

The Representation of Racism on 'This Is America' Music Video

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Abstract. 'This is America' music video which released in May 2018 has been ranked at the best songs of 2018 and marked to be the most viral music video where gun shooting scenes and other controversial scenes are clearly portrayed. It has become a hot issue to be discussed in a number of mass media in America and has reached a million viewers on YouTube. Childish Gambino as the singer and songwriter put some metaphors sequences about criticism on races and the discrimination experienced by black American people. Roland Barthes semiotic approach is used to analyze visual scenes messages along with the myths. The video has portrayed strong scenes about Black people as a minority. There were 7 scenes that had been analyzed. All scenes represented racism, riots, hedonism, and social injustice to black people.

Keywords: representation, racism, black american

Introduction

Historically, racism developed when different races met in the context of colonization. Racism defined as the inferior assessment to people by the determination of tribes, country, social, civic, and economy (Fields, 2001). Racism is the belief that some races are better than others, such as labor migration, slavery and colonialism (Silva, 2015). While Marger (2012) stated that racism is a belief system to justify racial inequality and denying people of particular races to have equal access to societal rewards. Spoonley (1990) concluded that race was a colonial concept that developed when the enthusiasm for expansion swept across Europe. Racism is one of the big problems being faced by the world community today, especially in the United States. In 1995, it reached 41 percent; while in 2011, it dropped to 28 percent and increased to 49 percent in 2015 (Shoichet, 2015). The United States is one of the countries which is used as benchmarks and standards of ideal state life. The United States is a multiracial country, inhabited by all races of various kinds of people throughout the world (Syafiie and Andi, 2011). In the

1950-1960s, there were rules in the United States that required black people not to take a taxi together with white people or enter the building from the same entrance. In addition, African Americans had to drink from separate drinking water fountains from white people, went to separate restrooms, attended black schools, separated funerals, and even swore by using separate Bibles. They were excommunicated from restaurants and public libraries, while many parks banned blacks from entering, and posted signboards stating that "Negroes and Dogs are forbidden to enter". A city zoo even provided separate opening hours for blacks and white people.

On December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American from Alabama didn't want to give his seat for the white passengers. Referring to Jim Crow's law which was the State and Local Laws applied in the Southern United States from 1876-1965 stipulated that bus seats had to be prioritized for whites; in addition, there were also barriers on the bus that distinguished seat parts for white and black people. Rosa Parks was arrested and sentenced to prison for up to 8-15 years at a hearing on December 4th, 1955 for not giving

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his seat.

Racism in America has not disappeared and still exists until today (Shoichet, 2015). The National Geographic, a photography and nature magazine, acknowledge that in its history of being racist in its coverage of black people in America, the National Geographic ignored the presence of African Americans who were not laborers or household maidens and describe non-white people as people who often do not wear tops/clothes and were primitive. On April 12th, 2015, Freddie Gray was arrested by Baltimore police for being caught staring at a police officer. When about to be taken to the police station, he was placed behind the car without wearing a seat belt. He was brutally beaten by six officers and he suffered from serious injuries. A week later, he passed away (Nirmala, 2015). Plant and Peruche (2005) in their research explained the Black males viewed as brutality actor and criminal by white police. The police view black as a threat, so that they often use direct violence. It was also explained that racial issues became the first reason for police officers' decision act assertively to Black (Jefferis et al. 2011).

Racism arises through an imbalance intolerance between the majority towards a minority in an environment. This social discrimination is something that has not been eradicated until now, especially when there is still a majority who feels more powerful. In the United States of America, social discrimination leads to a very deep gap between blacks and whites. White people have no compromise in exercising state control to maintain white domination by utilizing their position in the National Government in Washington (Irab, 2007: 56). Therefore, blacks figured out the medium to deliver their voices about discrimination through music. Music as a work of a combination of several fields of art has symbols that have certain forms of the message. Researchers are interested in the semiotic study of "This is America" music video. This Semiotic Study will bring and assist researchers in finding racist meanings of the symbols in this music video.



Childish Gambino (Donald McKinley Glover Jr) is a California-born actor, comedian, writer, director, rapper, singer and also a DJ. Gambino has released 'This is America' music video. The album was released on May 5, 2018. Since it was shared for the first time to the YouTube viewers, 'This is America' reached more than 200 million viewers.

