



QUESTION TO AMERICAN PEOPLE'S COMMITMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN GEORGE TILLMAN JR'S *MEN OF HONOR*

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Info Artikel

Sejarah Artikel:
Diterima Oktober 2013
Disetujui Oktober 2013
Dipublikasikan
November 2013

Keywords:
Commitment,
discrimination, human
rights

Abstract

This study is attempted to analyze question or critique toward American people's commitment in a movie entitled Men of Honor movie. The objectives are: 1) to identify what practices of human rights violation are revealed in the movie, 2) to investigate how the practices are assumed to be a question on American people's commitment towards Human Rights. The writer uses qualitative descriptive research and structuralism approach in this research. Source of the data is the movie script and scenes of in the movie. The data collected in this research are consisting of words, phrases, sentences and implicit meaning found in scenes laid in the movie. In conducting this research, I used observation sheets as the instrument. The data are collected by reading the movie script, identifying supportive text, inventorying the data into table, and classifying the data. From the analysis the writer concluded that (1) the United States of America break the civil war act, the Executive order 8802, and the universal declaration of human rights.

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ISSN 2252-6463

INTRODUCTION

Human rights are rights inherited to all human beings. They are not from other human's confession, but basically they are a fundamental gift which has been clung since the human beings were born. Human rights have a universal characteristic. It means that human rights are applied to all human beings whenever they are, their nationalities, social status, ethnics, skin color, religions, languages, and other status. The rights are needed by the people for keeping their status of humanity.

Human rights are also guaranteed by international law, such as the United Nations (UN). They commit to fight against human rights violations by arranging human rights charter plan which has collaboration with Economic and Social Council of UN consisting of 18 members after the World War II in 1946. The formulation of the charter was called Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Two years later, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations accepted it and most of the members of United Nations agreed with the charter plan on general session of the United Nations. Although this declaration was not an agreement, the entire members of UN had to apply it morally in their countries.

America is one of the countries that fight for human rights in the world such as the declaration its independence from England in 1778, the Thirteenth Amendment, the civil War Act, etc.

The main problem that found in the United States society reality by the writer is the United States of America do not commit human rights enforcement for example the military aggression in Iraq.

In point of fact, literature has an extraordinary position in our life because literature can show a good role through conveyed messages. Literature also has a role to convince someone to do something in their social life. Wellek and Warren (1956: 3)

said that literature is creative activity, a work of art. It means that literature was made by human beings, humans' idea, one of the inspirations to make an art work in literature is based on human's experience, so that why we can find an art work that concerns about social issues such as kind of racism, woman's discrimination, etc. because most people who make an art work are inspired by their social life. Studying literature can make the reader aware of problems in their society.

According to Hornby (2000: 473), "Film is a series of moving pictures recorded with sounds that tells a story, shown on television or at cinema or movie theatre". It means that film is made by human to entertain people to get experience. By watching film, people can watch and learn story about some social issues, human's life, etc. As a result, they can take some moral values and get the message of the film.

However, the above authentic information about human rights enforcement and the violation of human rights done by the United States of America, the writer gets a conclusion to question to American commitment toward human rights. Furthermore, the writer wants to analyze the discussion entitled *Question to American People's Commitment on Human Rights in George Tillman Jr's "Men of Honor"*.

This research has some objectives as listed below:

1. To identify what practices of human rights violation are revealed in the movie.
2. To investigate how are the practices assumed to be a question on American incommitment towards Human Rights.

DISCUSSION

4.1 Practices of Human Rights Violation Revealed in the Movie.

After watching and reading the script of *Men of honor* movie, the writer found some discrimination that can be included as

practices of human rights violation. The evidence analyzed can be seen as follow.

4.1.1 The Discrimination Done by White People Toward Black People

The discrimination becomes social issue that has to be completely removed from the United States of America. Because the United States of America is as good example of freedom for most countries in the entire world, the United States of America has so many citizens coming from other ethnics such as from Africa, Asia, etc.

