

The Representation of White Supremacy in Colson Whitehead's the Nickel Boys

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i2.689>

*Evi Setyo Budi Utami, Agry Pramita, Mahi M Hkikmat¹²³

¹²³Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: evisetiyobudi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain the forms of white supremacy in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. The theory used in this research is Fredrickson's theory of white supremacy. This study was used descriptive qualitative research. This research analyzes the dialogue and narration in the novel as a whole. Supported by Stuart Hall's representation theory illustrates that this novel represents events in America in the 1960s regarding white supremacy based on social problems arised. This study's findings show that three forms of white supremacy are represented in the novel. Color bar reflects the inequality in American multiracial society depicted in the novel. Racial segregation refers to the separation of communities based on different races and skin colors that identify blacks and whites are separated in the school. Restriction is a combination of the two concepts, color bar and racial segregation, which ultimately causes people of color and blacks not to obtain equal rights with whites.

Keywords: Colson Whitehead, Fredrickson, representation, *The Nickel Boys*, white supremacy

Article History:

Received 07th February 2025

Accepted 26th February 2025

Published 16th March 2025



INTRODUCTION

In society, literary works often serve as a mirror for existing social, cultural, religious, historical, and political realities. Literary works are considered to have a close relationship with life that is influenced by social conditions, and at the same time, literary works can also influence society. Concerning literature and society, according to (Swingewood, 1991), literature is a reflection of the times. Based on current conditions, society has a variety of issues and problems. One issue that persists today is white supremacy. This phenomenon has a massive impact on everyday life, especially for black people. Black people get unfair, unequal, and even inhumane treatment by white people (Gibbons, 2018). At the worst, they were even killed and buried inappropriately. White supremacy is a doctrine or idea that believes that the natural superiority of the race is people who have light-colored skin compared to other skin colors. This was especially true in the United States during the time of slavery and Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation in the 1960s. This is reflected in works such as Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*. Through the depiction of strong white supremacy, this is in line with George. M. Fredrickson's view that non-white people are sometimes subjugated and treated as inferior in the United States and South Africa (Fredrickson, 1981). White supremacy according to Fredrickson, means color bar, racial segregation, and restrictions on citizenship rights which divide groups characterized by light pigmentation.

White supremacy is the belief that the white race is naturally superior to other races and that white people have the right to dominate or control other racial communities. According to Fredrickson (Fredrickson, 1981), means color bar, racial segregation, and restrictions. Supporting by Oxford dictionary, color bar is a system in society in which black and non-white people are not granted access to the equal rights, opportunities and facilities as white people. Webster's Cannon also describes color bar as a barrier that prevents black people from engaging in white people's activities. Based on these definitions, color bar can be interpreted as a system to separate people based on their skin color. Differences in skin color play an important role in determining who is the absolute master of other humans (Fredrickson, 1981). According to the Oxford Dictionary, color bar refers to a system that separates black and white people by limiting their access to the same rights, opportunities and facilities enjoyed by white people. Meanwhile, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines color bar as a barrier that prevents black people from participating in activities that white people do. Based on these definitions, a color bar is a rule that discriminates against individuals based on the color of their skin.

Whereas, racial segregation is the separation of people based on their race or ethnicity in various daily activities, such as education, housing, and the use of public facilities. A common feature of social structure is that people with similar social characteristics tend to cluster in physical and social relationships. In the United States, racial and ethnic groups tend to live in separate communities (Massey & Denton, 2019). In many parts of the world, men and women are segregated into different occupations and activities (Massey & Denton, 2019). On a small scale, such as marriages and families, mating processes tend to be assortative, bringing together individuals with differences in religion, education, age, social class background and other traits (Kalmijn, 1998).