It also rated at the number one song on the hot billboard of 100 charts. As can be seen in the music video, Gambino uses gunshot in two scenes. Gambino put some metaphors sequences about criticism on races and the discriminative of black American people. Those symbols are captured lively in Gambino music video 'This is America'. Seeing deeply to all scenes, there are many symbols implied in this music video as blacks people voice out their condition. Gambino tries to visualize the overview of America with gun violence, chaos, discriminative and police brutality in treating blacks differently from whites. Bobo (2001) stated that blacks were understood as inherently and temperamentally. Consequently, people acted by white ordered. White has more privilege compared to blacks in related to education rights, job access, and voting right. As Solozarno, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) research on racial microaggressions of African American college students, reveals that racial issues exist at three universities. They should face subtle insults from white people regarding their skin color. The racial system which associated with dividing blacks and whites position in America has its semiotics racial signs to become the racial conflict models of racial rebellion to the global world (Bonnett, 2000:54). In addition, many YouTubers from various countries, European, Asian and African countries are inspired by a better chance for their country by using 'This is America' cover song. The majority of these YouTubers are teenagers' idols, such as in Table 1.

Malaysian YouTuber JinnyboyTV ('This is Malaysia'), Germany YouTuber Citizen Doe ('This is Germany'), Ghana YouTuber koboAfrika ('This is Ghana'), Akwa Ibom YouTuber Danny P ('This is Akwa Ibom'), Nigeria YouTuber FalzVEVO ('This is Nigeria'), Iraq YouTuber Official I-NZ ('This is Iraq'), France YouTuber ZEF Officiel ('This is France'), Brazil YouTuber Porta dos Fundos ('This is Brazil'), Africa YouTuber Axel Merryl ('This is Africa'), China YouTuber Mr. Opinion ('This is China'), England YouTuber NIZZY NYCH ('This is England'), Jamaica YouTuber Jnel Comedy ('This is Jamaica') and so many other YouTubers around the world. They dub 'This is America' song and substitutes the lyrics by adjusting to their own country problems. There are also some YouTubers from Indonesia who adopt 'This is America' music video into 'This is Indonesia' as their video covers. The Indonesia YouTubers are

Table 1
'This is America' cover song by famous Youtubers around the world

Country	Youtuber	Title of 'This is America' Cover Song
Malaysia	JinnyboyTV	<p>'This is Malaysia'</p>  <p>Chinese Gambino - This is Malaysia (Parody) JinnyboyTV • 662K views • 1 year ago This is Malaysia. We are Malaysian. A parody music video of "This is America." Song Performed by - Jin</p>
Germany	Walter Weiss	<p>'This is Germany'</p>  <p>Walter Weiss - This is germany (This is america PARODIE) Wai Media • 1.4K views • 10 months ago Walter Weiss - This is germany (This is america PARODIE)</p>
Ghana	koboAfrika	<p>'This is Ghana'</p>  <p>This is Ghana - koboAfrika Kobo Afrika • 111K views • 1 year ago #koboafrika #thisisghana #ghana #westafrika</p>
Akwa Ibom	Danny P	<p>'This is Akwa Ibom'</p>  <p>Danny P - This Is Akwa Ibom (Official Video on Youtube) Danny P • 140K views • 1 year ago Kindly SUBSCRIBE TO MY CHANNEL. "This is Akwa Ibom" by DannyP (IG: @DannyP) is a cover to</p>
Nigeria	FalzVEVO	<p>'This is Nigeria'</p>  <p>Falz - This Is Nigeria FalzVEVO • 17M views • 1 year ago Watch Now 'Le Vrai Bahd Guy' : https://youtu.be/CdVY-tf13ME Lyrics, Vocals & Recording: Folarinde</p>
Iraq	Official I-NZ	<p>'This is Iraq'</p>  <p>I-NZ - THIS IS IRAQ (الراق) Official I-NZ • 5.1M views • 11 months ago New Music 'Let Me Love' - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rhigvBNPuQ 'This is Iraq' FREE download</p>
France	ZEF Officiel	<p>'This is France'</p>  <p>ZEF - This Is France ZEF Officiel • 646K views • 11 months ago Abonne-toi ici : https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ8gmkp6F138F3_JTK1mx6A ZEF te présente son</p>
Brazil	Porta dos Fundos	<p>'This is Brazil'</p>  <p>THIS IS BRAZIL Porta dos Fundos • 5.5M views • 1 year ago Algumas pessoas podem pensar que esse vídeo é um tapa na cara, motivado pela violência e pelas</p>
Africa	Axel Merryl	<p>'This is Africa'</p>  <p>Axel Merryl - "THIS IS AFRICA" Prod Mill H and Cheetah Boy [Axel Merryl • 753K views • 1 year ago Voici mon remix de THIS IS AMERICA Mon Afrovine 4 est enfin dispo Regardez appreciez et donnez vos</p>

