

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE RACIAL BINARIES

AS SHOWN IN *MALCOLM X* (1992)

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Gaining
The Bachelor Degree in English Literature



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MOTTO

“It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.”

-Lou Holtz

“Life without a goals it's like a body without a soul”

-Researcher

“No one will reap except what they sow”

-Q.S Al Anam: 164

“They planned, but Allah also planned. And Allah is the best of planners.”

-Q.S Al Anfal: 30

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DEDICATION

This graduating paper is dedicated to my mother, my late father, my sister, and my entire family. Most importantly, I extend my deepest gratitude to my partner whose support and assistance were invaluable throughout the creation of this paper.





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Saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqosyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

Atas perhatian Bapak Dekan, saya mengucapkan terima kasih.

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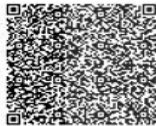
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FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this graduate paper is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this graduating paper. Other researcher's opinion or finding included in this research is quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

Yogyakarta, 27 November 2024

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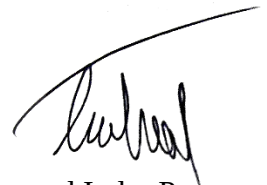
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Finally, I understand that only Allah SWT holds perfection. However, there might be some mistakes in this research. Because of that, suggestions, criticism, and advice are very welcome to help improve my graduating paper. I also hope that this research can be useful for readers, future researchers, and the general public.

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The Deconstruction of Racial Binaries as Shown in *Malcolm X* (1992)

By: Muhamad Indra Putra

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the deconstruction of racial binaries in the 1992 film *Malcolm X* through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. The film portrays the life of Malcolm X, a key figure in the American civil rights movement, and explores the transformation of racial conflict between Black and White people. Using Derrida's deconstruction methodology, the research critically examines selected scenes, focusing on dismantling binary oppositions such as "white superiority vs. black inferiority" and "dominance vs. submission." The analysis reveals that Islam, as depicted in the film, plays a pivotal role in challenging and deconstructing these binaries, fostering unity and equality. The study explores the Islamic values of peace and tolerance, which serve as the foundation for Malcolm X's turning point and the central focus of the analysis. Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca and his shift from advocating racial segregation to promoting racial tolerance demonstrate this transformation. The film's portrayal of Islam as a catalyst for deconstructing racial binaries highlights its significance in Malcolm X's personal and ideological evolution, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of race relations in the United States.

Keywords: Deconstruction, racial binaries, *Malcolm X*, unity and equality.

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The Deconstruction of Racial Binaries as Shown in *Malcolm X* (1992)

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis dekonstruksi biner rasial dalam film *Malcolm X* tahun 1992 melalui lensa teori dekonstruksi Jacques Derrida. Film ini menggambarkan kehidupan Malcolm X, tokoh kunci dalam gerakan hak-hak sipil Amerika, dan mengeksplorasi transformasi konflik rasial antara orang Kulit Hitam dan Kulit Putih. Dengan menggunakan metodologi dekonstruksi Derrida, penelitian ini secara kritis mengkaji adegan-adegan terpilih, berfokus pada pembongkaran oposisi biner seperti "superioritas kulit putih vs. inferioritas kulit hitam" dan "dominasi vs. submisi." Analisis mengungkapkan bahwa Islam, seperti yang digambarkan dalam film, memainkan peran penting dalam menantang dan mendekonstruksi biner-biner ini, menumbuhkan persatuan dan kesetaraan. Penelitian ini menyelidiki nilai-nilai Islam tentang perdamaian dan toleransi, yang menjadi landasan bagi perubahan penting Malcolm X dan fokus utama analisis. Perjalanan Malcolm X ke Mekkah dan perubahannya dari menganjurkan segregasi rasial menjadi mempromosikan toleransi rasial menunjukkan transformasi ini. Penggambaran film tentang Islam sebagai katalisator/alat untuk mendekonstruksi biner rasial menyoroti signifikansinya dalam evolusi pribadi dan ideologis Malcolm X, yang pada akhirnya berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa tentang hubungan ras di Amerika Serikat.

