these albums were made under the music alias, *Childish Gambino*.

Gambino has earned two Grammy nominations in 2015, and nominated in another five in 2018. This time, he won as the winner of Best Traditional R&B performance for one of his song, titled *Redbone*. After that, his fame begins to rise with song *Redbone* which quite popular and unique, added by 80-90's vibes and the song also recreated as a meme in internet.

His latest single; *This is America*, however, sounds very different with the previous single, *Redbone*. The song hits the internet citizen's major attention due to the Gambino's fantastic performance and the message of the song. *This is America* is written and produced by Ludwig Goransson and the artist itself. Goransson is Glover's primary creative music partner behind the persona of *Childish Gambino*. This also goes with the traditional *R&B* music touch in *Redbone*, which previously popular in the 2017's music chart.

This is America is a hip-hop based song that has become the most popular song in his career also with the music video, directed by Hiro Murai. Gambino's vocal and performance are catchy and somehow unique, which piqued the curiosity of the audiences. YouTube, as new media, provides a well-known service for people to watch their favorite videos on demand, including Childish Gambino's music video of "This Is America". The music video became viral with many people analyzing the meaning behind the song. There are various discussions and conclusions of what the song is about, yet mostly agree that the song tell us about the discrimination of black people, especially in America.

2.2 The Song and The Summary

This Is America

Performed by: Childish Gambino (Donald Glover)

Lyrics: Donald Glover and Ludwig Goransson

Intro

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah, yeah, yeah, go, go away
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah, yeah, yeah, go, go away
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah, yeah, yeah, go, go away
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah, yeah, yeah, go, go away

Stanza 1

We just wanna party
Party just for you
We just want the money
Money just for you (Yeah)
I know you wanna party
Party just for free
Girl, you got me dancin' (Girl, you got me dancin')
Dance and shake the frame (Yeah)
We just wanna party (Yeah)
Party just for you (Yeah)
We just want the money (Yeah)
Money just for you (You)
I know you wanna party (Yeah)
Party just for free (Yeah)
Girl, you got me dancin' (Girl, you got me dancin', yeah)
Dance and shake the frame (Ooh)

Stanza 2

This is America
Don't catch you slippin' now

*Don't catch you slippin' now
Look what I'm whippin' now
This is America (Woo)
Don't catch you slippin' now
Don't catch you slippin' now
Look what I'm whippin' now*

*Stanza 3 This is America (Skrrt, skrrt, woo)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Ayy)
Look how I'm livin' now
Police be trippin' now (Woo)
Yeah, this is America (Woo, ayy)
Guns in my area (Word, my area)
I got the strap (Ayy, ayy)
I gotta carry 'em
Yeah, yeah, I'ma go into this (Ugh)
Yeah, yeah, this is guerilla (Woo)
Yeah, yeah, I'ma go get the bag
Yeah, yeah, or I'ma get the pad
Yeah, yeah, I'm so cold like, yeah (Yeah)
I'm so dope like, yeah (Woo)
We gon' blow like, yeah (Straight up, uh)*

*Stanza 4 Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, tell somebody
You go tell somebody
Grandma told me
Get your money, Black man (Get your— Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Black man*

*Stanza 5 This is America (Woo, ayy)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Woo, woo, don't catch you slippin'
now)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Ayy, woah)
Look what I'm whippin' now (Slime!)
This is America (Yeah, yeah)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Woah, ayy)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Ayy, woo)
Look what I'm whippin' now (Ayy)*

*Stanza 6 Look how I'm geekin' out (Hey)
I'm so fitted (I'm so fitted, woo)
I'm on Gucci (I'm on Gucci)
I'm so pretty (Yeah, yeah, woo)*

I'm gon' get it (Ayy, I'm gon' get it)
Watch me move (Blaow)
This a celly (Ha)
That's a tool (Yeah)
On my Kodak (Woo) Black
Ooh, know that (Yeah, know that, hold on)
Get it (Woo, get it, get it)
Ooh, work it (21)
Hunnid bands, hunnid bands, hunnid bands (Hunnid bands)
Contraband, contraband, contraband (Contraband)
I got the plug in Oaxaca (Woah)
They gonna find you like "blocka" (Blaow)

Stanza 7

Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, tell somebody
America, I just checked my following list, and
You go tell somebody
You mothafuckas owe me
Grandma told me
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Black man
(1, 2, 3—get down)
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, tell somebody
You go tell somebody
Grandma told me, "Get your money"
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Black man)
Black man