China	FlowerKidd		'This is China'	<p>FlowerKidd – This Is China Flower Kidd · 5.5K views · 3 months ago We remix the hit song "This Is America", Now it's our turn into this game We wanna say something truly</p>
England	NIZZY NYCH		'This is England'	<p>This Is England - Childish Gambino - This Is America NIZZY NYCH · 1.5M views · 1 year ago CHECK OUT MY LATEST TRACK= https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwRs87Pi66s</p>
Jamaica	Jnel Comedy		'This is Jamaica'	<p>Childish Gambino This Is America REMIX (This Is Jnel Comedy · 2.5M views · 1 year ago DONATE TO MY CHANNEL ... CC</p>

Source: www.youtube. 'This is America'

Papa Cringe, GenkBenk, Childidsh Ikvval and Nikoplak. In fact, 'This is America' music video has become the effective media message tool that inspired many young generations throughout the world to share their country issues.

Research Methodology

Communication semiology is an intuitive interpretation carried out by the interpreter based on the intellectual experience and subjective beliefs of the relevant signs. This concerns the credibility and scientific authority of the researcher to use the basis for thinking. Barthes (1957) explains that one of the uses of semiotics is "*critique ideologique portant sur le langage de la culture dite de masse*". It is the ideological criticism of mass culture language. This formula states that the communication semiology interprets the sign based on social and cultural context, the physical context environment, time and place where those symbols are placed. It means that the messages are constructed by the communicator by considering social norms and values, myths and beliefs, and considered the place where the message will be distributed to the public. The message also refers to space and time, when and where the message is placed. While Hall (1997) said that, "representation is the medium to interpret sign or symbol using language. It is where the meaning is produced and also exchanged among the group members". Giles (1999) explained that there are three definitions of the word "to represent" (i.e. to stand in for). Giles's statement is also stated by Supratman (2015), that the representation

is the process of delivering verbal and nonverbal messages from the sender to the recipient with meaningful sign and covers all aspects of human behavior.

This study uses a qualitative approach that is more directed at the type of qualitative research that is descriptive in nature. The approach used for this research is Roland Barthes analysis. The researcher uses the Barthes model because it sees the same aspects as those in the music video 'This is America' about how the sign can be associated with connotation meaning that can refer to ideological values and the existence of myths namely the cultural references that exist in the music video 'This is America'. A qualitative method with the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes with a denotation, connotation, and mythical system of symbols and signs on each piece of scene chosen by researchers which present racism in music videos 'This is America'. The key to Roland Barthes's semiotic teachings lies in the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis

Signifier	Signified	
Denotative sign		
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified	
Connotative Sign		

Source: (Barthes, 1957)

In this study, researchers will analyze the meaning of racism in the music video 'This is America' by searching for signifiers and signifiers then looking at denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings to obtain meaning from signs. The object of this research is the music video 'This is America', while the part in the video that will be examined are all forms of racism representation that appear in the music video scenes.

Results and Discussion

Racial Issues on The Scenes

The music video of 'This is America' represents American conditions on racial issues against the African-American community. In his scenes, Gambino has successfully described guns violence which focused on black people as the victims. The message that Gambino wants to convey is truly phenomenal, considering most of his other brilliant music works. However, 'This is America' has a powerful message of humanity that wrapped in the music beats.

