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BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
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**REFLECTIONS OF RACIAL SEGREGATION AND
SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN THE MOVIES: *MUDBOUND* AND
*THE HELP***

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tezi Hazırlayan:

AYLİN YARKA

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Aylin YARKA

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ÖZ

IRK AYIRIMI VE SOSYAL ADALETSİZLİĞİN YANSIMALARI: *MUDBOUND VE THE HELP*

Günümüzde ten rengi ile zekâ arasında herhangi bir ilişkinin olmadığı, dolayısıyla aşağılık göstergesi olmadığı, bilinen bir gerçektir. Kültürel ve fiziksel farklılıklar sadece ırklar arasındaki çeşitliliği oluşturur. Dolayısıyla bugün ırkçılık olarak bilinen yanılmanın, beyazların Afrika’dan köle olarak getirilen siyalara hükmetmek için kullandıkları sosyal bir kurgu olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Eleştirel Irk Teorisyenlerine göre, yaklaşık 250 yıl boyunca yasal ve toplumsal olarak kasıtlı olarak uygulandığı için, ırkçılık sadece bilimsel bir hata da değildir. Afrika kökenli Amerikalı yönetmen Diandrea Rees, Hillary Jordan’ın aynı adlı romanından uyarlanan önemli filmi *Mudbound*’da (2017), 1940’lı yılların savaş sonrası döneminde, Amerika’nın güneyinde uygulanan ayırmıcılık ve Jim Crow yasaları ile Siyahi Amerikalıların maruz kaldığı sosyal ve yasal eşitsizlik ve adaletsizlikleri, ustaca tasvir ederek eleştirir. Beyaz Amerikalı yönetmen Tate Taylor, Kathryn Stockett’in aynı adlı romanından uyarlanan *The Help* (2011) adlı filminde, 1960’lı yıllarda Amerika’nın güneyindeki ayırmıcı ve önyargılı toplumun, özellikle hizmetçi olarak çalışan Siyahi Amerikalı kadınların sömürülmesindeki adaletsizlik ve eşitsizlikleri yansıtır. Her iki film de karakterlerin yaşamlarına ışık tutarak, Siyahi Amerikalılar için ayırmıcılığın zorluklarını ve sonuçlarını yansıtsa da yönetmenlerin konuya yaklaşımları önemli ölçüde farklılık göstermektedir. Bu tez, Diandrea Rees’in *Mudbound* ve Tate Taylor’ın *The Help* filmlerini analiz ederek, iki yönetmenin Amerika’nın güneyindeki ırk ayırmıcılığına yaklaşımları ve tasvirleri arasındaki farkları Kritik Irk Teorisi perspektifinden aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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ABSTRACT

REFLECTIONS OF RACIAL SEGREGATION AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN THE MOVIES: *MUDBOUND* AND *THE HELP*

Today it is a well-known fact that there is no relation between skin colour and intelligence; hence no sign of inferiority. Cultural and physical differences constitute only the variety among the races. Thus, today it is claimed that the delusion known as racism is just a social construct used by whites to dominate blacks brought from Africa as enslaved people. According to Critical Race Theorists, racism is not merely a scientific error either since, for about 250 years, it was legally and socially practised deliberately. In her great movie, *Mudbound* (2017), based on the novel by Hillary Jordan, Diandrea Rees, an African American director, skilfully portrays and criticises the social and legal inequalities and injustices endured by Blacks during the post-war era in the 1940s in segregated Southern America. Tate Taylor, a white American director, also reflects on the injustice and inequalities of a segregated and prejudiced society in 1960s Southern America, particularly the exploitation of Black American women working as maids, in his movie *The Help* (2011), based on the novel by Kathryn Stockett. Although both films reflect the difficulties and consequences of discrimination against Blacks by shedding light on the lives of the characters, the directors' approaches to the subject differ significantly. By analysing Diandrea Rees's *Mudbound* and Tate Taylor's *The Help*, this thesis aims to illuminate the differences between the two directors' approaches and portrayals of racial segregation in the American South through the perspective of Critical Race Theory.

CONTENTS

Page No.

ÖZ

ABSTRACT

GLOSSARYii

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE

SLAVERY, SEGREGATION AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

1.1. The Origin Of American Slavery..... 4

1.2. Racial Segregation In The United States 6

1.3. Critical Race Theory 7

CHAPTER TWO

DIRECTORS MATTER

2.1. Diandra Rees 13

2.2. Tate Taylor..... 19

CHAPTER THREE

SEGREGATED SOUTH IN *THE HELP* AND *MUDBOUND*

3.1. Analysis Of *The Help* 24

3.2. Analysis Of *Mudbound*..... 30

3.3 Segregation And The “Back Door” 39

3.4. Ku Klux Klan Organization..... 41

CONCLUSION 45

BIBLIOGRAPHY 48

GLOSSARY

Black Codes: laws intended to prevent black people who had been slaves from using their rights after the American Civil War.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): is a cross-disciplinary intellectual and social movement of civil-rights scholars and activists who seek to examine the intersection of race, society, and law in the United States and to challenge mainstream American liberal approaches to racial justice.

Critical Race Theorists (CRTs): Legal scholars, lawyers, and activists who develops and supports alternative legal theories and frameworks for combating racial inequality through the light of Critical Race Theory.

Jim Crow Laws: US laws and customs that kept black people apart from white people and prevented them from having the opportunities available to white people from the 1800s to the 1960s.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence or serious injury.

Segregation: the policy of keeping one group of people apart from another and treating them differently, especially because of race, sex, or religion.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK): A secret US organization of white Protestant Americans, especially in the south of the country, who oppose people of other races or religions.

INTRODUCTION

Racism was and, to some extent, is still a significant problem concerning Blacks in the U.S.A. Some Hollywood films and platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO etc., provide an opportunity for producers and scriptwriters to bring to light the problem of racism in America, both in the past and the present; thus, some movies can be considered great instruments to raise awareness or even furthermore to change the mindset of the people about racial issues today. It is a well-known fact that dramatic and impressive images and narratives depicted in the films leave a profound effect on the viewer; therefore, watching some great films reflecting the sufferings of Blacks, social injustice, prejudiced attitudes of whites and their lives under racist conditions can help us understand the issue of racism better.

As mentioned above, many movies on racism, slavery, segregation and Black American life are available on different movie platforms today. Several movies and TV shows making racial problems a current issue are available on such platforms. Netflix is a very significant one, on which racism and racial issues are raised candidly today. It could be claimed that the increase in the number of films dealing with racial discrimination raises awareness of society about the inequality existing subtly today. Critical Race Theorists (CRTs) claim racism still exists and stands as a barrier to the advancement of blacks in America: Still, by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of colour, including holders of high-echelon jobs, and even judges. Studies show that blacks and Latinos who seek loans, apartments, or jobs are much more apt than similarly qualified whites to be rejected, often for vague or spurious reasons. Thus, these cases are critical and crucial issues that should not be overlooked.

Both movies studied in this thesis, Diandrea Rees's film *Mudbound* (2017) and Tate Taylor's film *The Help* (2011), are made to reflect segregation and social injustice in the American South. They are based on two different white writers' novels of the same titles; *Mudbound* is based on Hillary Jordan's novel, and *The Help* is based on Kathryn Stockett's novel, but what makes one movie different from the other is how two directors of different race and gender handle the same segregation matter. Dee Rees, a Black

American director, directs *Mudbound*, and *The Help* is directed by Tate Taylor, a White American actor and filmmaker. The way they address segregation in the South and its effects on the lives of both white and black people differs from one director to the other. While the plot of *The Help* is centred on a white American girl telling the stories and the challenging conditions of black maids, Rees, in *Mudbound*, chooses to pursue a more realistic and artistic approach to the lives and problems of Blacks.

Moreover, Rees presents not only the black female characters but also white women, one of whom is a cultured wife struggling in the harsh living conditions of the South, so she reflects the influence of social injustice in a segregated society involving both genders and races. On the other hand, the core of Taylor's movie is mainly set in the world of Southern white females. The white ladies take their fears and inadequacies out on the black help due to the chauvinism caused by their husbands or boyfriends; thus, the lives of white females come to the forefront rather than the injustice blacks are exposed to in the segregated South.

Briefly, both directors deal with the long-term and generational effects of bias in the daily life of the Mississippi Delta during the segregation period. Although Taylor does an excellent job of capturing the tensions of the period, he could be considered more populist by arousing pity for blacks and using exaggerated colourful clothes, club chatting, gossip, and over-mannered white ladies. Consequently, his characters are regarded as more simplistic than the ones in *Mudbound*. Furthermore, his white protagonist, Skeeter, is overly romanticised, and nothing new is added in *The Help* to what historians, authors, and filmmakers have already covered in previous works. Rees, on the other hand, presents characters of both races suffering from the challenges of the segregated life in the South much more poetically while the characters are not exaggerated and feel much true to life.

In this thesis, I aim to compare how the two directors differently portray the racial issues and challenges in a segregated society in their movies within three chapters. In the first chapter of the thesis, besides Critical Race Theory and principles supported in the movies, the origin of American Slavery and racial segregation in the U.S.A are presented.

In the second chapter, different depictions of the segregated South are analysed thoroughly by different approaches of the directors to the theme in their filmmaking. In the third chapter, two movies *Mudbound* and *The Help*, are analysed to show the effects of segregation and injustice due to racial discrimination. Third and last subheadings of chapter three point to the effectiveness of the “back doors” and organisation of the “Ku Klux Klan.”



CHAPTER ONE

SLAVERY, SEGREGATION AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

1.1. The Origin of American Slavery

Today when the slavery experience back in American history is taken into account, it is acknowledged that race has served as an ideology to justify the exploitation of blacks and the dominance of whites. Before American slavery, there certainly was the practice of the slave system, but back then, the excuse for the captivity of people was religion or class system, as in Asia. In the American slavery experience, however, the reason for blacks' being slaves was based on the difference in skin colour. In the sixteenth century, England drew attention to the differences between the West Africans and the English, and the negative connotations attached to their skin colour were grounded in *The Bible*. If the colour black was the symbol of sin and evil, the same connotation could be attached to the black-skinned person. They must have been the cursed descendants of Ham; hence slavery was the Divine Punishment: "The argument that they were the descendants of Ham (Ham sinned against his father, Noah, and as punishment, Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan, to a life of slavery.) The English could therefore conclude that slavery had originated as a divine punishment for sinful behaviour" (Wood, 1998, p. 24).

The English also admired the hierarchy in their highly organized society and were ready to enslave black people since they believed that black people were created to serve white people. This view, held by Thomas Carlyle and Anthony Trollope, was summed up thus in 1865 in the *Spectator*: "The negroes are made on purpose to serve the whites, just as the black ants are made on purpose to serve the red" (Fryer, 2021, p. 70). The philosopher John Locke used religious differences as a justification for institutionalized slavery: "Locke was instrumental in the formation of the Board of Trade, the architect of the old colonial system, was a vital player in the slavery system's growth" (Ogg, 1958, p. 177). Although religion was used as the justification for slavery first, skin colour was another fundamental factor in this process: "Locke's contribution to emerging racism was his provision of a model which allows skin colour to be counted as an essential property of human beings" (Bracken, 2019, p. 55). The British, who already interiorized slavery as

policy and regarded Africans as their property, thought they already had the right to govern them due to their superiority, which resulted in more than 250 years of enslaved blacks.