Racial segregation is commonly caused by factors such as: income inequality, discrimination in the housing market, racial composition of neighborhoods. Furthermore, segregation refers to limiting opportunities for various forms of association between members of one racial, religious, national or geographic origin, or language group and another, driven by the actions of agencies that represent multiple branches of government (Clark et al., 2004). Segregation, on the other hand, refers to the non-random assignment of people into different groups, social status, and social and physical distances between groups (Bruch & Mare, 2008). It is most evident in the division of racial and ethnic groups in space, separate levels of economic, social, and political resources, and the close relationship between spatial and social inequality (Massey & Denton, 2019). In the meantime, segregation is an effort to build and maintain it. In the 1960s, according to (Brown & Stentiford, 2008), Jim Crow managed to dominate almost all aspects of black life in the United States, including making black people receive substandard health and education services, to the daily humiliation of always being served last in stores and having to give way to whites on public sidewalks.

Then, restriction is a limitation or rule that is applied to regulate the course of bureaucracy. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, restriction is defined as the state in which something is restricted. In the context of white supremacy, restriction refers to laws or policies that limit or control individuals based on their race.

Moreover, the white supremacy that occurs in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead is a representation of America in the 1960s. Representation is the process by which meaning is created and exchanged in culture through language, symbols and signs. Representation refers to the use of language to convey relevant meanings about the world to others. This is a core element in the process by which meaning is generated and exchanged among members of a culture. In representation, people use language, symbols and images to represent things (Hall et al., 2024). Representations not only reflect reality, but also shape and influence the way we understand the world. In Hall's view, representation works through two main systems: mental representation systems and language. The mental representation system is how individuals map and understand the world in their minds, while language is the means to express that understanding through symbols, words, or images that can be

socially communicated. Hall emphasizes that representation is never completely neutral, as it always involves power, ideology, and interpretation. Representations can reinforce stereotypes or create new meanings depending on the context, especially in the media, where symbols are used to construct a particular discourse. This perspective is known as the “constructionist approach” which highlights that meaning is not inherent in objects, but rather generated through complex social and cultural relations.

According to Stuart Hall, (Wykes, 1998) *to put it briefly, representation is the production of meaning through language. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary suggests two relevant meanings for the word. First, “to represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses; as, for example, in the sentence, “This picture represents the murder of Abel by Cain.” Second, to represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for; as in the sentence, “In Christianity, the cross represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ.”*

The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead is a novel that represents the 1960s in the United States. During the Jim Crow era and after World War II, there was racial discrimination against black male students attending Nickel Academy. The novel tells the life of Elwood Curtis, a black teenager who has hopes for a bright future, but is sent to Nickel Academy due to a misunderstanding. There, Elwood must face the harsh reality of racism, abuse and corruption in educational institutions. The backstory is crucial as it highlights the systemic injustice and racial inequality that remained strong during the Civil Rights era. *The Nickel Boys* depicts the real horrors that occurred in reform schools in the United States. Reform schools like Nickel Academy, inspired by the real-life case of Dozier School for Boys, about how white supremacy controls social institutions by limiting the rights and opportunities of black people. Whitehead was inspired by the Dozier School for Boys in Florida, which was known for its violence and abuse of teenage inmates. Nickel Academy in the novel is a small reflection of a society whose young people's lives are permanently affected by discriminatory practices.

As the author of *The Nickel Boys*, Colson Whitehead chronicles the incidents that happened at Nickel Academy by looking for sources from all sides. Whitehead was born in 1969 and began writing this novel in 2014. Whitehead has written nine books of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Underground Railroad*, which was a 1 New York Times bestseller and won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. A recipient of MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships, he lives in New York City. He is one of the novelists who explores social themes, including racism. He gathered information to write *The Nickel Boys* by interviewing people who had experienced the tragedy at Dozier School in Florida who are still alive today. In the novel, besides depicting racial discrimination, Whitehead depicts white supremacy through the character and experiences of Elwood Curtis. Elwood Curtis is an optimistic black teenager who ends up attending Nickel Academy because of a minor incident. There, Elwood and other black children are victims of brutal abuse by the school's white staff. The violence depicted in the novel represents the deep-rooted racism in America and the cruelty of the white supremacist system that justifies violence against black people in order to maintain the racial order that white society considered ideal at the time. The novel reflects the events in 1960s America regarding black oppression. Unfortunately, racial segregation still exists today.

