Judul : Public enemy's views on racism as seen trough their

   songlyrics

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Choosing The Subject

Music has become the most popular and widespread entertainment product in the world. As the product of art, it has performed the language of emotions that can be enjoyed and understood universally. Music is also well known as a medium of expression and message delivering long before radio, television, and sound recordings are available. Through the lyrics of a song, musicians may express everything they want, either their social problems, political opinions, or their dislike toward something or someone.

As we know, there are various music genres existed in the music industries nowadays : such as classic, rock, pop, jazz, folk, country, rap, etc. However, not all of them can be used to accommodate critical ideas for sensitive issues. Usually, criticism is delivered in certain music genre that popular only among specific community, where its audience feels personal connection with the issues being criticized. Hip-hop music belongs to such genre. It served as Black people's medium

for expressing criticism and protest over their devastating lives and conditions in the ghettos. Yet, hip-hop succeeds in becoming the most popular mainstream music. The reason is this music, which later on comes to be synonym with *rap*, sets its themes to beats and rivets the audience with them. Therefore, for the audiences that do not personally connected with black struggle (like the white folks), it is kind of protect them from its provocative message, since "it is possible to dig the beats and ignore the words, or even enjoy the words and forget them when it becomes too dangerous to listen" (Sartwell, 1998). Consequently, artists like Jay Z and Kanye West have been able to reach fame by being critical.

However, during the 80s—or twenty years ago before those artists gain popularity as conscious and political rappers—*Public Enemy* already experienced such popularity among the black and white fans. *Public Enemy* is a hip-hop group formed in 1982 that consists of four crews : Chuck D (lead rapper and lyricist), Flavor Flav (fellow rapper), Terminator X (DJ), and Professor Griff. They attracted the audiences by creating a new and unique sound—"the most formidable wall of sound ever heard in rap" (Cobber-Lake, 2004). This group also combined the sound with explicitly political lyrics that pushed the limits of what it was acceptable to say. As the result, *Public Enemy* was caught in many controversies with the public. Nevertheless, the harder the public banned them, the bigger their fans became. Both the black and white hip-hop fans acknowledge this group's credibility, because *Public Enemy* has always kept their political focus throughout their twenty-year-old career.

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Like other black rappers, racism (among other social criticism) became main theme in most of *Public Enemy*'s albums. However, unlike many of them, *Public Enemy* noticed the changing shape of racism in America as it came to modern times, and how it is implied into many aspects of life that most people are not even aware of. Furthermore, *Public Enemy* wants to educate or share that knowledge with their audiences through their songs. Choosing rap as their expression medium has been a perfect option, since "rap transforms oppression into resistance, and it does so in a way that makes the conceptual structure of that oppression … absolutely clear. … [I]n order for the dichotomy of race to be overcome, it must first be made visible" (Sartwell, 1998). That is exactly what *Public Enemy* do; through the lyrics of their rap songs, *Public Enemy* tries to make visible one of that oppressions (i.e. racism) that is not blatant anymore.

In the eighties decade (as post Civil Rights era), the white people were more careful with their action related to Black issues. They no longer said or did things that could be regarded as racist actions—such as called a black man as Nigger, or acted physical offenses to black people in public. Nevertheless, racism and discrimination toward Black remained, but it has transformed into a more hidden and hypocrite shape. Hence, it is difficult to finger any particular individual as directly responsible. As Crispin Sartwell, a white reporter, has also said that : "Racism has been subtilized to the point that no persons seem responsible for it" (1998). At the time, the black community had great expectancy that Blacks would have big opportunities to improve their lives (especially with government's affirmative action programs and looking at Black's fast advancement during Civil Rights era). However, in reality, the

black community turned out to have significant declines. The growth of black business was blocked. The number of unemployed black was immense. Moreover, government's "war on drug" policy in mid 80s was "unofficially sentenced" to black youth in which many young blacks from the ghetto were arrested for drug abused and drug possession. Thus, in their song lyrics, *Public Enemy* clearly shows their rejection on racism, and encourages their young audiences to be aware with the existence of the new racism around them.

