



THE MAIN CHARACTER'S RESPONSE TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN *INVICTUS* MOVIE

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Received: (October 2025)

Accepted: (November 2025)

Published : (December 2025)

Abstract

This article examines how the main character, Nelson Mandela, responds to racial discrimination in *Invictus* (2009), directed by Clint Eastwood. The research focuses on Mandela's strategies in addressing the deep racial divisions in post-apartheid South Africa. Using John Paul Lederach's theory of reconciliation, the analysis highlights four key responses shown by Mandela: truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace. These responses are expressed through dialogue, symbolic actions, and leadership decisions in the film. The findings reveal that Mandela's commitment to reconciliation helped transform rugby, a sport once seen as a symbol of racial division, into a unifying tool for the nation. His responses demonstrate that racial discrimination can be resisted not only through political struggle but also through moral leadership and inclusive vision. This article aims to give readers a deeper understanding of how film portrays responses to racial discrimination and to provide a useful reference for further studies in literature and film analysis.

Keywords: film analysis, *Invictus*, Nelson Mandela, racial discrimination, reconciliation

INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination is one of the most destructive problems in society because it not only harms individuals but also breaks the relationships between groups. Victims of racial discrimination often experience deep pain, anger, and injustice, while society becomes divided and filled with mistrust. The struggle against discrimination, therefore, is not only about changing unfair laws or political systems, but also about healing the broken relationships among people. To achieve this, reconciliation becomes an important process to restore trust, understanding, and cooperation between former enemies.

John Paul Lederach (1997) explains reconciliation as a long process that involves four connected elements: truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace. Truth requires people to face past pain honestly; forgiveness offers a chance to let go of hatred; justice restores fairness and dignity; and peace becomes the final goal of living together in harmony. As Lederach (1997) says, "Reconciliation requires that people deal with the past in ways that are honest and open" (p. 27). This theory gives a useful perspective for analyzing how characters in literature and film respond to racial discrimination and how they transform conflict into peace.

Clint Eastwood's film *Invictus* (2009) portrays Nelson Mandela's leadership in post-apartheid South Africa, where racial discrimination had left deep wounds in the nation. Instead of choosing revenge, Mandela responds with reconciliation by applying truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace in his actions and words. His famous line, "Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon," reflects his belief in healing through forgiveness rather than hatred. This article analyzes Mandela's response to racial discrimination in *Invictus* by using Lederach's reconciliation theory as a framework. Through this analysis, the article shows how Mandela's responses illustrate a powerful model of leadership and reconciliation that transformed racial division into national unity.

This study is supported by several theoretical perspectives that strengthen the analysis of social issues depicted in *Invictus*. To provide a comprehensive view, it combines approaches from both literary and film studies, particularly focusing on narrative structure and cinematography. Literary theory is useful in examining how elements such as character, setting, and conflict reflect wider social problems, while film theory explains how visual techniques—including camera angles, lighting, and shot composition—communicate ideas of race, power, and division. By integrating these disciplines, the research can interpret racial discrimination not only as a social reality but also as an artistic message conveyed through the medium of film.

In addition to literary and cinematic approaches, this study also relies on sociological theories that address racism and racial discrimination. Blank, Dabady, and Citro (2004) highlight the different forms and consequences of discrimination, which provide a framework for understanding the struggles represented in the film. To analyze the main character's response, John Paul Lederach's (1997) theory of reconciliation is applied, emphasizing four key elements: truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace. This perspective allows the study to connect Mandela's personal choices and leadership with broader social healing, bridging the artistic portrayal of discrimination in *Invictus* with the political and cultural realities of post-apartheid South Africa.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method to analyze racial discrimination portrayed in the film *Invictus* (2009). According to Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (1949), qualitative research focuses on gathering meaningful, descriptive data, whether written, spoken, or observed behavior to gain a deep understanding. The writer collected primary data from the movie's scenes, dialogues, and character expressions that depict racial discrimination and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. Key scenes, such as the contrast between segregated sports fields and Mandela's security guards refusing to work with former regime officers, illustrate the deep-rooted racial tensions and set up the narrative for reconciliation.

