Shred of Truth: Antinomy and Synecdoche in the Work of Ta-Nehisi Coates

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> Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.[1]
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> —*Karl Marx*

> When I was in Washington last [Christ]mas, we should have met and gone over one or two possible things to be done in connection with my plans to leave Howard University. Perhaps it is just as well because my disgust with the place is just about as great as yours and good riddance...[2]
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> — *Harris to Alain Locke, May 10, 1947*

> People keep saying, 'We need to have a conversation about race...This is the conversation. I want to see a cop shoot a white unarmed teenager in the back,..And I want to see a white man convicted for raping a black woman. Then when you ask me, 'Is it over?', I will say yes.[3]
>
> —*Toni Morrison*

On August 9, 2014, 18-year old Michael Brown was gunned down by police officer Darren Wilson, in the suburb of Ferguson, Missouri. Riots broke out a few days later, led primarily by working-class Black youth. The city was overtaken by "warrior cops," the fog of tear gas, a hail of rubber bullets and military tanks. Days later, members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) would appear, arguing that voting at the ballot box was the only legitimate manner to address the anger in the streets of Ferguson. These politicians hoped to transform the anger in the streets into a midterm election turnout that would favor the Democratic Party. President Barack Obama stated: "I won't comment on the investigation [in the death of Michael Brown]." Only to add: "Cynicism is a choice, but hope is a better choice. Get those souls to the polls. If we do, I guarantee we've got a brighter future ahead."[4] By January 2015, "Black Lives Matter" was the rallying cry heard throughout the world; even typically apolitical Black professional athletes—Reggie Bush, Derrick Rose, Kobe Bryant

and LeBron James—donned T-shirts with the slogan: "I Can't Breathe."

The uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, were the result of deindustrialization in the Midwest Rust Belt. The closing of two Chrysler plants in nearby Fenton, Missouri in 2011 was the culmination of decades of plant closures beginning in the late 1970s. During its heyday as a boomtown for industrial migration, North St. Louis county – which includes Ferguson, Hazelwood and Florissant – was the home of railroad workers, several automobile plants such as Ford and Chrysler in addition to food production plants like General Mills and Sara Lee.[5] By August 2014, the Black unemployment rate in Ferguson was reportedly 19%, whereas the national Black unemployment rate was 11.5%. The median household income in Ferguson was $44,000 compared to $75,000 for St. Louis as a whole.[6]

One year after the tragic death of Michael Brown and scores of other Black men and women, Ta-Nehisi Coates with his *Between the World and Me* (*BWM*) published what many consider to be the political manifesto for the emerging "Black Lives Matter" movement.[7] Across the nation, on nearly every social-media platform, in barbershops, reading groups, high schools, universities, and newspapers, Coates has been lauded as a literary genius who unveils the gut-wrenching truth about racial inequality in the United States. Coates' book weaves together memoir, social commentary and political manifesto in order to explain the World to his 15-year-old son, Samori. Borrowing the epistolary form of Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), his book has created a fanfare, particularly after being lauded by Toni Morrison ("I've been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died"), then awarded the prestigious MacArthur "genius" grant in addition to the 2015 National Book Award for nonfiction. He has become a celebrated Black public intellectual by both bourgeois liberals and parts of the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

The vast majority of reviews have been positive—with the occasional critic being disappointed with Coates' pessimism. Given its literary success, the arguments and presuppositions of the book (and affiliated writings) need to be subject to a critical evaluation. As Marxist literary scholar Barbara Foley has noted in another context, success in the U.S. book market is not just a question of literary excellence or authorial prominence. Often, there are literary figures whose success hinges on a text's embodiment of normative assumptions about bourgeois civil society and self.[8]

In this essay, we aim to examine the conceptual underpinnings of Coates' analysis of race and racism, principally in his award winning book but also in his well-known articles for *The Atlantic*. We hope to clarify the differences between Coates' anti-racist (essentially liberal-nationalist) analysis and a Marxist (class) analysis of racism. We examine several antinomies that run throughout Coates' work: class versus race, white freedom versus Black subordination, voluntarism versus determinism and essentialism versus anti-essentialism.

