

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of Research

There are many kinds of injustice that occur throughout the world, one of which is social injustice. Several forms of social injustice are often perpetrated by some societies in various countries, especially in America, against minority communities, such as police brutality, discrimination and other racial crimes. This has become one of the problems that is widespread among minority communities and has become the center of attention at the moment. These acts of injustice and arbitrariness committed by the majority group certainly have various impacts on the victims, such as physical impacts to psychological impacts. Many of the people who witnessed it directly or indirectly, felt sympathy and empathy for the social injustice so, with a sense of humanity, many of them did not accept it and chose to show empathy by voicing their opinions in various ways.

From the past until the present moment, there is evidence of social injustice and how society shows its humanity towards it, as happened in America. Scribbles, and banners proclaiming “Black Lives Matter” were strewn across the streets. As explained by Buchanan and his colleagues that protests against injustice against African Americans in America have been around since 2013. Even recently, support for these movements and protests have not only come from citizens, but organizations such as N. F. L and NASCAR also toured as well. In 2020 itself, the "Black Lives Matter" movement because of the death of George Floyd made about 15 million to 26 million people in the United States take part in

this protest (Buchanan et al., 2020). In addition, in the article from Arbar, due to the pandemic that started in 2019, many of the Asian Hate stop movements emerged. The movement caused by the large number of people committing acts of exclusion and even violence against Asian citizens who were accused of being the origin and spreaders of this virus. The real case that can be seen is the attack carried out by several Americans against Asians in the city of New York, as many as 24 cases in 2020 (Arbar, 2021).

Many authors highlight the theme of social injustice in the works they create, one of which is the book that won the Caldecott medal. The Caldecott Medal is one of the prestigious awards besides the Newbery Medal. The Caldecott Medal was founded by Frederick G. Melcher as a tribute to children's picture books. The origin of the name for this award is from the first person who created a children's book with color illustrations in it, Randolph Caldecott. As stated by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) that the Caldecott Medal was designed by René Paul Chambellan in 1937 and he engraved the winner's name and date on the back. The only recipients of the Caldecott Medal are artists who are citizens of the United States and books published in the previous year. In addition to honoring America's most famous picture book artist for children, the Caldecott Honor Books also honors picture books that deserve attention.

Discussing the Caldecott medal is surely important to examine the children's picture book itself. As Lynch Brown and Tomlison present in their book entitled *Essentials of Children's Literature* that the picture book itself is considered as children's literature along side with poetry, and traditional literature (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 1998). Picture books are a medium used by

writers to convey messages to readers through pictures and also sentences where the use of sentences is less than the illustrations. Both of these have an important role in conveying the message of a story. It was even written in the same book that the role of illustrations in picture books is used as an explanation because it provides concept information as well as plots in a story and even other things such as settings and character traits (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 1998). This is the fundamental difference between picture books and other children's books. Picture books in their development have many types such as wordless picture books, board picture books, and others. Even so, the general purpose of these picture books is similar, to introduce children first to the world of reading and help children in their growth and development. As time goes by, the things discussed in children's picture books are increasingly diverse, one of which raises the issue of social injustice.

From 1995 until now, there are four children's picture books that won Caldecott medal that address the three forms of social injustices that are rife in America towards minority. The four award-winning books are *Watercress* by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin won a Caldecott medal in 2022, *The Undefeated* by Kwame alexander together with Kadir Nelson as an illustrator of the book, which won the Caldecott medal in 2020, *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* written and illustrated by Javaka Steptoe won the Caldecott medal in 2017, and the last Caldecott medal winner in 1995 was *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting with the help of David Diaz as an illustrator.