Historically, white people who feel superior to black people have mistreated them (Lake & Reynolds, 2008). White society tends to assume that membership of civil society is determined by color as a qualification (Fredrickson, 1981). The depiction of the reality of discrimination and slavery that occurred in the white community against the black community has become a historical record recorded in the form of books, novels, films and other literary works. American history records that the riots that occurred in the 1960s in the United States were like social riots, including the civil rights movement that fought against racial segregation and oppression of the black community. Many middle-class students in the 1960s felt oppressed in America (Fischer, 2006). Between 1877 and the middle-1960s there was

a legitimization of anti-black racism represented in the Jim Crow period. One of the most common Jim Crow laws written by Martin Luther King stated that white children and black children attending reform schools should be separated from each other (Fischer, 2006). It is unfortunate that a school that is supposed to be a place to seek knowledge, but instead is used as a place of exploitation of its students for the benefit of a certain group, namely the staff at Dozier school.

In Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* discusses in depth how white supremacy is represented in the relationship between white and black characters in 1960s Mississippi. It highlights aspects of systemic discrimination embedded in everyday life, both through personal interactions and social norms that sustain racial injustice. As a comparison in this research, with a similar theme raised but with a different setting, namely the education system in Florida's remedial institutions in the Jim Crow era. These two works both show the profound impact of white supremacy on the black community, *The Help* emphasizes interpersonal relationships and domestic structures, while *The Nickel Boys* explores systemically organized forms of oppression in state institutions.

The issue raised in this study is the use of the term white supremacy to describe how white people control black people in the novel. According to Fredrickson, the term "racism" is ambiguous to indicate the privilege of white people over black people in a racially different society (Fredrickson, 1981). Therefore, the term white supremacy is considered very appropriate to describe the situation that occurs in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead.

Based on the explanation above, the use of Fredrickson's white supremacy analysis provides a strong foundation for understanding the highest level of power exercised by whites. As stated by Fredrickson, white supremacy pervades many aspects of life, especially towards the black community. Through a literary sociology approach in Alan Swingewood's perspective on social reflection that places literary works as a reflection or reflection of the times and Stuart Hall theory about representation, works such as Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* illustrate how white supremacy can reflect the lives of people in the United States. Thus, this research is expected to be able to bridge previous studies by conducting more in-depth research on the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead with the title "The Representation of White Supremacy in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*".

METHOD

The analysis technique in this research is that the data collected is then analyzed and interpreted appropriately so that it can be concluded objectively. Qualitative descriptive method is used to describe social facts in the novel "The Nickel Boys" by reviewing several previous studies. The researcher analyzes the data that has been found completely based on the formulation of the problem by using several stages, namely describing the data, analyzing the data, and concluding the data. This research uses a critical paradigm, which focuses on social phenomena that occur in society. This critical paradigm criticizes the existing social structure with the aim of seeking justice and liberation. In line with the novel *The Nickel Boys*, the main character in this novel tries to fight for justice and freedom for the black community and white supremacy. This research uses several theoretical frameworks to analyze the representation of white supremacy through Fredrickson's theory in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*. By analyzing based on Fredrickson's theory of white supremacy based on a historical structural approach that places the novel in a historical context in America. This research seeks to reveal how white supremacy is depicted in the novel so that this research provides a more comprehensive understanding that this novel is not just a fictional story but represents America in the 1960s in several aspects.

The type of research used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono, states that qualitative methods are actual data obtained in depth so that data sources can provide deep meaning (Sugiyono, 2013). Then, researchers use a descriptive approach

because the data obtained cannot be expressed in numerical form. In this study, the data will be described in the form of an explanation of the data that has been obtained after using various data collection techniques. The source of this research is primary data. Primary data sources as described in the book *Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods* (Ardyan et al., 2023) are data obtained directly from respondents to a case or questionnaire through interviews. Primary data is original data collected by someone who researches to answer something in particular. Primary data used in this study is a novel by Colson Whitehead entitled *The Nickel Boys*. A book published in 2019 that has won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. According to Book Marks, the novel received a cumulative “rave” rating based on fifty-three reviews: forty-one “rave” reviews, ten “positive” reviews, one “mixed” review, and one “pan” review. In the September/October 2019 issue of Bookmarks, a magazine that aggregates book critic reviews, the book received (4.0 out of 5) based on critic reviews. Secondary data used is by literature study through books, journals and previous research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