Kata Kunci: Dekonstruksim, biner rasial, *Macolm X*, persatuan dan kesetaraan.

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CHAPTER I

1.1. Background of Study

The movie *Malcolm X* (1992) also received positive reviews from movie reviewers and film critics such as Roger Ebert and Emanuel Levy, who describe *Malcolm X* (1992) as one of the great screen biographies that celebrate the whole sweep of an American life beginning in sorrow, bottoming out on the streets and in prison, and reinventing itself in triumph (IMDb, n.d).

Following the hype, it also attracts attention from researchers such as Juan F. Perea in his journal *The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" of American Racial Thought*, which focuses on understanding the racial binaries of Black/White and their impact on the discrimination of Latinos and other minority races such as Asian and Mexican (Perea, 1997, p. 212). In his research, Perea concludes that the focus on Black/White binaries overshadows the discrimination against other marginalized races, excluding Black/White (Perea, 1997, p. 213). Outside Perea's research on *Malcolm X* (1992), Nina Bosnicova, in her article *Malcolm X and the Fair Sex: Representation of Women in Malcolm X's Autobiography*, focuses on Malcolm X's attitude towards women as mirrored in his autobiography. Her research concludes that Malcolm X's sexist attitudes and inability to view gender relations more progressively are evident not only in his speeches and public announcements but also in his life story (Nina, 19: 83).

Another study that uses *Malcolm X* (1992) as one of its subjects is a research essay written by Robert Chrisman titled *What is the Right Thing? Notes on the Deconstruction of Black Ideology*. This essay primarily analyzes the movie *Do the Right Thing* (1988), focusing on understanding how deconstruction works in the movie's plot. It also brings up a scenario where Spike Lee, the director, contrasts statements by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X: "In the end, justice prevails one way or another. There are two paths to that: the way of King, or the way of Malcolm." This essay concludes that *Do the Right Thing* (1988) deconstructs contemporary Black ideologies without replacing them with a new vision, allowing hegemonic thought to occupy surrendered ideological space (Chrisman, 1990, p. 57).

However, missing from these previous discussions is an analysis of how racial binaries in *Malcolm X* (1992) are deconstructed by the values of tolerance shown by Islam. Perea's research on the racial binary paradigm demonstrates the dominance of two races over others, marginalizing races other than Afro-American and Caucasian. However, it lacks an analysis of Islam's role in fostering tolerance. Similarly, the research of Nina Bosnicova and Robert Chrisman overlooks Islam's significance in reshaping Malcolm X's perception of race.

Islam plays a vital role in addressing racial binaries and deconstructing race issues in *Malcolm X*. Based on this, deconstructing binary oppositions through the Islamic paradigm of tolerance provides a new perspective. This movie is analyzed using deconstruction theory to examine the binary opposition of racial binaries portrayed in the narrative. Malcolm Little, widely known as Malcolm X, is born in

Michigan. His father, a preacher, follows the teachings of Marcus Garvey, an African-American leader who believes that white Americans will never accept Black people and advocates for African Americans to return to Africa. Following his father's path, Malcolm becomes a minister who teaches a variation of his father's beliefs, shaped by his life experiences. Throughout his life, Malcolm faces violence: his father is murdered by the Klan, his house is burned, his mother is unable to support the family, and he ends up in foster care.

As one of the brightest students in his class, Malcolm's talents are steered away by white teachers who tell him that, as a Negro, he should pursue manual labor. He begins working as a Pullman porter and later becomes a numbers runner and small-time gangster in Harlem. At this darkest stage of his life, Malcolm is imprisoned and introduced to the Black Muslim movement of Elijah Muhammad. He converts to Islam and takes the name Malcolm X, shedding the legacy of slavery. Through Islam, he became a charismatic preacher and rose rapidly to advocate for Black independence and self-sufficiency.

