CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Drug addict is a kind of social problems. This social problem is occurring not only among black people but also in the entire world. Social problems exist when there is a sizable difference between the ideals of a society and its actual achievement. Social problem are created by failure to close that gap between the way people want things to be and the way things really are. According to this definition, racial discrimination is a social problem because we believe that everyone should receive fair and equal treatment, yet certain groups are still denied equal access to education, employment, and housing. The phenomenon of drugs addict and racial discrimination as a kind of social problem is also portrayed in Sonny’s Blues story. 

Sonny’s Blues written in 1957 by an American author, James Baldwin.

Baldwin makes Harlem as the setting of the story. Near the years of 1950-1960 Harlem was the home for drug dealing and other antisocial activity and poverty. Harlem here represent as a symbol of black American’s social problems. There are so many social problems which are faced by black American people such as race discrimination, drugs abuse, alcoholism, poverty, and criminal, which are reflected in this story. Most blacks lived in poverty and suffered from racial discrimination. Blacks left the South in record numbers to escape oppression and to take advantage of urban economic opportunities. The period of the 1920’s known as the Harlem or Negro Renaissance is pivotal. It was a time when black and white Americans are discovered the vibrancy and uniqueness of black art, music, and
especially, literature. James Baldwin saw this issue and raised it into his short story. So this description of the story’s setting is where the author was raised in equal conditions to the two main characters in the story Sonny and his older brother. (Quoted from http://www.harlemheritage.com/history-of-harlem/)

The social problem which is reflected in Sonny’ Blues story is based on the place where the main character live. In Harlem, race discrimination still exists that’s why black people have known as the second class and they live in poverty. The black people who live in poverty try to solve their problem by consuming alcohol and it is not only happen to black people but also the white people. The people who are influenced by alcohol makes the criminality will be happen. Drugs addiction is also the main problem of black people who life in Harlem.

Sonny’s Blues is a short story. As we know that short story belongs to prose fiction, shorter in form than a novel. It is a brief, imaginative, unfolding in a single predominating incident and a single chief character. It contains a plot, single directed in theme, the detail which is so compressed, and the whole treatment so organized, as to produce a single impression. Short story is normally applied to works of fiction ranging in length from one thousand to fifteen thousand words. Short story necessarily embodies issues and ideas. The idea will bring the readers into a message. That message will make the reader easier to understand the story. The idea or what we called theme sometimes talk about social life. In fact, the literary work is the reflection of the society, real life or social condition.

Talking about literature is basically talking about life. Literature means to know about life because literature is the imagination of the writers about life, about everything that the writers have felt or thought in life. It could reflect the living
condition of the writer. Literature can be a picture of life in the past, now, and future. Wellek (1977:94) state that “…literature ‘represents’ ‘life’; and ‘life’ is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary ‘imitation’.” It means that literature, as with any art form, should hold a mirror up to society and reflects what is happening there. Besides using his creative imagination or the ability of writing, the writer should connect his work to the real life about what the write sees in the society. But sometimes, a literary work doesn’t represent life directly but it just indirectly appears that there is a social life issue portrayed inside.

Reading literary works directs reader to see some problems in society. The problems are called the social problems. Social problem is a form of behavior, which is considered to be deviated from social norm. The deviation becomes problem because it is not in accordance with social norms. Thus the response of society to the deviants causes problems to the society. Some problems in Sonny’s Blues story are considered to be social problem. The social problems which are portrayed in that story are about Black American social problem.

Robert A. Nisbet (1978:2) states that a social problem is a condition that is harmful to society. But the matter is not as simple, for the meaning of such every day term as harm and society are not clear. Every society has different measure about social problems. For instance, alcoholism is a social problem for a certain society but not for another one. Social problem are also different, based on the time factor. Gambling has probably dilemmatic social problems in the past. But nowadays, it is not dilemmatic anymore because there have been rules that determine gambling is
social problem. Clearly, most people define social problems as conditions that harm or seem to harm their own interest.

Soekanto (1990:401) states that there are four factors in social problems; they are economic, biological, biopsychological, and cultural factors. Economic factors for examples are poverty, unemployment, and so on. Biological factors can be varied problems which come from diseases. Biopsychological factor for examples can be caused by neurosis, suicide, and so on. Cultural factors, for examples divorce, child disobedience, racial conflict, and others. In *Sonny’s Blues* story, the event such as race discrimination, drugs, alcoholism, poverty, criminal involvement, materialism are the important points portrayed.

*Sonny’s Blues* story is an observation of a real life. Most of James Baldwin’s stories are about events in social-political aspects that occurred in James Baldwin life, but some of them are related more to his intimate life. At that time, blacks were in disadvantage and mistreated so James Baldwin recurred that phenomenon unto books and stories to express about the dilemmas and social pressure that has been happened those days. Baldwin tries to send a message from the story. In this story, Sonny more like a guy who pursuit his dreams no matter what really happened. He uses his music as an expression just like Baldwin did with his writings about social aspects. How blacks were discriminated, like in the moment his father was killed by white people without any reason. An incident that may happen in real life because in those times there was a very tension environment and he could write it in his book like an important event.

The social problem which is portrayed in the story still happens until now and we can see those social problems occur in our environment. In the story Sonny is a
drug abuser because he feels trapped in Harlem, trapped in school, and trapped by what he's *supposed* is so contradictory to what he *wants* to do. He's trying to find his way in the world, not quite an adult but definitely not a kid anymore. Sonny turns to drugs to escape the feeling of being trapped by his surroundings and by the passing of time he gets rehabilitated and able to control his addictions and finally he can control his addict by being a musician, jazz musician. About race discrimination we can see from the experience of his father in the past. His mother’s tells that his father has an experience in the past that the brother of his father was killed by some white people. All the Black American’s social problem which is represented in this story based on the condition of Harlem. The writer expresses his experience in the story and it’s interesting to be analyzed. These are the background why I have chosen the topical heading of this thesis as “*An Analysis of Black American’s Social Problem as reflected in “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin.*

1.2 Problems of The Study

Social problem is a kind of serious disease that hinders people in getting normal social life and they become social blocks to manifest social living harmony. The phenomenon of social problems is depressingly so long that many people throw up their hands in despair. *Sonny’s Blues* is a short story represents social problem and the focus of this story is the social problem which is faced by Black American who lives in Harlem. In accordance with the title of this thesis, some questions are arranged which act as the center of problems. Problems that the writer would like to analyze are:

1. What are the social problems portrayed in *Sonny’s Blues* Story?
2. What are the impacts of those social problems on the main character?
1.3 **Objective of The Study**

In line with the problem above, this thesis the writer tries to find out the answers of those questions, they are:

1. To identify and to explain the social problems portrayed in *Sonny’s Blues* Story.
2. To identify and to explain the impacts of those social problems on the main character.

1.4 **Scope of The Study**

In doing the analysis, we need to limit the fields that are going to be analyzed to make sure that the analysis is not out of context. The scope of the analysis is about how the social problems in terms of race discrimination, drugs, alcoholism, poverty, and criminality influence the characters of *Sonny’s Blues* and also about the cause of social problems and impacts toward the characters.

1.5 **Significance of The Study**

These analyses are expected to be able:

- To develop the literature study especially short story.
- To give information about literature and Social problems among Black American people.
- To be used as a reference for the readers who are interested in learning the relationship of literature and sociological problems.
- To help the readers to understand about the social problems in social life.