Many historians consider the starting time of American slavery in the year 1619. When the first Africans came to the new continent, indentured servitude had been the only kind of labour. It was a widespread practice in England, and this practice was extended to the New World. The problem with the indentured servants was that at the end of their contracts, no servant would be in favour of renewing their contracts, so the colonist needed permanent workers. Moreover, as new people came to the continent and the lands to be cultivated expanded, the need for workers and labour increased. That cost of black slaves would be somewhat lower than those associated with indentured servants, therefore, originated the system of exploitation of blacks in American history.

The legalized enslavement of West Africans began in the Caribbean. By the mid-1630s, the English in Barbados had already defined the status of West Africans as slaves. In the Caribbean, a small group of white people had the majority of the wealth, and they ruthlessly suppressed African slaves' traditional religious beliefs and practices by forcing them to replace their beliefs with Christianity so that Africans could follow the hierarchy better in society and obey the rules. The English were defined in terms of wealth and civilization; thus, there was no chance for West Africans to rise to the level of white masters in Barbados. After Barbados, a large number of Africans were brought to Carolina, and by 1700, there was no longer any dispute about the status of Africans in English America. They all became enslaved people, and racism was deliberately used by white people for their own benefit. Black slaves were despised, feared, battled, and dehumanized so they could be kept under the control and power of white people.

The drive to abolish slavery had started in the North and was stronger there since the North was much more liberal compared to the South, and also, the economy was based on the industry but not on agriculture, depending on slave labour. There was support for the abolition of slavery in the North but a growing concern for continuing slavery in the South to save their economic basis. The maintenance of economic prosperity was the most

significant aspect of preserving the slavery system and then segregation in the South. The words “liberty for all men” were mentioned regularly during the American Revolution, but soon after, it became evident that “liberty, justice, and freedom for all” exclusively applied to white men in Southern America.

1.2. Racial Segregation in The United States

The word segregation, indicating inequality, is used to define the separation of some groups of individuals with different traits. It was the practice of limiting individuals to circumscribed regions of habitation, life conditions, services or institutions based on race in their daily lives. Plessy v. Ferguson is the Supreme Court case in 1896 that paved the way for these racist segregation laws by states and local governments until it was overturned first by Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 (Newton & Frug, 2016). Segregation became an effective strategy for whites to ensure their authority over blacks: “Segregation denotes a complex amalgam of political, ideological and administrative strategies designed to maintain and entrench white supremacy at every level” (Dubow, 1989, p. 1).

The Southern “Black Codes” were the first steps toward formal segregation, and they were practised between 1865 and 1866. They were designed to limit the freedom of Blacks, although slavery was abolished. Nearly 4 million enslaved people were given freedom, but the situation of blacks in the South remained unsolved. The following years were called the Reconstruction period, and then Jim Crow Laws replaced the Black Codes in 1876, which led the institutionalized injustice. For instance, Blacks were required to sign annual labour contracts in many states; if they did not, they risked being jailed, fined, or forced to perform free labour. The institutionalized segregation of Blacks by the legal system in the United States was strongly effective from the late 19th century till the 1950s. Segregation started with the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Under the separate but equal doctrine, the segregated services provided to blacks were meant to be of the same quality as those provided to whites, but in truth and practice, they were not. Shortly, it caused a significant separation between Whites and Blacks almost everywhere in the South, and they were exposed to several prejudiced attitudes. It was almost impossible for Blacks to

win a court case. Using Jim Crow laws, lawmakers divided everything from schools to residential neighbourhoods, public parks to pools to cemeteries, asylums, theatres, train stations, platforms, and jails. They were so strictly enacted that those who sought to disobey them were frequently arrested, fined, imprisoned, and killed. State laws prohibiting interracial marriage were implemented in the South and many Northern states. Through suffrage regulations, such as the imposition of poll fees and literacy tests, blacks' voting rights were progressively curtailed or denied. "They were a set of state and local regulations that made racial segregation lawful, and the term "Jim Crow" is frequently used to refer to the segregation laws, norms, and rituals that emerged after Reconstruction ended in 1877 and lasted until the mid-1960s" (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 38).

Racial tensions became high in the aftermath of World War II. "In 1954, Supreme Court decided that segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause and it declared "Separate is not equal" implying that the only way to fulfil the goal of the equal-protection clause was to end segregation" (Kousser, 1980, p. 41). This judgment took several years to implement in some states. Finally, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and put an end to Jim Crow laws that had long-established segregation: "White supremacy - once writ large in the law via slavery and Jim Crow segregation - was removed from its legalized pedestal with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Voting Rights Act of 1965" (Heitzeg, 2015, p. 54). It enabled people of many races, ethnicities, and genders to recognize the "common humanity that is in us all" (Gaines, 1993, p. 157). As a result, segregation legally existed for almost 100 years, from the post-Civil War era until the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

1.3. Critical Race Theory

Race is the classification of individuals based on common physical characteristics. The American anthropologist Ashley Montagu, who "sees the concept of race as one of the greatest and most tragic errors of our time, has suggested that a word that has exercised such an evil tyranny over human minds should be permanently dethroned from the vocabulary" (Montagu, 1962, p. 927). Defining people with a classification in racial categories is fraught with ambiguity and inconsistency, leading to hazardous

consequences. It is a well-known fact that race played a particular role in the founding and growth of the United States historically. It is regarded as a basic concept and a fundamental principle that has formed and defined the country's societal stratification, history, and culture; however, it is now universally recognised as a consciously structured idea in almost all academic fields. Blood is made up of the same elements in all human beings. The competence or ability of human beings are not, or cannot be, determined by physical differences, and they are never related to skin colour.

In the 1970s, Critical Race Theory emerged when some attorneys, activists, and academics realised that the gains from the civil rights movement in the 1960s had stopped and, in many cases, had been reversed. Today, CRTs analyse the history and legal structures and discuss and challenge racial injustice: "Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement that seeks to understand how white supremacy as a legal, cultural, and political condition is reproduced and maintained, primarily in the U.S. context" (Tomas De La Garza & Ono, 2016, p. 1). It was an academic concept developed by Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Patricia Williams, who were the first advocates of that scholarly movement. It is a multidimensional academic and social process based on not only understanding the dynamic between race, racism, and power but also changing prejudiced views, especially legal practices in the United States. According to CRTs, racism in the United States is more than simply a collection of negative views against other racial groups; it is also a system of laws and legal procedures whose practical result is the oppression of people of colour, primarily Black Americans.

Although CRT researchers believe that extreme racist attitudes and beliefs are less prevalent in white society now than in the mid-twentieth century, they think that the majority of people of colour are still subjected to unfair or discriminatory treatment in both public and private settings. It could be considered that segregation still exists in the twenty-first century. CRTs discuss that the oppression and unfair views of the past should not be forgotten and not to be ignored, and more work must be done since they believe the discrimination and segregation practised in the past may have harmful consequences

in many aspects today: “While we keep pushing segregation into the past, it is too frighteningly recent for us to see it clearly” (Bollinger, 2012, p. 1). Despite all the legal reforms since the 1940s, it might be claimed that the United States remains a partly segregated society to some extent, with considerable discrimination visible in housing patterns, career possibilities, school enrolment, church participation, and even college admissions. All things considered, it could be argued that different forms and impacts of segregation in some respects exist in American society. For instance, it could be seen that Blacks are more likely to be rejected for loans or work compared to white people and are more likely to be unjustly accused of unlawful acts by police or white citizens. “Hyper incarceration is overwhelmingly biased towards people of colour” (DuVernay, 2016, 00:40:30-00:40:33).

In the United States, dominant white groups continued to defend their oppression and exploitation of Blacks by claiming they were inferior, immoral, or incapable of governing themselves. Black people were typically depicted until the middle of the 20th century as immature, simple-minded slaves and labourers. Following civil rights protests in the 1950s that questioned whites’ unequal control of American society, black people were portrayed as either innately prone to violent actions or idle loungers relying on social assistance programs supported by so-called hardworking whites. Ava DuVernay’s thought-provoking documentary *13th* on Netflix brings to light the truths about Black’s unjust imprisonment and the growth of black prisoners in U.S. prisons through documents and interviews of academics, activists, and politicians. The theme of the documentary is the American prison system and how racial inequality has shaped the country’s system of justice by causing the high imprisonment rate in the United States. It argues that:

Slavery has continued in the United States by criminalising certain behaviour, convict-leasing, suppressing Black Americans, the war on drugs, and mass incarceration. And the American people, in many ways, were harmed by these policies due to the mass incarceration of people, particularly people of colour. (DuVernay, 2016, 00:59:56-01:00:03)

Thus, as the documentary stresses, people of colour have been subject to racial inequality and fallen into the trap of a handicapped social system.

Today, many Blacks still live in economically disadvantaged and racially segregated communities. Many predominantly white neighbourhoods have zoning restrictions that keep out lower-income people. Most Black or Hispanic neighbourhoods also receive inferior public services, particularly in public education. Lack of improved education limits job options and forces them to live in impoverished areas leading to a much more challenging life. People of colour, particularly Blacks, are imprisoned at a higher rate and for longer durations than whites who commit the same crimes. They are also more likely exposed to police violence and be victims of lethal force without justification than whites. In the documentary *13th*, author Michelle Alexander states, “Police violence, that is not the problem in and of itself. It is a reflection of a much larger, brutal system of racial and social control known as mass incarceration, which authorises this kind of police violence” (DuVernay, 2016, 01:33:10-01:33:26). As it is pointed out in the documentary, old sins due to the slavery experience cast long shadows in present modern America.

Some academics regard CRT as both an activist movement aimed at resolving the injustices faced by Blacks and a Theory aimed at raising awareness in America and other communities, thus, eliminating this unfair inequality by drawing attention to all the injustices encountered in other social processes. Therefore, CRTs developed frameworks for analysing how and why previous initiatives to abolish racial prejudice had failed. Later, those frameworks evolved into a Theory that had the depth and breadth to analyse race in local and global contexts:

CRT approaches have the potential to contribute to intellectual property scholarship by aiding in resisting the dominant framework of law and economics and supporting the evolving work on the relationship of marginalized persons vis-à-vis intellectual property regimes currently structured primarily by Western understandings of knowledge production. (Vats & Keller, 2021, p. 790)

CRTs contended that despite civil rights laws and court judgements in the 1950s and 1960s, political liberalism was incapable of resolving fundamental issues of unfairness in American society. They argue that “racial groups are more than individuals with similar traits, but rather people that have common goals and mainly work to achieve those together” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8).