Binary opposition, especially racial binaries, is a central theme in Malcolm X (1992). It causes conflict and drives the plot, shaping the main character's development. By the end of the movie, Malcolm X rejects racial binaries, embracing racial tolerance, which raises questions about how his thinking evolves. From supporting segregation to advocating for tolerance, this shift reflects deconstruction's role in dismantling binary oppositions.

The change of paradigm that the main character "Malcolm X" is very interesting because he was an activist in the American community who significantly supported racial segregation, which is his main ideology of racial separation of black skin and white skin to discontinue the injustice from racial inequalities. The behaviors and the way Malcolm X thinks represent the binary opposition of racial binaries, which is the main topic of this movie. Hence, the ideology of binary opposition or racial binaries of Malcolm X is a sudden change from supporting racial separation to supporting racial equality and tolerance, which reflected the way of deconstruction work on deconstructing binary opposition or racial binaries as implemented in this movie.

Malcolm X was a symbol of Afro-American intellectuals who fought his way to break the injustice and discrimination by the white people and struggle for Afro-American equality in every aspect of life regarding human rights and citizen rights. As an act, Malcolm increased equality, and the discourse created a racial separation that showed the duality between colored people and white-colored people, caused by the long history of white people's domination in the history of the United States and the privileges that white people created throughout the times. This shows that the duality between black-colored and white-colored people creates a binary opposition between those races. G. Smith states that binary opposition is the system by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another (Smith, 1996,, p. 383).

Binary opposition is an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought (Baldick, 2004). Binary

opposition has an important role in structuralism and the movie *Malcolm X* (1992), which plays a role in developing the character and eventually becomes the main motive of the main character to deconstruct the binaries.

Binary opposition that shows in this movie as a form of racial segregation or racial binaries is the boundary created by the racial categories, which are also affected by the superiority and prejudices created by white people to assert that white people are above the Black race, as shown in the movie by the lack of choice that Afro-Americans have compared with Caucasians. Derrida declares that binary oppositions are hierarchical since one pair element is always in a superior position and, thus, privileged, making the other element inferior or unprivileged (Bressler, 1999: 125).

The binary opposition of the Black and White races is an obvious part of this movie; however, how Islamic values deconstruct the binary opposition of the Black and White races in the movie is the main focus of this graduating paper because deconstructing the binary opposition gains another meaning. Thus, this kind of deconstructive reading leads us to a new meaning of the text. This movie is analyzed using the analysis of deconstruction theory on the phenomena of the binary opposition of racial binaries portrayed in the movie.

1.2. Research Questions

How do Islamic values of racial tolerance showed by the act of *Malcolm X* deconstruct the racial binaries according to the action shown in the movie?

1.3. Objective of Study

From the research questions above, the main focus of this study would aim to find out how Islam's values of racial tolerance can be used as a source to deconstruct the racial binaries depicted in the movie Malcolm X.

1.4. Significance of Study

This research concerns the deconstruction of the racial binary portrayed in the movie Malcolm X by using the theory of deconstruction that deconstructs the binary opposition, in this case, racial binary, as seen in the movie. Hopefully, this research exposes how Islam can deconstruct the paradigm of racial binary, and this research becomes an inspiration to analyze Islam as the source of peace and equality.

1.5. Literature Review

The researcher finds some previous research related to the object or the theory used in this research. The first research is a graduating paper by Kholifatul Khoeroh in 2020 from the State Islamic University (UIN) of Sunan Kalijaga entitled Social Deixis in Malcolm X (1992) Movie. The study aims to analyze the types of social deixis that occur in the Malcolm X movie and describe the function of each social deixis found in the movie by using the social deixis theory by Stephen C. Levinson. This research helps understand the function of social deixis in Malcolm X's movie.

