

Racism and Racial Segregation in *Hidden Figures*: Discrimination Against Black Women in America

Hikma Musyaffa Pramudya^{1✉}, Yusrina Dinar Prihatika²

¹English Literature, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²English Literature, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia

✉email: hikma2100026030@webmail.uad.ac.id

Received:

July 13, 2026

Revised:

July 23, 2026

Accepted:

July 25, 2026

Published:

August 1, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of racism and racial segregation in the film *Hidden Figures* as a portrait of discrimination against Black women in the United States during the 1960s. The analysis focuses on the experiences of its three main characters Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson who worked at NASA in a racially segregated and male-dominated professional environment. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the representation of racism and racial segregation in the film *Hidden Figures*. Data were collected through repeated observation and documentation of scenes and dialogues in the film multiple times, and was examined using thematic analysis based on intersectionality and representation theory. The analysis applies intersectionality theory together with Stuart Hall's representation theory to explore how race and gender intersect in shaping social oppression and media representation. The findings indicate that the film portrays both explicit and implicit forms of structural discrimination, including segregated facilities, limited professional recognition, and the marginalization of intellectual contributions. At the same time, the film functions as a counter narrative that challenges dominant stereotypes about Black women in science and technology. Through its representation, *Hidden Figures* not only reflects historical realities of systemic racism but also serves as a medium of social criticism that promotes awareness of racial and gender justice.

Keywords: *Racism; Racial segregation; Intersectionality; Representation; Black women.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, racism and racial segregation have remained central issues in global discourse, driving extensive interdisciplinary research on structural inequalities, systemic discrimination, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; O'Flaherty & Sethi, 2015). In the United States, these issues are deeply rooted in a long history of laws and institutional practices that normalized unequal access to education, employment, housing, and public facilities. Contemporary scholarship further demonstrates that structural racism continues to shape institutional opportunities, particularly for Black women, through intersecting systems of racial and gender discrimination in leadership, employment, and higher education (Begeny et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2020; Dill &

Duffy, 2022). Consequently, understanding racism requires examining not only individual prejudice but also the institutional structures that sustain inequality across generations.

Within this context, *Hidden Figures* (2016), directed by Theodore Melfi and adapted from (Shetterly, 2016) nonfiction book, emerges as a significant cultural text. Based on the true stories of three African American mathematicians Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson who made essential contributions to NASA's space program during the 1960s, the film invites audiences to confront the realities of racial and gender discrimination within one of the most prestigious scientific institutions in the United States. Beyond its commercial and critical success, *Hidden Figures* has renewed public discussion concerning the role of popular media in reconstructing overlooked histories and challenging dominant narratives surrounding race, gender, and intellectual authority. Moreover, scholarship inspired by *Hidden Figures* argues that Black women's experiences in STEM continue to be marginalized when race and gender are examined separately, reinforcing the importance of intersectional analysis (Ireland et al., 2018).

As a form of visual literature, *Hidden Figures* constructs a complex narrative through characterization, dialogue, spatial symbolism, and institutional critique. The film depicts segregated public facilities, unequal professional recognition, and restricted career advancement as manifestations of structural racism embedded within the American social system during the era of legal segregation (Febriani & Arianto, 2020; Purasih, 2023). Rather than merely reconstructing historical events, the film illustrates how race and gender intersect to produce layered forms of oppression experienced by Black women working in a scientific institution dominated by white men. This portrayal is consistent with contemporary scholarship demonstrating that Black women continue to encounter institutional exclusion, racialized sexism, limited access to mentorship, and unequal professional opportunities within STEM education and workplaces (Chaturvedi & Mirza, 2026; Mcgee et al., 2019; Ong et al., 2018). At the same time, the film portrays intelligence, resilience, and collective solidarity as forms of resistance against oppressive institutional systems. Through these narrative strategies, *Hidden Figures* highlights how institutional structures systematically regulate access, recognition, and professional mobility according to racial and gender identity. Furthermore, the recurring depiction of workspaces, segregated restrooms, libraries, and classrooms functions as visual symbolism that exposes the normalization of racial segregation in everyday life. Consequently, the film serves not only as a representation of historical events but also as a critical reflection on the power relations that continue to shape the experiences of Black women in educational and professional institutions.

