
Dehumanization And Racial Hegemony In Between The World And Me

Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), Coates writes a letter to his fifteen-year-old son, Samori, to inform him and share his experience of racial hegemony in America today. Coates letter to his son is the version of “the talk,” the talk parents’ needs to have with their kids. This talk isn’t so much so of the typical talk that parents give about sex and etc. more so a preventative talk to inform Samori what it means to be black in today’s society. Coates states, “That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free. The men who had left his body in the street like some awesome declaration of their inviolable power would never be punished. It was not my expectation that anyone would ever be punished. However, you were young and still believed. (Coates, 11) this letter, or “this talk” was triggered by Samori’s emotional reaction to the announcement that no charges were brought against the officer who killed Michael Brown. Coates states, “And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include frisking’s, detaining’s, beatings, and humiliations. All of this is common to black people. And all of this is old for black people. No one is held responsible. (Coates, 9) As readers, we can sense Coates tone through this letter. “I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world. —” (Coates (108) Through Coates’s tone, we can sense he’s scared, hurt, angry, and frustrated. Coates’s vulnerability and his concerns are not only for his son’s future but also the future of America. Coates makes it clear that he did not write this letter with ill intentions towards white people; his problems are not with them. However, for him, to us, to the rest of the world, it is an eye-opener, to give them insight on racial hegemony that the black society is facing.

“This is your country, this is your world, this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it.” (Coates, 15) with this letter “Coates demonstrates by going into great detail on how America is relentlessly “destroys the black body.”(Coates) “Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body — it is heritage.” (Coates,103) He wants to know why this happening to our black bodies is. They are destroying our black bodies and then refusing to recognize the oppressive behaviors that caused them to be destroyed. Coates is trying to tell us, yes black bodies are being destroyed, but this is a way for America and their oppressors to keep the whites on top and keep the blacks at the bottom. With this Coates’s goal is trying to challenge the understanding of America on why blacks keep on facing racial hegemony. Coates mentions America as “White America” throughout his letter, he renames it because of the white hegemony that is happening. He believes this white hegemony is in full effect and our black society is not aware of what is happening to them, although, it is happening to only them. Readers have to understand that even though this letter is for his son, he is also speaking to the black community as if were his kids as well. “If we don’t move soon, we are all going to die.” (Coates,21) Coates is showing us with this quote he is making a vital point. Any black person; rich or poor, powerful or powerless, educated or uneducated, doesn’t matter who you are, if you are a person of color and don’t wake up and realize what’s going on amongst themselves losing black lives to racial hegemony will become something of the norm. “This officer, given maximum power, bore minimum responsibility. He was charged with nothing. He was punished by no one.” (Coates, 80)

From early history, blacks only identity was being a slave. Fast forward today, the way they are

under scrutiny and how they are being viewed as a threat is what causing them to be dehumanized. What Coates points out is what people tend to forget is that America's success was built from the destruction of colored people. The destruction is what leads to dehumanization. Moreover, this reflects onto Coates point where he sees how the white society denies the humanity of blacks to try and maintain its fake dream, as he likes to call it. Coates calls it "The American Dream," "I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways. The Dream is treehouses and the Cub Scouts. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake. And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies." (Coates,11) What Coates is saying is that "The American Dream," has its nice houses with nice lawns and white- picket fences. He goes on to explain that black people will never get to experience this dream due to racial hegemony. Something we can all relate to what Coates was saying, growing up and seeing kids living the perfect American Dream. Those living the dream have nothing to worry about, as opposed to, us black people who are constantly worrying about being killed senselessly. The ones living the dream have nothing to worry about, their worries consist who will be their date to the senior prom, who's going to be captain of the cheerleading teams. Unlike blacks, their worries involve of day-to-day fears as being beaten to death from people who undertook a sworn promise to protect us "The law did not protect us. And now, in your time, the law has become an excuse for stopping and frisking you, which is to say, furthering the assault on your body." (Coates, 18). Coates considers "The American Dream" is a role that is damaging American Society which he insists it's a just a cover-up for racial hegemony that is happening today. Coates states, "To awaken the Dreamers, to rouse them to the facts of what their need to be white, to talk like they are white, to think that they are white, which is to think that they are beyond the design flaws of humanity, has done to the world. (Coates, 146) With this quote, Coates suggests that "The American Dream" wants to have this narrative, while on the other hand is completely ignoring certain facts. To believe this façade that our American society is totally normal, that our society is not dehumanizing our black bodies. For that exact reason, people tend to ignore any signs that challenge this belief which ultimately leads us back to dehumanizing our black bodies through racial hegemony.

Dehumanizing is defined as an inner process that members of a particular group of people declare over another group of people. It views the others as less than human, which means denying them of any moral respect. Nazi' seen Jews as a group that didn't deserve any moral respects. In the event of the massacre, it affected millions of lives of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals. The Nazis' objectives with the holocaust were to hurt, destroy, deprive, and essentially dehumanize, the lives they disregarded. Primo Levi, a chemist, writer, and most importantly a holocaust survivor wrote his memoir *If this is a man* (1993) to give his experience of the Auschwitz concentration camps during the holocaust. In his memoir, Levi exposes the Nazi of their inhuman actions, and ways of dehumanizing their prisoners. He provides details of his experiences and goes above and beyond of going over his story.