One of the most controversial concerns in contemporary American racial thought is whether the framework used by CRTs reflects the right perspective for race discrimination for all ethnic groups. The argument suggests that black people are the prototype minority group. The phrases “Race” and “Blacks” go alongside one another. Insofar as their experiences and treatment are comparable to those of Blacks, other ethnic groups like Indians, Asians, and Latinos are merely minorities. New paradigms in society do not arise without resistance and difficulty. Therefore, CRT, which aims to shift the dominant paradigm of civil rights thinking, has faced some opposition. It has been questioned in various ways by those with opposing viewpoints. Critics felt free and confident in stating their opposite opinions as the movement progressed. The media regarded CRT with caution during the first few years of its existence. Opponents object to CRTs’ explicit pronouncements that reality is socially constructed. However, CRTs continue their studies and efforts to raise societies to a more conscious level about all racial discrimination and to abolish racial prejudices in practice:

In some respects, the movement is thriving. Dynamic sub-disciplines, such as LatCrit and queer-crit studies, challenge civil rights activists to rethink the ways they conceptualize equality and civil rights. Critical race theory is taught at many law schools and spreading to other disciplines and even to other countries, such as the United Kingdom, where British scholars, particularly in the field of education, use Critical Race Theory to understand inequality in schools, high-stakes testing, and many other topics. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012 p. 113)

Many law schools teach CRT, which is quickly extending across fields. Some judges include its trademark concepts and critiques in their decisions, even if they are not

labelled as such. Lawyers employ CRT concepts to advocate for their clients and uncover systemic racism. Some of the group's internal conflicts and the influence CRT seems to be having on current discourse have been reviewed and discussed extensively. "According to some critics, CRT's paradigms are often seen as unscientific and subjective, but CRT never makes claims of objectivity or rationality. Rather, it sees itself as an approach to scholarship that integrates lived experience with racial realism" (Hartlep, 2009, p. 15). In brief, Critical Race Theory is a theory that could be used to explore and determine the operation, research, existence, and effect of racial hierarchy in history today.



CHAPTER TWO

DIRECTORS MATTER

Tate Taylor, the director of *The Help*, is a white American actor and director, while Dee Rees, the director of *Mudbound*, is a black American. Although the two directors discuss similar segregation issues, they take different approaches to depicting the same racial injustice. Both films are based on novels written by white American authors, but only *Mudbound* is directed by a black director who distinctively portrays the challenging and unequal conditions of Southern life in a more realistic way, which constitutes the main difference distinguishing one film from the other. Shortly, it is worthwhile to examine the different approaches of directors of diverse races and gender to the same issue of segregation and racist attitudes.

2.1. Diandrea Rees

Diandrea Rees, often known as Dee Rees, is an American producer, director, and screenwriter. She is a Sundance Screenwriting & Directing Lab Fellow, a graduate of New York University's graduate film program and the director of the film *Mudbound*. Rees was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on February 7, 1977. She has previously worked in the Hollywood entertainment business, appearing in English-language films. *The Last Thing He Wanted*, a 1980 political thriller based on Joan Didion's novel and starring Anne Hathaway as tough journalist Elena McMahon, is one of her early works. *Pariah* (2011), her first feature movie and *Bessie* (2015), her Emmy-winning HBO film starring Queen Latifah as a blues artist Bessie Smith, are Rees's first complex and ambitious films. *Pariah* received an award at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. It is a semi-autobiographical movie about a black lesbian adolescent confronting family norms. In 2013, Rees became one of the directors in the "To Watch List of New York Times" for *Pariah*, and her other film *Bessie* was nominated for twelve Emmy Awards. Briefly, Rees is a successful screenwriter and director who received multiple awards.

Rees's glorious movie, *Mudbound*, depicts the oppressed life of the Black people of the South with brief but ample significant examples. There is no doubt that Rees, as a Black woman, experienced some racist attitudes in her childhood, which has provided her

with a deep understanding and identification of the theme and, eventually, distinctive depictions in her movie.

Moreover, with the aid of her grandmother's diaries, Rees gives *Mudbound* a personal touch. At the Toronto International Film Festival, director Dee Rees visited the L.A. Times studio to talk about her historical drama *Mudbound*. In her interview, "she expresses that it is a strange notion for Black Americans to write down one's family history, but she also claims her grandmother's personal journal had a great contribution to her latest accomplishment" (Bianculli, 2018). Rees explains her aim and inspiration in her own words. She says she has seen her grandmother's story in *Mudbound*, a one-of-a-kind woman from the town of Ferriday. For example, in *Mudbound*, Ronsel's little sister wants to be a stenographer. In the scene when the Jacksons are at the dinner table little girl says, "That's why I'm not gonna be no farmer. I'm gonna be a stenographer" (Rees, 2017, 00:19:49-00:19:52). Her brother cannot understand the word, but his mother explains it. "A Ste... what? - It's kind of like a typist" (Rees, 2017, 00:19:52-00:19:55). Her brother says, "They don't allow no coloured typists. - Your sister will be the first" is Hap's response to his son (Rees, 2017, 00:19:56-00:19:59). In another interview with journalist Sophie M. Kaufman, she explains "Rees's grandmother had made the decision that she would not be a sharecropper, cotton picker, or domestic servant. She made the decision to become a stenographer, and she was the first person in her family to have a dream of being a stenographer" (Kaufman, 2017). That Ronsel's little sister dreams of being a stenographer in *Mudbound*, just like Rees's grandmother, constitutes evidence of how her grandmother inspired Rees.

Another scene showing the effects of Rees's grandmother's story in the movie is about a belief in bad luck during a farewell. As Rees mentions in the interview: "her grandmother believed it was bad luck to witness someone depart" (Kaufman, 2017). Similarly, Ronsel's mother, Florence, turns back and does not look at him when he leaves home to join the army for WW II. Neighbours and relatives rush forward as Hap eases the truck away, waving and whistling on the gravel road, but Florence intentionally does not look at Ronsel. Florence's internal monologue goes: "I can't look back. I didn't look back.

They say it's bad luck to watch somebody leave" (Rees, 2017, 00:16:10-00:16:22). That scene indicates the effects of her grandma's stories in her direction. "Rees also mentions that her maternal grandpa fought in world war and her paternal grandfather fought in Korea, so it was an opportunity for her to convey the narrative of black soldiers like Ronsel who returned" (Kaufman, 2017). Furthermore, the director adds how her grandmother would tell her family stories. Her family owned their land but only farmed and picked cotton like the Jacksons. As Rees mentions, as soon as she read the novel *Mudbound*, all similarities in her grandmother's life led her to take the challenge. Consequently, her grandmother's and her own experiences helped her to see, depict and visually narrate the story in her distinctive style.

Since the adoption of civil rights legislation and during the "post-racial" era, some significant cultural and literary works have emphasized Jim Crow racism and its destructive and dehumanizing effects. The novel *Mudbound* is based on flows with soothing, redemptive storytelling on occasion. Its characters and relations of the members of two families bound by fate, hatred, and economy reflect the complexity of the living conditions in segregation; however, the script of the film, written by Dee Rees and Virgil Williams, makes the film much more artistic and Faulknerian as Chang states: "The script for *Mudbound*, which the director co-wrote with Virgil Williams, is adapted from the novel of Hillary Jordan, who cites Faulkner and Toni Morrison as influences" (Chang, 2017). Thus, their contribution as screenwriters and Rees's directing forms a production not only gives aesthetic delight but also draws attention to severe racial matters of the time: "Rees has mostly kept the symphonic, almost Faulknerian structure of numerous narrators that dominated Jordan's novel to a degree that is both formally astonishing and politically engaged" (Chang, 2017). In an interview, Rees explained how she embraced the book's multiple narrators, and she said: "These shifting points of view are Faulknerian, like *As I Lay Dying*. It's interesting cinematically. So, when we're in Hap's shoes, we see the land as he sees it, with this unattainable beauty. In Henry's eyes, he sees it as future prosperity, a thing to be conquered and tamed. Through Laura's eyes, it's mud and muck and irredeemable" (Thompson, 2017). In *Mudbound*, therefore, the inner monologues of characters of different races and gender constitute the Faulknerian structure of chapters

and a colourfully woven cinematic plot, which also saves the film from being narrated from one limited perspective like *The Help*.

In one of the inner monologues belonging to Henry, he states the significance of owning land for a white man in the South. He says, “My great great granddaddy and his slaves built the farm I grew up on” (Rees, 2017, 00:30:32-00:30:36). He looks at a group of distant sharecroppers. He takes a handful of earth in his hand and states:

Henry: “One time, my granddaddy told me to go out, grab a handful of dirt from the yard and bring it in”

Granddaddy: “What are you holdin', son?”

Henry: “Dirt.”

Granddaddy: “That's right. Now give it to me.”

Henry: “So I did”

Granddaddy: “Now what's this I've got in my hand?”

Henry: “Dirt,”

Granddaddy: “No, boy, this is land that I've gotten. Do you know why? Because I own it. Because it's mine. And one day, it'll be yours.”

Henry’s inner monologue goes: “Except that land never became mine. No pappy sold it after the flood.” (Rees, 2017, 00:30:38-00:31:07)

Henry’s inner voice and action show how his dream to have a land was nurtured by his father since his childhood, and now he has to struggle with unfruitful muddy land. Interestingly, Laura’s, Henry’s wife, inner monologue states an entirely different meaning for the land they own. This time the audience of the film sees the land through Laura’s eyes in several scenes, and in contrast to Henry, it is not something she dreams about but is something she is frustrated with: “When I think of the farm, I think of mud. Encrusting knees and hair. Marching in boot-shaped patches across the floor. I dreamed in brown” (Rees, 2017, 00:04:44-00:04:59). It is evident that the connotation of land for this white couple, Henry and Laura, is entirely different. While it means the means of living for

Henry, it makes Laura feel stuck and bound in mud. Hap considers the land a precious property, although he knows it is impossible for him to own it. In his inner voice, his thoughts about the land become clear: “That mule made me a share tenant, not a sharecropper. And had me dreaming about having my own piece of land. Maybe that’s where the problem started” (Rees, 2017, 00:25:44-00:25:56).

As for the black female voice, we hear Florence’s, Hap’s wife, inner monologue. She is an elegant and powerful wife who adores her children and is never subservient to anyone since she is well aware of her status as a black sharecropper woman and a mother. She adores each of her children equally, but she prayed for Ronsel during the four years he has been away at war. Her feelings and thoughts about Ronsel’s leaving for the war are conveyed with her inner monologue: “I love them all equally. Every mother does. But during all those four years... all that time he was gone... I only prayed for him. God will forgive me” (Rees, 2017, 00:16:52-00:17:15). Briefly in *Mudbound*, there are several inner voices and different perspectives thanks to Rees’s ability to capture the essential qualities of her characters through her style. Thus, I claim that the Faulknerian structure of chapters is created in the movie by the inner monologues of characters of all races and genders. Clearly, *Mudbound* is different from its counterparts since it is in line with the ordinary course of life in its flowing narrative of social relations and prejudices of the American South.