The cultural significance of *Hidden Figures* lies in its dual function as both an act of historical recovery and a critique of institutional injustice. On one hand, the film restores recognition to Black women whose scientific contributions had long been overlooked in American history. On the other hand, its inspirational narrative raises questions regarding whether emphasizing individual achievement risks softening the realities of systemic oppression that characterized the segregation era. This tension illustrates the broader role of

media as both a reflection and a producer of social meaning. In accordance with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, media does not simply mirror reality but actively constructs meaning through discourse, ideology, and cultural representation (Annisa et al., 2025) (Annisa et al., 2025). From this perspective, *Hidden Figures* operates as a counter-narrative that challenges stereotypes portraying Black women as intellectually inferior while repositioning them as central contributors to scientific and technological progress. Recent educational research similarly suggests that culturally relevant representations of historically marginalized communities can reshape dominant historical narratives and contribute to greater educational equity (Bisht et al., 2026).

Although scholarship on intersectionality, racism, and media representation continues to expand, research that comprehensively positions *Hidden Figures* as a cultural critique of institutional racism remains relatively limited. Several recent studies have examined the film from different perspectives. (Rahmalia, 2024) analyzes the depiction of systemic racism in public facilities, education, and workplaces, emphasizing how segregation is represented through discriminatory institutional practices. Likewise, (Perkasa et al., 2024) investigate gender equality and intersectional feminism in *Hidden Figures*, highlighting women's resistance against racial and gender discrimination through an intersectional feminist perspective. Similarly, (Amanda et al., 2024) explore issues of race and gender inequality through characterization and narrative development, while (Alviani & Halomoan, 2026) focus on representational aspects of racial identity. Despite these contributions, no prior study has comprehensively examined how *Hidden Figures* constructs ideological meanings of institutional racism by integrating Stuart Hall's theory of representation with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, particularly through the analysis of dialogue, visual symbolism, and narrative structure. Existing studies primarily emphasize identifying forms of discrimination or feminist resistance rather than explaining how cinematic representation produces and circulates ideological meanings concerning institutional racism, professional legitimacy, and the intersection of race and gender. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive analysis that integrates Stuart Hall's theory of representation with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to explain not only what forms of discrimination are depicted, but also how these representations produce and circulate meanings concerning power, identity, and institutional inequality. Furthermore, contemporary scholarship on Black women in STEM demonstrates that structural exclusion continues to operate through organizational cultures, institutional evaluation systems, and everyday workplace practices rather than isolated acts of prejudice (Bell et al., 2020; Chaturvedi & Mirza, 2026; Tomkin & West, 2022).

Using a qualitative approach grounded in intersectionality theory and representation theory, this study analyzes the film's narrative, visual, and dialogic elements to uncover critiques of institutional injustice (Crenshaw, 1991). Building upon the limitations identified in previous studies, this research positions *Hidden Figures* as a cultural text that not only reflects historical realities but also critiques dominant narratives regarding race, gender, and

professional legitimacy in American society. Specifically, this study aims to examine how the film represents the social impact of racial discrimination on Black women and to analyze the extent to which it functions as a critique of structural racism and racial segregation. Through this analysis, the study argues that film can serve as a powerful medium for social reflection while contributing to broader discussions of racial justice, gender equality, media representation, and cultural studies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the representation of racism and racial segregation in the film *Hidden Figures*. A qualitative approach is chosen because this research focuses on meaning making, interpretation, and the ideological constructions embedded within the filmic text. In cultural studies and representation studies, qualitative methods enable researchers to explore in depth how social realities are not merely reflected, but also constructed through narrative, dialogue, visual symbols, and the power relations depicted. Qualitative research emphasizes the understanding of social phenomena through interpretative analysis and contextual meaning rather than numerical measurement (Rustamana et al., 2024). Therefore, this study does not aim to measure phenomena quantitatively, but rather to understand how racial and gender discrimination are represented and interpreted within the social context of 1960s America.

The primary data source of this study is the film *Hidden Figures* (2016), directed by Theodore Melfi and set within the scientific institution of NASA during the era of racial segregation. The primary data consist of scenes, dialogues, characterizations, narrative conflicts, and spatial symbols that represent practices of facility segregation, restrictions on professional access, intellectual marginalization, and inequalities based on race and gender. To strengthen the analysis, this study also utilizes secondary data obtained through a literature review of scholarly journals, theoretical books, and academic articles relevant to structural racism, racial segregation, intersectionality, and media representation theory. The main theoretical frameworks employed are (Crenshaw, 1991) theory of intersectionality and Stuart Hall's theory of representation (Annisa et al., 2025), which help explain how racial and gender identities intersect and how media constructs social meaning. The use of intersectionality is essential to examine how overlapping systems of oppression operate simultaneously across race and gender (Kassam, 2024; Siira et al., 2023).