The second research is a graduating paper by Ervan Yudhi Triatmoko 2009 from the Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta entitled Breaking the Hegemony of White Americans Reflected in Spike Lee's Malcolm X: A Sociological Approach. The

research uses Malcolm X's (1992) movie as the research object. It applies a sociological approach to examine the chronicles of Malcolm X and how he fought against the American system to defend human rights. The main intention of this study is to understand how Malcolm X led the movement to break the hegemony of white Americans and defend the equality of human rights based on sociological theory.

The third research, *The Deconstruction of Alice in Alice Through the Looking Glass Movie*, is a graduation paper written by Lintang Putri Sayekti in 2018 from the State Islamic University (UIN) of Sunan Kalijaga. This paper uses the Deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida to deconstruct the ambiguous meaning and other motives that can be read according to the struggles of Alice's role in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

The fourth research, entitled *From Villain to Hero; From Antagonist to Protagonist: Deconstruction of Suicide Squad*, is a graduation paper written by Mahfud Sya'roni in 2017 from State Islamic University (UIN) of Sunan Kalijaga. This research aims to understand how the roles of the main characters can be explained from the perspective of shifting roles from antagonist to protagonist and how the shift in characterization from villain to hero happens. To uncover this issue, Deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida is used.

From the four prior studies above, the researcher infers that all of them have differing ideas of using deconstruction theory to deconstruct the binaries, especially racial binaries, in Malcolm X's (1992) movie. Although the first research uses the same

object, and the third and fourth research papers use the same theories, none aim to deconstruct binary opposition in the Malcolm X (1992) movie. In conclusion, the researcher concludes that this research is the first to use deconstruction theory in analyzing the Malcolm X (1992) movie.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on several theories that deconstruct the Islamic values used by the main character of Malcolm X. The deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida is the main theory of this research, along with the binary opposition theory, also introduced by Derrida in Post-Structuralism and semiotics film theory as supporting theories (Derrida, 1967: lxxviii). The deconstruction theory is used to deconstruct the binary opposition of racial binary phenomena that occur in the movie. In contrast, semiotics film theory is used to analyze each scene of the movie.

1.6.1. Deconstruction

According to Christopher Norris, deconstruction, as if it were a method, a system, or a settled body of ideas, falsifies its nature and lays itself open to charges of reductive misunderstanding. Deconstruction is partly seen as a vigilant reaction against this tendency in structuralist thought to tame and domesticate its best insights (Derrida, :2).

Jacques Derrida defines the term deconstruction in his approach to literary analysis, where he assumes that all texts, whether literary or not, can be deconstructed.

This also involves the effect of dismantling texts or parts of them, which reveals the inner inconsistencies where a text might appear to imply one thing that can be shown to imply the opposite (Carter, 1998, p. 111).

The deconstructive interaction does not come from the text/reader but from the text itself; it is now there; it is the pressure 'between what (the text) implies to say and what it is compelled to mean. There is no technique or method to deconstruction since texts in a literary work deconstruct themselves (Norris, 1988 p. 19). The idea of deconstruction is found in a text itself, but usually, this idea comes from another perspective that people uncommonly see because of the precedent thought from previous researchers.

Deconstruction Theory is one of the theories used in literary criticism and was popularized by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction theories focus on locating the promising marginal text, disclosing the undecidable moment, prying it loose with the positive lever of the signifier, reversing the resident hierarchy, only to displace it, dismantling to reconstitute what is always already inscribed (Derrida, 1979, p. 78). On the other hand, the focus of this theory is to dismantle a text with a purpose that leads to finding another meaning.

In his book *Grammatology*, Derrida explains that deconstruction concerns the unseen rather than the obvious. A deconstructive reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does

not command in his language patterns. It attempts to make the unseen accessible to sight (Derrida: 1976,158-163).