In brief, Coates conflates class and caste; conflates race and class (where ruling race becomes ruling class); and conflates two very different binaries: freedom and slavery and ruling and working class.

These conflations are partly expressed in his fetish term, "the Black body," a term which appears over 130 times in *BWM*, and in his belief that, as two expressions of this corporate body, he and his son are, in Derrick Bell's phrase, "at the bottom of the well." And these conflations are partly expressed in his view that all whites benefit from racism, though, following James Baldwin, they are morally and psychologically damaged by the process of white self-invention. These contradictions are at the heart of his analysis and are the result of his failure to give any serious attention to the role of class and class struggle in history.

We will proceed with a close examination of Coates' view of (1) American history—from slavery and Jim Crow to the "new Jim Crow" and "Age of Austerity"—that follows from the above conflations; (2) Coates' romantic view of historically Black colleges and universities along with an attendant view on Black and white selves that repudiates vulgar romantic nationalism in favor of a hipper, socially constructed nationalism that we might call postmodern essentialism; and (3) his ersatz conception of political struggle, rooted in classic bourgeois antinomies.

We will argue that racism hurts the entire working class, both nationally and globally, through differential exploitation and oppression. The less exploited and oppressed do not benefit from the more exploited and oppressed. Contra Coates, the ruling class is not some mysterious white ruling caste. Class rule in the United States has never been that simple. Today, things are even more complex as more people of color—who are not tokens—are being incorporated into the ruling class. Moreover, corporate multiculturalism in conjunction with right-wing populism functions to mystify the nature of capitalist exploitation and social oppression operating in the U. S. social formation.

Coates' Odyssey through American History

Historian N. D. B. Connolly claims that "[w]ithout question, the historical profession has likely had no better evangelist" than Coates. Others, such as MSNBC host Chris Hayes, have declared Coates the "greatest essayist of our time."[9] In short, there are no shortage of people who are celebrating Coates' book for its insight into the "Black mind" in the Age of Obama.

Coates' *bildungsroman* of sorts is divided into three sections. In these sections, Coates traces the history of white violence against "Black bodies," "the long war against the black body" (98) which he claims is at the center of United States history. Coates often solicits the reader's agreement on a number of key 'nodal' points in United States history. The most prominent "structured silence" surrounds the notion of class as a determinate social relation in the United States and the World.[10] He attempts to persuade the reader that the United States is a caste system composed of "Black bodies" and "white Dreamers." Coates portrays Euro-American people as those "who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white." Here Coates—following the white privilege position so prevalent today—presents white people as "an undifferen-

tiated mass with a common experience of privilege, access and unfettered social mobility."[11] For Coates, there are no fundamental class divisions or differential power within the Euro-American population. All white people—as a result of their whiteness—have power over all non-white people.

His journey through U.S. history begins with an acknowledgement that race is a social construction. In an attempt to explain the process that has led to the creation of a racist polity, he argues that racial divisions "were imposed on us by the Virginia Planters obsessed with enslaving as many Americans as possible." (42) This shorthand of the origins of slavery is obviously inadequate as shorthands are—but it is also an important rhetorical maneuver used by Coates. He intentionally elides how the planters arrived at racialized slavery in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion (*BR* is discussed in *CR* not *BWM*). In the course of the book, the Virginia planters, or what a Marxist analysis would unapologetically call the ruling class, quickly morphs into "Americans" understood for the most part as "white."