Generally discrimination rise up when there are some differentiations about something or someone in negative side. Discrimination commonly happens in the United States of America done by white people toward black people. For example, when *the Thirteenth Amendment* has been adopted then African-American should be assimilated into the larger American culture. In fact, African-American people still could not be allowed to vote and they segregated the colored men in all aspects of their social life. Black children were not allowed to attend white public schools too.

However, the writer finds some discrimination by the white men towards black people in the United States of America based on the *Men of Honor* Movie in three form of discrimination, there are the discrimination in the form of employment, social relation, and education. The evidence above is parts of the movie that cannot prove the validity. Seeing that the writer uses sociological approach in literature as the main approach, the important thing in analyzing the sociology of literature is to find out the interrelation among society, so the writer would like to compare the evidence from the movie with the evidence from the real life. The real evidences are taken from magazine, newspaper, books, and other veritable references.

4.1.1 Employment Discrimination

The first discrimination found by the writer is discrimination in the form of employment. Generally, the employment discrimination rise up when there are some differentiations about something or someone in negative side in employment field. The first evidence that reveals employment discrimination can be seen on datum 5A below;

Chief Floyd : “A big future. Tell that recruiter, to take his crystal ball and shove it directly up his ass. I just got back from fighting a war, making the world free for democracy and they still got me slaving over a hot grill next to you. **There's only three choices a colored man has in the Navy.**”

Navy Cookie : “What, chief?”

Chief Floyd : “**A cook, officer's valet, listening, Carl? Or getting the fuck out of the Navy. Big future.**” (*Datum No. 5A*)

The dialogue above is a dialogue between Chief Floyd, Cookie Chief, and navy cookies in the Navy soup kitchen. All Cookies in the United States Navy were the colored people, including Carl Brashear, the colored man that had an aspiration to be a Navy Diver in the United States Navy. They were discussing about their future in the U.S. Navy. Chief Floyd also ridiculed Carl Brashear who told them about what the navy recruiter had promised. The navy recruiter promised that if Carl and the other colored men settle for enlisting to the U.S. Navy, then they will get a very big future but in fact, they just become cookies.

The bolded phrase, “**There's only three choices a colored man has in the Navy.**” means the white people's discrimination toward colored men in the United States Navy. The bolded phrase above can be interpreted as the white people's restriction toward all colored people in the United States Navy in the field of employment. The white gave the colored

people three choices when the colored people were enlisted in the United States Navy.

Furthermore, the bolded phrase said by Chief Floyd, "**A cook, officer's valet, listening, Carl? Or getting the fuck out of the Navy. Big future**" means that all colored people enlisted in the United States Navy were given opportunity by the white people to be a cook, or officer's valet, or the white men would discharge them from the U.S. navy. Then, the writer assumes that the utterance said by Chief Floyd, the colored man, indicates his awareness of the colored people's fate in the United States Navy. He is aware that the white people in the United States Navy still cannot live together with the colored people. The colored people were given three choices by the white people when the colored people were enlisted in the United States Navy. The evidence also had a very contradictory reality with what the Navy Recruiter's had promised to the all enlisted men to get a "Big future". However, in fact, all colored people were given just three choices when they were enlisted in the United States Navy. According to the writer's opinion, the three choices will not ever guide them into the big future. For the colored people, a big future in the United States Navy is their future to be a sailor.

Meanwhile, the writer compares the evidence above with the evidence showed in the real life, according to Lewis on Los Angeles Sentinel Press, "*The armed services may have been desegregated at that time, but that did not mean that Blacks had many opportunities. Most of them worked in the kitchen or performed custodial duties.*" and according Carl Brashear cited by Kathleen T. Rhem on U.S. Department of Defense, "*In the '40s most blacks were given the job as steward.*" It means that in the United States of America, especially in the United States Navy at that time, the colored people still have not many opportunities to work in the United States Navy. They could not choose even wish to get better work such as a sailor, petty officer,

although the armed service have been desegregated in the US Navy.