Stanza 8

You just a black man in this world
You just a barcode, ayy
You just a black man in this world
Drivin' expensive foreigners, ayy
You just a big dawg, yeah
I kenneled him in the backyard
No, probably ain't life to a dog
For a big dog

(Genius, 2019)

America is one of the biggest countries with multi-cultural and multi-racial group of society. The more races in society, the more complex conflict in racial equality. According to Pew Research Center Web, more than four-in-ten Americans say the country still has work to do to give black people equal rights with whites. Blacks, in particular, are skeptical that black people will ever have equal rights in this country. It is also said that most adults, regardless of race or ethnicity, say blacks are treated less fairly than whites in encounters with police. This kind of racial discrimination is considered to be the most inspiration of Gambino's single hit, *This is America*.

The song has a very bold topics and nuances, very much different with his any other song before. The music performance and lyrical concept somehow triggered a mass curiosity of what the song is about. In some occasion, people want to find out the meaning by directly interviewed the artist. Based on Indiewire Web, Gambino was asked what his intentions were when writing *This is America*. Gambino responded with self-aware and politically charged misdirection, refused to answer the concrete meanings. Some people respect Gambino's answer, understanding the fact that the song is open for any interpretation related (Sharf, 2020).

This song is a hip-hop song that sounds like most modern rap songs, yet it has a unique perspective of racial discrimination. The writer determines that the song is about the black people who often get discriminated. This is America is

performed with light rhythm and upbeat tempo instead of unfortunate background theme of the song. It is the reality of America society where people got distracted while their minority is accused with unfair gun policy and misbehave.

CHAPTER III

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Intrinsic Aspects of the Lyric

3.1.1 Diction

Diction is the careful selection of words to communicate a message or establish a particular voice or writing style. Writers choose specific words and phrases depending on the outcome they're trying to achieve. Taken cited from Master Class, accessed on November 15th, 2020 (<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-diction-learn-8-different-types-of-diction-in-writing-with-examples#what-is-the-purpose-of-diction-in-writing>).

Diction is often classified as formal or informal. Choosing more uplifted dictionary words will make a formal text of literature, while choosing slang words will make it informal. This contributes different kinds of uniqueness in their writings. It is also the purpose of diction that is to support writer's attitude towards the subject of the literary works. In addition, it also establishes a narrative voice and tone to impact readers' emotional response.

3.1.1.1 Denotation

Denotation is mostly defined as the literal meaning of words. A word's denotation is completely absent of emotion, so it is distinguished from its connotation. Therefore, it is the specific exact meaning of a word, independent of its emotional coloration of associations. (William Flint Thrall et al.: A Handbook to Literature, 1960: 123)

“The explicit or direct meaning or set of meanings of a word or expression, as distinguished from the ideas of meanings associated with it or suggested by it; the association or set of associations that a word usually elicits for most speakers of a language, as distinguished from those elicited for any individual speaker because of personal experience.” Taken cited by Dictionary, accessed on June 15th,2021 (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/denotation>).

The application of denotation is quite important in literary work. A word or phrase’s denotation can be found in the dictionary, so it is important to provide clear, literal definition. Yet if we only wrote using denotative meaning, then the writing would be dull. Taken cited from Literary Terms, accessed on November 20th, 2020 (<https://literaryterms.net/denotation/>).

3.1.1.2 Connotation

According to Thrall et al. (1960:98) connotation is the cluster of implications that words or phrases may carry with them, as distinguished from their denotative meanings. It is an additional meaning for a word or phrase.

Connotations set the tone when writing and speaking, and clarify one’s intentions -they can elicit certain emotions or reactions or help to provide distinct impressions of things. Conversely, choosing words with the wrong connotation can produce an undesired reaction or emotion and misrepresent one’s intentions. Taken cited from Literary Terms, accessed on November 20th, 2020 (<https://literaryterms.net/connotation/>).

A connotative word can be categorized as having either positive, negative, or neutral connotation. Positive connotation is a word whose implies positive emotions and association while the negative one implies the opposite. If the word’s connotation is neither positive or negative, then it is included as neutral connotation.

3.1.2 Tone

According to Perrine (1969: 162), the writer's or speaker's attitude toward his subject, his audience, or himself can be defined as tone. It is the work's emotional coloring, or emotional meaning, and it is a significant aspect of the overall meaning.. To put it simply, a different tone might lead to different meaning even in one word.