Rees’s work has been called “revolutionary,” and she has received high appreciation for her artistic direction with an effective narrative style. “Rees is not interested in showing off how well she can manipulate the people. Instead, she tells the tale and invites the audience to participate. Additionally, the story is not overtly sentimentalized. Rees has been well served in this by her excellent ensemble” (Mcdonald, 2017). Rees instead prefers simply conveying incidents to dramatization. For example, Laura sends her little daughter, Amanda Leigh, to call Florence as soon as she understands she is about to deliver her baby too early. Florence comes to help her. In that scene, Florence hugs Laura insightfully, saying, “I lost one of my babies once, too. His name was Samuel” (Rees, 2017, 01:25:29-01:25:38). Laura feels miserable, and she sobs while

Florence gravely solaces her without talking more. It shows how Rees does not exaggerate that sentimental moment. Therefore, I argue that Rees's directing is relatively objective since her involvement in the direction of the picture is almost invisible. She wants to avoid manipulating the audience and making them feel pity for specific characters. Instead, she depicts the story without any rhetorical divisions like "we" and "they," which helps silently break the fourth wall of the cinema and let the audience of any race and gender in. The audience is not an outsider but a person who is asked to be conscious of racial matters.

It is evident that *Mudbound* portrays the harsh racial conditions in the American South during the 1940s when Jim Crow Laws reigned supreme. However, it also digs deep into the Mississippi Delta's soil, reflecting life conditions for both races in a harsh, unforgiving region of blazing heat, pounding rain, and acres of mud. Rees's ability to define and communicate what she wants is awe-inspiring. Alternatively, in a fantastic movie, immediately after the scene of the lynching attempt, a superhero would appear in a costume and fight the white-hooded bad guys; a group of black freedom fighters would rush the shelter in a political movie to put the lynch mob out of action, and in a police drama, the police would put an end to the crime, catch the criminals, and save the sufferer. However, in *Mudbound*, due to Rees's realistic style, there are no such fictional results in her film; the audience witnesses the events precisely as they happen in real life. Therefore, after that horrific torture scene and the brutal slashing of Ronsel's tongue, the audience sees his own people hauling him home from the barn, where he is naked, beaten, battered, and hanged from his arms. Just like in real life, no saviour comes and rescues Ronsel from this torture and brutality, and only Black people take him home. Through Rees's impressive directing, the song "Glory, glory," sung by Odetta Holmes, the voice of the civil rights movement and American folk and blues singer, is heard in the scene. The scene becomes deeply impressive due to Rees's cultural approach "What makes *Mudbound* notable is that Rees is not interested in examining prejudice simply to say, 'Look how awful this is' and then wallow in that awfulness. She is interested in the consequences, both immediate and generational, of that prejudice and the complicated, unexpected ways

those consequences surface in daily life” (McDonald, 2017). Thus, I argue that she instead lays the issue bare in front of the eyes of the audience to be considered by themselves.

In conclusion, Rees’s different perspective ultimately makes *Mudbound* a successful film. While it is still about how racism affects people’s lives, the difference is that it approaches the issue from a different angle, treating racism as an ongoing aspect of American life rather than something that occasionally emerges into senseless hatred and violence. Furthermore, *Mudbound* creates a difference in Rees’s natural and modest insistence on giving both black and white characters similar moral and emotional significance. While Taylor emphasizes the existence of the white heroine Skeeter to help Black maids in *The Help*, Rees, in *Mudbound*, does not attribute a significant meaning to any of the characters as a saviour for Blacks suffering from segregation.

2.2. Tate Taylor

The Help (2011), based on Kathryn Stockett’s novel set in the segregated South, was directed by Tate Taylor. He was a childhood friend of the author, and both grew up in the South and have been friends since they were kindergartners in Jackson. When her novel *The Help* became a best seller, Stockett decided her friend should write the script and direct the movie. “I really wanted a Mississippian to tell the story, to translate it to the screen,” she says (Kraft, 2017). Taylor is known for directing *The Help*, *Get on Up*, and *The Girl on the Train*. He frequently works with his friends and outstanding character actors like Viola Davis, Allison Janney, and Octavia Spencer. Taylor steps into a field of social and historical issues in his first major film, *The Help*. The film presents the racial tensions between black maids and their white employers in 1963 in Jackson, Mississippi, just at the beginning of the civil rights movement. It clearly shows the injustice and inequality between the lives of blacks and whites. While privileged white ladies express their contempt for their black servants through derogatory words and arrogant actions, the only thing the maids can do is just rage at the daily insults of whites. Taylor does a good job of capturing the tensions of the segregation period, but unfortunately, his white heroine, Skeeter, is overly romanticized, and his characters lean toward the simplistic

when we compare it to Rees's *Mudbound*. Moreover, in *The Help*, there is not much fresh information presented there that has yet to be covered by filmmakers in the past.

It is a well-known fact that churches and religion have always played a significant role in the lives of Blacks since they helped them endure the challenges and difficulties in their lives. Also, they had such a significant role in Civil Rights Movement since they nourished the encouragement they needed; however, the depiction of the church scene is not striking enough and remains weak in *The Help*. On the other hand, in *Mudbound*, Hap Jackson, as the preacher, tells Jesus' words from *The Holy Bible* (Rees, 2017, 00:44:43-00:45:40), and the scene turns into a presentation of Blacks' singing spirituals in a jazz format or call and response music which has been transmitted over the centuries in various forms of cultural expression. I argue that when call-and-response is taken into consideration, Hap's preaching scene in *Mudbound* serves the purpose of the tradition quite well:

Call-and-response has its roots in traditional African music, which largely employed a vocal version. It's when the pastor or song leader calls out or sings a line, and the congregation responds. In other styles of music, call-and-response is used as a form of experimentation, as well as a way to speak directly to the listener. In live performances, for example, some performers use call-and-response as a way to connect with their audience. (Hancock, 2021)

In *The Help*, the church scene stands as a plain courageous speech of the pastor for the black congregation who seems to depend on it, and the speech follows the spiritual song by a separate choir. In *Mudbound*, however, we see a well-established bond and connection of the Hap, the pastor, with his congregation. Similarly, Hap has a courageous speech, but his speech is blended with his people's contribution in the form of call and response. Furthermore, the spiritual is not sung by a separate black choir but by the whole black congregation in the form of their tradition with the lead of Hap. Briefly, Rees adorns this scene with black culture and then combines it with the reality of war. How she smoothly moves into the reality of war is admirable.

Furthermore, in *Mudbound*, both genders and races are treated and dealt with equally, but only female characters predominate in *The Help*. It is evident that in the novel *The Help*, the black maids and white female bosses are the centres of attention, and eventually, so are in Taylor's film, but these focal characters remain weak in terms of depicting the segregation in the South and the interrelated racial matters. *The Help* also depicts the sufferings of Blacks during the segregation period; however, it comes almost close to missing the main issues of a segregated society regarding all aspects of race discrimination since it is less about the humiliated black people in general but more about the women. For instance, the film focuses primarily on the working-class relationships between white employer women and their black maids, but it falls short in depicting the working circumstances that black men have at work, their relationships with the whites and the hardship of segregation in their lives. Therefore, when the depictions and approaches of the two directors are compared, it can be claimed that Taylor's film *The Help* is more populist to arouse the interest and sympathy of the audience, and it is inadequate to reflect realistic circumstances of segregation, especially for Blacks. It is thought-provoking but cannot make the audience more conscious of the real-life consequences of a segregated society compared to Rees's *Mudbound*. *The Help* can be regarded as an ordinary movie on race discrimination, which does not go beyond emotional exploitation.

In an interview, Taylor states, "What I did was I represented the book *The Help*, and I found ways to heighten and further little things that were perhaps a small blip in the book. That's what I wanted to do: Give people what they love and then expand the ideas that were just hinted at" (Kraft, 2017). Indeed, his film clearly meets his purpose. For example, at first, the chocolate apple pie event seems like a befitting punishment for a villain like Hilly, but it is ultimately an act of disgusting and disagreeable revenge:

Hilly: "What do you put in here that makes it taste so good?"

Minny: "That good vanilla from Mexico... and something else real special..... Eat my shit"

Hilly: "Excuse me?"

Minny: "I said eat...my...shit."

Hilly: "Have you lost your mind?"

Minny: "No ma'am, but you about to, cause you just did." (Taylor, 2011, 01:37:42-01:38:44)

Hilly cannot help herself, and she eats two slices of pie before Minny confesses that she has added her own faeces as an additional ingredient. Shortly, a black maid in the segregation period serves her former employer, Hilly, a faece-filled version of her famed chocolate pie as payback for her unfair dismissal from work. Although this behaviour seems to aim an act of revenge for Hilly's discriminatory attitudes, it could be interpreted as a subversive event. In order to add humour and make his film more impressive, Taylor perhaps unwittingly portrays Blacks as people who could take such heinous revenge, and somehow, he causes their humiliation again. The revenge might be seen as humour by the audience, but in fact, it humiliates the blacks rather than Hilly. The fact that this sensitive detail has been overlooked shows that a white film director is still inadequate compared to Rees's directing style, which reflects the importance of cultural values as much as the challenges of a segregated society.

Nine years after the film's release, Viola Davis, who performs Aibileen Clark in *The Help*, expresses her regrets for taking part in the film and disapproves of the way the film portrays racism in an interview with Sonia Saraiya:

There's no one who's not entertained by *The Help*. But there's a part of me that feels like I betrayed myself, and my people, because I was in a movie that wasn't ready to [tell the whole truth]," Davis says. *The Help*, like so many other movies, was "created in the filter and the cesspool of systemic racism." (Saraiya, 2020)

Moreover, according to Davis, the film does not endow any emphasis on their humanity and have any contribution to the respect for black people:

Not a lot of narratives are also invested in our humanity. They're invested in the idea of what it means to be Black, but...it's catering to the white audience. The white audience at the most can sit and get an academic

lesson into how we are. Then they leave the movie theatre, and they talk about what it meant. They're not moved by who we were. (Saraiya, 2020)

Briefly, *The Help* falls short of effectively conveying all the consequences of a segregated society and raising awareness about racism since it undermines critical racial issues and turns “racism into a social farce” (Saraiya, 2020).



CHAPTER THREE

SEGREGATED SOUTH IN *THE HELP* AND *MUDBOUND*

3.1. Analysis of *The Help*

The Help elaborately portrays the untold stories of Black women and their experience in service to white women, the civil rights movement in patches and segregation in Southern America. Skeeter Eugenia Phelan, the movie's main character and heroine, is a young girl with college graduate ideals. Unlike the women around her, she prefers a career rather than a marriage. Desiring to be a writer, she writes a column for a local newspaper. She wants to interview with Black women working as maids for wealthy Southern families in Jackson, Mississippi, during the Civil Rights movement. She is a young white woman who is different from the other arrogant ladies in her society. Although *The Help* seems to reflect the challenges of segregation for Blacks in the south, Taylor's highlighting of the white protagonist as a savior contradicts the aim. Skeeter, for instance, is depicted as a determined and self-sufficient white woman, while black women need an initiator to be courageous. In this regard, it could be considered that since Taylor emphasizes the white protagonist, it becomes unclear if the title of the film, *The Help*, refers to Skeeter's help for Black maids or Black maids' help for white ladies. Blacks make the life of the wealthy Southern ladies simpler by helping with the housework and childcare. In this process, Black maids are exposed to discrimination and insult. For example, it is strictly forbidden for Blacks to use the toilets in the houses they work, although they look after their children with love, cook meals in the kitchen, do all the washing up, do the shopping and clean the house.