4.1.2 Social Relation Discrimination

The second discrimination found by the writer is social relation discrimination. Generally, social relation discrimination rise up when there are some differentiations about something or someone in negative side in the social relation. The discrimination usually happens when there is a social group that becomes majority in certain place have desire to dominate the minority groups so the majority can rule the minority. The minority itself usually has a background from certain race and religion.

Datum 1A below would be the evidence of social relation discrimination. Here is the detail of the analysis.

Billy Sunday : "Ornery son of a bitch"

Shore Patrol 1 : "**Friend of yours?**"

Shore Patrol 2 : "**Looks like chief here is a nigger-lover.**"

Billy Sunday : "Asshole, now you're going to address me as master chief." (*Datum No. 1A*)

The dialogue above happened when Master Chief Billy Sunday was waiting a car that would bring him to the rehabilitation center in the waiting room of the United States Navy Court with two Shore Patrols accompanying him. Master Chief was sent to the rehabilitation center because of his alcoholic habit that made some disturbances in the United States Navy when he got drunk. Suddenly, he got shocked when he saw his friend, a colored man, appeared on the waiting room's television. The utterance, "ornery son of a bitch" can be interpreted as the expression of the closeness of Billy Sunday with the one who appeared on the television.

The bolded phrase is regarded as the evidence of social relation discrimination. The bolded phrase, "**friend of yours?**," that is said by Shore Patrol 1 with an

astonishment tone, at the same time he sees Master Chief Billy Sunday with an expression showed his incredulity on Billy Sunday's statement. The expression indicates that there is a discrimination done by Shore Patrol 1 because the expression can be interpreted as a form of Shore Patrol's astonishment toward Master Chief Billy Sunday that makes friend with a nigger. Meanwhile, the statement of Shore Patrol 2, "**looks like chief here is a nigger-lover**" indicates that white people feel awkward when a white man makes friend with a nigger. Although he stated it by a low tone, it indirectly can be interpreted as the white men's negative attitude towards the niggers. Furthermore, the use of hyperbole words "**a nigger-lover**," can be interpreted as a teasing allusion toward the one that according to the common white people not a noble deed when they make friend with the niggers. The white people, in this case represented by Shore Patrol 1 and 2, believe that the niggers do not deserve to live together with the white people and if it happens, then the white people definitely make a big mistake.

For corroborating that the evidence above was really happening, the writer finds the data from (*123HelpMe.com*), "*in most southern towns and cities blacks were not allowed to use the same restaurants, parks, public toilets, transport and schools as whites, "separate" did not mean equal.*" The sentence above discuss about the disadvantages of black Americans in 1950s. It is clearly described that in the United States of America after the American Civil War in 1865, black people in the American south were no longer slaves, but they still had never gained equality with whites. In fact, the white people in America still differentiate in many areas such as they still separated in restaurants, parks, public toilets, etc. it can be concluded that the white people in America at that time still cannot accept the existence of the colored people in such areas.

4.1.3 Education Discrimination

The third evidence found by the writer in *Men of honor* movie is education discrimination. The first evidence which reveals the discrimination in the movie is when Carl Brashear is accepted to train in the United States Diving School. The evidence can be seen as follow.

Carl Brashear : "Chief Sunday, we never met, but I served with you on U.S.S. Hoist."

Billy Sunday : "U.S.S. Hoist. I expect I remember you now. So, what's for chow, Cookie?"

Carl Brashear : "I wouldn't know, chief. I'm reporting for diving school."

Billy Sunday : "**Oh, yeah, that's right. They say you wrote over 100 letters requesting admission. Hope you're better than the last cook. Man's food could kill your dog.**" (*Datum number 12A*)

In the real event, the writer finds a quotation from Washington Post on Friday, July 28, 2006, "*he began sending letters requesting admission to the Navy salvage diving school, but his notes usually went missing or unanswered.*" According to the statements above, the writer assumes that despite the president Truman has ordered to desegregate the military in the United States of America in 1948, in fact, the first African-American accepted to train in the Navy salvage diving school was in 1954. It can be concluded that substantively most school in the United States of America still cannot accept black people to study or train in the school which most of the students or trainees are white people.