The data collection technique was carried out through intensive observation by repeatedly watching the film and systematically noting scenes relevant to the research focus. These scenes were then classified based on themes, such as the segregation of public facilities, inequality in access to education and professional positions, and forms of resistance by Black female characters against the discriminatory system. The analysis process was conducted interpretatively through several stages: first, identifying forms of racism and gender

discrimination within the narrative; second, analyzing them through an intersectionality perspective to examine the intersection of race and gender as layered forms of oppression; and third, applying representation theory to explore how the film constructs a critique of unjust social structures. This interpretive qualitative approach allows researchers to uncover deeper meanings embedded in media texts and social discourses (Rai et al., 2020). Through this approach, the study aims to demonstrate that *Hidden Figures* not only represents historical reality, but also functions as a medium of social critique against structured racism and institutional inequality in American society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Racial Segregation in Public Facilities as Spatialized Structural Power

In *Hidden Figures*, racial segregation is depicted not merely as a social custom, but as a system institutionalized through the division of space. The scene where Katherine Goble is required to use the 'Colored' restroom serves as a clear representation of this practice. This spatial separation not only limits access but also places black women in a subordinate position in the workplace. Although such rules seem ordinary in daily life, the practice subtly reinforces entrenched racial inequalities. This shows that space is not neutral, but functions as a mechanism to maintain racial differences and social hierarchy.



FIGURE 1. THE SUPERVISOR ASKED KATERINE

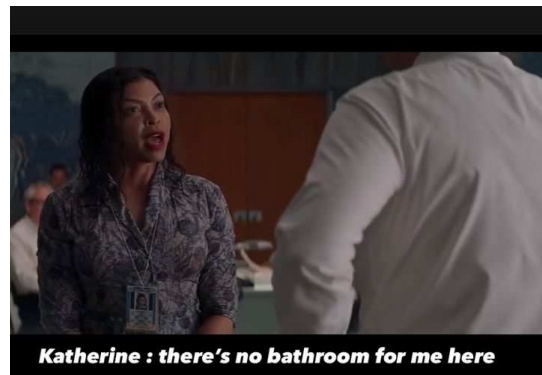


FIGURE 2. KATHERINE FROM BATHROOM.

The impact of this system is evident when Katherine frequently returns late from breaks because she must walk nearly one kilometer to reach the designated restroom. She is even forced to complete part of her work in the bathroom due to time constraints and continuous work pressure. This situation demonstrates that segregation affects not only comfort but also directly undermines productivity and professional performance. More importantly, it reveals how structural inequality disproportionately burdens marginalized groups within institutional settings. Furthermore, this moment reflects a broader system of spatial control that regulates not only movement but also the physical presence of Black women. Katherine must sacrifice her limited break time simply to access basic facilities, while simultaneously complying with strict appearance codes, including wearing skirts below the knee, high heeled shoes, and minimal jewelry except for a simple pearl necklace deemed acceptable. Ironically, these standards ignore the economic realities faced by Black workers, whose wages are insufficient to meet such expectations. This indicates that control extends beyond physical space to the regulation of bodies and appearances under discriminatory institutional norms. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of representation (Annisa et al., 2025), space actively produces social meaning and sustains identity hierarchies. In this context, the "Colored" restroom operates not merely as a facility but as a visual sign that symbolically reproduces the inferior position of Black women within a racialized social structure.

After hearing Katherine's complaints, the division head ultimately removes the "Colored Ladies Room" sign, which had functioned as a symbol of racial segregation within the workplace. This decision reflects a growing awareness that such rules are not only unreasonable but also detrimental to employee performance. The act of removing the sign is portrayed dramatically, symbolizing resistance to segregation. However, this change remains limited, as it depends on the authority of a single individual rather than systemic transformation. Thus, the film critiques segregation as an institutionalized structure rather than merely a matter of personal prejudice (Febriani & Arianto, 2020). This moment

ultimately reveals how deeply racial boundaries are embedded within institutional spaces, where even acts of reform rely on individual intervention rather than structural change.