Coates thus embraces – following Edmund Morgan's thesis in the classic *American Slavery, American Freedom*—what Theodore Allen calls the paradox view of American history. According to this view of American history, with the establishment of racial oppression, the multiracial working-class threat from below was solved and the "white race" was freed. With Black slavery comes American (white) freedom. Consequently, Coates concludes that "America begins in black plunder and white democracy."[12] The implication here is that "America" begins shortly after 1676 in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion. With the birth of racial slavery, we are to infer that the class exploitation of both free and bond labor, of both the African and European proletariat, was quickly transformed into white freedom based on Black slavery. From Coates' narrative, we are led to believe that a system of caste oppression was founded after Bacon's Rebellion and continues to imprison the United States polity.

But Coates goes further to argue not merely the paradox thesis of American history, but that the contradiction between white freedom and Black slavery is analogous to the contradiction between classes. Or more accurately, to the extent that class exists in his narrative, it is synonymous with caste. Indeed, it is not far from the truth that Coates eliminates class structure, class rule and class exploitation in the Marxist sense from his World. He creates a ruling race as a ruling class. As he states in his widely read article "The Case for Reparations": "at the beginning of the 18th century, two primary classes were enshrined in America" (*CR*, IV.) Black people have become America's "indispensable working class" and all whites have become rulers. Clear evidence for this point is Coates' use of an 1848 quote from the former Vice President and Senator John C. Calhoun, quoted in both *BWM* and his essay on reparations:

> The two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black…And all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals.[13]

Coates adds the following commentary: "And there it is—the right to break the black body as the meaning of sacred equality. And that right has always given them ["whites"] meaning, has always meant that there was someone down in the valley because a mountain is not a mountain if there is nothing below…You and I, my son, are that 'below.' " In "The Case for Reparations," Coates adds evidence from John Wilkes Booth to bolster his case for caste (which in turn underlies his case for reparations):

> This country was formed for the white, not for the black man," John Wilkes Booth wrote, before killing Abraham Lincoln. "And looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint held by those noble framers of our Constitution, I for one have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us) that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. (CR, V: The Quiet Plunder)

Coates as noted is following the historian Edmund Morgan, who opens the door to a sociogenic analysis of racism (a class analysis as opposed to a psychocultural one). At one point, Morgan argues: "the answer to the problem [of preventing a repeat of Bacon's Rebellion] was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt."[14] But then towards the end of his book, Morgan shuts the door he opened when he introduces the paradox analysis of American history, an analysis based on the false assumption that when "race" replaced class, there were then "too few free [white] poor to matter." In response, Theodore Allen argues that Morgan "is wrong on the facts and wrong on the theory."[15]

The proportion of landless European-Americans did not shrink to insignificance as a social category in the plantation colonies in the century between Bacon's Rebellion and the American Revolution. In 1676, the overwhelming proportion of the population of Virginia was in the Tidewater region. Of its economically active (tithable) European-American population, half were bond laborers and another one-eight were propertyless freemen. Of the 40 % that did own such labor, about ¼ were large landowners, those owning over 500 acres.[16]

While the status of poor whites improved relative to African Americans, "they faced a decline of opportunity for social mobility after 1680."[17] When we widen our lens to the country as a whole, "in 1770 when Ben Franklin praised 'middling America,' 3 % of the people owned 30 % of the wealth; and in de Toqueville's America of 1830, one percent of Americans owned nearly half the wealth."[18] On this account, we should not take Coates seriously nor Calhoun about the upper class consisting of rich and poor whites.

As Allen notes, the "all whites benefit" line leaves much unexplained. If Black slavery was based on the collaboration of the formerly poor whites with the gentry, a shared interest due to the formerly poor whites becoming property holders, then "why did that collaboration not diminish when the contrary tendency [spread of propertylessness] set in, as it evidently did, and 'racial' competition

for employment became one of the well-known features of American society?" And what is the rationale for the exclusion of the free Black people? "[I]f the operation of the slave economics was such as to make free people generally into property holders, why were the free African Americans excluded from a fair share of the bounty? Would not their participation have strengthened the front against the threat of slave revolt, which strengthening was calculated to be the effect elsewhere in the Americas?"[19]

Coates quick transition from class to race, a transition which is a transition in causal analysis, is based, interestingly, not on Morgan's analysis of separating dangerous white from dangerous Black people (dangerous from point of view of social control), but based on the cheapness of the African slave and the status of the European indentures as English subjects. But this truncated narrative is in its own way as distorted a narrative as Morgan's own when Morgan describes the free white poor as too few to matter.

