



THE ISSUES OF RACISM IN THE NOVEL *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME* BY TA-NEHISI COATES

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ABSTRACT

One of the issues that attracted public attention recently regarding American culture is racism. It is a belief system or theory known as racism that holds that a certain race is superior and has the right to govern over other races and that biological differences between human races dictate cultural or individual achievements. This can occur in the majority between the black and the white race. Racism has occurred since time immemorial and has become a historical thing in the United States. This phenomenon is published in various forms, both literary and scientific works. One of them is the novel *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which discusses the issues of racism that he experienced. The issues in this novel include the difficulty of living in school as a black student and the different treatment of black people in terms of law and security.

Keywords: *racism, black, white, struggle, exploitation, Coates*

INTRODUCTION

The conflict between races or what we often hear about racism today is not a surprising thing. It is a big problem that is even common among the general public, especially in a big country like the United States of America. To understand this, we all have to know what racism is and how it happens. First of all, Interracial conflict or racism refers to a situation where a person is treated less favorably or is not given the same opportunities as other people in the same situation because of their race, country of birth, ethnic background, or the color of their skin. To get a clear picture of the meaning of this, we can look at examples in everyday life such as a white employer refusing to hire a person with dark skin even though this person is qualified, but the employer instead hires an unqualified person of the same race with him because he was afraid of losing customers if the worker was black. This is a minor form of racism, many other examples are worse. For example, the most recent, heartbreaking case of interracial conflict occurred on May 14, 2022, at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, United

States. Quoted from The New York Times, “The suspect shot 13 people, almost all of them black, including three who survived the attack. The main objective of the suspect is to kill as many black people as possible” (McKinley, Closson, & Freytas-Tamura, 2022). We can see how brutal the result of this interracial conflict is. So how can this interracial conflict occur and what are its origins? No one knows exactly when this started. However, it is estimated that this interracial conflict started from slavery. Quoted from History.com (2022), “There have always been stories of enslaved Africans and this has become a symbol of the roots of slavery. The fate of enslaved people in the United States divided the nation during the Civil War. White people in America have enslaved and destroyed black people for centuries. This devastation had occurred for so long and with such totality that many white men truly believed it was their right to procure slaves. And after the war, the legacy of racism and slavery will continue.” That tradition still holds true today. Despite the absence of physical slavery, there were still widespread incarcerations, extreme poverty, and a disproportionately high rate of black arrests and fatal shootings. It did not involve physical slavery, there were still mass incarcerations, mass poverty, and a disproportionate number of black people who were arrested or killed. Therefore, this story about the interracial conflict that occurred decades ago has been published in many forms. Some immortalize it in the form of poetry, songs, paintings, and novels. One of them is a novel by Ta-Nehisi Coates entitled *Between the World and Me*. In this novel, Ta-Nehisi Coates shares his story, dealing with the strangeness of the interracial conflict he experienced. Therefore, this paper will discuss Ta-Nehisi Coates' experiences in dealing with the issues of racism in the novel *Between the World and Me*.

RESEARCH METHOD

Ferdinal, Seswita, and Sandika (2020) argued that literary critics can look at works of literature from different perspectives either qualitatively or quantitatively by applying different approaches and theories. This qualitative research is centered on a descriptive discussion. The writer will enter the object to look for sources from writings or reading materials related to the issues of racism in the novel *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Bogdan and Tylor (in Moleong 2000) state that what is meant by descriptive qualitative is the method used to analyze data by describing data through the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. The research is descriptive, describing things as they are, which means that the data collected is in the form of words or logic, visuals, and not numbers. For these reasons, the author chose to conduct this style of descriptive qualitative

narrative research. An outline for a qualitative procedure should have a section on the story that results from data analysis. In qualitative research, the narrative offers data in the form of text or images. Authors can talk about narrative traditions by using a variety of long, short, and short quotations.

To gather details about the subject of this research, the author also carried out a data search through written sources. Scientific journals, reference books, and publications found in libraries are used as sources of data or information for data-gathering strategies (Ruslan, 2003). In this study, the author used an open library system to gather data or information on the problems under investigation by reading materials.

Additionally, the author uses technical aid in the form of tools and search engines on the internet, where all material from all eras is available, as well as data collection approaches. Finding a file or set of data with the speed, thoroughness, and accessibility of data from various years is quite simple with the aid of internet searching. On the internet, searching, browsing, surfing, and downloading are all options for finding information.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

For us to understand Ta-Nehisi Coates' point of view in this novel, we should know who Ta-Nehisi Coates is. Ta-Nehisi Paul Coates is an American writer and journalist born September 30, 1975, in Maryland. According to Sparks (2022), "Coates' mother was a teacher, and her father was a librarian, entrepreneur, and publisher who founded Black Classic Press, which republished the works of forgotten African Americans." From this, we can see that Coates is part of the African-American race. Coates has lived in the midst of the conflict for most of his life.