3.1.4 Figurative Language

A creative wording in literary work is considered to be more interesting. One of the main reasons is the use of figurative language by writers and poets to build imagery and give words more power. Figurative language is a form of communication that goes beyond the literal meaning of words to convey a message or make a point. Taken cited from Master Class, accessed on November 23rd, 2020 (<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/writing-101-what-is-figurative-language-learn-about-10-types-of-figurative-language-with-examples>).

Figurative language is intentional departure from the normal order, construction, or meaning of words in order to gain strength and freshness of expression, to create a pictorial effect, to describe by analogy, or to discover and illustrate similarities in otherwise dissimilar things. (Thrall et al., 1960: 185)

3.1.5 Metaphor

Metaphor is a type of figurative language that authors and poets regularly employ. According to Perrine (1998: 65), metaphor is an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second. The example of metaphor is “turning tables”. It is not a table literally turned upside down, it actually means to change a bad circumstance of someone in disadvantage.

Metaphors and similes are frequently compared since they both relate things that are fundamentally different.. The only difference is that in simile the comparison is expressed, by word or phrase such as like, than, similar, or resembles. Meanwhile, in metaphor the comparison is implied within its word or phrase.

3.1.6 Imagery

Thrall et al. (1960:224) believes that imagery is a term used widely in contemporary criticism which has a great variety of meanings. In its literal sense it means the collection of images within a literary work or a unit of literary work. Imagery may be defined as the representation through language of sense experience. It is a figurative and metaphorical language used to portray objects, actions, and ideas which appeal to our senses.

According to the senses, there are a few different sorts of imagery. Visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and organic imagery are among the several varieties. These are explained as:

1. Visual imagery. It is a kind of imagery that relies on the sense of sight. The visual imagery may include color, shapes, size, or pattern.
2. Auditory imagery. It refers to an image that focuses on the sense of hearing. It also describes what we hear, from music to noise to pure silence.
3. Kinaesthetic imagery. This kind of imagery refers to an image that represents the movement, physical tension. The movement includes all activities undertaken by the body.
4. Organic imagery. A kind of imagery that resembles feeling and thoughts experienced by the subject. It mostly involves internal thirst, sensation, hunger, fear, pain and so on. It also can be interpreted as the image of what we feel inside.

The importance of using imagery in literary work is a tool so readers or listeners may sympathize as they imagine having the actual sense of experience. A good imagery might help build compelling poetry, interesting narratives, well designed film sets, and descriptive song.

3.1.7 Theme

A theme is mostly defined as the main idea or a fundamental meaning of a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly. It is the central or dominating idea in a literary work. In non-fiction prose it may be thought of as the

general topic of discussion, the subject of the discourse, the thesis. (Thrall et al., 1960: 486)

Theme in literary work is able to be presented in several means. It may be expressed by through the feelings or the experience of the main character. It also can be explained through thoughts and conversations of a different characters. Moreover, the events and the actions taking place in a narrative are significant in determining its theme.

3.2 Extrinsic Aspects of the Lyric

3.2.1 Definition of Racial Discrimination

Race is a cultural and historical category, a way of making difference to signify people in their variety of skin tones. Human physical features are meant to be different as a signifier, yet not to differentiate human rights. In order to fully comprehend the concept of racial discrimination, there are some cultural terms that need to be described. The terms are prejudice, discrimination, and racism. (Storey, 2009: 167).

According to Blank (2004: 40), racial discrimination occurs when a person of one racial group is treated less favorably than another and suffers negative consequences. It doesn't have to be intentional or unlawful. It is possible as a result or rule based on race.

There are several components that define racial discrimination, based on the cause. The first component is *differential treatment on the basis of race* that disadvantages a racial group. It means that a one group is suffered a negative consequence of being racially different. This kind of racial discrimination is the

most common definition that often happens for those in education, housing, and employment. The second component is a treatment on *the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race* that disadvantages a racial group. It is quite the contrary of the first component where the unequal treatment is simply based on race. This kind of circumstance might be caused other than race; it can be from anything that sets the difference between the majority and the minority of people.

Based on Andersen & Taylor (2013: 230-232), there are few things about the element of racial discrimination, and it can be explained as follows:

- (1) Prejudice – It is the evaluation of a social group and the individuals within it based on conceptions about the social group held despite facts that disprove them. It is usually defined as bad tendency attributes that are rarely positive. Negative thought of people only because they are one of X group is prejudice.
- (2) Discrimination - An overt negative and unequal treatment of the members of some social group only because of their membership in that group. If prejudice is a form of attitude, then discrimination is somehow explicit behaviour.
- (3) Racism - The perception and treatment of a racial or ethnic group, or member of that group, as intellectually, socially, and culturally inferior to one's own group. It includes both behaviours and attitudes.