White supremacy is a doctrine that believes that individuals with light skin of the white race are naturally superior to other races of color. According to Fredrickson, white supremacy has been going on for a long time since the era of colonialism carried out by European countries in various parts of the world which reflects superiority tendencies which then shape and influence the discriminatory attitudes of light-skinned people towards those with darker skin. Fredrickson also defines white supremacy into three forms, namely color bar, racial segregation and restriction.

First, the color bar shows the social restrictions that occur in society that prevent other skin races, especially black people, from accessing the same things as white people. White supremacy believes that light-colored skin has the right to be superior and gain all power, it believes that we are not equal based on skin color. According to Fredrickson, one form of white supremacy is color bars. These color bars serve to separate different colors in power over others. The separation is created by colorism, a form of racism within one race, when individuals who have darker skin color are discriminated against by others even group members of the same race (Fredrickson, 1981). An example of the color bar is that in the early 20th century in the United States and South Africa, many companies only hired white people for prestigious positions, while black people were given menial jobs with lower wages.

Second, racial segregation indicates the separation of different races and skin colors. Racial segregation is a more extreme form of discrimination, where the law officially sets rules to separate certain ethnic or racial groups (Fredrickson, 1981). This segregation limits individuals' access to various forms of social interaction based on race, religion, nationality, or geographic region, often reinforced by government policies (Clark et al., 2004). Thus, racial segregation refers to the separation of facilities based on racial differences. An example of racial segregation is when white people tend to live with people or communities of the same race and vice versa for black families.

Third, restriction is defined as a limitation or condition in which a person is restricted in acting. In the context of white supremacy, restriction refers to laws or regulations that limit and control individuals based on race. For example, in the case of the African-American community, white people often limit black people's opportunities to develop their potential (Fredrickson, 1981). This study uses dialog and narratives contained in the novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. Here are some of the narratives used as sample data:

The Forms of White Supremacy

Color Bar

The first form of white supremacy presented in this novel is the color bar. As explained above in the literature review, the color bar is a social system that makes a separation depending on the color of people even though they share the same race or ethnicity. Thus, this

separation focuses only on skin color. Then, the novel *The Nickel Boys* is set in Florida, where there are borders and boundaries between blacks and whites. There are color bars that appear in the story.

They were in the country and there were no other cars. Rodney muttered and pulled over. Elwood put his satchel in his lap and Rodney told him to keep cool. The white deputy parked a few yards behind them. He put his left hand on his holster and walked up. He took off his sunglasses and put them in his chest pocket.

Rodney said, "You don't know me, do you?"

"No," Elwood said.

"I'll tell him that."

The deputy had his gun out now. "First thing I thought when they said to keep an eye out for a Plymouth," he said. "Only a nigger'd steal that." (Colson Whitehead, 2019) Page. 39

In Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*, a scene depicting the interaction between Elwood, Rodney, and a white deputy on a remote road illustrates how white supremacy works through demeaning racial prejudice. As Rodney and Elwood pull up to the side of the road, the presence of a white deputy who immediately suspects them based solely on skin color exposes the systemic injustice that has been embedded in the institution of law enforcement. The deputy carries a gun that shows intimidating intentions and emphasizes unequal power dynamics.

The deputy's words not only contain racial slurs but also reflect the stereotype that black people are naturally associated with criminality. This situation also reflects how the law and its enforcement are often used as tools to reinforce racial hierarchies, where black people are treated with suspicion and threats, even when there are no legitimate grounds. Moreover, the interaction shows how state institutions, such as the police, play a role in reproducing racial injustice, both directly and indirectly. The scene illustrates the psychological distress and physical threats faced by the black community in the era of racial segregation, while exposing the far-reaching impact of white supremacy in everyday life.