Despite black maids' doing all daily household chores, including cleaning and cooking, some white people assert that black people have certain diseases that can spread to others by sharing the same toilet seat. However, there is no contagious disease based on skin colour. That they were considered filthier than whites was just an excuse to justify the discrimination. In his reputed work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon expresses his experience of race prejudice and the connotation of black skin colour as dirty:

“You, as a Negress—.”

“Me? a Negress?”

“Can’t you see I’m practically white? I despise Negroes. Niggers stink. They’re dirty and lazy. Don’t ever mention niggers to me.” (Fanon, 1986 p.35)

Furthermore, their skin colour does not indicate that they are filthy beings, which contradicts keeping all these black people as their maids if they think so. Other than that, it is just a simple mind or childish thought. As Fanon stresses, there is this misconception of blacks’ being dirty. In his book, the chapter titled ‘The Fact of Blackness’ starts with this catchy line: “Dirty nigger!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro!” (Fanon, 1986, p.82). From a childish perspective, the kid sees the different colours as dirt on the human skin, but not as a discriminatory or biased characteristic as racist people see. Fanon emphasises that it is just a way of a child’s thinking. Unfortunately, black people were the “black problem,” “the symbol of sin,” and “the lowest value”; however, there is no scientific basis for that.

Minnie Jackson, one of the main characters in *The Help*, is described as the best cook in Mississippi. She is the maid of a white lady, Hilly Holbrook, who certainly believes that Blacks carry contagious diseases; hence, they should never use the same toilets as whites. Hilly persuades other white ladies to build separate toilets for their black maids, and she always marks the toilet paper in the restroom to understand whether Minnie uses her toilet or not. Then, Hilly organises a campaign and wants toilets to be separate in the town. Eventually, Hilly fires Minnie aggressively after discovering that she has used her toilet on a stormy night. Separated restrooms symbolise the personal convictions and practices that support and spread institutional segregationist regulations. Thus, I argue that the bathroom separation was one part of preserving racial segregation, and while Jim Crow-era legislation maintained racial segregation in the South on a state and local level, daily attitudes and social practices of Southern whites played an equal role in the continuation of that segregation in the Southern community.

Another significant Black character in *The Help* is Aibileen Clark, a black maid who lost her only surviving child in an accident in Mississippi in 1963. After this date,

she starts raising the children of white people due to her job. During this period, she mothered 17 white children. Her life story as a Black woman working for Whites and raising their children shows that she has never had any alternative work except being a maid because of her skin colour. When Skeeter asks her, “And did you know, as a girl growing up, that one day you'd be a maid?” (Taylor, 2011, 00:01:29-00:01:32). Aibileen answers, “Yes, ma'am, I did. My mama was a maid. My grandmama was a house slave” (Taylor, 2011, 00:01:38-00:01:46). It becomes clear that like her ancestors, she has never dreamed of being something else. She embodies the best submissive manners with a “m'am” at the end of each sentence. However, the agony and anger she is experiencing about her son's death are revealed in the scene when Skeeter is about to give up her effort on writing stories of maids, as she does not convince other maids to tell their stories. Aibileen suddenly starts telling the event regarding the death of her son in the scene “They killed my son. He fell carrying two-by-fours at the mill. Truck run over him, crushed his lung” (Taylor, 2011, 01:08:50-01:09:05). She continues her words with both anger and grief. “That white foreman threw his body on back of a truck. Drove to the coloured hospital... dumped him there and honked the horn. There was nothing they could do, so I brought my baby home” (Taylor, 2011, 01:09:11-01:09:34). She tells with deep sorrow, “He died right in front of me. He was just 24 years old, Miss Skeeter. Best part of a person's life” (Taylor, 2011, 01:09:44-01:09:53). The tragic death of Aibileen's son demonstrates one of the legal oppressions that Blacks endured under segregation, preventing them from participating entirely and equitably in society alongside white people. While hospitals served in separate places for blacks and whites, the quality of the service provided was also different. Black patients were sent home without much effort to save their lives or cure their illnesses. From Aibileen's words, it becomes clear that at the coloured hospital, they cannot do anything for her wounded son, and he dies without treatment for his injuries. Thus, as Hunkele states, “The worst effects that African Americans were faced with came from the Jim Crow laws that hindered blacks' abilities to gain access to medical facilities and necessary medical treatments” (Hunkele, 2014, p.2).

In *The Help*, the white protagonist, Skeeter, is different from other upper-class white ladies and feels sorry for the Blacks' humiliation by the whites. Finally, Skeeter develops a new work project and seeks help from Aibileen first and then Minny. She wants them to tell their stories regarding their renunciant service as maids to white ladies. At first, because they are worried about the punishments they might face if the authorities find out, the other maids are reluctant to tell Skeeter about their experiences. After one of their befriended maids is unjustly arrested and KKK brutally shoots a young black man, black maids become determined to tell their experiences about serving their white ladies, and they gather in Aibileen's house to share their sufferings with Skeeter. All the maids are willing to tell their stories of racial hatred as a reaction to the murder of the young black man. Skeeter's narrative, *The Help*, causes a disturbance among the white people there. It makes a significant impact on giving the black maids a voice. White ladies' scornful attitudes towards Black maids have become evident. Therefore, white ladies are annoyed with the truths revealed by their maids because Skeeter's book has shown that black maids are treated unjustly and irritated with racist attitudes.

Aibileen is a perfect example of the paradox depicted in the movie; many black maids and nannies work for white families but endure humiliation and maltreatment, although they show endless love and care to the white children they raise. Following the passing of her adored son, resentment has begun to seep into her heart. She says, "I lost my own boy, Treelore four years ago. After that, I just didn't want to live no more. After my boy died, a bitter seed was planted inside of me. And I just didn't feel so accepting any more" (Taylor, 2011, 00:08:29-00:08:58). Most recently, she begins to take care of Elizabeth Leefolt's child. A few scenes later, she says and makes little girl Mae Mobley repeat her words over and over. "You is smart... you is kind... you is important" (Taylor, 2011, 00:02:41-00:02:48). Her words indicate her compassionate personality and being full of love. As for Aibileen, every child is innocent. She tries to build the girl's self-confidence, which her mother somehow cannot. Children behave according to how they were raised, as mentioned before. Nevertheless, some become racist bosses of Black maids when they become adults, although their black nannies have raised them. They witness many insulting behaviours for their Black nannies; consequently, they might have

a similar point of view for black people. For instance, it is possible for Hilly Brooks' children to have similar racist views as their mother's when they grow up. It is understood that Black maids are aware that those little children would be their new bosses in the future. For example, in a telephone conversation with Elaine Stein who is the editor of a famous magazine in New York, Skeeter says, "I'd like to write something from the point of view of *The Help*. These coloured women raise white children, and in 20 years, those children become the boss" (Taylor, 2011, 00:26:12-00:26:22). Furthermore, while Aibileen and Minny are talking to Skeeter at Aibileen's house, Aibileen says "And how we love they children when they little. And then they turn out just like they mamas" (Taylor, 2011, 00:58:17-00:58:24). Therefore, from one generation to the other, those kinds of scornful attitudes continue towards black women.

Additionally, Aibileen's words in *The Help* indicate how white children are valued while being raised and how this worth could also help white children become confident adults in the future. While little white children are raised with words referring to being valued, such as kind, smart and important; on the other hand, black children are raised to be prepared to endure humiliation and being despised. Thus, Black children have their own ways, such as Game of Dozens, which stands as a practice of enduring humiliation and racism. The game is thought to help young Blacks learn how to handle verbal abuse.

Many Black Americans view the capacity to maintain composure in the face of the Dozens' as a sign of virtue. Developed at a time when Black Americans were especially subject to insults and assaults upon their dignity to which they could not safely respond, the Dozens served as a mechanism for teaching and sharpening the ability to control emotions and anger, an ability which was often necessary for survival. (Levine, 2007, p.358)

Another example of how segregation was utilized to isolate black people from the rest of society in day-to-day life is that black people could only sit in the back of public vehicles. *The Help* shows how seriously social barriers interfered with their ability to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. In several movie scenes, the maids travel in the back

of buses with white people at the front. When it comes to Blacks, even the most basic human rights, “the need for safety and the right to protection,” are disregarded. For instance, after a brutal murder of a black young man is announced, even under the risk of being attacked by whites, black passengers are forced to get off the bus, not the whites. In the scene, while Aibileen is travelling in the back side of a public bus with other Blacks in the evening, suddenly the bus stops, and the driver says, “Coloured people off, the rest of you, let me know where you're going” (Taylor, 2011, 01:21:10-01:21:14). The rest are the whites who are sitting in the front side of the bus as the privileged ones. The driver also answers the question about the reason for that sudden stop as, “I don't know. Some nigger got shot” (Taylor, 2011, 01:21:17-01:21:19). Although Blacks are not safe because of KKK's attacks, they are the ones who must get off the bus in the middle of the road but not whites at that late time.

Another class and race discrimination in the film is based on profession. While the white ladies are bosses belonging to the upper class, the lower-class ones are their Black servants and nannies. In other words, an employer-employee distinction is again related to skin colour. It would be correct to use the word “class” for rank in this economic and colour-based distinction. They are an obedient group that only performs the tasks assigned to them. However, some changes occur in the consciousness of this class when an author asks about their stories. With this question, the black maids realize they have a chance to express themselves. They come together and organize a kind of rebellion, which is triggered by the murder of the black boy. From this point on, they start to become a class for themselves. They tell their stories elaboratively; thus, they make their voice heard when Skeeter's book is published. They cannot change their social class and status due to their skin colour, but at least they can free themselves from their strict dependence on positions of slave-like labour. Skeeter concludes that in order to end racism in the South, it is necessary to abolish segregation as well as the racist societal norms and personal attitudes that would continue to exist even if the laws were abolished. The central message that the demeaning societal norms must be changed can be Taylor's subject matter in the film, but still, it is conveyed by a white character which is a significant point to be criticized in his film since the black voice is still deferred.

In the final scenes of both movies, common decisive thoughts about defeating segregation and racism are portrayed. In *The Help*, after Skeeter's book is published, telling those Black maids' stories, and read by almost all citizens of Mississippi, Hilly forces his friend Elizabeth Leefolt to fire Aibileen unjustly. Sadly, she must leave Mae Mobley, whom she has been looking after, but she also feels free from her chains. Aibileen says goodbye in tears but thinks her days as a maid are over. It becomes apparent that she thinks and says "enough!" in a way. The former submissive black maid becomes a civil rights activist by starting the first movement to tell the unspoken sufferings of black maids. She is the first Black to describe her humiliation experience as a maid to a white woman. While leaving her work, walking in the street in the last scene of the film, her inner voice is heard "No one had ever asked me what it felt like to be me. Once I told the truth about that... ...I felt free" (Taylor, 2011, 02:17:28-02:17:41). She seems relieved by the delight of being able to express herself entirely and be free from the constraints of her skin colour, most probably for the first time in her life. In addition, instead of the agony she lives because of her son's death, she remembers his hopeful words "My boy, Treelore, always said we going to have a writer in the family one day. I guess it's gonna be me" (Taylor, 2011, 02:18:02-02:18:12). This initiative seems to lead to substantial changes and developments in defeating black racism of a segregated society in Mississippi. Also, there is hope for a black voice in the future but deferred in the film. As for *Mudbound*, Ronsel returns to Germany and starts a new life with Resl and his son. Thus, the protagonists in both movies are hopeful for the future. They step out of the borders of the prejudiced society and unjust discrimination.