Intellectual Marginalization and Racialized Knowledge Control

Discrimination in this film is also evident through the restriction of access to intellectual legitimacy. The character Dorothy Vaughan shows how black women are recognized functionally through their contributions and work competence, yet are still structurally excluded from formal authority positions. This is seen in the scene when Dorothy says, *"If possible, my application for the supervisor position, ma'am, maybe they are still considering me for that position"*, which is then responded to by Miss Mitchell, *"well, officially the answer is no, they don't hire permanent supervisors for black women"*. This dialogue explicitly emphasizes that the rejection was not based on a lack of individual capacity, but rather on institutionalized racial policies. Thus, recognition of competence does not automatically result in formal legitimacy. This practice shows that discrimination not only limits career mobility but also maintains racial hierarchies through systematic exclusion from recognition and institutional power (Woods et al., 2024).

When Dorothy questioned the reason for the rejection again by saying, *"May I know why? I am doing my task as a supervisor"*, the response she received still did not provide a rational explanation. Miss Mitchell simply replied, *"Alright. That is NASA, for you. Fast with the spacecraft, slow in progress."* This statement did not directly answer Dorothy's question, but rather diverted the substance of the issue through a normative justification that implied that the disparity was part of an institutionalized system. The expression *"fast with the spacecraft, slow in progress"* implicitly affirms the contradiction between technological advancement and social stagnation, particularly in terms of racial equality. This situation indicates that the promotion mechanism is not conducted transparently or based on meritocracy, but is rather shaped by a power structure that normalizes racial exclusion. Although Dorothy has proven her capacity and competence, formal recognition of her position remains postponed without an objective reason. Thus, this practice reflects a form of institutional discrimination that is internalized within organizational mechanisms, where access to positions and authority is deliberately restricted for certain groups (Corbett et al., 2024).

When Dorothy was looking for a FORTRAN book in the library, she entered an area that was unwrittenly "designated" for white visitors. Across the bookshelves, a woman immediately confronted her with a wary tone and stated that they did not want any trouble in that place. Dorothy calmly replied that she did not intend to cause trouble, but only wanted to find the book she needed. However, the woman persisted and directed Dorothy to a special "black" section, as if access to knowledge also had to be segregated by race. Dorothy then explained that the book she was looking for was not available in that section, but her position as a black woman meant she had no power to openly defy the rule. In that situation, Dorothy

ultimately took the book she needed quietly, as a subtle form of resistance against a system that restricted her access to knowledge.

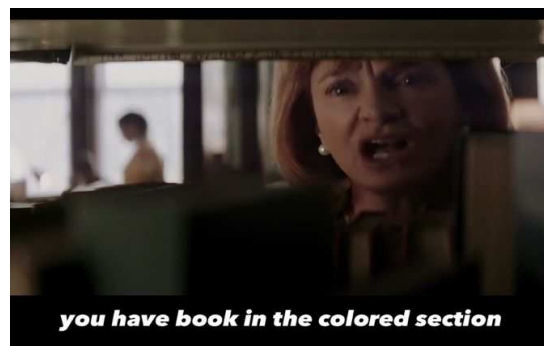


FIGURE 3. A WOMEN SAID TO DOROTHY, THIS IS A WITE PEOPLE'S LIBRARY.

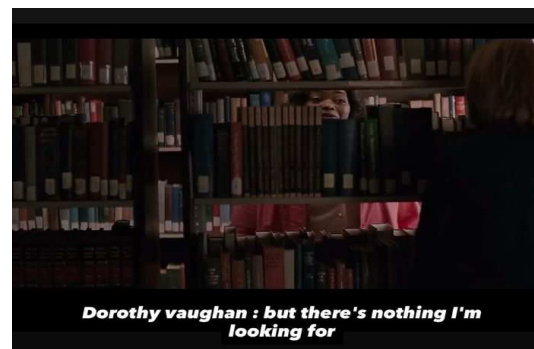


FIGURE 4. THE BOOK IS NOT AVAILABLE IN THE COLORED SECTION.

From the audience's perspective, this scene raises awareness that injustice does not always appear in an overt or confrontational form, but also through small rules that seem ordinary yet restrict access to knowledge and opportunities. The audience can understand that Dorothy is not incapable, but is hindered by a system that unfairly controls what she can and cannot access. This encourages reflection that success is not solely determined by individual effort, but is also influenced by structural obstacles that are often invisible. Furthermore, this scene builds empathy by showing that discrimination can occur in everyday situations that seem trivial but have a significant impact on a person's development and future. The scene illustrates that racial segregation not only regulates physical space but also controls the distribution of knowledge and access to technology. In this context, computer literacy and technical skills which are crucial for professional mobility are not provided equally, but are rather restricted through a racially based system (Woods et al., 2024).