Ebonics as The Medium Message

The language lyrics used by Gambino belongs to the language of Ebonics. Ebonics is a term referred to the language used by the black community in America to communicate verbally and nonverbally (black-style English). In addition to their different communication styles, blacks also present themselves in different ways. In terms of nonverbal communication, the blacks community in America use body movements, facial expressions, physical appearance, and voice characteristics. It is because Ebonics communicating style is not a form of style commonly used by white people. The emergence of Ebonics finally correlated with the emergence of African American in music, tradition, religion, and style. Those were developed separately from the patterns habits of white people. However, music is the biggest influence on the Blacks community (Johnson, 1998). These types of music are Hip-hop, R & B and Underground Hip-hop.

Gambino uses Hip-hop and R&B music to deliver critic and critical messages to the world (Figure 1). In the beginning of his Hip-hop music video 'This is America', Gambino wears nothing but pants. In this opening scene, he uses a strange smile with excessive movements too. These pants and the excessive movements are the arrogance symbol of America Confederate soldier

uniforms that used to fight and proud in maintaining the white lifestyle. They use blacks as slaves in South America. The current condition of black people in America is not much different from the past. Gambino reported in the following lyrics, "This is America...don't catch you slippin'up, look at how I'm livin' now."



Figure 1. Caption of Black as Voiceless
Source: www.youtube.'This is America'

Race is a categorization system that classifies populations on the basis of reference to physical attributes such as skin color and other bodily surgeries (Hartley, 2010: 255). This classification often shows that races that have the same physical characteristics in very large numbers (majority) are races that consider themselves to be compared to other races. Hartley (2010: 255) suggested that the concept of race itself is similar to the concept of nation, relational in nature, and each race is a product of an extension of its difference with other races in the system. The most cases of racism are those that intersect with skin color, especially racism against black people or African descendants. Countries in the African continent are often used as a colony of European and American countries. Native citizens of the State in the African continent were used as slaves in the colonial period in their own country or brought to the State that colonized them to become slaves there.



Figure 2. Caption of Cynical Character to Black

Source: www.youtube. 'This is America'

The next scene shows that Gambino is demonstrating the fictional character Jim Crow by holding a gun to shoot a man (Figure 2). Then, he bends his body as if he is Jim Crow. This Jim Crow character was taken from an African-American slave character in the 1800s that played by Thomas Dartmouth Rice on a theater stage. He is a white actor who painted his whole body with black color each time he made a stage performance of Jim Crow. Rice demonstrated a lazy black slave who had difficulty walking with a chaotic body movement.

In this video, racism manifests itself into Jim Crow sign marker which then forms a representation that is displayed as insulting the blacks. Black people are depicted as low caste acting as servants, drivers, uneducated, always alienated, and get worse facilities compared to white people. Some of these things are in accordance with the meaning of Representation that is to stand in for. This reveals that white people thereby show that they are richer, more educated, and more polite people than black people who are described as lazy, irresponsible, watermelon eaters, inhumane and crazy. The setting in this music video is America in the 1960s, where the South American country used Jim Crow's law which created an imbalance with blacks compared to whites. Jim Crow's Law was created aiming that black people could enjoy the facilities used by white people as well, but all facilities created should not be used together. In other words, black people were given the same facilities but might not use what are white facilities. Jim Crow's law was somewhat biased because the facilities provided for black people were arguably inadequate or inhumane and were very poor compared with those used by whites.



Figure 3. Two Captions of Gun Shooting
Source: www.youtube. 'This is America'

If it observed more closely, there are

two shooting scenes that appear in 0:52 seconds and 1:53 seconds (Figure 3). On each shooting scene, the weapon was held carefully by hands and put in a red wide-cloth by a teenager. Meanwhile, gun victims are being abandoned and not treated with honor. It shows a symbol that how guns usages in America are being well-treated rather than human lives. Moreover, guns selling are free to be sold. Gun usage eventually has taken many innocents of black victims.

The second shooting scene turned to a group of church choirs who were singing happily in an empty warehouse. Then, Gambino shot all of them. He took the Church as a second shooting scene in the video to represent a historic place for the African-American descendant's struggle. Gambino wanted to remind of the shooting case in 2015 where the human right for Black people was nothing. He wants to represent the case of mass murder that occurred in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, United States of America. The mass murderer was done by Dylann Roof, a white activist who agreed with white superiority. He shot dozens of Black at the Church. That shooting he did in the hope of triggering a race war. This mass shooting created the anxiety of the African-American community there. After the gunshot, people of Charleston had been thinking that the church has no longer become a safe place. Whereas, the African-America community makes the church as a sacred place, a meeting place for people of the same faith to pray to God. In the lyrics of this song it is clear about the gun usage critical, "yeah, this is America, guns in my area, I got the strap, I gotta carry 'em". In the other hand, it means a metaphor of the increasing number of shootings that occur in schools by students and young people. America government does nothing about it. It can be proven by looking at the statistical data where America listed at the first rank in the case of a shooting. Inequality in structure is a cause for people to take actions that are actually considered to be against existing structures. These dimensions will strengthen the position of outsiders and further weaken the position of marginalized people (Tahyudin, 2014).