"He barely got out-everybody knew white boys were lynching black men in uniform, but he never believed he'd be a target. Not him. Bunch of white boys jealous that they didn't have a uniform and afraid of a world that let a nigger wear one in the first place." (Colson Whitehead, 2019) Pages. 62

The quoted dialogue from Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* vividly illustrates the systemic racial hierarchies and exclusionary practices rooted in white supremacy, as conceptualized by Fredrickson's theory of the "color bar." Fredrickson identifies the "color bar" as a social and ideological construct that enforces racial segregation and exclusion, ensuring that people of color are systematically denied equality and inclusion in spheres of power, privilege, and societal recognition. The lynching threat faced by the Black soldier in the narrative underscores the deeply entrenched racial prejudice and hostility towards Black individuals who disrupt these norms by attaining symbolic markers of authority, such as a military uniform. This uniform, a sign of honor and equality, directly challenges the white supremacist narrative that prescribes subservience for Black individuals, thus provoking violence as a means of reasserting racial dominance.

The dialogue highlights the fear among white men who perceived the Black soldier's uniform as an existential threat to the racial status quo. This dynamic reflects the fragility of white supremacy when confronted with Black advancement, echoing Fredrickson's assertion that such ideologies thrive on maintaining rigid racial hierarchies. The phrase "afraid of a world that let a nigger wear one" epitomizes the perceived inversion of the racial order, fueling the collective violence of white lynch mobs to reestablish racial boundaries.

"According to Brown v. board of education, school had to desegregate it was only a matter of time before all the invisible walls came down. The night the radio announced the supreme court's ruling, his grandmother shrieked as if someone had tossed hot soup in her lap"

The dialog above shows the existence of white power over blacks that appears in the Nickel Academy environment. This is evidenced when Brown V as the Board of Education as

a white person discriminates against blacks, namely Elwood. He decided to separate white children and black children in different places and was considered the dominant race. So that this can have an impact on the black race itself which causes people to see blacks as people who are low-ranking in society. This segregation also reinforced a sense of superiority among whites, who increasingly felt entitled to oppress the rest of the population.

Racial Segregation

A common feature of the segregation process is that it is self reinforcing. In other words, the characteristics of the setting in which groups are segregated are interdependent with the actions of individuals within the group. If low rents attract poor people to less desirable neighborhoods, the government can simply dump garbage in areas that are already disadvantaged areas. This discourages immigration from wealthier individuals and reinforces the economic segregation of neighborhoods. Segregation also leads to limited choices that are generally available to individuals. As an example, a white family who would rather choose to live in an unified society may be constrained to an entirely white or almost entirely black neighborhood. With limited options, they choose to stay with their own group, further maintaining segregation.

In the novel *The Nickel Boys* everything is separated. Different looks, races, ethnicities make them separate in some cases. Racial segregation is one of the main features in America.

On the first day of the school year, the student students of Lincoln High School received their new secondhand textbooks from the white high school across the way. Knowing where the textbooks were headed, the white students left inscriptions for the next owners: Choke Nigger! You Smell. Eat Shit. (Colson Whitehead, 2019) Page.29

The above narrative clearly depicts the separation between reform schools for white and black students, representing the widespread practice of racial segregation in that era. This separation was based on the Jim Crow laws that prevailed in the United States in the 1960s, where white and black communities were required to live separate lives in various aspects, including education. Schools for black children often received far worse facilities, resources and treatment compared to schools for white children. In this context, students at Lincoln High School receive used textbooks from white schools, a practice that exposes fundamental inequalities in the education system. According to (Brown & Stentiford, 2008). The books not only show a decline in the quality of learning materials, but also contain hateful messages written by white students.

This incident represents how racial segregation does not only take the form of physical separation, but also contains a deep psychological dimension, where racial slurs and harassment are part of the daily experience of black children. The hateful writings not only reinforced the sense of superiority believed by white students, but were also designed to humiliate, degrade and intimidate black students who had to use the books to study. This phenomenon demonstrates the devastating impact of institutional discrimination that is deeply rooted and pervasive in the education system, limiting black children's opportunities for an equal and dignified education. Ultimately, this experience serves as a vivid portrait of the systemic injustices inherited by racial segregation in the United States.