From the perspective of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), Dorothy's experience demonstrates how race and gender intersect to produce layered forms of oppression. She is marginalized not only as a woman but also as a Black woman within a

male-dominated scientific work environment. Thus, this scene does not merely represent an individual experience, but also reveals how social systems constrain a person's potential through subtle yet significant mechanisms. Furthermore, this intersectional position places Dorothy in a structural dilemma, where her competence is acknowledged, yet her identity simultaneously restricts access to recognition and authority. This indicates that discrimination operates not within a single dimension, but through overlapping systems of power that reinforce one another. As a result, the barriers she faces become more complex and deeply embedded, making it increasingly difficult to challenge existing institutional norms. Therefore, this scene highlights how intersectionality functions as a critical lens for understanding the persistence of inequality within professional and organizational structures.

Everyday Objects as Ideological Markers of Hierarchy

The film also uses everyday symbols to depict the normalization of segregation. This is seen when Katherine Goble, Mary Jackson, Dorothy Vaughan, and their colleagues go for a lunch break in a separate room, with a "Colored Only" sign posted at the entrance of the room. This separation is not accompanied by explanations or open resistance, but rather accepted as part of the work routine, thus showing how segregation has become embedded in daily practices. In this context, a simple action like choosing a dining space becomes loaded with meaning because it reflects invisible yet binding social boundaries. This underscores that segregation is not only present as a formal rule but also as a habit that is continuously repeated and normalized in everyday interactions.



FIGURE 5. LUNCH BREAK IN A SEPARATED ROOM WITH A "COLORED ONLY".

Racism does not always appear in the form of overt actions, but often operates through mechanisms that seem ordinary and inconspicuous. In many cases, power is actually more effective when disguised in everyday practices that are considered normal. Therefore, discrimination can persist continuously without provoking direct resistance from individuals who experience it. Structural racism operates not only through institutional policies, but also

through symbols, signs, and everyday practices that subtly instill and maintain social inequality. Objects and visual markers that seem simple serve as tools that regulate access while affirming social hierarchies between groups. Because they are present routinely and without confrontationally, these practices normalize discrimination, making it difficult to recognize, while also contributing to the ongoing reproduction of social inequality. The small label serves as a symbol of how racial ideology operates in a subtle yet systematic way, where everyday objects function as symbolic boundaries that reproduce social distinctions within racialized spaces (Yazdiha, 2022). Discrimination does not always appear in the form of obvious violence, but is instead expressed through everyday objects that seem ordinary (Zhang et al., 2022). Another scene shows Katherine Goble standing in front of a water dispenser marked “Colored”.



FIGURE 6. WATER DISPENSER WITH MARKED "COLORED".

Racial segregation is maintained not only through formal policies, but also through everyday social practices that appear simple yet are laden with ideological meaning. In this context, brief interactions and the use of visual markers function as mechanisms that affirm social boundaries while also regulating who is considered "worthy" to be in certain spaces. The brief exchanges in the scene show how segregation is normalized without the need for explicit coercion. From a representational perspective, the "Colored" sign functions as a discursive device that continuously reproduces the subordinate position of Black women in public spaces, because the space itself is shaped by a racially based system that regulates access, belonging, and legitimacy (Hirokawa, 2023). Thus, public space in this film is not only a backdrop, but also functions as a medium that actively maintains structures of racial inequality.

Legal Segregation and Institutional Gatekeeping in Education

Segregation also operated through the legal and education systems, which directly restricted access to professional opportunities. In *Hidden Figures*, this is seen when Mary Jackson aspired to become an engineer at NASA but was required to attend training classes at a school designated only for white people. Because she did not have access to that institution, Mary had to pursue legal action by petitioning the court to be allowed to take night classes at that school. In the trial, she presented her arguments firmly before the judge, emphasizing that the obstacles she faced were not due to a lack of ability but rather to a system that restricted access based on race. His statement, “*I planned to be an engineer at NASA, but I couldn’t go to a white school for training, and I couldn’t change my skin color, so I had no choice but to be the first,*” reflects an awareness of structural limitations that he could not change, as well as a determination to break through those boundaries. This sentence not only shows personal ambition but also asserts that individuals from marginalized groups are often forced to be “the first” as the only way to obtain rights that should be equal.