Prejudice, discrimination, and racism have become institutionalized in society, resulting in a racial discrimination mindset. These occur in our everyday life such as; employment, education, housing, access to social services, and many more. Racial prejudice between black and white people is still occurring in the twenty-first century, even though the world has become multi-colored and multi-

cultural. The discrimination become implicitly biased, subtle, covert, and nonobvious. (Taylor et al., 2013: 230-232)

3.2.2 The Signs of Racial Discrimination

These are few things that mark the occasion of racial discrimination in human society. When people become conscious of social difficulties, these signs will surface. It is important for us humans to acknowledge the issues as the sign of racial discrimination.

Public understanding of the nature and causes of racial discrimination has grown dramatically in the last seventy years as a result of discoveries in the social sciences, though these are not usually seen as discoveries since so much new social science is assumed, after the event, to be only common sense. In the 1920s it was widely, and reasonably, believed that racial prejudices were inherited. One of the achievements of the 1920s and 1930s was the marshalling of evidence showing that racial prejudices were learnt, and that, if they were passed from one generation to the next, they were culturally transmitted. (Banton, 1996: 341)

Based on the article above, there are several ways of how a racial discrimination may happens. It can be explained as:

- (1) Explicit discrimination—A type of discrimination that includes explicit behavior, such as; verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination.
- (2) Subtle discrimination—It occurs when there is an unconscious beliefs and associations that affect the behaviors and attitudes of the majority toward the minority of people.

3.2.3 Relation between the Intrinsic and the Extrinsic Aspects

The writer believes that the connection between the intrinsic and extrinsic element is significantly important. The inner and outer aspects are connected to create a more coherent literary work. Both of the aspects are carefully analyzed, forming a whole unified explanation. *This is America* by Childish Gambino is considered a literary work since it contains both intrinsic and external aspects. His diction and vocabulary in the song lyric can be interpreted through the feeling and experiences felt by the author's life. The writer also believes that there are many solid problems which can affect a person's perspective to criticize publicly. Therefore, the relation between the intrinsic and extrinsic elements created a descriptive explanation of what we could be learned from the literary work.

America is one of the biggest countries with multi-cultural and multi-racial group of society. The more races in society, the more complex conflict in racial equality. It is stated that more than four-in-ten Americans say the country still has work to do to give black people equal rights with whites. Blacks, in particular, are skeptical that black people will ever have equal rights in this country. It is also said that most adults, regardless of race or ethnicity, say blacks are treated less fairly than whites in encounters with police. This kind of racial discrimination is considered to be the most inspiration of Gambino's single hit, *This is America*. Taken cited from Pew Research Center, accessed on August 6th, 2020 (<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019>).

Donald Glover, the man behind the persona of *Childish Gambino*, released a single; *This is America*, which bombed the internet. The song has a very bold topics and nuances, very much different with his any other song before. The music performance and lyrical concept somehow triggered a mass curiosity of what the song is about. In some occasion, people want to find out the meaning by directly interviewed the artist. Based on *Indiewire*, Gambino was asked what his intentions were when writing *This is America*. Gambino responded with self-aware and politically charged misdirection, refused to answer the concrete meanings. Some people respect Gambino's answer, understanding the fact that the song is open for any interpretation related.

The writer believes that an artist must have at least one purpose for creating a particular work of art, such as happy or sad experience. The research, occasionally, find its way to the reality of Gambino's early days in the entertainment industry. Donald Glover as known as Childish Gambino is also a very talented person who kickstarted his career as many things; including actor. His early days in acting got him to NBC series *Community* for five seasons. The other particular cast member, however, acknowledge his talent with an uneasy racist joke while in the process of shooting. This might be the first official racial discrimination that happened in Childish Gambino's career. Taken cited from Biography, accessed on August 6th, 2020 (<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.biography.com/.amp/actor/donald-glover>).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

4.1 Intrinsic Aspects Discussion

4.1.1 Diction

4.1.1.1 Denotation

In “This is America”, there is only a little amount of literal meanings. Donald Glover points out the common experience of being black in America. The words can be quoted from last stanza. In this stanza, Gambino shows his sense directly that being black as a minority puts you in disadvantage.