The dialogue above happened when Carl met Master chief Billy Sunday in front of the United States Diving School. Carl was accepted to train in School under Captain Pullman's recommendation. Fundamentally, Carl reported Master Chief Billy Sunday in order to accept Carl to be one of the trainees in the School but Master Chief turned a cold shoulder to Carl's report because master Chief never train a black people in the

United States Diving School. The writer assumes that the bolded sentence, “**Oh, yeah, that's right. They say you wrote over 100 letters requesting admission.**” is a discrimination done by the white people toward the black people because the expression means the United States Diving School causes difficulties for Carl Brashear to be accepted in the School. Every American citizen has equal rights to train in the United States Diving School if they have already fulfilled the requirements that are determined by the school. However, in fact, Carl Brashear, the one that fulfills the requirements to train in the Diving School has to make 100 letters to request the admission.

Furthermore, Carl should be accepted in the diving school easily because he is recommended by Captain Pullman that knows Carl's ability. In addition, the bolded sentence that said by Master Chief Billy Sunday, “**Hope you're better than the last cook. Man's food could kill your dog.**” can be defined as Master Chief's discriminatory view towards the black people. Master Chief considers that the highest position for the black people in the United States Navy is a cook, including Carl Brashear that has been accepted in the United States Diving School.

4.2 How Are the Practices assumed to be a Question on American People's Commitment towards Human Rights?

As we know that the United States of America have great history about their commitment to protect human rights. The followings are some components:

- a) *The Declaration of Independence* in 1778. The content of the declaration was, “All men are created equal; endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...”
- b) *The Massachusetts Supreme Court* in 1783. It has a purpose to make illegal for any slavery in the United States of America.

- c) *Virginia Statue of Religious Freedom* in 1785. It has a purpose to make people of the United States of America free to choose and believe the religion according to their faith.
- d) *The Thirteenth Amendment* in 1865. It has a purpose to abolish slavery by the president of the United States of America, Abreham Lincoln.
- e) *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948. It was held by the United Nations and the United States of America taken part of the declaration.
- f) *The Enlightenment to Desegregate the United States Military* in 1948. It has a purpose to desegregate all people in the nation to take part of the military. The United States of America beyond out of doubt has showed their commitment to protect the human rights in their country. The protection itself is applied to all people in America including the immigrants from Asia, Africa and the other nations that have become American citizen.

On the other hand, the United States of America surprisingly do the opposite with their spirit to protect human rights in the nation if we see some evidence on the main character of *Men of Honor* movie, Carl Brashear.

In *Men of Honor* movie, the writer finds some discrimination done by the white people toward Carl Brashear and the other colored people in the United States Navy (US Navy). Based on the evidence discussed in the previous sub-chapter, the writer takes some points about the discrimination in *Men of Honor* movie as follow:

- a) The discrimination done by the white people toward the colored people in the form of employment in the US Navy;
- b) The discrimination done by the white people toward the colored people in the form of social relation that disadvantage the colored people in the US Navy;

c) The discrimination done by the white people toward the colored people in the form of education in the US Navy;

According to Fulthoni (2009: 8), "discrimination is differentiate equitable actions that have a purpose to differentiate certain individuals, groups, that commonly have a categorical characteristic such as based on races, ethnic groups, or social class membership." It is very clear to understand that all differentiate action based on race can be interpreted as discrimination. In this case, all points that have been showed by the writer above can be concluded as discrimination done by the white people toward the colored people in the US Navy.

Meanwhile, human rights should be owned by all people in the world including in the United States of America. In the nation, human rights are not only owned by the original citizen of America but also immigrants. As we know that there are so many immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the other nations that cannot be mentioned one by one in the nation. The immigrants that have stayed and become American citizen should also get equal rights with the original citizen of America because the nation has committed to protect human rights.

The protection toward human rights in the United States of America means the nation have to protect all aspects of human rights such as to protect and consider all American citizen to get equal opportunity, employment, freedom. Furthermore, the United States of America also have to punish all people in certain capacities that do human rights violation like discrimination.

