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October 15, 2016

A Dream turned into Shattered Glass

Why do black lives matter so much that a revolution has spawned? A question I often asked myself with my feet up on the table and duty pistol faithfully by my side; while going through my daily paperwork. This question has also loomed over me while patrolling in my daily assigned police car. The question was finally answered by Ta-Nehisi Coates’ book *Between the World and Me.* Coates is a black man who grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, where he learned that his “body” is never truly his; it belongs to anyone who dares to take it from him. This insight on life isn’t only his own but of his black culture; his entire family and those of his black community have to live in fear from the police who think they are judge, jury, and executioner. This comes as a shock to me as a former police officer, I thought I was protecting people so that they could find a way to reach their dream, believing I was stopping the bullies not being one. I know now that the “Dream” is just that, a dream. That dream is depicted by Coates as something unattainable to those with a high amount of darkened melanin. Coates aims to reason with all those minds that still believe in the Dream, so the cerebral vacation breaks into shattered glass. To show Americans their true heritage, not the smoke and mirrors that has been spoon fed to them. This dream is a construct made to keep higher members of society feel safe. In order for them to feel safe, we the people are subject to the will of the police which the higher members of society have employed. We the people are prey to these predators.

I shall explain this Dream as best as I can, because it has such a vast amount of socially constructed parts with the help of Coates who portrays it in his own way. He states “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 wanted to escape into that Dream, to fold my country over my head. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies. And knowing this, knowing that the Dream persists by warring with the known world, I was sad for the host, I was sad for all those families, I was sad for my country, but above all, in that moment, I was sad for you.” (Coates, 11) He’s sad because his son will never be in this safe dreamland, because of his skin color he will never know what it feels like to walk on a street without feeling threatened or wrong in some way, shape, or form. That higher society is forming these dreams into mirages, making them close enough to see but too far to reach for those with darker skin, the dream is a prison of words with fear being the bars that hold black people in place. In order to shatter that dream, all those that believe in the dream must understand that it’s just a figment of their imagination.

Now for a lot of Americans today this dream is as real as their belief in Jesus Christ. They believe what the storytellers on their television screens are saying, how, if one just does what they are told, they too can live in this American dream. Coates brings this to light with this small excerpt, “The Dream seemed to be the pinnacle, then-to grow rich and live in one of those disconnected houses out in the country, in one of those small communities, one of those cul-de-sacs with its gently curving ways, where they staged teen movies and children built treehouses, and in that last lost year before college, teenagers made love in cars parked at the lake. The Dream seemed to be the end of the world for me, the height of American ambition. What more could possibly exist beyond the dispatches, beyond the suburbs?” (Coates, 116) Coates once believed in this dream, it was his lighthouse in a sea of darkness; Americans have been blinded by this light, thinking it to be their true directional path. Unknowingly, that blinding light is used to blind people from the truth that keeps them distanced from the Dreamers. Using legislature, a Dreamer can enact racism into the society by giving it a new name like “stop-and-frisk” which uses police as their new weapons.

We need to “reject magic in all forms” (Coates, 12) in order to see through smoke and mirrors. Coates depicts police brutality as one of those mirrors when he inscribes to his son, “I am writing you because this was the year you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes; because you know now that Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help, that John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store. And you have seen men in uniform drive by and murder Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old child whom they were oath-bound to protect.” (Coates, 9)

This reality of police killing children because of their skin tone should anger every parent; even though I am not one it angers me because those oath-bound protectors are my brothers and sisters. We forgot we stand together, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Police officers don’t realize that they themselves are what’s keeping the Dream intact, because of all the positive reinforcement they receive from the oppressors; “the destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations.” (Coates, 9)

It’s important to state that not all of these Dreamers are what society has deemed as “white” but are also black; Coates writes, “They were black people who elected their own politicians, but these politicians, I learned, superintended a police force as vicious as any America. I had heard stories about PG County from the same poets who opened my world. These poets assured me that the PG County police were not police at all but privateers, gangsters, gunmen, plunderers operating under the color of law.” (Coates, 53) Note that this evil has no color, for it is only seeking to be rich and all powerful, using “bodies” as the foundation on which it thrives on. However, they still need fresh “bodies” in order to survive on top of the mountain of skulls that has been inherited over time, collecting them with so called badges in the shape of a shield in order to feed their predatory desires.

How do we move on from this? A question I now ask myself while looking at a picture beholding a vision of a naïve police officer, who’s looks look like the man I once saw in a mirror. Do we simply forgive and forget? No because, “the forgetting is habit, is yet another necessary component of the Dream. They have forgotten the scale of theft that enriched them in slavery; the terror that allowed them, for a century, to pilfer the vote; the segregationist policy that gave them their suburbs. They have forgotten, because to remember would tumble them out of the beautiful Dream and force them to live down here with us, down here in the world. To awaken them is to reveal that they are an empire of humans and, like all empires of humans, are built on the destruction of the body.” (Coates, 143) Now I may be asking a little much from today’s people but I employ them to combat this terror; not with guns like PG County Police but with words like Ta-Nehisi Coates. When we remember all the people lost to this terrorism, we are using memory as our weapon of choice, words as ammunition, and, the pen as a trigger to fire at the Dreams fragile frame turning it into shattered glass.

Works Cited

Coates, Ta-Nehisi “*Between the World and Me*” W.W. Norton & Company. April 12, 2010. Print.