3.2. Analysis of Mudbound

Mudbound is a fascinating film due to Rees's profound social concern for the lives of Blacks under the strict conditions of segregated Southern America and its accurate historical setting. With this film, Rees succeeded in being the first Black American woman to be nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Adapted Screenplay category, and it received over 100 nominations, including four Oscar nominations and two Golden Globe nominations. The film tells the story of a black and a white family who labour on the same

hard-to-cultivate farmland. It portrays the experience of two World War II veterans who struggle with prejudice and post-war life. We initially see the film through the perspective of Laura McAllan, a white lady who left her privileged Memphis life to live in a claustrophobic Mississippi farmhouse with her stalwart but ignorant husband, Henry. The Jacksons are a black family that works as sharecroppers on property owned by the white McAllans. The film deals with the coexistence of physical proximity and psychological distance, dependency, and prejudice.

The title of the movie *Mudbound* refers to the challenging conditions of the region, not only natural but also societal ones. The mud of the 1940s Mississippi Delta is a metaphor for entrapment for those who try to make a livelihood from it. It is also the reoccurring metaphor of borders that highlights the restrictions of living in a racist and divided society that prioritizes societal customs and norms over fundamental human values and desires. In the film, mud is everywhere, and heavy mud resulting from continuous rain sticks to people's skin and clothes along with buildings and never seems to wash away, just like the prejudices and racial discrimination in society as Rees states: "The mud, for me, was an allegory for race... It's the muck of our own creation that we're stuck in. We can't get out, it dries to our clothes, we carry it with us, it comes off on other things, it sticks to us, it's impossible to keep out of our lives" (Dry, 2019). No matter how strong the characters' willpower is, they are all trapped in a system that continues to tear them down.

Mudbound depicts the lives of two families under the segregated Mississippi Delta's influence during World War II and the post-war period. *Mudbound* depicts the lives of two families under the segregated Mississippi Delta's influence during World War II and the post-war period. The Jacksons are the black sharecroppers struggling to break out of their vicious circle, while the McAllans go through several hardships but have the privilege of being white. As these two families struggle to maintain a decent life, World War II breaks out, and each family has to send a son to fight in the war. The son of the white family, Jamie, returns as a shattered man. The son of the black family seems much

more sober-minded, but when he comes home to Mississippi, he sees that his service in the war means nothing to some white racist people, which eventually disappoints him.

Mudbound also depicts a bold and depressing picture of segregation in American military services. The United States military was still segregated in the course of the war, so Blacks had to serve in segregated regiments in the US Army; as Ronsel says: “Army gave us separate barracks, separate blood supply, separate latrines” (Rees, 2017, 01:36:14-01:36:23). They were frequently under-trained and under-equipped and were frequently deployed on the front lines in suicide operations. Only a limited number of Blacks could take place in the US armed forces, Air Force Corps, and Marine Corps. For instance, in *Mudbound*, racist father Pappy McAllan scoffs and humiliates Hap when he proudly states that Ronsel fights as a tank commander under General Patton. Pappy derisively states, “You mean diggin' ditches and peelin' potatoes?.... Oh, there's no way the army's gonna turn a tank worth thousands of dollars over to a nigger” (Rees, 2017, 00:28:59-00:29:08). It is clear that racist mindset does not allow a person to see a black as a worthy man no matter what he does. Unfortunately, no Black American won the Medal of Honour, and their jobs were mainly designated for non-combat groups in the war.

The significant point of *Mudbound* is that it represents the strong bond due to the mutual war experience between the two veterans of a different race, Jamie McAllan, the white veteran and Ronsel Jackson, the black one. However, on their return from the war, their forbidden friendship due to the race difference turns into a devastating incident testing their faith and bravery. They find that the prejudices of their society have remained the same when they return to their native country. Both return from the war as different people. While Ronsel has witnessed equal treatment and becomes much more conscious about the drawbacks of segregation, Jamie, a bomber pilot, returns with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a mental and behavioural condition disorder that can develop because of exposure to a traumatic event. Unfortunately, both veterans struggle to reintegrate into an atmosphere of hatred and despair that intensifies the symptoms of their mental and physical wounds. They become the protagonists of a tragic event and look for peace, love, and honour in a brutal time and place. It comes to a deeper life when

they scarcely know one another but are bonded by their common war experience. Even though their race would ordinarily divide them, Ronsel and Jamie form a bond based on experience. Their connection is built on war stories and liquor, which Jamie consumes excessively to mask the effects of his PTSD. They develop an objectionable friendship due to their similar war trauma. Nobody knows this as well as Ronsel and understands Jamie as much as he does.

Jamie was a bright, lively person before the war but returned home with PTSD and a drinking problem. He cannot adjust to agricultural life, family relations, and the prejudiced society. Even though he has been attractive, compassionate, and sensitive before the war, he becomes weak, dependent, and self-destructive. Nevertheless, he is a distinguished war hero as a bomber pilot and has been awarded both the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross, but his experience in war is nearly devastating because he has witnessed many deaths; besides, he has faced death himself. He tells his story to Ronsel when they are in the barn but cannot complete his words: “We were somewhere over Austria. We made contact with a whole swarm of Messerschmitts. I mean, they was everywhere. Took out my tail gun, co-pilot...” (Rees, 2011, 01:27:06-01:27:21). His tail gun soldier and also his co-pilot sitting next to him during a flight over Austria are fatally shot dead. Being shocked, he notices he was saved by a black pilot, which becomes a turning point changing his life forever.

The black character, Ronsel, attempts to overcome the racial barriers and be regarded as equal to the other white American citizens because he has served in the military to fight for his country, just like the white soldiers during World War II. Therefore, he wants the same rights and treatment as a Black veteran who has witnessed having almost equal rights with white people in Europe. He witnesses colour-blind attitudes in Europe, one of which, for instance, is not forcing him to sit at the rear of the bus with the other black people. In *Mudbound*, he is the significant black character who tries to break these racist customs in various ways, including defying segregation laws and confronting white people’s harassment, having a love relationship with a white female when he is in Germany.

Unfortunately, Ronsel faces the boundaries of racism right away on his return, one of which is his friendship with Jamie. Ronsel and Jamie seem to have crossed the line when they are back home as returning soldiers, although serving in the war provides them with an opportunity for respect and hero status. Ronsel has defied racial taboos in Germany and embraced social and personal liberties as a liberator-conqueror. He understands that while he is “a saviour” in Europe, he becomes “simply a negro” again in his hometown: “Over there, I was a liberator. People lined up in the streets waiting for us. Throwing flowers and cheering. And here, I’m just another nigger pushing a plow” (Rees, 2017, 01:35:03-01:35:19). He recalls a thrilling and horrifying event in which hundreds of inmates were struggling to escape from a burning building as he and his friends tried to save them as heroes. Ronsel’s disappointment by realizing how he is perceived in two different societies, German and American, is reflected here to show how cultural aspects and attitudes differ in racially prejudiced societies because he has been a hero in Germany but an inferior black person in Mississippi.

Jamie and Ronsel cannot adapt to their communities; they cannot meet the expectation of society as veterans when they return to their segregated society, and they face different challenges. They are not the same men due to their experience in the war, which has changed their view of race and life. Having common war experiences, Jamie’s sharing his liquor with Ronsel and encouraging him to ride in the pickup truck next to him results in a cross-racial bond between the two veterans. Indeed, they continue to drink together regularly as a ritual of shared understanding. Ronsel knows Jamie’s and his own need for alcohol as a painkiller for a fellow former soldier. That Jamie and Ronsel’s hands tremble is another symptom of wartime trauma. Ronsel and Jamie’s connection offers a safe zone in which they can embrace one another’s individuality, free chat, and friendship, publicly disclose their war experiences, and express their fears and wishes.

On the other hand, Jamie’s friendliness is filled with bluntness, and he does not foresee the danger that could arise from their sincere friendship. Due to the mental pains of the war, he does not realize the risk for Ronsel as a man of colour. It is dangerous for Ronsel to be a close friend of a white man. Intrinsically, Ronsel predicts and feels the risk

hidden in the relationship but chooses to ignore it since he hopes to experience the unprejudiced life in Europe back home. Despite Ronsel's initial scepticism and concern about Jamie's motives, Jamie's story is persuasive enough for Ronsel. Jamie shares an effective experience from the bomber cockpit; while flying his bomber over Austria under heavy fire that kills his tail gunner and co-pilot, Jamie makes a pact with God that if he is survived, he will do something good. A squad of P-38s, a Tuskegee Airman with red tails, appears out of nowhere to save his life and make a clean getaway. Then he sees a pilot saluting him on a nearby jet flying along. When Jamie returns the salute to the man, he notices his saviour is black. That is the moment of his transformation to be a more humanistic person.

Thus, in *Mudbound*, Rees depicts how a wartime act of bravery involving a black pilot may forever change one's perception of another race. Ronsel understands Jamie's feelings, but he is also aware that Jamie's alcoholism is getting worse day by day. Neither of the veterans is able to adapt to the segregated society in Mississippi. Jamie has become a loose cannon, and Ronsel is hesitant to return to racial restrictions since he has witnessed a humanistic view without race discrimination in Europe. Therefore, for Ronsel, his progressive friendship with Jamie does not seem like a weird one through his eyes. Despite the constraints, Jamie and Ronsel push racist boundaries, and they care about neither the strict Jim Crow laws nor the societal boundaries in the prejudiced society they live in, so they come together even on the drive without keeping their friendship a secret.

When their friendship is compared with the one in *The Help*, a young white lady and a black maid, it is evident that their close friendship is based on not a common trauma but a common goal which is to write about the experiences of maids during their service to the whites. They do not meet in public but in secret, cautiously against the dangers they might encounter due to the strict Jim Crow laws. The consequences of their innocent friendships are undoubtedly different from each other. While in *The Help*, Skeeter becomes a published author with the contribution of black maids' stories, Ronsel, in *Mudbound* as a black, is harshly attacked, tortured by bigotry whites and loses his speech organ intrinsically due to the reason that he has had an affair with a white German woman,

who does not even live in America. While in *The Help*, the black maids have a chance to speak about their problems only through the agent of a white person, in *Mudbound*, the black man is muted forever as the consequence of interracial friendship and support.

Rees's realistic approach in her directing also indicates black pride and dignity by Hap's refusing Laura's job offer to Florence as a maid for cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. Although they need money, Hap does not want his wife to work for McAllans: "We don't belong to them. We pay rent, work our crops for us. They can't just pick us up, set us down like we tools" (Rees, 2017, 00:43:44-00:43:53). It is a kind of resistance to Whites' authority as Hap wants to preserve his family's pride by refusing their offer as a strong character. Furthermore, in the lynching scene, the Klan offers Ronsel a way out; all he needs to do to survive is to declare that he did not sleep with a white woman and that the child in the photo is not his. However, despite being aware that he will die, he answers, "Yes!" He does not want to be submissive, so it is clear that he has the black pride to confront the Klan, even if it means risking his life by telling the truth.