Besides criticizing racism and discrimination toward black that occurs within the American society, *Public Enemy* also tries to offer some solution for racism. *Public Enemy* sees that America has corrupted its citizens' minds with classism and inequality that confront any efforts of integration. Hence, they believe that what is needed is a change from within. If people could change their attitude and way of thinking, and if Black could have confidence with itself; then equality will be formed and racism hopefully could be ended. Thus, researcher finds it interesting to analyze *Public Enemy*'s view on racism and their proposed solutions as seen through their song lyrics. Moreover, their perspective and solutions are still relevant with today's condition. For the analysis, researcher has selectively chose ten song lyrics from four (out of nine) *Public Enemy*'s albums.

B. Problem Statements

1.   How is *Public Enemy*'s view on racism ?

2.   What are the solutions for racism offered in *Public Enemy*'s song lyrics ?

C. Scope of The Study

The analysis of this research will be focused to the song lyrics. To avoid deviation and rambling analysis, it is necessary to give some limitation. Therefore, the researcher limits only on the song lyrics that contain *Public Enemy*'s experiences, visions, and thoughts about racism as the main issue being analyzed. In order to achieve the comprehensive answer for the problem statements, researcher will also use the song lyrics that talk about black history, since *Public Enemy* applies it as one of the foundations of their visions.

D. Objectives of The Study

1.   To find out *Public Enemy'*s view on racism.

2.   To explore the solutions for racism offered in *Public Enemy*'s song lyrics.

E. Research Benefits

1.   To give information about how to analyze song lyrics in American Studies.

2.   To give information about American hip-hop music in the past especially in the decade of 1980s.

3.   To give information about racism seen from *Public Enemy*'s vision.

F. Method of Research

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1. **Data and The Source of Data**

The source of data in this research is *Public Enemy*'s albums produced by BMI and Def Jam Recordings, which was released in late 80s to early 90s. The data are in the form of lyrics. The main data are ten song lyrics, which are speaking about racism, discrimination, and injustice treatment along with all related-issues. They are *Rightstarter* (from *Yo! Bum Rush The Show* album, 1987); *Don't Believe The Hype* and *Party For Your Right To Fight* (from *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* album, 1988); *Fear Of A Black Planet, 911 is A Joke, Burn Hollywood Burn, Who Stole The Soul, Revolutionary Generation* and *Fight The Power* (from *Fear Of A Black Planet* album, 1990);, and *Get The Fck Outta Dodge* (from *Apocalipse 91* album, 1991). While for the supporting data, the researcher took them from any sources that can be used to uphold the data; such as interviews, articles, news, books, magazines, quotes, and internet sources that have connection with *Public Enemy* and which is helpful in conducting the analysis so that *Public Enemy*'s criticism can be found.

2. **The Technique of Collecting The Data**

In collecting the data, the researcher collects *Public Enemy*'s song lyrics written in the 80s to early 90s. To obtain the whole lyrics, researcher uses the internet service at www.publicenemy.com and collects from their CD. Then, the researcher reads the lyrics of the songs repeatedly, in order to select the suitable song lyrics that deal with the theme of racism. As the result, there are ten song lyrics found.

3. **The Method of Processing The Data**

There are several phases in processing the qualitative data, which represent a set of activities.

1. First is the description phase. In this phase, the problem and the data has been found and clarified.

2. The next phase is classifying the data according to the interest. In this research, the data is clasified based on the type of racism the lyric has expressed : whether it is covert individual racism, overt individual racism, covert institutional racism, or overt institutional racism. The results, then, regroup again into three parts : racism within the movie and the media, within the American institution, or within the social relationship.

3. After classifying the data, the researcher enter the analysis phase. In this phase, the researcher applies the theories, which become the approaches of this research : they are sociological, historical, biographical and semiotic theories. The aim is to find out *Public Enemy*'s view on racism and their proposed solution for racism.

4. The last one is the conclusion phase. After analyzing the data, the researcher concludes the entire discussion to a certain conclusion as the answers of the problem-statements.

G. Theoretical Approach

This research is conducted within the framework of American Studies. Therefore, interdisciplinary approach is used in order to give more comprehensive

analysis. As the consequence of using interdisciplinary approach, this research employs more than one theory. Like Joseph J. Kwiat and Mary C. Turpie mentioned in *Studies in American Culture*, "The defining characteristic of American Studies is not the size of the problems, but the effort to view any given subjects of investigation from many aspects of it as possible." (1980 : 3).