*You just a black man in this world
You just a barcode, ayy
You just a black man in this world
Drivin' expensive foreigners, ayy*

The first and the third line of the stanza are the particular denotation. The stanza is positioned at the end of the song, means that it also stated the song's conclusion. It also means that Donald is a very critical person and is able to give his honest opinion about discrimination of black people. If people do think this way, then they will confirm discrimination among American society where black people needs to put an extra mile to be considered as a worthy human being. There is another problem in the following quotation, which explains:

*This is America (Skrrt, skrrt, woo)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Ayy)
Look how I'm livin' now
Police be trippin' now (Woo)*

Yeah, this is America (Woo, ayy)
Guns in my area (Word, my area)

This first half of the third stanza explains the dire circumstance. The phrases “This is America” and “Guns in my area” clearly defines the gun’s violation issue in America society. The long-time culture of discrimination does create a people’s mindset that most of the gun violator is in black community. This is also supported by the facts that “Police be trippin’ now”. It is a reference to the police force in America which known to be racist. Studies shows that black man between age 15-34 are a staggering 9 times more likely to be killed by police than other Americans.

4.1.1.2 Connotation

In this lyric, there are lots of the indirect meaning of words. The author wants to tell his audience that he has acknowledged the bad stereotypes of black people, which he describes it as “Barcode”, and “dawg” which can be seen on the last stanza:

You just a black man in this world
You just a barcode, ayy
You just a black man in this world
Drivin' expensive foreigners, ayy
You just a big dawg, yeah
I kenneled him in the backyard
No, probably ain't life to a dog
For a big dog

“Barcode” refers to the black people, which means that they are valuable only as a thing or commodity. The word contains a negative connotation because it brings a negative feeling. This kind of circumstance may be related with what

happened back in 18th century, when black community considered as a commodity in slavery. It is one of the most unethical times in the past, where the slaved people often chained and treated poorly, like a “dawg” or dog, an animal. The moment when slavery is no longer exists, the black community need to put an extra time and effort in order to live prosper. This is portrayed in the following stanzas:

*Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, tell somebody
You go tell somebody
Grandma told me
Get your money, Black man (Get your— Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Black man*

Based on the stanza above, Gambino states that black people do have to get the money since that what grandma, or the elders, told them. The long-time culture of discrimination explains why the elders know what to do to balance the circumstances. The elders, as “Grandma”, ensures the black youth to work hard earning money, in order to fit in the society as an equal.

In the first stanza, Gambino uses the words “dance” and “party” to describe what a modern person does nowadays. These things mentioned early because Gambino tries to tell his audience that most of the time all of the nation’s crisis tends to be covered with superficial entertainment. The society like to commemorate entertainment and special events before paying more attention to the nation’s crisis.

4.1.2. Tone

The listeners focus more on the vocal lyrics of the song because the instrumentals and the word seem to be at the different volume. The tempo of the song is a bit too fast to for listeners to catch attention, even though Gambino's pronunciation of the song is clear enough. It is a complex combination of pop, hip-hop, rap, mixed with a little bit of gospel harmony. The sound of African-vibe guitar at the beginning and the catchy electronic beat of the music gives the listeners the energy and stimulates them to sing and enjoy with the song (*Intro*). It is overflowed with joyful and calm mood. Then, there is a sudden gunshot and the music turns faster, followed by mumble rap (*stanza 2*). The tone is changed into more serious, critical nuances. The song's mood is approximately the same until the last section (*stanza 8*), where it leads to sad and sorrowful emotional state.

One of the major impacts on the audience of this song "This is America" is its catchy rhythm of the song. Childish Gambino's amazing vocal is very flexible and versatile which able to sing properly in many genres, including an upbeat hip-hop music styles that give the song an energetic mood. In this song, he uses the technique of "vocal high-notes" which makes the song more attractive and unique with his characteristics. He often uses the sound of interjection "aah" which makes the song groovy and marvellous.

4.1.3 Figurative Language

4.1.3.1 Metaphor

The metaphors are included in the following stanza:

*You just a black man in this world
You just a barcode, ayy
You just a black man in this world
Drivin' expensive foreigners, ayy
You just a big dawg, yeah
I kenneled him in the backyard
No, probably ain't life to a dog
For a big dog*

The word “barcode” in the second line conjures up images of things like a product or commodity, which relates to the existence of black people. It’s a statement that they are nothing more than a property. Overall, in this stanza, it means that the author does care about the label towards black community. It doesn’t matter how rich or successful an African American is, he will still be just a “black man”.

