

The Color of Justice: Unpacking Racial Bias in the Legal System in *If Beale Street Could Talk*

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Abstract—The study dives into racial bias in the legal system, and it draws insights from Barry Jenkins's *If Beale Street Could Talk* to emphasize how widespread oppression affects the lives of African Americans. It also looks at how racial expressions in films reveal the flaws in the legal process. While past research has often focused on the romance and the characters' perseverance, this study fills in the gaps by zeroing in on the scenes that tackle racial injustice. Doing so provides a fresh perspective on how race and the law intersect. The real value of this study is that it simplifies how widespread racism is woven into cultural stories, which adds more depth to the ongoing conversation about media representation. The analysis takes a qualitative approach focusing on conversations and selected scenes, all supported by Intersectionality theory. The primary data comes from specific scenes in the film. The study shows that Jenkins uses racial expression, both in speech and body language, to critique racial bias in the legal system, emphasizing the structural barriers that contribute to injustice. This study adds to the growing use of Intersectionality in analyzing media, helping us understand how film can push back against dominant narratives and advocate for racial equality. The unique part of this study is its sharp focus on racial expressions in key scenes, which expands the conversation about race, law, and storytelling in cinema.

Index Terms—racial bias, legal system, Critical Race Theory, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, systemic injustice

I. INTRODUCTION

Barry Jenkins's *If Beale Street Could Talk* is based on James Baldwin's novel, and it digs deep into racial injustice, revealing the widespread oppression that still haunts our society. The film tells the love story of Tish and Fonny, two Black lovers whose relationship is overshadowed by institutional racism and the inequalities that affect African Americans. The institutional racism in housing, education, and the prison industrial complex shaped their lives brutally (Troy, 2020). It reveals the painful and harsh reality that, in a society ruled by white supremacy, Black people are

treated like second-class citizens and do not have the same rights as white people (Jing, 2017). Jenkins presents a narrative that involves personal resilience with collective struggle, affirming the human cost of systemic injustice. By framing the story through the voice and perspective of a Black woman, the film critiques the structural barriers faced by the Black community. It explains the emotional and relational dimensions of the struggle.

If Beale Street Could Talk is an example of how literary works convey critical social issues, especially those affecting marginalized groups (Bacci, 2021). The film portrays the efforts of Black women, especially their support for incarcerated Black men, as a key to the hope of freedom and justice (Smith, 2020). This film encourages the audience to reconsider gender and relationships in the African community through the perspective of a Black woman (Yeboah, 2020). The film is about Baldwin's anger at the racial injustices in the aftermath of Black Power and the civil rights movement and his deep connection to human emotions as a writer (Corber, 2019). The film provides a strong message about America's struggle with social justice. The film shows the power of the human spirit and the importance of resisting injustice. The film depicts systemic racism by exposing the struggle of Black people in facing a corrupt justice system, resulting in Black women having to live a difficult life because they have to raise children alone (Witherspoon, 2019).

There is a growing need for films that shine a spotlight on racial disparities and discrimination to help raise awareness about these crucial issues. Some great examples are *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), *A Time to Kill* (1996), and *Scottboro: An American Tragedy* (2000) (Beck, 2019). Two recent films that tackle discrimination and racism are *Hidden Figures* (2016) and *Green Book* (2018). *Green Book* explores racism through the lens of history and the concept of habitus, highlighting the evolving relationship between a Black artist and a white person as they navigate racial discrimination (Amalo et al., 2023). Like *If Beale Street Could Talk*, these films use powerful narratives to fight against widespread racism and raise awareness about social injustice.

Talking about widespread racism is still super relevant today, especially since racial disparities are prevalent in areas like housing, education, job opportunities, and the legal system. Movies like *If Beale Street Could Talk* help engage audiences with these issues, sparking reflection and conversation. With ongoing problems like racial profiling, police brutality, and mass incarceration, it is transparent that society needs more cultural pieces that amplify marginalized voices and challenge mainstream narratives. In this context, Jenkins's film is essential as it connects past injustices to what is happening now, reminding viewers that the fight for racial equality is far from over.