Sack (1996) explained that in the beginning of 1990, a series of firebombing was set at African American churches, primarily in the US South. According to the statistics of the Atlanta based Center for Democratic Renewal, between January 1990 and May 1996 there were 57 cases of firebombing

or vandalism of African American houses of worship with 36 firebombings occurring between January 1995 and May 1996.”



Figure 4. *Gwara-gwara as struggle dance*
Source: www.youtube.'This is America'

At 2:18 seconds scene (Figure 4), Gambino shows a number of *gwara-gwara* dance movements with other teenage dancers. It is a dance from South Africa (self-defense dance). This shows that the issue of racism or what is called *apartheid* also occurred in America. Talking about race, it is closely related to the Politics of Identity. Hartley (2010: 237) assured that the Politics of Identity has the goal to offer a political system of participation for people who are left out from the major community, e.g. movements or communities formed by the black race. Marger in Pratama (2016: 5) stated that racist thinking influences the fundamentals of thinking and actions to give different treatment to each member of a race that is different from other races. Graham (1997) also mentioned that the meaning of racist between white people versus black people had the similar meaning with good people versus bad people. It defined the fact that the slavery system in the 18th-19th century in America was an initial system of racism that black people had or were at a lower social level than white Americans in the United States of America.

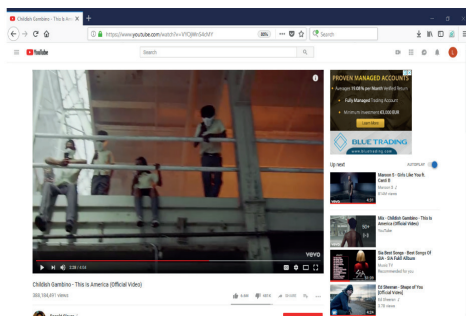


Figure 5. *Caption of smartphone cases criminalization*

Source: www.youtube.'This is America'

In this scene (Figure 5), the video feature extras of 4 black teenagers holding smartphones. This scene becomes the representation of Stephon Clark murder case. Clark is a black teenager who lives in Sacramento. He was shot by the police for carrying suspected objects (guns). In fact, he only carried an iPhone in his pocket when the gunshot occurred. Another incident that provoked racialism was the Trayvon Martin murder case in 2012. Martin was an African-American teenager who was killed by his own neighbor. The killer was George Zimmermann (white people) who claimed that Martin's movements in front of his house were suspicious. He wore a hoodie sweater worn on his head and put both of his hands in his sweater pocket. Zimmermann suspected Martin to commit a crime at his house. But the fact was Martin only passed Zimmermann's house without carrying any gun at all. In the court, Zimmermann claimed to shoot Martin to protect himself. Zimmerman was freed from the murder charge. The death of Trayvon Martin is only a few examples of Blacks who have the experience of being attacked in America. (King 2011; Loyd 2012; Murch 2012; Rafail et al. 2012; Chaney 2013).

The other meaning of black teenagers with their face mask covering half of their faces in the video is the teenager's ignorance in social life. In this video footage, they seemed to be playing with great excitement and ignored the chaos which happened in front of them. Some of them are just recorded the chaos and share it in social media post. It has become an addicted behavior that most people tend to record such accidents with a smartphone rather than trying to help in an actual way. Martindale (1990) explained that the reportage of blacks has indicated the reportage of black Americans stereotypical images in four leading newspapers (Atlanta Constitution, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Boston Globe).