"The younger boy being bullied, Corey, was not someone he'd met before. The bullies he'd encountered at his breakfast table: Lonnie with his bulldog face, and his manic partner Black Mike. Elwood went into the first-floor bathroom to urinate, and the taller boys had Corey up against the cracked tile wall. Maybe it was because Elwood didn't have any goddamned sense, as the Frenchtown boys said. Maybe it was because they were bigger and the other guy was smaller. His lawyer had persuaded the judge to let Elwood spend his last free days at home; there was no one to take him to Nickel that day, and the Tallahassee jail was overcrowded. Perhaps if he'd spent more time in the crucible of the county jail, Elwood would have known that it is best not to interfere in other people's violence, no matter the underlying facts of the incident.

Elwood said, "Hey," and took a step forward. Black Mike spun around, slugged him in the jaw and knocked him back against the sink."

The quote above represents racial segregation that places the white group as the dominant party (superordinate) and the black group as the subordinate party who are often victims of discrimination and violence. Corey and Elwood, as a representation of the subordinate group who are black, become targets of intimidation by Lonnie and Black Mike, two individuals from the white group who utilize their position to maintain power and status. Lonnie and Black Mike see themselves as part of the dominant group who inherently feel superior, so they treat Corey and Elwood with humiliation and physical violence. Lonnie and Black Mike's actions also reflect how racial segregation creates social hierarchies that are enforced through violence and injustice. When Elwood tries to help Corey, his good intentions are perceived as a form of defiance against the hierarchy, so he becomes the next target of violence. This shows how racial segregation not only limits the movement of subordinate groups, but also punishes them.

Moreover, the indifference of the community at the Nickel Reform School demonstrates the systemic effects of racial segregation. The community, although aware of the violence, chose not to intervene for fear of the consequences of confronting the dominant group. The deep-rooted principle of racial segregation in the community makes them inclined to accept the dominant group's power as normal, so they prefer to feign ignorance rather than engage in conflict. This inequality is further reinforced by the actions of Spencer, the school superintendent, who should be in charge of maintaining justice, but instead perpetuates violence. The excessive corporal punishment of the students shows how racial segregation gives legitimacy to the authorities to act arbitrarily against subordinate groups. Spencer not only represents an individual with power, but also a symbol of the system that structurally reinforces racial segregation and discrimination.

"Elwood's second White House beating was not as severe as the first. Spencer didn't know what damage the boy's letter had caused-who else had read it. who cared, what sort of repercussions roiled down in the capitol.... He gave the boy twenty licks then, distracted, handed Black Beauty to Hennepin for the first time.... Hennepin beat the boy briefly before Spencer stayed his hand. There was no telling what was happening in Tallahassee. They took the boy to the dark cell." (Whitehead, 2019) Pages. 121-122

This quote shows that physical punishment has become a culture there. As one of Nickel Academy's staff, Spencer has the authority to administer punishment to students. Unfortunately, Spencer always gave physical punishment to the students. Like the action above, he ordered one of his men, Hennepin, to beat Elwood with a whip called Black Beauty. He did this because Elwood's actions were considered to threaten Nickel Academy's well-established reputation. In fact, the various abuses of authority and acts of violence as white people in Nickel Academy are true. In addition, it is also not in accordance with applicable law.

Based on this, it can be seen that the quote represents the racial segregation that occurs in the novel. It is caused by acts of violence committed by superordinate groups (Nickel staff) against subordinate groups (students). This happens because of the use of power by the superordinate group to achieve their interests. In the end, it can be said that the subordinate group uses its power by committing acts of violence so that the superordinate group can obey its orders.