Films have always been a powerful way to critique society, offering a different lens to tackle complex social issues. Unlike typical academic or journalistic approaches, films can stir strong emotional responses and help audiences develop empathy and understanding. *If Beale Street Could Talk* displays it by using the magic of visual storytelling to emphasize the struggles of Black Americans and critique the systems that perpetuate injustice. His ability to combine particularity with sharp social criticism signals the potential for change in the film as an artistic and activist medium. Films can influence public opinion and cultural behavior, and the public recognizes them as an essential form of creative expression and social commentary (Sumarsono, 2022). Films can change gender and racial stereotypes, change behavior toward specific populations, and bring to the fore a variety of topics (Kubrak, 2020). Movies offer a tool to explore the human experience, and they can inspire empathy, compassion, and a deep understanding of the lives around us. Salma said that the impact of film on humans and their thought processes is significant (Sumarsono et al., 2023). It is crucial to bring up topics like racial injustice, as films can powerfully illustrate widespread discrimination faced by communities of color and encourage empathy for their experiences.

African American communities, like many other minority groups, frequently deal with discrimination and unfair treatment in many areas of life, including the criminal justice system. Racial injustice has been a long-standing issue in the USA (Watson et al., 2020). But many researchers, such as Delgado and Stefancic, argue that this deep-rooted prejudice is still a hot topic of debate (Goff et al., 2022). Various forms of media, including films, play an essential role in spotlighting these problems and pushing for social change. Barry Jenkins's *If Beale Street Could Talk* is a significant representation of racial injustice and discrimination in the USA.

This study examines racial bias in the legal system, as emphasized in the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*. It takes a closer look using Intersectionality theory to dig into the tricky ways widespread oppression hits African American communities. The movie explains how racial discrimination can affect legal proceedings and lead to social inequality. By focusing on the protagonist's struggles, the study reveals how racial bias messes with every part of the legal process, from arrest to when the verdict is read, often leading to injustice for African Americans. This in-depth analysis shows how films like *If Beale Street Could Talk* critique the flaws in our justice system. The study also explores how racial expression in cinema raises awareness of this disparity by deepening a deeper understanding of the need for legal reform and social change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Racism and discrimination have been ongoing issues in the USA, with African Americans facing widespread injustice in many areas of life. Racism is beyond a personal belief, and it is a social and cultural issue that marginalizes people of color, supports white supremacy, and widens the gap between European Union citizens and racial migrants (Seikkula, 2019). Racism manifests in individual actions, institutional policies, and cultural norms that maintain a hierarchy based on race (West et al., 2021). Discrimination is unfair (Greenland et al., 2018). Discrimination still exists

in the form of unequal treatment of individuals and groups based on race and gender (West et al., 2022), even without explicit barriers (Eaton et al., 2020). Racial injustice goes beyond prejudice and bias, covering broader aspects such as social networks, inheritance, distribution of resources and opportunities, and intergenerational transmission of privileges and losses (Morales Silva et al., 2023). *If Beale Street Could Talk* serves as a depiction of these issues, illustrating the existence of racial discrimination that African Americans have long faced and highlighting long-rooted injustices in American society.

Researchers and analysts have analyzed various aspects of *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Wang and Zhang conducted a comparative study between the novel and the film. Baldwin succeeded in bringing up themes of racial injustice and portraying spaces such as streets and prisons as potential places for Black agents. Jenkins's films differed from his novels in that they focused on religion, family, and gender. Jenkins emphasized the romanticism of Black love, which deflected attention from Baldwin's criticism of religious fundamentalism and the importance of family and humanitarian solidarity (Wang & Zhang, 2023). The study highlights how film adaptations can expand Baldwin's influence and reach a wider audience who may not have read the novel. They say that adaptation can be more impactful if it can maintain Baldwin's original message about religion, family, and gender equality.

A study analyzes the concept of home as a place of productivity and identity for African Americans, especially in Harlem. The study explores how the struggles of Black people surrounded by racism shape their artistic and cultural expression, emphasizing how a housing atmosphere can promote unity, peace, and financial stability. The study analyzes how the Harlem Renaissance shaped the fate of the Black community, with housing providing shelter and a platform to defend against white supremacy. The study connects the characters in *If Beale Street Could Talk* to Black' more significant struggles and aspirations in Harlem, showing how their movement unfolds in this cultural hub (Batoool et al., 2023).