Stories of extraordinary cruelty find their way and men and women begin to move to abolish slavery. In England, William Wilberforce and Zachary Macalay, historians, organized a group to suppress slavery. First, they succeeded in issuing a law which made the "slave trade" illegal. After 1840, there was no more slavery in the British colonies; and in 1848, there was a revolution that ended slavery in French territory. The Portuguese also issued a law in 1858 that promised freedom

for all slaves within 20 years from that date. In early 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a "proclamation of emancipation" that freed all slaves in America. A few days later President Lincoln was killed, however, his work was completed to free slavery in America. Slavery was abolished by President Lincoln, nevertheless, acts of discrimination against white people continued to occur. For example, the expulsion of 25 black people that occurred at the Wild Wing Cafe restaurant in North Charleston, the United States in 2013; previously, 25 people had waited for a place for two hours. Their expulsion was due to a white visitor who was uncomfortable eating with black people in a restaurant. Then, there was a similar case at the end of 2018, a manager at a Chipotle restaurant in St. Paul, Minnesota, was fired for refusing to serve five black teenagers in the restaurant.



Figure 6. Caption of Hidden Chaos
Source: www.youtube.'This is America'

Figure 6 displays two contradictory atmospheres. The front atmosphere shows teenagers happiness in ambience dancing with laughter and joy. While at the back atmosphere, it seemed out of control. There were 2 captures of white horse and a police car. They both run together. The white horse is a symbol of 'war' and 'death' in Epic movie. Behind the white horse, there is a police car. It is a metaphor of legal injustice for black people. Gambino might want to deliver that the meaning of these two symbols of white horse and a police car is a description of black people real-life in combating or defending racism issue. The racism issue is still a great issue to be fought by them until now. Brunson (2007) observed the experiences of 40 African-American young men's about police harassment and their impact on police perception. The research results shown that the value of using comprehensive measures encounters the effect of adverse experiences

In the last video (Figure 7), Gambino runs very fast to avoid white people chase. This scene illustrates that Gambino wants to deliver an important message at the epilog. It is even though the black people pursue a lot of wealth, they will still be oppressed. As it is implied in the lyrics, "Get your money,

black man. You just a Black man in this world". The lyrics of this song mean that even though black people are successful in all terms, they will still get the discrimination. Marable (2007) investigated that United States of America will develop its IT system from the beginning of politics; apparatus which are racist, capitalist, and committed to bourgeois democracy. It means that the act of racism has kept carrying out by a group based on cultural perspectives as social values and the consideration where people outside the group are wrong. This is included in a term of representation, i.e. to re-present, which has the meaning shown to have its own history in the past.



Figure 7. Caption of White Supremacy
Source: www.youtube.'This is America'

Past and Present of Blacks in America

What is shown in this music video are things that have been recorded in American history, myths about racism commonly used by whites against blacks. Loon (2019: 453) stated that it should be noted that slavery in the American continent was introduced by the Spaniards. Initially, they tried to use the Indians as laborers in the fields and in the mines, but many Indians eventually fell and died as a result of heavy work, and to save them from extinction, a priest suggested that the blacks be brought from Africa to do work. Negroes were strong and resistant to abusive treatment, besides the association with the white people would give them the opportunity to study Christianity and in this way, they could save the lives of black people. However, there was a greater need for cotton supplies and the Negroes were forced to work harder than usual, and they also experienced what the Indians felt at that time in which many died under the treatment of the foremen. On the one hand, this country declared itself based on self-proven truth, one of which was "that man was created equal," a proclamation made by the third President Thomas Jefferson stated that the country declared its independence from Great Britain. However, he had 600 slaves during his lifetime, and even the first

American President George Washington who was one of the founding fathers of America turned out to have a tobacco plantation and had many slaves (Loon, 2019: 453-455).

Conclusions

Racism is more often seen as an act that distinguishes people due to differences in ethnicity and skin color and can evoke a very strong emotional reaction, especially for black people who have felt the oppression coming from racist behavior during slavery. Racism is an ideology based on the belief that certain features that do not have some characteristics are inferior and unacceptable.

The album is definitely very controversial as it portrays the discrimination of black people. Gambino has successfully viewed the lives of black people through his video clip as a political message to the world about the current situation in America. In addition to the gun shooting and other chaos portrayed in the video scenes, Gambino also conveyed the injustice and adversity experienced by blacks. He also portrays police brutality which is considered to treat blacks differently from whites. The message that Gambino wants to convey is full of symbolic meaning. He can put the message of humanity wrapped tightly in his music video 'This is America'.

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