The first children's picture book is *Watercress*. The picture book which published in 2021 is autobiographical by the author, Wang focuses her story on a

Chinese immigrant girl who felt ashamed of her family's condition and her heritage until her mother tells the story of her family's past in China during the great famine. Second, *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander which published in 2019 shows how many challenges the black community in America have to face injustice such as police brutality, and hate crime that written in free verse. Then, a children's picture book which published in 2016 called *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe. It is includes as a biography. It briefly tells Basquiat, an Hispanic-American about his childhood dream of becoming a great artist. In his book, Steptoe also writes that in building Basquiat's dream as a famous artist, Basquiat went to New York, where the majority of the population is white. Lastly, Bunting explains in her book which published in 1994, *Smoky Night*, a boy named Daniel witnesses a riot at night that set the apartment he lived in on fire. This made all residents including him and his neighbor who had never get along before have to be evacuated to the shelter and that is where Daniel and his neighbor learn to live in harmony with each other.

The reason for doing this research is that the writer wants to show that children's picture books also have things related to complex society. As Dedeoglu and his colleague stated in their journal called "A Content Analysis of International Children's Picture Books: Representation of Poverty" that picture books are also useful as a learning tool for complex social studies concepts and for discussing some other difficult issues (Dedeoglu et al., 2011). Since as the writer knows before that, children's picture books only contain stories that are made to entertain children. However, after interpreting it, its meaning is much deeper than just the

entertainment that is told to children. Therefore, the writer wants to study the theme in selected four children's picture that won Caldecott medal.

After observing the list of books that won the Caldecott Medal, the writer found that the four picture books that won the Caldecott medal are not from one author because apart from looking at the same theme or having a common thread, namely social injustice, the writer also observes that from the list that wins Caldecott medals each year, the themes discussed by the same author are different in the picture book they created.

In addition, after reading the book review in *Goodreads*, the writer finally chose four children's picture books such as *Watercress* by Andrea Wang, *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander, *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe, and *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. The reason for choosing four of them instead of one is that the writer wants to reveal that many forms of social injustice occur in society. The form does not only damage a person's mentality as discrimination does, it can even torture a person in physical terms, such as police brutality and other race crimes. Therefore, the author does not only want to focus on discrimination but wants to discuss three forms of social injustice and how to overcome it in realizing the meaning of social justice itself which is generally a hot topic of discussion, on the topic of multiculturalism, in the children's picture book that won the Caldecott Medal. Hence, the writer will title her research "Social Injustice Reflected in Four Caldecott Award-Winning Books."

## 1.2. Identification of the Problems

In the four children's picture books that won the Caldecott medal, such as *Watercress* by Andrea Wang, *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander, *Radiant*

*Child* by Javaka Steptoe, and *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting, the writer found problems related to social injustice received by minority citizens is carried out by majority citizens in each of the works such as discrimination in *Watercress* by Andrea Wang and police brutality that portrayed in *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe, *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander, and *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. In addition, writer also found hate crimes in *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander and *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe.

### 1.3. Review of Related Literature

In this study, the writer conducts a literature review of previous studies related to the topic that the writer studied as a benchmark in writing her research as well as the review of four picture books that writer found on the internet. There are four review of picture books and two journal and two theses found by the writer related to the problem of multiculturalism.

First, the thesis entitled *Race and Social Injustice: The Representation in Children's Picture Books, 2016-2020*. Brittany Boisvert (2021) as the author provides an explanation regarding social injustice depicted in children's illustrated books published from 2016 to 2020. The social injustices that the author finds in the children's picture books she reads are white supremacy, racism and police brutality. Even the author adds that children's picture books are an important medium for readers to learn various things and can leave a lasting impact on children from the collaboration of text and illustrations in it. The author of this thesis presents a good analysis where she not only uses words, phrases, and sentences but also shows the main evidence by describing illustrations from picture books. Unfortunately, the weakness of this thesis is that it does not cite

images from the book correctly. Apart from that, this thesis can be a reference for the writer on how to properly analyze children's picture books and of course deep knowledge about the problems of discrimination, police brutality, and hate crimes.