Verdickt analyzes the international circulation of James Baldwin's work, which focuses on European translations of his works from when he died in 1987. This study explores the development of the history of Baldwin's translation, with special attention to France, Italy, and Germany. French and Italian publishers were essential in promoting Baldwin's work in the late 1990s (Verdickt, 2022). The study also focuses on the translation strategies of major publishers in France, Italy, Germany, and Romania.

This study fills the gap by focusing on racial bias in the legal system by analyzing racial expression in *If Beale Street Could Talk*, using the theory of Intersectionality to explore systemic oppression, unlike Wang and Zhang (2023), which focuses on the differences between Baldwin's novel and Jenkins' adaptation by emphasizing the themes of love, family, and humanitarian solidarity, without analyzing the depiction of racial injustice in the legal system.

In contrast, Batoool et al. (2023) analyze the concept of housing and its role in shaping Black citizen identity and cultural expression, especially in the Harlem and Harlem Renaissance context, without discussing legal struggles in films. Their study uses a sociocultural perspective, emphasizing housing as a tool for resistance and empowerment rather than analyzing legal injustice. While Verdickt (2022) focuses on the international reception and translation of Baldwin's work in Europe by exploring European publishers' historical development and strategies for spreading their literary impact, it is unrelated to the analysis of racial and legal themes in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Their studies highlight how the film's romantic focus shifts away from Baldwin's original message; they do not explore cinematically how legal biases are shown.

The novelty of this study lies in the specific analysis of racism, both verbal and nonverbal, in scenes, which provides a new perspective on racial and legal intersection. By offering a qualitative analysis based on scenes supported by intersectionality theory, this study contributes to developing a discourse on how film can challenge systemic racism and influence more excellent representation, which previous studies have not done.

This study uses Intersectionality Theory to analyze racial injustice in this film. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw (1991), is how different social identities, such as gender and race, intersect to create discriminatory experiences and privilege (Van Belle et al., 2023). It highlights how each marginalized group member faces challenges that cannot be understood simply by analyzing each identity separately. It is an idea that helps understand how parts of a person's self, such as gender, race, and class, merge and create challenges (Kumaran, 2023). Since everyone has more than one identity, Intersectionality explains how race relates to other marginal identities such as gender, ability, gender orientation, social class, economic status, religion, and culture (Johnson, 2021).

In *If Beal Street Could Talk*, Intersectionality is reflected in how characters experience layers of oppression because of their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The film highlights how African Americans, especially Black women like Tish, must face hardships not only because of racial discrimination but also because of gender expectations and economic hardship. Tish's struggle to free his fiancée Fonny from false accusations shows the systemic burden and economic disparities that intersect in the legal system. The film emphasizes how overlapping identities shape their experiences and resilience in facing injustice.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative and descriptive analytics, with library research as the primary technique. This study analyzes racial injustice and discrimination in America as depicted in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. The data comes from scenes and dialogues that depict racial discrimination and injustice. Supporting data is from literary journal articles, e-

books, film reviews, and other sources. The writers took a deep dive into the data to figure out how well the film tackled the issue of racial injustice and discrimination in America. They looked at how the movie portrays widespread racial profiling, corruption within the criminal justice system, and the strength and determination of African American communities. Through content analysis, the writers check out how effectively the film captures the brutal realities of racial injustice and discrimination in the USA. This study emphasizes the film's portrayal of a flawed and corrupt legal system and the urgent need for reform.

This approach solidly analyzes the racial injustice and discrimination shown in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Using primary and secondary sources, the author evaluates the film's depictions of bias and corruption in the criminal justice system and the need for change. The descriptive-analytical method allows for a comprehensive analysis of film themes through the lens of Intersectionality theory by analyzing how different social factors intersect to shape the African American experience in the justice system.

IV. FINDING AND RESULT

In *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Jenkins does a fantastic job of capturing the brutal truth about injustices that marginalized groups face, primarily through the character of Fonny, a young Black man wrongly imprisoned due to false allegations. Fonny's situation emphasizes how the American legal system unfairly targets Black individuals, often because of race and the stereotypes tied to gender, which adds to the ongoing oppression they experience and makes it more challenging to get justice. It is backed up by the fact that the US prison system shows a stark racial imbalance, with way more Black inmates compared to White ones. It is a result of systemic legal injustices, including discriminatory policy practices that target the Black community (Bleiker, 2020).