4.1.4 Imagery

1. Visual Imagery

This lyric is written by Childish Gambino and Ludwig Goransson. In the lyric, there is imagery used to describe the sense of aesthetic. A visual imagery is a kind of imagery that relies on the sense of sight. Subject used in poetry in the lyrics is the “black” in fourth, seventh, and eighth stanza, and “look” in the second and third stanza. More in the song lyrics, “pretty” and “watch” are included in visual imagery. These examples are mentioned in the sixth stanza:

Look how I'm geekin' out (Hey)
I'm so fitted (I'm so fitted, woo)
I'm on Gucci (I'm on Gucci)
I'm so pretty (Yeah, yeah, woo)
I'm gon' get it (Ayy, I'm gon' get it)
Watch me move (Blaow)

A visual imagery involves not only the subject or object looks, but also a verb that involves an element of vision. In this case the word “watch” and “look” are categorized in the visual imagery.

2. Auditory Imagery

An auditory imagery refers to an image that focuses on the sense of hearing. Gambino and Goransson has little use of auditory imagery in it. The word “blocka” is one of the auditory imagery. Literally, “blocka” is defined as a pop or explosion from a gun. This is followed by another onomatopoeia “blaow” which also can be included in auditory imagery as a sound of gun shoot. The imagery gives a vital information about gun ownership issue.

3. Kinaesthetic Imagery

The writer believes that kinaesthetic imagery refers to an image that represents the movement, physical tension. All activities undertaken by the body are the element that is included in the sense movement. In this imagery, the verb is mostly already included. There are “dance”, “shake”, “catch”, “carry”, “blow”, “tell”, “move” and still many more. Most verbs in “This is America” lyrics are included in the kinaesthetic imagery. These verbs provide clearer information to the audience which Donald gives the action that he acknowledged.

4. Organic Imagery

Organic imagery refers to an imagery that represents about feelings and thoughts experienced by the subject. It involves internal thirst, sensation, hunger, fear, pain and so on. The organic imagery can be interpreted as the image of what we feel inside. In other words, the image is linked elements in the form of common things that are existed in environment surrounding. In this song lyric, other than the subject of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic imagery, all of the words might be included in the category of organic imagery.

The author, however, use only a mild amount of organic imagery. The writer finds that “know”, “want”, “owe”, “free” and “life”. These words might seem unrelated somehow, but it’s actually the feeling of emotion or something that we can feel inside us. Therefore, these vocabularies in imagery gives Donald the perspectives and opinions toward discrimination in black community.

4.1.5 Theme

“This is America” by Childish Gambino, as known as Donald Glover, is about a person talking about the society in life where racial inequality happened to black people. The composer has added the obvious yet ambiguous lyrics into the song so people will curious about the song’s idea of modern racism. As one listens to this song, she or he will realize that Donald is mentioning many kinds of discrimination toward black community without even mentioning white people.

Racial discrimination is considered to be the primary source of multi-cultural conflict in the society. It is one of the common problems, affecting all

human beings in the idea of racism. Donald's perspective and opinion is portrayed in the lyric of "This is America". He tries to tell his audience that there is a racial discrimination even in modern days, where the idea of racism is already institutionalized in the society. Thus, he also institutionalized his perspectives and opinion to his song for the audiences to be informed and entertained at the same time. It takes place in America, along with any other related issues. Therefore, based on the main issue and settings of place, the theme is injustice and America.

4.2 Extrinsic Aspects Discussion

4.2.1 Racial Discrimination in *This is America*

In this thesis, the writer believes that the song *This is America* is one of the songs that has an appropriate background story of racial discrimination. Through this song, we can learn about the forms of racial discrimination in American society nowadays. It is internalized unconsciously through many aspects of social life. We can find several things about racial discrimination in the song *This Is America*, as follows:

(1) *Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, tell somebody*
You go tell somebody
Grandma told me
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Get your money, Black man (Get your—Black man)
Black man

In these eight sentences, we can see that a grandma telling the youngsters to look for money which means occupation. This kind of scenario is mostly happened in modern black community when they are considered as legally equal

with white majority. However, the employment rate for a black man is quite low. This kind of circumstance makes it difficult for them, so they may live in prosper.

Therefore, there is racial discrimination in this part of the lyrics. This kind of circumstance may happen in a subtle or explicit way. The diction of “black man” also confirms the subject of the whole issues throughout the song, and it will make more sense when we look for another part of the lyrics.

*(2) This is America (Skrrt, skrrt, woo)
Don't catch you slippin' now (Ayy)
Look how I'm livin' now
Police be trippin' now (Woo)
Yeah, this is America (Woo, ayy)
Guns in my area (Word, my area)
I got the strap (Ayy, ayy)
I gotta carry 'em*

Then in this part of the song there are other causes of racial discrimination. The affirmation of settings is depicted on “This is America” then another issue rises from police behavior. The writer believes that guns policy in the society somehow connected with police behaviour toward black people. Many accidents of illegal gun shooting is happening around America and the black people is tend to be more suspicious for the police.