There are two main frameworks for deconstructing: the analysis of textual fact and the rejection of textual fact (Derrida, 1976, pp. 3-5). Analyzing textual facts in the deconstruction method involves identifying and interpreting the existing structures, meanings, and binary oppositions within a text (Derrida, 1978, pp. 10-12). The rejection of textual fact challenges a text's established meanings, norms, and binaries, destabilizing the accepted interpretations (Culler, 1982, pp. 86-90). In the step-by-step analysis of the rejection of textual fact, we begin with the transcendental signifier. Derrida's concept of a transcendental signifier refers to a central reference point that shapes meaning within a system of thought (Derrida, 1976, pp. 49-51). Next is logocentrism, which involves prioritizing a central, authoritative presence or "logos" that defines meaning (Derrida, 1997, pp. 11-15).

Binary opposition, a key element in deconstruction, focuses on the hierarchical pairing of concepts where one dominates the other (Norris, 1987, pp. 30-33). Phonocentrism refers to privileging speech or presence, overwriting or absence in constructing meaning (Derrida, 1973, pp. 56-59). Finally, the metaphysics of presence relates to the idea that meaning is tied to a central, stable presence, which deconstruction seeks to expose as unstable and fluid (Derrida, 1976, pp. 133-137).

1.6.2. Binary Opposition

Binary opposition, introduced by Derrida, is rooted in structuralism, which results from a system of difference, and according to Norris, the main point of this system of difference is binary opposition (Norris: ix). According to Norris, binary opposition compares two terms in which the first term is superior to the second, for example, signifier or signified, speaking or writing, and langue or parole (Norris: ix). Binary opposition originates from Saussurean structuralism theory. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, binary opposition is how language units have value or meaning: each unit is defined against what it is not (Litencyc, n.d).

In structuralism, binary opposition is fundamental to human philosophy, culture, and language. In the community of philosophers and scholars, most of them believe that, as Derrida describes, "useless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise it isn't a distinction" (1991). Binary opposition is used to recognize the phenomena of a racial binary, which is portrayed in the movie *Malcolm X*. The focus of the binary in this film is the phenomenon of a racial binary that is highlighted throughout the story of this film.

1.6.3. Film Theories

This research uses film theories to support the main theories by analyzing the cinematic aspects of the movie to assert the meaning and analyze the hidden meaning behind every scene that happens in the movie. Two aspects of film theory are used in this movie: *Mise-en-scène* and camera movement.

The first aspect of film theory is *Mise-en-scène*. According to Ed Sikov, *Mise-en-scène* describes the primary features of cinematic representation, which consist of all of the elements placed in front of the camera that have to be photographed, starting from settings, props, lighting, costumes, makeup, figure behavior, which means actors, their gestures, and their facial expressions (Sikov, :5).

The second aspect of film theory is camera movement. The film offers something unique, which is mobile framing (Sikov, 2010 :25). According to Ed Sikov, the camera can move from side to side, up and down, backward and forward, all of the above, and more (Sikov, 25). This camera movement is used to notice every element in the movie scene, from the background, character expression, and also the nuance shown in the scene. There are various kinds of camera movements used in the movie.

- a) Pan, is a condition where the camera is stationary but pivots on its axis from side to side.
- b) A tilt or vertical pan is a condition where the camera is stationary but tilt's up and down.
- c) Moving shot is where the camera is mounted and placed in a moving object such as a vehicle.
- d) Motivated movements are those that are prompted by the characters and events in the film.
- e) Unmotivated movements are those that pertain to the filmmaker's commentary on characters and events (Sikov, :25-27)

1.7. Methods of Research

This research uses the qualitative method. The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and processes, on meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Thousand et al.: Sage, 2005). The researcher uses qualitative methods because the data gathered in scenes and text from the dialogue in the movie cannot be processed with calculation. Hence, the data are collected using library and literature research.

1.7.1. Data Sources

The researcher uses primary and supporting data for this research. The primary data are collected from the movie *Malcolm X* through the scenes and dialogues. The supporting data used for this research come from books, journals, articles, and reviews related to the movie and the analysis.