However, in *Men of Honor* movie, the United States of America do not show their commitment to protect human rights since there are so many discriminations happen in the United States of America especially in the US Navy such as employment discrimination, social relation discrimination, and education discrimination. To prove that the United

States of America do not commit their commitment toward human rights enforcement, the writer compares the evidence found in *Men of Honor* movie that represent the real life in 1960s with the rules or documents applied in the country at that time below.

4.2.1 Employment discrimination

The first evidence that the writer found in the movie that represents the real life in 1960s is employment discrimination done by the white people in the United States Navy. It was kind of irony because the discrimination happened after the United States of America announce to sign *Executive order 8802* by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June, 1941. The main purpose of the *Executive order 8802* was to prohibit racial discrimination in the national defense industry. It was the first federal action, though not a law, to promote equal opportunity and prohibit employment discrimination in the United States. It was strengthened by The New York Times that published the order on June 25, 1941. The New York Times said, "*President Roosevelt took action today to prevent discrimination of defense jobs because of race, creed, color or national origin, asserting that 'the democratic way of life within the nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups.'*"

4.1.2 Social relation discrimination

The second evidence that the writer found in the movie that represents the real life at that time is social relation discrimination done by the white people in the United States Navy in 1960s. Meanwhile, in the same time, the writer compares with *the Civil Rights Act* (1964) that outlawed segregation in businesses such as theaters, restaurants, and hotels. It banned discriminatory practices in employment and ended segregation in public places such as swimming pools, libraries, and public

schools. The last point is very clear to understand that the segregation in public place that part of social relation was prohibited. Hence, the writer concluded that the American people still broke the rules made by the United States government concerning social relation discrimination.

4.1.3 Education discrimination

The last evidence that the writer found in the movie that represents the real life at that time is education discrimination done by the white people toward the black people in the United States Navy in 1960s. If the writer compare with *the Civil Rights Act* (1964), that outlawed segregation in businesses such as theaters, restaurants, and hotels. It banned discriminatory practices in employment and ended segregation in public places such as swimming pools, libraries, and public schools, the evidence that the writer found in the movie has strong contradictory with the law applied in the United States of America at that time. We can see at the last point of the act is the United States of America ended segregation in public school, it means that all people in America have equal rights to attend the school they choose no matter what races, religion they believe but in the reality, there were many schools that cannot accept the black people in their school.

However, after the writer shows some evidence above, the writer concludes that the United States of America do not fully commit to protect human rights in their country because the United States of America breaks *the Executive order 8802*, *the Civil Rights Act*, and the United States of America also step out of line with *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* because one of the essence of the declaration says, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (*The*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2).

CONCLUSION

Men of honor is a film which is inspired by true story that tells the tale of Carl Brashear, an African-American man who pursues his dream to be a Master Diver in the United States Navy (US Navy). However, Carl Brashear does not get a simple journey to be a Master Diver in the US Navy because he gets so many discriminations done by the white men in the US Navy. There are so many conflicts that appear in this movie concerning discrimination done by the white people toward the colored people in the US Navy. In fact, the discrimination is considered to be a normal deed by most of white people in the US Navy.

The white people discriminate the colored people in the US Navy in many ways such as the rules made by the white people that disadvantage the colored people and punish the colored people that can make them die if they break the rules, etc.

In the US Navy, all enlisted men have equal rights to get duties and certain position according to their ability. In this movie, all colored people enlisted in the US Navy were just given two jobs by the white people, a cook and officer's valet. If the colored people refuse the job, they will be discharged from the US Navy by the white people.

By the existence of discrimination in the US Navy, the main character Carl Brashear is motivated to struggle to cope with the discrimination in the US Navy and proves that he deserves to be a diver by showing his ability and his potentiality.

The United States of America is one of the nations that commit to protect human rights; it can be seen at their great history concerning human rights enforcements. However, on *Men of honor* movie, the United States of America do not show their

commitment to protect human rights since there are so many discriminations happen in the US Navy. It makes the writer concludes that the United States of America do not fully commit to protect human rights in their country.

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