In contrast to the characters in *The Help*, Rees invests in the black characters and depicts them with dignity by making them resist white supremacy. *Mudbound* may look dark and a slow pacing film at first, yet it is incredibly clear-eyed and comes into focus soon. Rees has a remarkable capacity to understand her characters as entire persons, except for Henry's despicably racist father, Pappy, who spends the majority of the film sneering at Laura and the Jacksons as an unscrupulous man: "He was a hard, cruel, openly and aggressively racist man who's somewhere between idle and retired and takes pleasure in blusteringly criticizing anyone, family or friend, in his midst, but reserves a special hatred for blacks and takes a special pleasure in insulting them to their face with impunity" (Brody, 2017, p.3). Pappy reflects the biased, remorseless, hostile, and strict view of some whites when Blacks' rights become an issue.

Another elaborately depicted critical issue in *Mudbound* is the inequality in owning land. As it is emphasized in CRT, inequality between Blacks and Whites occurred not only in social functions of the society but also in the practices of the law, including landowning. Although sharecropping was developed to satisfy the needs of both Blacks

and Whites, it resulted again in the supremacy of the Whites because “the desire for land ownership...was lost in the politics of Reconstruction, the former slaves were forced to negotiate accommodation and labour terms with white landowners” (Ochiltree, 1998, p. 357). Hap’s disappointment about the impossibility of being a landowner just because of his skin colour is depicted clearly in *Mudbound*. While surveying the land, he says: “What good is a deed? My grandfathers and great-uncles, grandmothers and grand-aunts, father, and mother--broke, tilled, toiled, planted, plucked, razed, burned, broke again. Worked this land all their lives. This land that would never be theirs” (Rees, 2017, 00:18:29-00:18:59). Additionally, Hap’s inner voice shows how the whites broke the law of property by extorting his ancestor’s land. “One of my great-uncles, Uncle Willie, got a hold of a piece of land down reconstruction. He had a deed. Four white men on horses rode up one day, aimed a pistol... said he was dead. My uncle’s good deed, torn into forty pieces and thrown to the wind. And so, I ask, what good is a deed?” (Rees, 2017, 00:25:10-00:25:36). Hap’s words intrinsically display the injustice, brutality, and whites’ impropriation of the land during Reconstruction in the South.

At the end of the American Civil War, many former slaves hoped that the large plantation landholdings would be broken up and they would each be given “forty acres and a mule,” but by 1868, it had become apparent that this would not occur. Since landowners needed laborers and former slaves needed work, an early form of labour organization involved housing workers in what had been slave quarters and taking them out to the fields to work in supervised gangs. (Blessett & Box, 2016, p.116)

The family history of an ancestor forced to turn up the property to a white man under threat of violence has soured Hap’s tenancy. It is remarkable in reflecting the cases of unfair extortion from black people. Even though they were granted the right to own land in the Reconstruction era, it emphasizes how the whites unjustly and ruthlessly took their land and all their legal rights. Since that act of violence by the Whites took away their legal claim to the property, the Jackson family has become just sharecroppers for generations. Therefore, Hap’s uncle losing his land due to unfair extortion parallels CRT’s

arguments. With a natural, realistic approach, *Mudbound* exposes the harsh reality of race in America through the eyes of Whites and Blacks:

I wanted to give weight to what is it to not be able to come home, to be self-reliant,” Rees told IndieWire in an interview for the Spotlight Awards series. “It's this pioneer story, except it's with two families, and these two families are kind of tethered to each other.” The ensemble story allowed Rees to show both the weight of family and the weight of history, and the ways we must shoulder both burdens without turning a blind eye. (Dry, 2019)

In the last scenes of *Mudbound*, some impressive ironies can be seen. The first one is that two brothers together bury their bigotry father, Pappy, killed by Jamie, in a slave grave which is an irony as their father has always been cruel and hateful to the slaves, and now he has to be buried in the remains of the one. Another irony in the film is Hap's help to them and presiding over his burial rite during the simple funeral. Ironically, Hap becomes the preacher for Pappy and prays for his soul. As a Klan member and strict racist bigotry, Pappy would have never accepted to be buried in a black slave's grave and their black neighbour Hap's aid in presiding his funeral if he were alive.

A significant scene which could be considered an indication of the potential changes for Blacks is shown during the burying scene of Jamie and Henry's father. Hap's words reflect his thoughts when he accepts to help the white brothers while sitting on the carriage with his family on the way to another land. Henry insistently asks for his help and says, “Hap! Hap, can you hold on? Need to get the coffin in the ground” (Rees, 2017, 02:02:08-02:02:20). Hap ignores Henry's calling, yet he goes on as “Hap? Appreciate it. Why don't you use your boys?” (Rees, 2017, 02:02:41-02:02:56). At that point, Hap's response symbolizes more than a refusal of their sons' help. He thoughtfully answers, “My sons are not gettin' down out of that wagon” (Rees, 2017, 02:02:57-02:02:59). Somehow, he says, “enough!” just like Aibileen in *The Help*. Furthermore, his words imply that the next generations would not be obedient and would not serve the whites as it has been before for a long time. Segregated, humiliated, and insulted Blacks would not obey the

orders of the white man, so they would no longer be submissive, weak, and silent. Therefore, it is implied that the next generation will be different from their ancestors in both movies.

3.3 Segregation and the “Back Door”

One of the significant laws implemented in the segregated South was that black people had to use the back doors, which was one of the humiliating social norms of the Jim Crow Laws. In *Mudbound*, when Ronsel returns to his hometown, he first goes to the general store and buys little things for his family. After chatting with the storekeeper, a kind white lady, in a friendly way, he attempts to leave the store from the front door, but as he leaves the store, he comes across Klan mates Orris Stokes and Pappy. They insult Ronsel and tell him a “nigger” must leave by the back door. Ronsel refuses to leave through the back door, although it is against the Jim Crow laws, and he defiantly says that “General Patton put us on the front line, While y'all at home safe and sound” (Rees, 2017, 01:07:10-01:07:22). He tries to remind them how he has served in the war for his nation on the front line while they have been living safely in their homeland without taking any risks for their lives owing to his efforts in military service. He also implies that he has been on the military’s front line, although he is not permitted to use the front door in his homeland. The older men are petrified by his gallant act; nevertheless, Ronsel leaves by the back door to avoid further argument.

Similarly, the back door law is dealt with in *The Help*. When Skeeter returns home after graduation, she sees that her black nanny Constantine has left home. She does not believe her mother’s story about Constantine’s leaving and tries to learn the truth. Skeeter’s mother, Charlotte, later admits that she has laid off Constantine because Constantine’s daughter Rachel has come to visit her mother, and she has refused to follow Charlotte’s instructions to enter the house through the back door in the kitchen. Rachel has entered the house through the front door while Charlotte has guests at home, and to keep her dignity at the Daughters of America luncheon, she has fired the old nanny. Although Constantine is like a family member to all, due to her lifetime of service of her, the old nanny has been fired just because her daughter has used the front door. In both

movies, the members of the young black generation try to rebel against this racist norm they have to obey; Roncel, in *Mudbound*, is depicted with dignity with his brave response, while in *The Help*, we have helpless blacks unfairly fired when they resist; thus, all the dignity and courage of the daughter is just wasted for the sake of the sentiment.

The consequences of the Jim Crow Laws are represented similarly in other movies or series dealing with racism and segregation in the US. *Women of the Movement* is a series that criticizes the humiliation of Blacks by forcing them to use the back door in the Jim Crow South. It depicts Emmett Till's tragedy; a fourteen-year-old black Chicago kid brutally killed in the Mississippi Delta in 1955 for a minor flirtation at a small shop. It is based on the true story of Mammie Till, who risked her life to seek justice for her son Emmett after his death. After her son's murder, Mammie Till was determined to take legal action against racist white killers. Her courage for justice is considered one of the reasons that triggered the civil rights movement. In that TV show, Blacks' being forced to use the back doors is emphasized again in the fourth episode. While Mammie and Dr Howard are talking about the little town, Mound Bayou, which was founded for black people and was run by Dr Howard during the time, Dr Howard says, "Even our hospital employs an all-Negro staff, so when one of us is sick, we can enter through the front door, and we can do so knowing that we will be heard and counselled by someone that can see our pain and acknowledge it" (Cerar, 2022, 17:27:10-17:27:35). Dr Howard's words about their being able to enter through the front door of all black staff hospital stress how black people are despised by being forced to use the back doors again.

Using back doors by the lower class was a habit that had existed for many years in the aristocratic traditions of the British. The lower-class servants had to enter or leave mansions by back doors, which might have been the continuation of this cultural convention in Colonial America. The TV series *Downton Abbey*, directed by Michael Engler, could be a kind of reference or example of the influence of British culture in segregated life norms in the South. This TV show is set between 1912 and 1926 in the post-Edwardian era and depicts the life of an aristocratic noble family, the Crawleys living in Yorkshire and their domestic employees. It depicts the early twentieth-century living

conditions, conventions, and traditions of a British aristocratic family and their servants. All servants must use back doors when they come and leave the mansion. In the movie *Mudbound*, the white people's attitude towards black people and obligation of their usage of back doors in the New World can be seen as reminiscent of the British attitude towards the lower-class people, including their servants, which confirms the British racist perspective in Colonial America. In other words, the class distinction is replaced with skin colour classifications in a much more severe form in the New World.

3.4. Ku Klux Klan Organization

The most brutal organization of the Jim Crow era emerged as a private club called the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee in 1865. With influential hateful white members, some of whom even from the government, the KKK became a dangerous organization that harassed Blacks in their homes. There were also economic reasons behind this organization since the white middle class was afraid of losing their jobs due to the cheaper labour force of blacks. Since the blacks agreed to work for less wage, white people believed they were at risk of losing their job opportunities. Eventually, violence was on the rise with the spreading KKK, and Blacks were constantly exposed to danger and violence; hence, their lives were at risk. During the period, for instance, black schools were damaged and destroyed, and a lot of Black people were evicted from their homes by the members of the KKK in the middle of the night. Many black families were attacked, tortured, and a lot of them were lynched. "The ugly side of the Ku Klux Klan, the mutilations and floggings, lynchings and shootings, began to spread across the South and an even more immediate impetus for the Ku Klux Klan was the civil War itself and the reconstruction that followed" (Baudouin, 1997, p. 14).