The Nazi's plan of dehumanizing Jews and other prisoners successfully started an anti-Semitism which was the blueprint of getting rid of any European Jews' moral rights and freedom. The Nazis announced that all Jews needed to be barred from the rest of society; Which led to a widespread of getting rid of them, which helped to set the stage up for the genocide. During the time of the massacre, The Nazis developed different techniques on ways dehumanizing their prisoners that required the Jews to suffer painful conditions. Levi explains

the painful experience where they were ripped from their homes and being transported to the concentration camps. They were transported onto cattle cars. Although the cattle cars are meant for animals it showed the level of respect the Nazis has for the Jews. Deliberately not giving proper transportation, it challenged the importance of Jews existence. Another way Nazis dehumanized their prisoners was when they were given a tattoo. "I have learnt that I am a Häftling, prisoner number 174517" (Levi, 27) the purpose of the tattoo symbolizes that each prisoner who received one has lost its identity. 'We are the slaves of the slaves and our name is the number which we carry tattooed on our arm.'(Levi,27) Levi believes with this tattoo, that is with him forever, he is not a human being with any value. They are no longer human beings, they're objects.

Levi's gives an outlook into the lives of the victims of the holocaust. Readers of Levi's work can sense his skills on how to handle dehumanizing. Levi states, "But because of this way of eating on our feet, furiously, burning our mouths and throats, without time to breathe, really is fressen, the way of eating of animals, and certainly not essen, the human way of eating, seated in front of a table, religiously. Fressen is exactly the word." (Levi,26) Nothing is less dehumanizing then not giving someone food, and letting them suffer through starvation. Levi state, "As soon as the cold, which throughout the winter had seemed our only enemy, had ceased, we became aware of our hunger" (Levi,74). Levi is explaining to us the painful circumstances that he and other victims went through. He puts aside his own anger and pain to write out this memoir. "Thus, in an instant, our women, our parents, our children disappeared. We saw them for a short while as an obscure mass at the other end of the platform; then we saw nothing more." (Levi,32) Just picture having your loved ones being taken away as fast as having your identity being taken away without any thinking twice about it. This is what Levi and other prisoners went through during the Holocaust." Levi says, "Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man." In a moment, with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us: we had reached the bottom." (Levi,21) Levi mentions the word "demolition of a man" meaning the destruction of a man, the breakdown of a man. These words Levi is using is telling us is vital. Levi survives through a demolition of a man; he takes us readers to an understanding of what that is. Levi states, 'The obstacles preventing the realization of both these extreme states are of the same nature: they derive from our human condition which is opposed to everything infinite...' (Levi, 17) "They poison every lasting happiness; they equally assiduously distract us from our misfortunes and make our consciousness." (Levi 17) With this quote, Levi explains how the Nazi ways of extermination of the prisoner's humanity. Nevertheless, Levi does show some certain moments that led to positivity. He describes how those exact moments gave him the strength to push through each instant of dehumanization. Despite being a victim of the holocaust, Levi writes this memoir without any anger, hurt, resentment to paint the picture of the massacre. It is meant to serve as a memoir to the millions of people forcefully went though as a subject to dehumanization. Levi's preface states, "it should be able, rather, to furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind." He mentions the word documentation. And that is exactly what Levi's memoir serves as. His description of the event is documented evidence noting each victims' voice that ever suffered during the holocaust.

Both Coates and Levi gave the world a look at dehumanizing one group through racial hegemony. Although, Coates's letter was to his son about the ongoing racial hegemony that is happening today and how he is scared for his son's future, and the future of America and Levi's memoir shared his experience at the Auschwitz concentration camps during holocaust, both serves a purpose of giving us insight on the world of dehumanization & racial Hegemony.

In a phone interview, Coates states, "There are two burdens of racism in this country. The first is the actual burden you know, sort of socioeconomics that we see all the time, wealth gap, life expectancy, death rate, those sorts of things. But then there's another portion of this that folks ask you to accept, and that is the notion that somehow this is not really tied to our long history really our 250-year, almost 400-year history of policy directed toward African-Americans. That somehow this is our fault, or partly our fault. Between the World and Me is my complete rejection of that idea. It may well be our responsibility, but it certainly is not our fault. Prince Jones bears no fault in how he was killed. None. Absolutely none. He was not just killed by the officer; he was killed by the heritage of this country." (Coates, "All Things Considered") The tragic death of his friend Prince Jones was never talked about, and the police officer who was responsible for his death never was held accountable for his death. This struck Coates hard because first, that was his friend, secondly, he was killed with no remorse. Coates letter is a scream for help that America needs to stop dehumanizing the black society. Before Levi's life was cut so short, he recorded a broadcast documentary by the (Italian State Television, Rai, in 1983). Levi was asked, "In the concentration camps one would adapt to anything?" Levi replied, "The ones who adapted to everything are the one who survived. But the majority did not adapt to everything, and died." Levi's compelling words just prove his testimony on his memoir. He took his situation for what it was. Certainly, he and millions of Jews were victims of the massacre, where they suffered through cruel tortures. Nonetheless, what Levi did was he adapted to his new world, which led to survival, which led him writing his story for the world to comprehend and understand the dehumanizing that took place.

Work Cited

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