Access to education is not entirely neutral, as it is determined by the social structure that governs the distribution of opportunities. Structural inequality in education is not only shaped by institutional policies, but also systematically limits access for marginalized groups. Mary's experience demonstrates how the social mobility of black women is constrained through legal regulation, where school segregation creates an education system that is "separate and unequal" (Schools, 2025). Thus, the education system functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that maintains racial exclusivity while reproducing social inequality (Liu, 2024).

In reality, the legal system does not operate entirely objectively, but is often influenced by power structures that uphold the existing social hierarchy. Through the courtroom scenes, the film not only portrays Mary Jackson's individual struggle but also shows how the law can function as a mechanism that reproduces inequality when access to justice depends on the interpretation of those in authority. Although Mary ultimately gains permission to attend training, she is only allowed to attend evening classes at a school for white students, indicating that the access granted remains limited and conditional. Her success does not reflect systemic change but is rather the result of persuasive efforts directed at the judge as an individual with authority. This confirms that justice in that context is situational and uneven, thus reinforcing the film's critique of law as an institution that can both open and limit access to equality (Dustin & Malleon, 2025).

Structural Racism as an Intersectional System

Structural racism is maintained not only through formal policies but also through everyday practices that systematically regulate space, bodies, and access to facilities, making

inequality appear normal and unquestionable. *Hidden Figures* depicts racism as a system embedded in workplaces, public facilities, libraries, and legal institutions, reflecting how discriminatory mechanisms operate across interconnected institutional domains and sustain social inequality (Brown & Homan, 2024; Homan et al., 2021). This is concretely seen through the existence of segregated facilities, such as the “Colored Ladies Room” in workplaces, which indicates that even basic needs are regulated based on race. Additionally, in public spaces like sinks or wash areas, there are markers such as “White Only” and “Colored Only” that visually divide access to facilities. These markers not only function as physical boundaries but also as symbols that affirm social hierarchy, in which Black groups are systematically placed in separate and unequal positions in daily life. The discrimination experienced by Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary shows that Black women face layered pressures: as women in a patriarchal system and as Black individuals in a system of racial segregation, illustrating the intersection of various forms of domination (Collins et al., 2021).



FIGURE 7. BATHROOM IN WORKPLACE.



FIGURE 8. HANDWASHING STATION IN PUBLIC FACILITIES.

Through its narrative and visual strategy, this film serves as a counter narrative opposing old stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority of Black women, while at the same time presenting a tension between structural critique and individual heroic narrative. On one

hand, the film affirms the abilities and significant contributions of Black women in the field of science, seen when John Glenn's space launch was nearly canceled due to a miscalculation. Katherine was called back to manually recalculate the capsule's coordinates, even though she had previously been reassigned because she was considered no longer needed after IBM was deemed more accurate. However, on the day of the launch, the calculation results did not match, so Katherine's expertise once again became crucial to the mission's success. On the other hand, the emphasis on individual success has the potential to oversimplify the complexity of structural racism, as it can make the audience see it merely as a result of personal hard work, rather than as a struggle against a limiting system. Thus, the film not only conveys social criticism but also shapes the way the audience understands injustice, both as a structural issue and as an individual challenge.



FIGURE 9. THE ASTRONAUT REQUESTED THAT KATHERINE CALCULATED HIS COORDINATES.



FIGURE 10. SAM WAS ASKED BY AL HARRISON TO INFORM KATHERINE.

The findings of this study affirm that *Hidden Figures* does not merely represent historical discrimination, but also constructs a critique of structural racism through spatial symbols, dialogue, and institutional configurations. This representation reinforces the

argument that film as a medium can serve as a site of meaning making that contributes to the development of social awareness regarding racial and gender justice (Salamon & Xie, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study examines how *Hidden Figures* represents racism and racial segregation as a structural system embedded within various social institutions, including workplaces, public facilities, education, and legal frameworks. Using a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this research analyzes narrative, visual, and dialogic elements to uncover how discrimination is constructed, normalized, and sustained. The findings demonstrate that racism in the film operates not only through formal policies but also through everyday practices that subtly regulate access, behavior, and social positioning.