Data collection involved repeated viewings of the film to fully understand its story and social context, followed by selecting and transcribing relevant scenes and dialogues related to racial discrimination. The writer then categorized this data based on types of discrimination and responses to it. Data analysis used a descriptive qualitative approach, organizing and interpreting the data with the theoretical framework of racial discrimination by Blank, Dabady, and Citro (2004). This framework helped identify various forms of discrimination in the film, such as verbal hostility, social exclusion, and institutional injustice, illustrating the social realities of racial issues in post-apartheid South Africa.

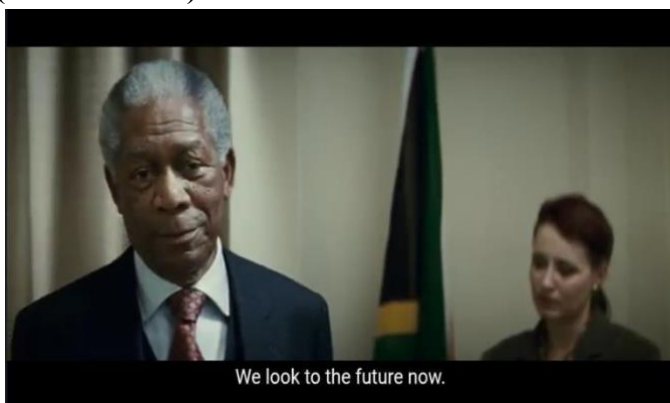
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lederach (1997) developed a reconciliation theory that focuses on repairing broken relationships after conflict or injustice. He emphasized that reconciliation is not only about ending violence but also about creating new bonds built on honesty, healing, and fairness. According to him, reconciliation requires four interconnected elements: truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace. Truth encourages people to face past pain openly, forgiveness allows individuals to let go of hatred, justice ensures fairness and responsibility, and peace creates lasting harmony in society. As Lederach (1997) noted, "Reconciliation requires that we envision our mutual future, even as we deal with the painful past" (p. 27). These elements work together to help individuals and groups heal from deep wounds like racism, making it possible to rebuild trust and unity.

TRUTH

Lederach (1997) emphasizes that truth is essential for reconciliation, as facing the past honestly is necessary for healing. He states, "Truth is the first step toward restoring the person and the relationship" (p. 29), meaning truth involves not just facts but also sharing emotions and experiences. By telling the truth, people better understand each other, giving victims a voice and building trust. This foundation of truth is crucial for lasting peace and justice.

Nelson Mandela Makes All His Staff Realize It (Minute 11:15)



At the beginning of his presidency, Nelson Mandela addressed the fears of white workers worried about losing their jobs under the new leadership by reassuring them that there was no need for concern. In the film *Invictus*, Mandela tells his staff, “*Past is the past, we look to the future now*” (Eastwood, 2009, 00:11:14–00:11:17). This moment illustrates Mandela’s approach to truth; he neither sought revenge nor ignored the painful history but accepted it honestly while emphasizing the importance of moving forward together as a nation.

This perspective aligns with Lederach’s (1997) view that reconciliation requires confronting the

past honestly and openly (p. 27). Truth, therefore, is not about erasing or hiding what happened but acknowledging past suffering and using that understanding as a foundation to build peace and unity for the future. Mandela’s approach demonstrates how embracing truth can help a divided society heal and progress.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness plays a crucial role in achieving peace by choosing to let go of anger and hatred despite past harm. Lederach (1997) explains that “Forgiveness breaks the cycle of revenge and creates a new path toward peace” (p. 29), meaning it stops ongoing pain without erasing what happened. Forgiveness interrupts cycles of conflict, allowing healing and the rebuilding of relationships. Although difficult, forgiveness is a courageous and hopeful step essential for lasting peace.