He characterizes this as an emotional struggle for freedom as a black person despite having lived in a nation where his ancestors had been held as slaves and being able to observe that history all around him. Coates viewed the African people as monarchs distinct from their kingdoms and as perfect human beings. But he realized that his views were similar to the way white Americans, whom he called Dreamers, often view Americans as innocent too. After the many struggles he faced to survive as a black man, Coates poured his stories from schools, problems with the police, and even the streets were dangerous for black men and women in his novel *Between the World and Me*. His main goal in writing this novel is to make people aware of the severity of racism. Drawing on his revelatory experiences from childhood to adulthood, Coates struggles to understand how discrimination against black people is justified between

the black and white races. He demonstrated that growing up in the United States, with its history of exploitation and outrage against the black race, usurped control of its rights and censored the positive side of black people's history.

The issue of racism that Coates first noticed was how hard it was to survive in a school for black students. The first thing that can be seen in school textbooks, the only important people are white people. When black kids share their ideas about black significant others, nothing is presented or discussed in class. Strange things are also clearly seen in the presence of pictures or paintings at school showing black people being beaten. Also, schools seem to only care about how they produce good students and this means students who stay put in line are not smart and knowledgeable. Despite the fact that some black pupils are particularly inquisitive, schools are not concerned with their inquisitiveness. Instead, the school advises them to develop into decent citizens and claims that continuing their regular school attendance will keep them out of jail.

Thus, the greatest atrocity that Coates has seen in the school system is that if someone does not do well in school, they are kicked out and thrown out into the street. However, if someone goes to jail because of the violence on the streets, they are told that they should still be in school. The fact that the brilliant potential of black students is ignored makes them unable to pursue their dreams in the same way and on an equal footing with the white race. Even though America is famous for the American Dream which states that in America everyone has the opportunity to succeed. This may seem like a positive thing, but if we look back in time, we find that it depended on our race. As the quote from the novel says, "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" (146). The only way the American Dream can exist is if we choose to ignore racial injustice. And the systems in question are those in charge of law and order and the educational system.

Black people are profiled and associated with crime and violence, and they struggle with a lack of funds for safe, high-spirited communities. Because of this, the American Dream is a dream that will never be available to either black or white people. He then continued, "Do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them...But do not pin your struggle on their conversion. The Dreamers will have to learn to struggle for themselves, to understand that the field for their Dream, the stage where they have painted themselves white, is the deathbed of us all. The Dream is the same habit that endangers the planet, the same habit that sees our bodies stowed

away in prisons and ghettos” (151). He believed that anyone could fulfill their aspirations and that they did not need to be white to do so, but as Coates points out, the American Dream is a white man's dream. Due to white people's definition of success, when black people realize their goals, they must assume the role of "successful black people," which is uncommon compared to white people's common and natural success. Coates contends that we need to build a more open and inclusive society because everyone's definition of success is different.

Furthermore, other issues of racism can be felt in the community. As he said in the first chapter of this novel, “to be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world”(17). Coates felt that black children grew up fearful because the environment was so violent and so gloomy. In addition, Coates felt that black people were also afraid of the police. There are innumerable instances where black people are killed or beaten by the police without any justification or supporting evidence, and the murderers get away with it.

This depressing situation supports the notion that someone can become the victim of arbitrary and spontaneous violence simply because they are black. The incident in Virginia where a police officer fatally shot his acquaintance, Prince Jones, in the front yard of her fiancé was another memorable encounter. He claimed Jones tried to run him over while he was being pursued by him. After killing Jones, the cop went unpunished and went back to work as usual. As he said, “And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body”(9). After the lack of accountability for the murders, he realized that his life was vulnerable to historical racism and police violence and that his life could be taken from him at any time without the law holding the perpetrators accountable. Additionally, if a black person committed a crime, they would receive a disproportionately large amount of punishment compared to a white person. In addition to having greater rates of poverty and drug use, which fuel crime, black communities also suffer from a lack of public services and initiatives. Because of this, there are more black males behind bars than white men.

Coates believed that white Americans would continue to plunder not only the black race but the environment as well. White people can never really understand what it's like to be black because they can never live it. So, white people mostly live blind to differences in treatment. Black folks were unable to even cross the street unafraid that onlookers or the police would have negative opinions of them.

CONCLUSION

Ta-Nehisi Coates has shared his experience dealing with the issues of racial conflict or racism that he experienced throughout his life. Coates is part of the African-American race and he has spent most of his life amid struggles. He managed to describe how he grew up in the United States, with a history of exploitation and mistreatment of the black race, deprived of rights, and the loss of the positive side of the history of the black race. One of the issues of racism that Coates first felt was the difficulty of obtaining justice and the right to learn in school and the difficulty of pursuing black dreams. Furthermore, another issue of racism is the fear that is felt by every black person in society who sees them as a danger without a definite reason and cause, as well as laws that do not stand up straight to defend the truth against them. We can scarcely comment on the racism and marginalization of black people out of all the concerns with racism mentioned above because we have probably never encountered it. According to the conversation, *Between the World and Me* gave its readers new perspectives, and everyone should read it. This book can assist the world in moving in the right direction by promoting the idea that everyone deserves fair treatment and opportunities.

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