1.7.2. Data Collection Technique

Several steps need to be taken to collect the data. The first step is watching the film. This first step aims to understand the movie's storyline and identify other intrinsic elements such as characters, characterization, theme, and setting. The second step is sorting out and categorizing the scenes and dialogues from the movie while also taking a screenshot of necessary aspects of the images related to and helping the analysis, specifically in the showcase of racial binary and the deconstruction. This step aims to make the data easier to analyze. After all the data are sorted and categorized, the researcher can start the analysis to solve the problem stated in the paper.

1.7.3. Data Analysis Technique

The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative technique to analyze the data. The first step of this research is identifying and collecting every scene or dialogue that fits into binary categories rooted in binary opposition theory. Second, after identifying and collecting the data, the researcher applies deconstruction theory to deconstruct the binary and analyzes each scene that fits into the racial binary, also making an explanation of the scenes through movie theory. The result of the deconstruction theory analysis is to find out how Islam, as shown in the movie, can be a deconstruction tool to deconstruct the binary depicted in the movies. Lastly, the researcher concludes the analysis.

1.8. Paper Organization

This research consists of four chapters, each subdivided into subsequent parts. The first chapter introduces the research, which consists of the background of choosing the subject, objective of the study, significance of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, research methodology, and paper organization. The second chapter consists of the intrinsic and binary data of Malcolm X. The third chapter shows the analysis using the deconstruction theory to reveal another meaning by deconstructing the binaries. The fourth chapter presents the conclusion of this research.

CHAPTER IV

In *Malcolm X*, the portrayal of the relationship between the Black and white races is evident as a binary opposition, wherein the white race symbolizes superiority, and the black race is representative of inferiority. Researchers have also observed a similar binary pattern at the level of characteristics for each racial group through an analysis of inter-pair hierarchy.

1. Exerting Powerful Social Control vs Experiencing Powerless Social Control
2. Having Limitless Opportunities vs Facing Limited Opportunities
3. Tending to Have Control over the Law vs Tending to Have No Control over the Law
4. Good social treatment vs Harsh social treatment

The examination of binary oppositions between Black and White individuals reveals a dominance imposed upon the Black community, highlighting the oppression they experience through various aspects controlled by the White population. This analysis stems from scrutinizing four binaries that underscore the racial domination of Whites over Blacks, wherein Whites are perceived as superior. Conversely, Blacks are consistently portrayed as dominant and weaker compared to Whites.

However, from a Deconstruction perspective, this dominance is not solely due to inherent weaknesses within the Black community. However, it is a result of long-standing societal practices where Whites have controlled social narratives and

tarnished the image of Black people. This systemic slander has fostered an internalized inferiority complex among Black individuals, perpetuating the belief in White superiority. The notion of White superiority and Black inferiority, rooted in enduring racial stereotypes, becomes part of the deconstruction of logocentrism originating from transcendental signifieds.

Malcolm X's initial adoption of racial stereotypes within an Islamic framework—believing it supported racial segregation—was influenced by a metaphysics of presence stemming from a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings. However, Islam, when understood in its authentic form, functions as a deconstructive tool that challenges these racial binaries. By advocating principles of equality and tolerance, Islam deconstructs the narrative of racial segregation promoted by the Nation of Islam. It reveals that the conventional portrayal of Whites as dominators, Blacks as the dominant, and Islam as a tool supporting racial segregation is a misrepresentation.

In essence, Islam serves as a mechanism to dismantle the constructed perceptions of dominance and inferiority between races. The true teachings of Islam advocate for the unity and equality of all humanity, thereby deconstructing the flawed binaries that have been socially and historically imposed. This challenges the preconceived notions and encourages a reevaluation of racial relationships, highlighting that perceived dominance is a societal construct rather than an inherent truth.

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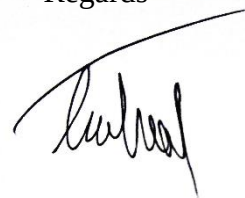
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