Nelson Mandela convinces Jason Tsabalala (Minute 14:40)



In this scene from *Invictus*, Mandela addresses his head of security, Jason, who is upset about working alongside white officers formerly involved in harming Black South Africans. Mandela responds, “*The Rainbow Nation starts here*”. “Reconciliation starts here. Forgiveness starts here too. Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon” (Eastwood, 2009, 00:13:55–00:14:45). Mandela’s words demonstrate his belief that forgiveness is essential for peace and healing, reflecting Lederach’s view that forgiveness breaks the cycle of anger and

revenge.

Lederach (1997) explains that “Forgiveness frees the person from being a hostage to the past and opens up the possibility of a new future” (p. 29). In this moment, Mandela does not deny the pain caused by the past but chooses to forgive, allowing the process of reconciliation to begin. This illustrates that forgiveness is not about forgetting past wrongs but about consciously opting for peace over hatred, enabling a future built on healing and unity.

JUSTICE

Justice is a vital part of reconciliation, as true peace depends on the feeling that fairness has been achieved. Lederach (1997) states, “Justice seeks to address the wrongs and restore the right relationships that were broken by violence or oppression” (p. 29). This means that those harmed by past injustices, such as racism or apartheid, deserve fair treatment and respect. Justice involves creating fair laws, ensuring equal opportunities, and preventing harm from recurring. Rather than seeking revenge, justice promotes trust and peaceful coexistence.

Nelson Mandela Reassures Jason Tsabalala (Minute 14:35)



When Mandela's head of security, Jason, grew upset after noticing four white Special Branch officers joining the team men who had once tried to harm Black South Africans, he questioned Mandela's decision to allow them to work there. Mandela responded calmly, saying, "*The Rainbow Nation starts here. Reconciliation starts here. Forgiveness starts here too. Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon*" (Eastwood, 2009, 00:13:55–00:14:45). This scene reflects Lederach's (1997) view that forgiveness is a vital step

toward reconciliation and peace, as it breaks the cycle of anger and retaliation. As he explained, "Forgiveness frees the person from being a hostage to the past and opens up the possibility of a new future" (p. 29). In this moment, Mandela demonstrates that forgiveness does not erase past suffering but instead represents a conscious choice to pursue peace rather than hatred, making it possible for healing to begin.

PEACE

Lederach (1997) views peace as more than just the absence of conflict; it involves building new relationships based on respect and fairness. He states, "Peace is built on relationships. It requires people to see themselves in a web of relationships, including with their enemies" (p. 26), emphasizing connection rather than division. True peace emerges when people listen, understand each other, and recognize one another as human, not enemies. Although peace is a gradual and challenging process, it becomes possible through trust and hope.

Nelson Mandela congratulates Captain Pienaar (Minute 02:05:09)



The concept of peace in Lederach's (1997) theory is vividly illustrated in the final scene of *Invictus*. After the Springboks win the Rugby World Cup, Black and White South Africans celebrate together in a display of unity and joy. Nelson Mandela joins the field wearing the team's jersey and hands the trophy to François Pienaar, the White team captain (Eastwood, 2009, 02:05:09). This moment symbolizes that peace goes beyond ending conflict, it marks the beginning of new relationships. Lederach (1997)

emphasizes that "Peace is built on relationships, including with those we once saw as enemies" (p. 26). Despite a history of division fueled by hatred and fear, this scene shows how peace can flourish when people unite in respect, understanding, and hope for what lies ahead.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Invictus* shows that Nelson Mandela's response to racial discrimination is best understood through Lederach's (1997) theory of reconciliation, which highlights truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace as essential elements for healing divided societies. Mandela demonstrates truth by acknowledging the painful past while encouraging his people to move forward, forgiveness by choosing peace over hatred even toward former oppressors, justice by promoting fairness and dignity without seeking revenge, and peace by uniting Black and White South Africans through shared experiences such as rugby. These responses illustrate that overcoming racial discrimination requires more than political change; it demands moral leadership, reconciliation, and a vision of unity. Through Mandela's example, the film portrays how reconciliation can transform deep wounds of racial division into the foundation for lasting national harmony.

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