Other than guns policy, most criminal activity is also stereotyped to black people activities. A black man is prone to get more severe punishment for any kind of wrongdoings, than the majority of white people. It strengthens the fact that racial discrimination is already internalized in the society.

(3) *You just a black man in this world*
You just a barcode, ayy
You just a black man in this world
Drivin' expensive foreigners, ayy
You just a big dawg, yeah
I kenneled him in the backyard
No, probably ain't life to a dog
For a big dog

After all of those elements in the song lyrics, Gambino takes a bold statement for the song's ending. These eight sentences of the lyrics state the truth about racial discrimination, in the depiction of "a black man". A victim who treated as a commodity, not equal of human being. Chained and shackled like an animal who even not worth of living. The writer believes that the dark nuance of the ending is intentionally exaggerated, which is necessary for the anchor of his whole statement about racial discrimination.

The form of racial discrimination is embedded all over *This is America*, and these three things above quite represents the issue. The first part is about the reality of black community in modern society with its difficulties. The second part is modern kind of racial discrimination through gun policy and police behaviour. Then the third part is the author's conclusion about the one who suffered from racial discrimination.

The writer believes that racism is the basis of racial discrimination. It is also considered as the act of racism, a discrimination in racial perspective. The significant act of racism in America starts in early 17th century when the American colonies look for a cheaper labor source; enslaved Africans. The

slavery was happened mainly in southern states in 19th century, where the were utilized as servants, laborers, and craftsmen. This misfortune of the enslaved leads to American civil war between northern and southern states from 1861 to 1865. The civil war is won by the northern, resulting in decent results; one of them is a nation-wide abolishment of slavery.

However, the freed black people status during post-war still remained in question. The white southerners established a kind of law, called as the Black Codes, which was created to limit black people's freedom and to ensure their job as the source of hard labor. This white supremacist later forms a radical group; one which the largest is the Ku Klux Klan. They did suppression, intimidation, and extreme violence to dissimilate potential civil rights for black voters. In this way, the freed black people is once again bound by racial discrimination of equal civil rights. The black community is pressured with white supremacist's activity, resulting in many movements. These movements of resistance including the Underground Railroad, Selma to Montgomery March to Black Lives Matter movement.

4.2.2 The Sign of Racial Discrimination in *This is America*

There are many occurrences as a sign of racial discrimination, although it is not happened at all time, especially in this modern society. In the past racial discrimination is also happened and most of it is occurred intentionally. In present times, racial discrimination is considered as have already internalized in American culture. It is not an explicit behaviour like the way it used to be. If slavery is what

happened back in 17-19th century, then what happens in the modern era is different.

This is America explains many things by using slang words, supported by catchy tone and rhythm. Every element related is combined into one song which resulted in a modern story of racial discrimination. These signs about racial discrimination can be seen from the types of discrimination. It is based on how someone got discriminated and what type of discrimination is it. For that reason, there is a classification about the kinds of discrimination, and that we can check the relation within the story contained in the lyrics of *This is America*.

- (1) Explicit Discrimination. This type of discrimination includes an explicit behaviour, such as; verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination. Every step may enable the next if any supporting factor is related. In the past history, this kind of discrimination is considered to be the most common. Based on *This is America* song lyrics, verbal antagonism, avoidance, and segregation is the most possible signs of discrimination in America modern days. Verbal antagonism means labelling another person of what considered as inferior race. Avoidance includes one's behaviour of excluding him or herself from any other racial group that he or she uncomfortable with. If this is happening in a long term, then it may level to segregation. This is depicted when the song lyrics are repeated all over again with '*Get your money, Black man*' which resembles the bitter reality of poverty in black community. This is supported with what considered as verbal antagonism in the last part of the song '*You just a black man in this*

world'. These means a condition where being black means having less salary, less occupation, yet more to be blames for any wrongdoings. It is known that there is law for an act of discrimination, however it is difficult to identify verbal antagonism, avoidance, and segregation since it got mixed with cultural values in society.

(2) Automatic Discrimination. It is considered to be modern, subtle form of prejudice that might leads to racial discrimination. It is also 'automatically' persisted in one's mind, even though she or he has a good intention. The main clue of this type of discrimination is to know the modern kind of racial discrimination, which is indirect, automatic, and subtle. Through *This is America* we can learn that racial discrimination is transmitted in superficial entertainment, news, and lifestyles. Based on the sentences or the song lyrics 'I'm so fitted, I'm on Gucci' and 'This is a celly, that's a tool' implies the superficial of modern entertainment that mostly distract people for the real issue in the society.