Crenshaw's concept of Intersectionality (1991) digs into how different social identities like race and gender overlap, creating unique experiences of marginalization or privilege. Fonny's story is a clear example of how these intersecting aspects impact the challenges that Black individuals face in a justice system that is full of inconsistencies, leading to greater scrutiny and discrimination against them. Black Americans have long been the subject of institutional racism, for example, laws, regulations, and other practices that cause racial disparities and create barriers to obtaining legal justice (Bleich et al., 2019). In the legal system, Black Americans had to face racial discrimination, where the legal structure often put them at a disadvantage. This kind of institutional racism is a significant factor in justifying racist practices and denying Black Americans equal opportunities and justice.

Fonny's wrongful accusations and subsequent imprisonment can be understood through intersectionality theory, which looks at how multiple overlapping identities like race, gender, and social class can influence a person's experiences. When it comes to race and the legal system, Fonny is targeted as a Black man. Racial stereotypes play a massive role in the false accusations that Fonny experienced. Religion, knowledge, and the media portray Black men as deviant, uncontrollable, and inherently free-roaming, making Black men experience dehumanization, objectification, and marginalization (Collins, 2005; Yeboah, 2020). In a world where Black individuals are often presumed to be criminals, Fonny becomes a victim of a flawed legal system that blames his flaws on his race. This kind of racial profiling is not a standalone issue; it is part of a broader, widespread problem of racial injustice. From the perspective of gender and stereotyping, as a Black man, Fonny's gender is intertwined with his race, which aggravates his sacrifices. These stereotypes about Black men influence how Fonny gets treated by police and the public, which leads to his false accusations. The justice system disproportionately targets Black men not just because of their race but also due to the masculine stereotypes that suggest they are more likely to be violent or aggressive.

From the perspective of social class and limited resources, Fonny's economic status is also intertwined with his racial and gender identity, adding to the increasingly difficult situation he faces in obtaining justice. Coming from a working-class background, Fonny did not have the financial strength to pay a lawyer to defend himself. Fonny's lack of financial support limits his ability to fight false accusations against him in a system that requires financial support to obtain justice. The mix of race, gender, and economic status puts Fonny in a tough spot, making it hard for him to stand up against a biased system that accuses him. This predicament is deeply rooted in a history of injustice, like the Jim Crow Laws that held back African American progress by enforcing segregation, leading to economic disparities among Black families (Althoff, 2023). With fewer economic opportunities, many Black folks find it difficult to get justice because they cannot afford good legal representation.

From the perspective of structural gaps, the intersection between social identities shows how structural gaps affect Fonny from various fields. Her race caused her to be the target of legal persecution, her dangerous and aggressive gender stereotypes, and her social class caused her to be unable to save herself from the corrupt legal system to prove her innocence. This detrimental intersection exposes how individuals, especially marginalized communities, face barriers that are not just one aspect of identity but are intersecting various systems of power and oppression.

Tish: Her home is on Orchard Street. ... If you know, New York is a very long way from Bank Street. Orchard Street is damn near in the East River, and Bank Street is practically in the Hudson. It is not possible to run from Orchard to Bank Street, particularly not with the police behind you. Yet Officer Bell swears he saw Fonny run from the scene of the crime. It is only possible if Officer Bell were off duty, for his beat is on the West side, not the East. Yet, it is now up to the accused to prove and pay for proving the irregularity and improbability of this sequence of events. (Jenkins, 2018, 0:38:36-0:39:12)

This narrative shows the impossibility of the scenario presented by Officer Bell, who claimed to have seen Fonny flee the crime scene due to the absurdity of the claim, both geographically and logically. Fonny, as a young Black man, was accused of being guilty based on racial stereotypes, such as that Black people often commit crimes. The legal system that accepts Officer Bell's testimony, even though it is absurd, shows that racial bias is embedded in policymaking. This narrative also alludes to the gendered stereotype that Black masculinity has long been perceived as a dangerous person, leading to the presumption of guilt due to this stereotype. Officer Bell's testimony is in line with this gendered narrative, where Fonny's race and gender make him an easy target for false accusations. Fonny's social and economic class also plays an essential role in how the legal system handles this problem. He had no support to prove his innocence, and Officer Bell's allegations were false.