Furthermore, the writer found reviews of four picture books. The first review is by Weileen Wang (2021) in an online magazine called *The Horn Book* regarding the book *Watercress* written by Andrea Wang. According to Weileen Wang, *Watercress* takes its readers across time and space with Andrea Wang who tells the reader about the memories that then unite a Chinese-American family. *Watercress* is the key to this story and this girl refuses to taste it until the story of hunger experienced by her family opens her heart to appreciate everything in her life more. Jason Chin helps in bringing those memories to life through his illustrations, one of which is extraordinary being the subtle transitions Chin uses in depicting the present in Ohio and the past in China with a corn field which then changes to the next page of the book with bamboos. The author of this review managed to provide a brief and clear review regarding the contribution of the author and illustrator of this picture book. However, the author does not give much of her opinion on Wang's written review where she only presents the conclusions of the book. Yet still, this review is very useful for the writer because it can increase knowledge related to picture books that will be analyzed by the writer.

Second, it is a review of the *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander by Rita Lorraine Hubbard (2019) in *New York Journal of Books Reviewer*. On the website, Hubbard explains how Alexander lists some of the invincible African Americans in his books such as athletes, fearless fighters in the “Black Lives

Matters” movement, and people who died of injustice in beautiful lyrical prose. Apart from that, assisted by his fellow illustrator, Kadir Nelson pours out his emotions and pride for those who dare to try and struggle to face the obstacles that are in front of their eyes to bring them down. This review helps the author in deciding that this picture book is suitable as an object for research that is by the author's topic, namely social injustice. In addition, this review helps the writer to find the victim of the incidents to serve as evidence in this thesis. In this review, the author does not only present a review of Alexander's writings but Nelson's illustrations well, understandably also with the same composition which does not only focus on Alexander's review but also how Nelson's illustrations play a role in the author's story. Even so, the weakness of this review is seen where the author does not introduce Kadir Nelson in the first paragraph as he did with Alexander.

Third, a picture book entitled *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe reviewed by Sujei Lugo and Lila Quintero Weaver (2017) in a collection of online book reviews called *Latinxs in Kid Lit*. In their review of this book, they revealed that Javaka Steptoe, as a writer and illustrator, wanted to teach readers that art is not always about being "neat and clean" to be considered beautiful. In every page illustrated by Steptoe, he also conveys that art doesn't always start with something good but that in its creation there will be many obstacles and chaos. It doesn't mean that things that are considered 'ugly, messy, and sometimes weird' aren't something beautiful and meaningful. After reading this review, the writer finds that the reviewers present well how Steptoe paints illustrations in his work, one of which is by giving the reader details about the symbols or motifs used by Basquiat such as stylized femurs and human skulls. Unfortunately, the reviewers seemed



only interested in reviewing the illustrations from *Radiant Child* without giving their opinion regarding the writing in the picture book. However, surely, this review is enough to contribute to the thesis writer not only paying attention to and analyzing Steptoe's writing but also paying more attention to the details in the illustrations made.

The fourth book review is "Smoky Night: Misguided Effort to Help Kids Understand Rodney King Events" by Beverly Slapin (2022), the reviewer of *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. According to Slapin, *Smoky Night* is a book set in the riots resulting from the acquittal of four police officers suspected of assaulting black youths. In this book, Eve Bunting only explains the chaos and looting that occurred by a group of people without explaining the original causes such as racism and injustice so that this will make assumptions about the "bad environment" for readers who do not know the background of the incident, especially readers who are not black. Bunting also describes the two cats and neighbor characters as learning in her book. The writer finds this review useful as a source of information related to the causes of the riots that Bunting told in her picture book. An interesting review is presented by a reviewer using easy-to-understand language regarding the background of a picture book entitled *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. Apart from the title and content which opposes *Smoky Night* as a book that directs readers about the incident of Rodney King's racism, it would be better than the reviewer also presents a little contribution of this book to the study of social justice.

Another thesis that the writer reviews in this section is the thesis by Vanessa Khairifa Sefra (2021) entitled *Embracing Cultural Diversity To Fight*

*Racism Against African-Americans as Reflected in Selected Multicultural Children's Picture Books.* In this thesis, the author discusses four children's picture books that describe the problem of diversity in the form of racism in various forms such as police brutality, gun violence, and skin color discrimination. In addition, the author also reveals how each picture book author embraces existing diversity, namely by strengthening the African-American community itself and the attitudes that must be carried out between races among Americans. The author of this thesis presents a well-organized analysis of the selected works, as can be seen from how she groups how to embrace diversity in his thesis. Unfortunately, the author does not present the proper topic sentence in her analysis so it will be confusing for some individuals who will read her research. The writer of this research finds that this thesis helps in increasing understanding related to police violence itself and how the history of diversity exists in America. In addition, this thesis is also a reference for writers on how to analyze picture books that are appropriate to the writer's thesis.