Therefore, both types of discrimination support each other to reveal the signs of racial discrimination. The sentences or song lyrics of *This is America* include the signs of explicit discrimination in verbal antagonism, avoidance, and segregation. Likewise, the automatic discrimination explains the indirect, subtle meanings of racial discrimination.

4.2.3 Relation between the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Aspects of *This is America*

The correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic aspect are important to comprehend the song's message. The writer believes that the message of the song is explained in the lyrics, both in explicit and intrinsic ways. This is affected by any social and environmental aspects related to personal life of the author. In the sixth stanza, what caught on attention is "Yeah, this is America. Guns in my area". Here Gambino states his perspective that he is aware of the gun ownership issue in America and people should know of it. This is also stated in the lyrics as one of the concerning issues. Such words like "gun" and "strap" are the clear references to the related topic.

Next, Gambino writes "You just a black man in this world, You just a barcode, ayy". In these lines Gambino is trying to point the racial issue which includes black community as the victim. This sentences or song lyrics strengthens the fact that mostly, black people still considered as unequal. Gambino also adds a word "barcode" which refers to black people as a commodity rather than human being. The other references of black community is mostly located in the last part of "This is America", indicating that Gambino give the circumstance of racial stereotypes as a closure.

In "This is America", Gambino incorporates easy rap and hip-hop, which is performed mostly by himself. Within this rap he mentions how guns, lifestyle, culture and nations are protected for their everyday beliefs even though it causes grief in human relations. Racism is a very painful way of thinking, since it's often

related with any racial discriminative action. The writer believes that a racial discrimination is an unfair circumstance of people's daily life. An ironic reality which triggered Childish Gambino, as an artist, gave his opinion by creating his thoughts into a song. The nuance of hip-hop is fully attached throughout the song, referencing hip-hop as one of the "black" music for generation.

One of the most frequent phrases of "This is America" is where Gambino states "This is America, don't catch you slippin' now". The writer believes that Gambino states the lyric over and over as a warning that America is well-known for its violence in crowd control. He makes it pretty obvious that people shouldn't get caught when they make a mistake. The circumstance is considered as problematic, supported by another frequent words, "Black Man" which explains the irony of being black in America. It also points out that more than a half gun-related incident in America is often leads to black people, either as a culprit or a victim. "This is America" is also the phrase that concludes the main setting for every statement in the lyrics, whatever the song is implied.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This is America by Childish Gambino is a hip-hop based song that represents meanings even with catchy lyrics and upbeat tempo. The song is about racial discrimination suffered by the black community of America nowadays. From the song, we can learn about how racial discrimination works in modern society through education, housing, employment, along with another internalized value of discrimination in society. The song also gave a lot of meaning, about how people got distracted by superficial entertainment while the act of discrimination is happening around the neighborhood.

The song has intrinsic and extrinsic elements that provide an explanation of what the song is about for both textual and contextual meanings. From the intrinsic elements, the author depicts the harsh reality of America which is complex and difficult yet described fascinatingly. It is supported with the diction and figurative language that help the song makes more sense in our common knowledge of racial discrimination. The figurative language offers a large part of what makes this song interesting with its metaphor, imagery, and theme. The diction picked for this rap song is also content with the idea of racism, portrayed with the song lyrics that describe the irony of one's circumstance than the others. These intrinsic elements prove the existence of racial discrimination embedded in the lyrics.

In the analysis of extrinsic elements, racial discrimination is the main issue of *This Is America*. As mentioned before, racial discrimination is defined as a circumstance when a person of one racial group is treated less favorably than another and suffers negative consequences. This unpopular behavior is signified as explicit and subtle (automatic) discrimination. It depends on a condition whether the tragedy is intentional or maybe already internalized in society.

People can understand the author's intent by looking at the relationship between the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the lyrics. Childish Gambino wants us to know that we should not be distracted by superficial entertainment, which is the trivial aspects of current popular culture—parties, money, and social media. He holds a mirror in front of us to open our eyes to the real problems facing American society in racial discrimination, violence, and gun policy. The song *This Is America* is performed by Childish Gambino with uplifting tones and rhythm while supported by a choir in several parts, depicting how the tragedy of racial discrimination in modern America is covered with modern superficial entertainments.

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