Lawyer: But Mrs. Rogers' refusal to reconsider her testimony has left us in a very tough place. And now she's disappeared.

Tish's mother: Disappeared? How can she just disappear?

Lawyer: I don't think she's gone very far. They certainly don't have the means for that, but her family may have returned her to Puerto Rico. ... I'll need special investigators and..

Tish: But doesn't it make it look bad for her case, for her to disappear like that? She's the key witness.

Lawyer: She's only one of the key witnesses in this case. You have to remember this, Officer Bell. His was the authoritative identification of the rapist. It's Bell who swears he saw Alonzo running away from the scene of crime.

Tish: If he saw Fonny run from the scene of crime, why did he have to wait and come and get him out of the house?

Tish's mother: Let me get you straight now. You're sayin' that Officer Bell tells her what to say.

Lawyer: Exactly. (Jenkins, 2018, 0:39:17-0:40:20)

The legal system, as depicted in this scene, works with racial bias that places Blacks like Fonny as guilty, based solely on Officer Bell's statements without considering the evidence and inconsistencies in the case. Mrs. Rogers' disappearance adds to the complexities of the case, emphasizing how economic limitations and systemic barriers make it difficult for the Tish family to defend Fonny. The fact that the lawyers defending Fonny knew of Officer Bell's influence on Mrs. Rogers' testimony shows how institutional power dynamics are detrimental to marginalized communities. Looking at this through the lens of Intersectionality theory, Mrs. Rogers, a woman of color and an immigrant, faced challenges that made her more susceptible to manipulation by law enforcement. Her economic situation kept her from resisting pressure from those in power, showing how race and class can silence the voices of marginalized people within the legal system. The inability of the Tish family to challenge the narrative of a state without adequate funding shows the systemic economic disparities that lead to racial injustice. Tish's mother's realization that Officer Bell may have compelled Mrs. Rogers to accuse Fonny in her testimony aligns with the theory of Intersectionality, in which power imbalances rooted in racial and gender differences influence the law and dictate whose voices are considered proper.

Officer Bell's false accusations were most likely caused by a dispute that had occurred earlier between him, Fonny, and Tish. The dispute was caused by Officer Bell's racial actions against Fonny and Tish, which were reflected in the way he treated them and his cynical view of them. The dispute between Officer Bell, Fonny, and Tish at a grocery store shows how police harassment occurs due to racial bias and intimidation, playing an essential role in shaping Black individuals' everyday lives.

Bell: What happened?

Tish: That man there attacked me.

Bell: And where were you...while, uh, while all this was goin'on between junior there and your girl?

Tish: Hew was around the corner...I was buying smokes.

Bell: Is that so, boy?

Tish: He is not a boy, officer.

Bell: You live around here?

Fonny: Bank street.

Bell: I'm taking you down...for assault and battery. (Jenkins, 2018, 1:19:31-1:20:27)

The scene between Officer Bell, Fonny, and Tish shows an illustration of how the theory of Intersectionality explains the treatment of Black people by police, especially in the context of racial and gender bias. Officer Bell's behavior and his questioning of Fonny and Tish are caused by the intersection between Fonny's race, gender, and class, which puts him in a vulnerable position. The first is that Fonny's Black identity makes him the target of Officer Bell. The way the officer questions Fonny, calling him a "boy" and demanding to know where he is, reveals a deep-rooted racism that sees Black people as suspicious and blameworthy. Using the term "boy" is a clear indication of racial infantilization, a tactic used historically to strip them of their independence and dignity, making them seem younger and less critical than they are. This disrespectful treatment stems from centuries of oppression where Black individuals are looked down upon and deemed unworthy of respect.

Second, gendered stereotypes of Black masculinity are very clearly seen in Officer Bell's question. Bell focuses on the interaction between Fonny and Tish, including his dismissive attitude, describing that Black men are always seen as

dangerous and scary, especially when they are close to Black women—the stereotype of believing that Black men are sexual threats or violent makes Fonny treated as such. Fonny's race, combined with her gender, makes him easy to suspect and accuse without looking at the actual situation. Bell's refusal to accept Fonny's innocence but calls him a 'boy' shows that Intersectionality between race and gender does occur in the criminalization of Black people.