Furthermore, a journal written by Amalia Putri Maurilla (2015) entitled "Racial Discrimination in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*." This journal written by Amalia uses a sociological approach and uses the library research method. Her findings explain social injustice in the form of racial discrimination experienced by African-Americans in *The Help*. The writer found three forms of this injustice, namely verbal abuse, unequal actions, and prejudice. In addition, the author also explains the effects of racial discrimination received by black minority groups. The good thing about this study is how the author presents her research in a way that is easy to understand and not long-winded, which makes it easier for readers

to understand the contents of their study. However, this study only summarizes the contents of the analysis without providing a closing statement or opinion regarding the importance of the arguments it provides. This study helps the writer to recognize various forms of discrimination received by minority groups which will be useful in writing the writer's research because the writer will discuss discrimination in the thesis later.

Lastly, which is no less important, the writer has to understand social injustice in American literature as the literary context of this research. The writer found a journal article with the title "The History and Development of British and American Literature" by Hua Yang (2017) in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* by Wadim Strielkowski and his colleagues. It explains how the development of British literature as well as American literature from the independent revolution period to the civil war period. It can be seen that from each period, these two literatures experienced a development, one of which was in the form of the themes discussed therein. In British literature itself, writers began to pay attention to how literature could reflect social conditions during the Renaissance which would reflect the suffering and aspirations of the people. In American literature, writers began to focus on reflecting on social life, such as how dark social life and suffering were felt by the people in literary works around the mid-19th century. Apart from that, this was also influenced by the American population, which began to develop with the discovery of diverse lives. The children's book, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one such work that presents all of this. From this study, the writer sees that this researcher explains briefly and quite easily to understand

about the development of British and American literature. This is of course an addition to the writer's knowledge of social injustice which is a topic that has been discussed for a long time in world literature, including American literature. Even so, the drawback of this scientific writing is that the author does not write down the development of this research in the form of sub-chapters starting from the independent revolution to the civil war period so that it is better understood by other readers.

After reviewing some of the related literature that the writer found, the writer saw that the researchers only focused on issues such as discrimination and police brutality and did not find how cruel hate crime was in taking justice for every member of the minority community. Hate crime is a form of violence that also deserves to be discussed because of its practices that are still found today, like bomb threats and racial attack. In addition, the authors also found that these scientific writings only focused on the injustices that befell black people and did not explain how the Asian-American minority group also received almost the same unfair treatment. Therefore, in this thesis, the author will contribute to explaining the injustices that befell Asian-American minority communities and black people. In addition, the author also explains hate crimes experienced by minority groups, especially black people.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

This research will answer several questions:

1. How are three forms of social injustice in America represented in *Watercress*, *The Undeclared*, *Radiant Child*, and *Smoky Night*?

2. What are solutions to prevent problems of social injustice depicted in *Watercress*, *The Undefeated*, *Radiant Child*, and *Smoky night*?

### 1.5. Scope of the Research

In this study, the issue that concern the writer is the social injustice in the selected picture books such as *Watercress*, *The Undefeated*, *Radiant Child*, and *Smoky Night*. By providing the results of this analysis, readers can learn about complex problems like this contained in children's picture books while at the same time adding and enriching knowledge related to the issues discussed in these four Caldecott medal-winning books.

### 1.6. Objectives of the Research

The aims of this research are:

1. To find out three forms of social injustice in America and how they are reflected in *Watercress*, *The Undefeated*, *Radiant Child*, and *Smoky night*.
2. To figure out the solutions to prevent problems of social injustice depicted in *Watercress*, *The Undefeated*, *Radiant Child*, and *Smoky night*.