The experiences of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson reveal that Black women face intersectional oppression shaped by the convergence of race and gender. This layered form of discrimination restricts their access to intellectual legitimacy, professional recognition, and upward mobility within a male-dominated scientific environment. Their struggles illustrate that inequality is not merely the result of individual limitations, but rather the outcome of systemic barriers embedded in institutional structures.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that discrimination is maintained through both explicit exclusion and implicit normalization. Dorothy Vaughan's experience, in particular, demonstrates how competence can be acknowledged without being institutionally legitimized, reflecting a system in which promotion and authority are shaped by racialized power relations rather than meritocratic principles. Through spatial segregation, restricted access to knowledge, and unequal legal opportunities, the film exposes how structural racism operates across interconnected domains and continues to reproduce social inequality.

Finally, *Hidden Figures* functions as a counter-narrative that challenges dominant stereotypes about Black women while simultaneously revealing the tension between individual achievement and systemic constraint. Although the film celebrates resilience and success, it also underscores the persistence of institutional barriers that limit equal opportunities. Therefore, this study concludes that the film not only reflects historical realities of racial discrimination but also constructs a critical discourse on how inequality is reproduced, highlighting the role of media as a powerful medium for fostering awareness of racial and gender justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings, guidance, and strength throughout this research. The author also extends sincere appreciation to Yusrina Dinar Prihatika, S.Hum., M.A. for her invaluable supervision, insightful guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout every stage of this study. The author is equally grateful to the lecturers of the English Literature Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, for their academic guidance and encouragement. Finally, the author

sincerely acknowledges the author's family for their unwavering support, prayers, and encouragement, which have been a constant source of motivation throughout this research.

REFERENCES

- Alviani, C., & Halomoan, H. S. (2026). *A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RACISM OF AFRICAN WOMAN IN THE FILM " HIDDEN FIGURES ."* 1(3), 1–17.
<https://jurnal.ubd.ac.id/index.php/bhumantara>
- Amanda, K. R., Purwanto, N. R., Nur, V., Putri, F., Siswandini, P., & Anggraini, H. M. (2024). *Analyzing the Movie " Hidden Figures " (2016): A Comprehensive Examination of Race and Gender Inequality.* 5(March), 116–120.
- Annisa, F., Nurnisya, F. Y., Raqib, M., Mohd, B., & Pradipt, E. P. (2025). *Decoding Diversity : Indonesian Student ' Reception of Religious and Multicultural Themes in ' Mentega Terbang ' Using Stuart Hall ' s Encoding / Decoding Framework.* 13(1), 113–128.
<https://doi.org/10.12928/channel.v13i1.1341>
- Begeny, C. T., Wong, C. Y. E., Kirby, T. A., & Rink, F. (2021). Gender, Race, and Leadership. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 35.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.450>
- Bell, M. P., Berry, D., & Leopold, J. (2020). *Gender, Work and Organization.*
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12555>
- Bisht, B., Ha, G., Kim, E., & Penner, E. K. (2026). *Cultural Relevance at Scale : The Effects of an Ethnic Studies Expansion on Academic Outcomes.* 63(3), 471–513.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312261426338>
- Brown, T. H., & Homan, P. (2024). *Structural Racism and Health Stratification : Connecting Theory to Measurement.* <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221465231222924>
- Chaturvedi, H., & Mirza, D. R. (2026). Black Women ' s Lived Experiences in STEM Education and Professional Spaces : Barriers , Identity , and Institutional Challenges. *International Journal Of Educational Research* 134, 134, 35–47.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought* (2nd Editio). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900055>
- Collins, P. H., Cristina, E., & Furseth, I. (2021). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory.* 20, 690–725. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00490-0>
- Corbett, C., Wullert, K. E., Gilmartin, S. K., & Simard, C. (2024). *Glass Ceilings , Step Stools , and Sticky Floors : The Racialized Gendered Promotion Process.*
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231241274238>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 59.
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?searchText=Mapping the Margins Intersectionality%2C Identity Politics%2C and Violence against Women of Color&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DMapping%2Bthe%2BMargins%253A%2BIntersectionality%252C%2BIdentit](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?searchText=Mapping%20the%20Margins%20Intersectionality%20Identity%20Politics%20and%20Violence%20against%20Women%20of%20Color&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DMapping%2Bthe%2BMargins%253A%2BIntersectionality%252C%2BIdentit)