The main data of this research is in the form of lyrics, which according to *Encyclopedia Americana* constitute a part of poem (1982). Lyrics poetry is built from human activities, which subject matter deals with personal responses to emotionally significant experiences. Jacob Sumardjo and Saini K.M. have written in *Apresiasi Kesusastraan* :

> "… dalam puisi lirik penyair menyuarakan pikiran dan perasaan pribadinya secara lebih berperan. Boleh dikatakan bahwa pikiran dan perasaan serta sikap "aku" dalam sajak lirik adalah mewakili pikiran, perasaan, dan sikap penyairnya." (1988 : 28).

Therefore, all lyrics of *Public Enemy*'s rap songs are considered as a poem that represents the thoughts, visions, and attitudes of the group (as the author). Relating to it, researcher will apply semiotics approach to trace the meaning of the lyrics and to get a deeper interpretation.

Semiotic denotes the study of signs, what they represent and signify, and how we act and think in their universe (available at http://www.isisemiotics.fi/semiotics. html). The semiotic approach used here is especially that of Roland Barthes. Generally, it is a way in understanding word meaning through the first order semiotic system and the second order semiotic system. The first order semiotic system is to find out the meaning of word as it is stated in the dictionary; the denotative meaning.

However, more importantly, the second order semiotic system applies to find out the connotative one, in which researcher will attempt to interpret the meaning of the lyrics by transforming those verbal words from linguistic code into cultural code.

Meanwhile, the issue is dealing with sociological problem that is *Public Enemy*'s view on racism, initially formed during the 1980s to 1990s—using hip-hop music as a means to criticize and fight it. Hence, the use of sociological approach is needed in order to bring understanding of the African-American societies' social and political condition in the eighties. The approach itself is concerned with every aspect of the self in relationship with others and every aspect of the social world that affect a person's thought and action. By analyzing it, researcher expects to get better comprehension about the condition of the time and how it influenced *Public Enemy* as the members of the society. Charles H. Anderson puts that relation this way, "Society as a system of social relations assume a relatively independent status with regard to the individual actor who find himself and herself born, raised, and living within pre-established network of interpersonal relations." (1974 : 18).

This approach is also expected to be helpful to know the importance of hip-hop music for the 1980s black youth. Seeing hip-hop music as an American subculture has become the media to express its society's beliefs and values. Just as Anderson said that culture may be conceived of as a type of code book for members of a society, since it consists of the sum of a society's meanings, expectations, and understanding (1974 : 23).

The importance of hip-hop will also be analyzed based on the lifestyle occurred amongst black youths who utilizes hip-hop as a way to actualize themselves so that the society will accept them; a tool to interact with people at their 'hood'.

> "Culture may be viewed as a way of life the members of a society develop in their attempts to maximize adaptation to their social and material environment." (Anderson, 1974 : 23).

To support those purposes, it is significant to use historical approach in this research. This approach is a systemic process of searching for the facts and the using of information to describe, analyze and interpret the past (Wiersma, 1986 : 203). Therefore, its use is appropriate to trace back the history of rap music and hip-hop culture, and to reveal what and how racism is; since the song lyrics that will be analyzed are dealing with this particular issue.

Last approach that researcher will use is biographical approach, which begins with simple but central insight that literature is written by actual people and that understanding on author's life can help audience more thoroughly comprehend the work. Hence, it will be used to figure out more about *Public Enemy*—especially Chuck D as the lead rapper, founder, and the soul of the group—their background lives and experiences, which give influence to their music.

H. Thesis Organization

This research will be presented into four chapters. The first chapter is introduction, which consists of background of choosing the subject, research questions, scope of the study, objective of the study, research benefits, method of research, theoretical approach, and thesis organization.

The second chapter is literary review, which consists of four parts. The first part is about hip-hop music in America since it is used by *Public Enemy* as the medium to express their criticism, which is then continued by a brief biography of *Public Enemy* (their life and carreer). The next one is about the social condition of Blacks in 1980s to early 1990s. The third one discuss about the new racism in United States. Meanwhile, the last part is talking about semiotics.

The third chapter is the analysis, which is divided into two sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter will discuss on how is *Public Enemy*'s view on racism. Followed by the analysis of *Public Enemy*'s offered solutions for racism.

The last chapter is the closure. It consists of conclusion and recommendation.