In Officer Bell's eyes, Fonny, who comes from the working class, does not have the social power or resources to defend himself against his accusations and intimidation. At that moment, Fonny's class in society became one of the causes of discrimination that occurred to him because he was subjected to the legal and social system that did not treat him with the same respect and justice that rich people or white individuals get.

The challenges faced by Tish and her family in obtaining legal aid for Fonny illustrate pervasive judicial bias in the legal system, where economic and racial disparities cause barriers to securing justice for Black people. Without putting aside their efforts, Tish and his family struggled to get a lawyer who truly believed Fonny was innocent, explaining how economic hardship limited their access to equal treatment in the eyes of the law by getting a reliable lawyer. The financial burden of financing legal proceedings is combined with systemic racial bias, reinforcing structural disparities that disproportionately affect Blacks in the legal system.

Fonny: What the fuck happened to Mrs. Rogers?

Tish: I don't know, but we'll find her.

Fonny: How we gonna find her?

Tish: We're sending people to Puerto Rico. We think that's where she went.

Fonny: Suppose she went to Argentina..Chile or China?

Tish: How's she gonna get that far?

Fonny: They can give her the money to go anywhere. The DA's office. How are we gonna get the money to find her?

Tish: We're all working,

Fonny: My daddy's working at the garment center, you're working at the department store, ...That lawyer don't give a shit about me. ...You know what's happening to me here? (Jenkins, 2018, 0:42:24-0:43:55)

The exchange between Fonny and Trish captures how this study can use Intersectionality, as Kimberle Crenshaw described, to understand better Fonny's struggles due to his race, gender, and class. Their conversation emphasizes the economic challenges that prevent Fonny and his family from accessing the same legal resources that wealthier or White individuals might take for granted, pointing out the gaps in the legal system. From the perspective of Intersectionality, the false accusations against him are not only a matter of racial discrimination but also an economic struggle. Tish's purpose in finding traces of Mrs. Rogers, a key witness, suggests that economic hardship hampered her ability to seek justice. Systemic racial bias in the legal system is coupled with limited financial resources, which prevent them from obtaining legal defense. This economic disparity, created by racial injustice, forces the Tish family to work all the way to cover all costs. At the same time, prosecution, backed by institutional power and resources, can manipulate cases without them knowing. Fonny, as a Black man, did not get the support of the system that had discriminated against him. As a Black citizen, Fonny, especially from a working-class background, was often ignored, just as his lawyers did to him.

Racial and class intersection shows how Black couples are excluded from mobility and economic stability, forcing them to live in deplorable conditions as a result of systemic racial disparities, as happened to Fonny and Trish, who experienced rejection from homeowners who did not want to rent to them due to racial and gender differences.

Daniel: They got lofts standin' empty all over the East Side, man.

Fonny: They all firetraps, too. And some of them ain't even got no toilets.

Daniel: So you figure, finding a loft ain't gonna be no sweat, right?

Fonny: But, man...this country really do not like niggers. They do not like niggers so bad, man, they will rent to a leper before they rent to a nigger, I swear. (Jenkins, 2018, 0:47:08-0:47:42)

The theory of Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw, sees the dialogue between Daniel and Fonny as a reflection of how various forms of oppression, race, and class intersect to create disadvantages for Blacks in terms of housing. The dialogue illustrates how systemic racial discrimination occurs alongside economic barriers to prevent access to necessities such as housing, forcing Blacks to maintain substandard living conditions or face exclusion. From the perspective of Intersectionality, Fonny's statement that his country dislikes Blacks shows how racial prejudice is deeply ingrained in the social structure, making it impossible for Black people to get comfortable housing.

Refusal to rent to Black tenants, despite the availability of property, shows how racial bias persists in economic opportunity, causing economic disparities. Black individuals have to face both discrimination in the rental market and financial limitations that prevent them from getting a decent place to live. It shows that Black people have been stigmatized as an unwanted group. It is in line with the theory of Intersectionality that marginalized groups often experience various forms of social and economic exclusion, making it difficult for them to break free from the cycle of poverty and discrimination.