- Dill, B. J., & Duffy, M. (2022). Structural Racism And Black Women ' s Employment In The US Health Care Sector. *Health Affairs*, 265–272. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01400>
- Dustin, M., & Malleson, K. (2025). Separate But Equal : Is Segregated Schooling (Still) Good for Girls ? *Feminist Legal Studies*, 33(1), 29–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-023-09542-9>
- Febriani, J. J., & Arianto, T. (2020). *RACISM TOWARDS AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN “ HIDDEN*. 2069(6), 66–76.
- Hirokawa, K. H. (2023). *Race , Space , and Place : Interrogating Whiteness Through a Critical Approach to Place*. 29(2).
- Homan, P., Brown, T. H., & King, B. (2021). Structural Intersectionality as a New Direction for Health Disparities Research. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 62(3), 350–370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221465211032947>
- Ireland, D. T., FREEMAN, kIMBERLEY E., WINSTON-PROCTOR, C. E., DELAINE, K. D., & LOWE, S. M. (2018). Chapter 10 (Un)Hidden Figures: A Synthesis of Research Examining the Intersectional Experiences of Black Women and Girls in STEM Education. *Experiences of Black Women and Girls in STEM*, 42(March), 226–254. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759072>
- Kassam, S. M. (2024). *Use of Intersectionality Theory and Interpretive Descriptive Qualitative Method to Address Inequalities in Marginalized Communities*. 4(1), 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.47540/ijqr.v4i1.1254>
- Liu, J. (2024). Education legislations that equalize: a study of compulsory schooling law reforms in post-WWII United States. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03460-0>
- Mcgee, E. O., Griffith, D. M., & STACEY L. HOUSTON, I. (2019). “ I Know I Have to Work Twice as Hard and Hope That Makes Me Good Enough ”: Exploring the Stress and Strain of Black Doctoral Students in Engineering and Computing. *Teachers College Record*, 121, 38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912100407>
- O’Flaherty, B., & Sethi, R. (2015). *of Racial Segregation* (Vol. 10, Issue 2). ScienceDirect. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/racial-segregation>
- Ong, M., Smith, J. M., & Ko, L. T. (2018). *Counterspaces for Women of Color in STEM Higher Education : Marginal and Central Spaces for Persistence and Success*. 55(2), 206–245. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21417>
- Perkasa, G. A., Khairunas, S., Wibowo, A. I., & Yastanti, U. (2024). Gender Equality and Intersectional Feminism in The Hidden Figures Movie Directed by Theodore Melfi. *SCOPE : JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING*, 09, 194–202. <https://doi.org/10.30998/scope.v9i1.24190>
- Purasih, J. M. (2023). *RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN HIDDEN FIGURES (2016) Jela Milenina Purasih Abstrak*. 11(3).
- Rahmalia, A. (2024). DEPICTION OF SYSTEMIC RACISM IN HIDDEN FIGURES MOVIE BY THEODORE MELFI. *Apollo Project*, 13, 79–88.

- Rai, S. S., Peters, R. M. H., Syurina, E. V., Irwanto, I., Naniche, D., & Zweekhorst, M. B. M. (2020). *Intersectionality and health-related stigma : insights from experiences of people living with stigmatized health conditions in Indonesia*. 1–15.
- Rustamana, A., Adillah, P. M., & Maharani, N. K. (2024). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. 2(6), 919–930.
- Salamon, E., & Xie, H. (2025). *Communicative intersectionality : advocating for equality , diversity , and inclusion in media industries*. May, 185–196.
- Schools, U. (2025). *Reconsidering School Segregation Contemporary Lessons from 1960s Protest against Separate and*. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X25100064>
- Shetterly, M. L. (2016). *Hidden Figures*. William Morrow and Company.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidden_Figures_%28book%29?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Siira, E., Linden, K., Wallström, S., & Björkman, I. (2023). *Intersectionality in nursing research : A systematic review*. September, 7509–7527. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.2021>
- Tomkin, J. H., & West, M. (2022). STEM courses are harder : evaluating inter - course grading disparities with a calibrated GPA model. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-022-00343-1>
- Woods, J. C., Lane, T. B., Huggins, N., Watson, A. L., Jan, F. T., Austin, S. J., & Thomas, S. (2024). *education sciences Structural Impediments Impacting Early-Career Women of Color STEM Faculty Careers*.
- Yazdiha, H. (2022). *Racialized Organizations in Racialized Space : How Socio-spatial Divisions Activate Symbolic Boundaries in a Charter School and a Public School*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492221114811>
- Zhang, N., Gereke, J., Baldassarri, D., Zentrum, M., Mzes, S., & Mannheim, U. (2022). *Everyday discrimination in public spaces : a field experiment in the milan metro*. February, 679–693.