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Art 108

28 February 2021

Necessary Reading

The book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates reveals the racial problems facing young black lives in American society. Toni Morrison, an American novelist, states, “I’ve been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly it is Ta-Nehisi Coates. The language of Between the World and Me, like Coates’ journey, is visceral, eloquent, and beautifully redemptive. And its examination of the hazards and hopes of black male life is as profound as it is revelatory. This is required reading”. James Baldwin was another American novelist that wrote highly acclaimed essays, books, and poems like *The Fire Next Time* which “Coates had been inspired” by to write his own version in *Between the World and Me* (Alexander). Morrison’s view on Coates’ book is completely correct because young minds are still developing during their teen to young adult years, and this book poses questions on American society for thought so that young people will have a greater understanding of the world that they are growing up in.

Both *The Fire Next Time* and *Between the World and Me* are geared towards young African American men and discusses the racial injustices that plague American society. Baldwin’s book is written in the form of a letter to his 15 year old nephew and Coates’ book is written the same, but for his 15 year old son (Alexander). Coates in his book reveals that the history of America is glorified even though there were multiple atrocities that America did commit like “torture, theft, (and) enslavement” (Coates 6). Coates refers to the lies of the American history and society as “the Dream” that the country is lost in (Coates 50). The racial injustices that Coates discuss are an eye opening experience that young people need to read about to fully understand how to deal with those injustices and protect themselves in America’s society.

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates poses many questions for thought on the black male life. In an article in The New Yorker by Brit Bennett, he discusses how to Coates being “black in a white supremacist society is to live in constant fear of disembodiment.” Coates discusses this in posing the question, “what does it mean, then to live in a body that is both scared and scary” (Bennett et al.). This question gives insight to the life of a black male in America by describing that black men are scared themselves of the world and the world fears them. The young men that read this will begin to see the world in a new light as they come into adulthood. They will begin to see that everyday life is so different from “the Dream” that they lived behind as a child and become more entuned with the world (Coates 49).

Even though the book mainly discusses black male experience in America, the black female experience is just as harsh if not more. Females that consider reading this book will see similarities between their experience and males. Police brutality of African Americans is only shown by black males, but females also faces this. The Black Lives Matter movement and their efforts to “criminal-justice reform” was started by black women yet they focus on black males (Rollert). Coates discusses that “police reflect in all of its will and fear” (Coates 78). Both young men and women grow up try to understand their place in the world (Bennett et al.). The “different vulnerabilities of black men and black women are not unbridgeable experiences”, because they help reveal each other (Bennet el al.). Young women reading this book begin to see their own vulnerabilities by reading about the vulnerabilities of the young male and then protect themselves from those that might harm them.

The book reveals that everyday life is a struggle for young readers and that it is the “only portion of this world…(their) control” (Bodenner). Children are protected from the world by their parents so young people might not yet see the struggles that they face ahead. In an article in The Atlantic Melvin Roger, a professor at U.C.L.A, wrote that “black folks may control their place in the battle, but never with the possibility that they, and in turn their country, may win” (Bodenner). When people read Coates’ book, they will understand that Roger’s point is about African Americans and their place in society. Readers will see that black people struggle everyday because of the system that is built around them and they can control themselves, but they cannot control the system. Young minds that read this book are more entuned with themselves and their place in the world and will try to find ways to change the world so that their children won’t have to face the same struggles they did.

Toni Morrison is correct in her views on Baldwin and Coates. Coates’ similarities to Baldwin’s writing style and his understanding to the racial injustices of American society make him the perfect to fill the void of James Baldwin. The topics, discussions, and questions that Coates poses in his book are relevant to America’s society today. The questions make the reader dive deeply in the thought of their own lives compared that Coates’ shares in his book. The world is then revealed to the reader through a different perspective. Coates’ book could be considered a textbook to life rather than for school and just like any textbook for class is required the same can be said for this book when it comes to life and American society.

Works Cited

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