Restrictions

There are various definitions of "restriction". According to the Oxford dictionary, "restriction" is defined as something that is controlled by someone or something. Meanwhile, Merriam-Webster defines "restriction" as a condition in which a person is restricted. In the context of white supremacy, restrictions refer to laws or rules that limit or control a person based on race (Taufik & Hasniar, 2016). For example, in the case of African Americans, white people set limits or restrictions to explore the abilities of black people. This is very unfair because the rights of black people are not given. The issue of equal rights and equal opportunities for all people has been one of the major issues in American history. In society,

this myth of superiority is closely linked to the meaning of citizenship rights (Syafrony, 2012). As Fredrickson explains, white supremacy is more than just prejudice. He states that white supremacy involves a systematic and conscious effort to make skin color or race a qualification for membership of the civic community. As such, black people are denied equal citizenship rights with white people.

The beginning of these restrictions occurred in the United States after the disputed election of 1876, which marked the end of the Reconstruction era. During this time, whites in the South regained political control of the region (Rasyid, 2021). They committed numerous human rights violations, including violent intimidation during elections and the structured and systematic disenfranchisement of black voters, which took place in Southern states from 1890 to 1908 (Rasyid, 2021). As white voter turnout increased in the twentieth century, traditional qualifications or restrictions remained imposed only on people of color, reducing their ability to influence electoral outcomes (Frederickson, 1981). These cases show how black people lost their citizenship rights due to white supremacy.

Representation of White Supremacy in Amerika 1960s

The representation embodied in *The Nickel Boys* of what happened in America in the 1960s is a reflection of the racial injustice, segregation, and systemic violence that became an integral part of the lives of black people in America during that era. The novel is based in the 1960s that opens with the main character, Elwood, receiving a Christmas Day gift in 1962. *"Elwood received the best gift of his life on Christmas Day 1962, even if the ideas it put in his head were his undoing"*. Representation, in this context refers to the way novels represent social reality through characters, events, and narratives that reconstruct the experiences of marginalized groups. In *The Nickel Boys*, Colson Whitehead presents a story based on the real history of the Dozier reform school in Florida, which became a symbol of cruelty towards black children who faced inhumane treatment in the name of education and rehabilitation. Racial stereotypes are a common part of popular imagery in American media. American television and film became important instruments in the widespread acceptance of racial segregation (Brown & Stentiford, 2008). Traveling minstrel shows, comics, cartoons, newspaper stories and movies reinforced two different images of black people, both of which underscored the need for white supremacy and the need for Jim Crow laws to control black people.

Jim Crow laws governed the lives of most African Americans with various customs, rules, and unwritten laws that reinforced white supremacy. (Brown & Stentiford, 2008) Brown argues that white men would be addressed as "Mister," while black men would be addressed as "boy," "Uncle," or, if in a newspaper or magazine, as "Negro," but never as "Mister." Black people would be served last, paid less, required to give way in public places, enter white people's homes through the back door, and most importantly, black men would interact socially with white women at the risk of their lives. *"Elwood saw it all: Africans persecuted by the white sin of slavery, Negroes humiliated and kept low by segregation, and that luminous image to come, when all those places closed to his race were opened. (hlm.15)"*

This is in accordance with the journal A comparative of American and South African History according to Fredrickson who said that, (Fredrickson, 1981) Fredrickson calls America and South Africa *Herrenvolk* societies. He defines this as a social system where non-Whites regardless of their numbers or levels of acculturation are treated as permanent aliens or outsiders. In delineating the process of White supremacy in America and South Africa, Fredrickson shows how the two countries were at once similar and different in their treatment of people of color. Supporting quotes by (Folmsbee, 1949), The practice of requiring by legislative enactment that Negroes use railroad coaches or compartments separate from those for whites, commonly referred to as "Jim Crow" legislation, did not become general in the South until the closing decade of the nineteenth century. Segregation that also occurred in the school environment that in the 1960s, middle class college students were under pressure and claimed that they were oppressed in America (Fischer, 2006). Earlier, however, in 1881, the legislature of Tennessee enacted a law requiring railroads to provide separate cars or compartments for

the use of Negroes. By this abortive statute for so it proved to be Tennessee acquired a somewhat undeserved notoriety, in at least one college textbook, as the originator of "Jim Crow" legislation. Moreover, the purpose of this law and the circumstances surrounding its enactment were strikingly different from what is generally believed to be the origin of this type of discriminatory legislation. It is often assumed that prior to the passage of the "Jim Crow" laws no effective racial discrimination existed on railroad trains. A review of the facts will serve to correct this misconception and also provide bases for a comparison of the situation and attitudes as they were then with what they are today.