Mudbound and *The Help* show some attacks of the KKK in the Jim Crow period, whereas, in *The Help*, the scene about the brutality of the KKK is minimal and short. The murder of a young black man is announced on TV news: "We view this as a cold, brutal, deliberate...- [sirens wailing] ...killing in a savage, uncivilized state. There is no state with a record that approaches that of Mississippi in inhumanity murder, brutality, and racial hatred" (Taylor, 2011, 01:21:53-01:22:15). Aibileen runs in a hurry to Minny's house

while the news is heard. She finds Minny and her children sitting in the kitchen silently in horror, listening to the news. Minny sadly tells Aibileen, “KKK shot him. An hour ago. Right in front of his children, Aibileen. We're gonna pray for the Evers. We're gonna pray for Myrlie. We living in hell. Trapped” (Taylor, 2011, 01:22:44-01:23:00).

In *Mudbound*, we also witness the brutality, scorning, and attacks of the KKK elaborately, and KKK atrocities are portrayed in much more detail compared to *The Help*. For example, while going for a drive with Jamie in his truck, Ronsel drops a letter and a photograph which reveal his secret love affair with Resl, a white German girl with whom he has a child. When Pappy, a Klan member father, discovers the photo and the letter, in which Resl pleads for Ronsel to return to Germany to be with her and his son. Pappy and her Klan allies apply vigilante justice to Ronsel for being impudent about crossing the colour line even though he has committed his “alleged crime” in Germany, not Mississippi. Ronsel’s tormentors regard him as a beast and a filthy who has abused a white woman and gotten a child; consequently, they believe that he must be punished. KKK captors use the letter and the photo to justify their remorseless killer acts. They kidnap Ronsel and then beat and torture him intensely in the barn. Pappy wakes Jamie up and brings him to the barn. Jamie cannot protect Ronsel from his kidnappers because he is not strong enough to fight all Klan members to save him. Pappy asks him to decide on the punishment for Ronsel while tormenting him constantly by insulting and swearing. “Nigger still needs to be punished. You let my son there decide how. I'll give you a choice. You don't want him killed, then you decide the punishment” (Rees, 2017, 01:55:35-01:55:56). He threats and forces Jamie to choose the punishment. “His tongue, his eyes, or his balls? Choose! Choose, God damn it” (Rees, 2017, 01:55:58-01:56:14). Eventually, Jamie chooses tongue as he thinks the minor punishment.

Indeed, the choices all symbolize different kinds of scorning and humiliating a person, and they could also be considered to indicate how KKK see Blacks. Ronsel’s persecutors regard him as a beast who has a child with a white woman and, therefore, must be punished. If he loses his manhood, that means a black man could not be a man anymore and could not have any children in future, which is one of the ways to make them extinct.

If he loses his eyes, he can only see dark, like his skin colour, with no light for the future. Finally, Jamie chooses “his tongue.” He tries to choose the most harmless one, but this punishment causes Ransel to lose his voice, which could be regarded as a great metaphor here because the voice is one of the key themes in the film, and he loses it. Losing his tongue removes not only his communication ability but also weakens his identity.

In the segregated South, Blacks were unable to express themselves due to the oppression by the Whites. As we witness in *Mudbound*, a white man decides that a black man should be silenced. If you want to oppress someone, preventing them from speaking is a great place to start. The punishment causes Ransel’s loss of his speech organ and prevents him from speaking. It might be considered that this torture or punishment is a metaphor for showing how black people were kept silent for a long time, as it is also emphasized by Critical Race Theorists. CRTs argue that “Critical Race Theory remains a dynamic force on the American legal and cultural scene. The formation of spin-off groups, far from impairing the group’s effectiveness or muting its voice, has only added new, vital dimensions to the movement as a whole” (Delgado, 2017, p. 121). They also suggest a solution to the problem of voice oppression in their theory under the subtitle “Cure for Silencing”:

Stories also serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. (Delgado, 2017, p. 43)

Rees’s frequent use of the inner voice method throughout the film may also be interpreted as a reflection of the need for black people’s voices to be heard after being forced to keep silent for centuries. Taylor portrays a white voice speaking for blacks in *The Help*, but thanks to Rees’s style and use of inner voice, we have black people speaking in *Mudbound*.

Another movie that criticizes the contempt of black people due to their skin colour and KKK violence is *The Best of Enemies*, based on Osha Gray Davidson’s book *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South*. Blacks risked their lives and fought

for their homeland as much as the white ones, so they deserved equal respect and attitude; however, it was otherwise. The film is about the conflict between activist Ann Atwater and Ku Klux Klan leader C. P. Ellis. Notwithstanding, *The Best of Enemies* falls short of capturing exactly how terrifying and brutal organization KKK was in real life. It is worthwhile to refer to this study as it emphasizes the similar significant racial discrimination for the black veterans in the U.S. KKK members threaten the selected voters and they force them to support segregation the previous night before the final election. When C.P. learns about their plan, he tries to prevent them, especially after learning that one of their targets is Lee, a business owner who has served in Vietnam; C.P. gets furious. Lee is a close friend of Emmett, a black manager whom Lee employs in his hardware store. In the scene of C.P. and Lee's conversation before voting, when C.P. asks whether he trusts Emmett, Lee says, "Other than my wife, he's the only person I trust" (Bissel, 01:18:00:22- 01:18:02). He explains that they have been in Vietnam together, and he emphasizes how he is grateful to Emmett. Furthermore, in the scene, it is strongly implied that Lee's life was saved by Emmett. Therefore, C.P. says, "Any man who served bravely in this country's military doesn't need to hear anything more from me" (Bissel, 2019, 01:18:34-01:18:38). Lee's answer is, "Emmett served this country, too, and he was a lot braver than me" (Bissel, 2019, 01:18:49-01:18:54). This scene is a very significant one since, in the aftermath of this conversation, C.P. changes his mind about that black man although he does not show it clearly. That C.P. Ellis, as a Klan leader, changes and rejects being a member of this brutal organization provides an effective hope for the future at the end of the film.

Briefly, Diandrea Rees's *Mudbound* emphasizes that Blacks, who had served in the war for their nation as much as white soldiers, deserved the same respect and esteem as whites regardless of skin colour. Society should not dare to put unjust, hurtful, and nonsensical limitations on an entire group of people due to race. The film has the audience watch the characters, listen to Blacks' inner voices, and makes us question our prejudices regarding race and skin colour.

CONCLUSION

Movies have long been seen to represent societal issues, and by highlighting these issues, they encourage the audience to think about them and eventually raise awareness. Many directors have attempted to indicate Blacks' sufferings due to racial discrimination and segregation in the unjust society of Southern America during the Jim Crow Laws period, so many films portray black people and their lives under the strict rules of segregated southern society. *Mudbound* and *The Help* are two movies examined in this thesis based on race discrimination and segregation in the United States of America. The practice of discrimination against someone based on race or ethnicity is recognized as racism. The first version of race discrimination goes back to the slavery system. Slavery is the consequence of the deceitful opinion that one group of people is superior to another, particularly those of a different race, skin colour, or ethnicity. Indeed, skin colour or biological characteristics do not determine humanitarian values. The word race, used as a political concept and excuse for white dominance in a societal structure, should be expelled from scientists' lexicon.

Today, it is no longer acceptable to regard or see a human being as a commodity or inferior to another. To support the issue, CRTs started a new movement to prevent and obliterate race discrimination, prejudiced segregation, and injustice, which are not legal anymore but still exist in society today. CRT, therefore, eventuates to provide Blacks with fundamental rights and freedom. CRTs aim to eliminate racist inequality, not just to determine but also to change by dealing with the issue of social stratification on racial and economic grounds. They also aim to raise social awareness regarding racist practices in society. As mentioned before, CRT mainly deals with examining how racial oppression impacted the structure of the United States via the study of law and US history. As a film about racial relationships, *Mudbound* presents how biased racial views and unfair deeds affect the lives of black and white characters during the post-war period. It reflects the strict Jim Crow oppression in the Mississippi Delta. It is set in historical settings and recycles and offers the uncomfortable viewer violence done by Southern whites against Southern blacks. Rees's investigation into a particular period of history is not altogether

unfamiliar. Rees's investigation into a particular period of history is not altogether unfamiliar. *Mudbound* tackles both historical themes of post-war racism as well as unresolved racial and social justice concerns. Similarly, Taylor's film *The Help* depicts similar issues, such as the unjust treatment of black maids and their challenges during Jim Crow Laws in the post-war era in Southern America.

Mudbound clearly shows that for blacks, serving their country does not help them to climb over the racial mountain in the segregated South. After World War II, black veterans who had heroically served their nation were to live under pre-war conditions. Rees deals with this injustice studiously and shows how a black veteran's effort for equality ends with cruelty. Most of the plot takes place in the segregated Mississippi Delta in the years following World War II. It is a historical fiction that deals with love, family, loyalty, duty, and the complicated relationships. *The Help* examines societal injustices such as racism and segregation in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s. *The Help* depicts the inner workings of a segregated society, especially for women. It also shows how racial inequality supports social class order by maintaining segregated or racialized geography, which separates classes and marginalizes the female black working class. It also portrays that prejudice based on race and the dominance of the white, wealthy ladies in Jackson. It emphasizes how racism justifies the continuation of an unequal society that deprives the minority group of many rights. Although racist manners and segregation laws make the maids hesitant to share their experiences first, they decide to tell everything to Skeeter in the end, and those stories reveal white ladies' disgraceful attitudes toward them in detail.

Taylor chooses to draw the attention of the audience by using some so-called humour like showing Minny's revenge on racist Hilly; nevertheless, it is not an excellent way to portray a black woman as an unfeeling one who makes a white woman eat her faeces in a cake. On the other hand, Rees, inspired by her grandma's real-life story, focuses primarily on the ordinary and realistic consequences of segregation and racism Blacks encounter in the American South. She portrays the unjust sharecropping system due to strict Jim Crow Laws by showing the Jackson family's history. Therefore, although Hap and his ancestors have worked themselves up into a sweat, they could never become

landowners of the plantation they have lived and worked. In particular, Rees emphasizes that Hap and his ancestors could not obtain the land they should have, despite their legal rights; thus, it supports the ideas of the inequality and injustice claimed by the CRTs on legal practices.

The main point of this thesis has been to indicate the significant distinction between the two directors' styles of portraying similar racial issues besides their different internalization of the socially constructed concept of 'race.' In the Mississippi Delta during the time of segregation, both directors witnessed the generational and long-term impacts of racism, but their portrayals and approaches to the same issues are very different from one another. By analyzing, identifying, and classifying facts connected to racial themes, I have aimed to show how two directors of different races differently approach the issue of segregation, including the racial challenges. Their experiences as children raised in the South are generally reflected in their works. Taylor directly points out black women's struggles and issues experienced by the working class, but he sometimes neglects the male factor. Rees mostly chooses to intersperse the theme of race discrimination throughout her film, making it her own primary focus. Her movie includes the challenges of black people's lives due to segregation and Jim Crow Laws. She also portrays all aspects of the consequences of a segregated society for both races and genders. Her work is a realistic reflection of the effects of societal injustice on both genders and races in a segregated society. However, Taylor's film mostly takes place in the world of black and white Southern women in a populist view without all the consequences of segregation. Eventually, *Mudbound*, thanks to its black director Dee Rees, is entirely significant and realistic with its brilliant characteristics. Therefore, I claim it is not a coincidence that Rees is the first black woman director to be nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Adapted Screenplay category for *Mudbound*.

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