Daniel's experience of being falsely accused and having to go to prison illustrates the intersection between racial and economic injustice. As a Black person, she was susceptible to systemic biases that criminalized her identity and limited her opportunities even after she was free from punishment. His entry into prison on false charges not only deprived him

of his liberty but also worsened his economic condition, making it more challenging to get work and housing. It aligns with the theory of Intersectionality, which emphasizes how intersecting races and classes lead to more difficult barriers that lead to a cycle of loss and exclusion for marginalized communities.

Daniel: I just got out the slammer, baby. Two years. They said. They still say that I stole a car. I had a little bit of pot on me, when they grabbed me, but, man, I ...I don't even know how to drive a car, Fonny. But then it sounded a whole lot better than a marijuana charge, you dig? (Jenkins, 2018, 0:51:42-0:52:38)

Intersectionality theory sees the false accusations that led to Daniel's imprisonment as a manifestation of how blended social identities cause a person to experience discrimination in the legal system. Daniel's experience of being accused of stealing a car, even though he cannot drive, shows how racial profiling and economic vulnerability intersect with the criminalization of Black people, regardless of the facts. His admission that being accused of being a car thief is better than a charge because marijuana reflects how Black people are forced to accept charges to avoid worse punishment, a reflection of their marginalized position in the legal system.

As one of the key witnesses to Fonny's innocence, Daniel was recaptured, further illustrating how systemic racism silences and weakens Black people who dare to challenge the status quo. His arrest again indicates that the legal system targets those who can expose injustice by using their socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Daniel's experience reflects on the intersection between racial discrimination and economic hardship, where Black people are caught up in a cycle of criminalization that limits their access to justice, financial stability, and social mobility.

Lawyer: You and Fonny insist that you were together in the room on Bank Street with an old friend, Daniel Carty. That's the alibi. But your testimony, as you can imagine, counts for nothing. Daniel Carty has just been arrested by the DA's office, and I've not been allowed to see him. What they're doing is really against the law, but Daniel has a record. They obviously intend to make him change his testimony, and ... I don't know this, but I'm willing to bet that that's why Mrs. Rogers has disappeared. (Jenkins, 2018, 0:41:03-0:41:31)

The above defense statement shows how Intersectionality, where race, class, and criminal record interact, has an essential role in the systemic oppression of Blacks in the legal system. Daniel Carty's previous track record, although unrelated to the Fonny case, was used as a weapon by the authorities to suppress his credibility as an alibi witness. It reflects how Blacks, especially those whose past dealings with the law, will continue to be criminalized and seen as untrustworthy, exacerbating institutional racism and causing a cycle of legal injustice. The legal system tends to exploit socioeconomic vulnerabilities and racial bias to ensure voices like Tish and Daniel are silenced, making it impossible for Fonny to get legal justice. Furthermore, Mrs. Rogers' disappearance shows the manipulation of evidence and witnesses, illustrating how gender power dynamics are used to maintain unfair legal outputs, making marginalized communities unable to gain access to justice.

V. CONCLUSION

This study dives into how Barry Jenkins's *If Beale Street Could Talk* shines a light on racial bias in the legal system, using Intersectionality theory as a lens. The film shows how race, social class, and gender come together to create widespread obstacles that impact African Americans, especially within the legal and economic worlds. By looking at some key scenes that spotlight racial injustice, this study sees how Jenkins effectively uses both spoken and unspoken racial cues to emphasize the unfair challenges that Black people face, like wrongful accusations, financial struggles, and ingrained discrimination.

This study adds to the conversation about media representation, showing how films can push back against mainstream narratives and advocate for racial equality. It shows just how essential it is to adopt an intersectional perspective to grasp racial oppression in cultural stories, giving us a fresh take on how social and legal inequalities are portrayed in film narratives.

Future studies can examine the interactions between race, gender, and class in other modern films emphasizing widespread oppression, providing some comparisons in different cultural settings. It will be interesting to examine how audiences view legal injustice in films like *If Beale Street Could Talk* and how that shapes their thoughts on racial injustice and legal bias. More research can focus on how racial discrimination is portrayed in legal dramas or documentaries to assess how realism impacts public awareness.

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