This system of white supremacy creates unjust social hierarchies and reinforces inequality through legal and cultural mechanisms. In the context of *The Nickel Boys*, Colson Whitehead represents this experience of segregation through the character of Elwood, who aspires to see a more just and inclusive world, but still faces the harsh realities of an oppressive system. The narrative highlights the far-reaching impact of segregation policies on individual lives while reflecting the long struggle towards racial equality. Awareness of this history is important for understanding how the legacy of white supremacy continues to shape social structures in the past and present. In these societies, such as in America and South Africa, people of color are considered permanent aliens regardless of their numbers or level of acculturation. This is seen in the history of institutionalized discrimination, such as through Jim Crow laws that segregated public facilities by race, including railways. The example of Tennessee in 1881 shows how segregation policies began to be formally implemented despite pre-existing de facto discrimination. Fredrickson underlines that while there are similarities in the application of white supremacy in America and South Africa, there are also contextual differences in the way communities of color are treated in both countries.

CONCLUSIONS

George M. Fredrickson's white supremacy theory serves as the foundation of this study, which identifies three forms of white supremacy in *The Nickel Boys*: color bar, racial segregation, and systemic restrictions. The color bar manifests as visual segregation that reinforces social hierarchy based on skin color, exemplified by Elwood's interactions with a white deputy, reflecting institutional bias. Racial segregation is evident through policies like Jim Crow laws, which create structural injustices in education, subjecting Black students to limited resources and psychological abuse. Meanwhile, systemic restrictions imposed on the Black community, both legally and culturally, highlight efforts to sustain white supremacy by denying opportunities and citizenship rights. These themes reflect the historical realities of the 1960s United States, aligning with Fredrickson's concept of *Herrenvolk* societies, where non-white groups were denied equal rights despite cultural acculturation. Through the characters' experiences, the novel illustrates both the hope for justice and the harsh reality of systemic discrimination. Future research could explore a comparative literary analysis by examining *The Nickel Boys* alongside works like *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee or *Beloved* by Toni Morrison to deepen the discourse on white supremacy in literature.

REFERENCES

- Ardyan, E., Boari, Y., Akhmad, A., Yuliyani, L., Hildawati, H., Suarni, A., Anurogo, D., Ifadah, E., & Judijanto, L. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif: Pendekatan Metode Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif di Berbagai Bidang*. PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.
- Brown, N., & Stentiford, B. M. (2008). *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American History [2 Volumes]*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Bruch, E. E., & Mare, R. D. (2008). *Segregation processes*.
- Clark, K. B., Chein, I., & Cook, S. W. (2004). The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation A (September 1952) Social Science Statement in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court Case. *American Psychologist*, 59(6), 495.
- Colson Whitehead. (2019). *The Nickel Boys*.

Fischer, K. P. (2006). *America in White, Black, and Gray: The Stormy 1960s*. A&C Black.

Folmsbee, S. J. (1949). The origin of the first "Jim Crow" law. *The Journal of Southern History*, 15(2), 235–247.

Fredrickson. (1981). *White supremacy: a comparative study in American and South African history*. Oxford University Press.

Fredrickson. (1981). *White supremacy: a comparative study in American and South African history*.

Gibbons, A. (2018). The five refusals of white supremacy. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 77(3–4), 729–755.

Hall, S., Nixon, S., & Evans, J. (2024). *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Kalmijn, M. (1998). Intermarriage and homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 395–421.

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (2019). American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass. In *Social Stratification, Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective, Second Edition* (pp. 660–670). Routledge.

Sugiyono. (2013). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Pendekatan Kuantitatif Kualitatif dan R&D*. Alfabeta.

Swingewood, A. (1991). *A Short History of Sociological Thought*. Macmillan.

Wykes, M. (1998). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Jstor.