It is simply false to assume that the "rights" of Englishmen were respected in the case of European indentures. As Allen notes, before the invention of the white race, women bond servants in the colonies as a punishment for marriage had their terms extended often by two and a half years.[20] The flip side of this is that male supremacy ("the 'man's home is his castle' principle"), a key feature of English social control, was abrogated for European male bond servants.[21]

This "denial of the right to marriage and family" was "not a social aberration" but an "indispensable condition" to the preservation of "that particular form of capitalist production and accumulation." But there are complexities. In doing this, the plantation bourgeoisie denied themselves the "benefit of patriarchy as a system of social control over the laboring people." Allen surmises that one of the elements encouraging the 1676 rebellion of servants and slaves was this loss of privilege.[22]

In the transition to the white race, this privilege would be returned to the now whitened European male and denied not only to slaves (this is obvious) but to "free Negroes and Mulattos." Allen provides voluminous evidence against the Morgan paradox. The existence of this large propertyless strata according to Allen requires that they be given privileges of status centering on stripping the "free male Negro" of his status. After all, we return to this in a moment, why not allow the "free Negro" to occupy his normal class status as part of the buffer against the negro slaves, much as was done in the Caribbean?

Allen demonstrates how much work the plantation bourgeoisie had to do to set up the system of ruling class social control. In doing so, he contests Winthrop Jordan's thesis that it was an "unthinking decision" flowing from the "need to be white."[23] He also contests the second half of Morgan's thesis, as indicated above, that the ruling class in acting out of social control motives in effect undid itself in mutating into a ruling race. And Allen's thesis is clearly at odds with Coates take on American history where a tendency on the part of the plantation bourgeoisie to impose lifetime servitude on African bonded labor is firmed up due to the cheapness of the labor on the one hand and the presumed inherited citizenship rights of European indentures on the other.

Allen argues that the cheapness of African labor would not have been affected by retaining the status of the "free Negro"; that the cheapness of the labor was decidedly secondary to social control. While Allen focuses on the well-known landmark legislation of 1705 Virginia that set "Negroes," Indians and Mulattos free and slave apart and was so central to the invention of the white race, i.e., the white race class collaborationist social control formation, it's worth focusing on later acts taken by Maryland Governor Gooch in 1723 and English Attorney General Richard West's initial objections to these laws. Richard West's response to the law of 1723 (West was responsible for evaluating laws in the colonies for their compatibility with English law) was to wonder "why one freeman should be used worse than another, merely on account of his complexion." And he concluded, after enumerating the rights of freemen, that it "cannot be just…by a general law …to strip all free persons of a black complexion…from those rights which are justly valued by every free man."[24]

It should be noted that these laws, including those put into effect by Governor Gooch, which included the elimination of the franchise for "free Negro men" and the right to hold office, meant "repealing an electoral principle that had existed in Virginia for more than a century."[25] The contrast with the bourgeoisie's behavior in the Caribbean cements the analysis that deliberate ruling class social control not "race consciousness" was operative:

> In the early 1720s, at the same time that the Virginia assembly was emphasizing the exclusion of free Negroes from any place in the intermediate social control stratum, in Barbados, free Negroes and other persons of color, like other free persons, were required to serve in the colony militia, and in Jamaica the assembly offered free Negroes and persons of color free homesteads. In both cases the policies were calculated to promote and maintain social control and the security of those colonies.

And again:

> the difference between the English plantation bourgeoisies in the British West Indies and the continental plantation bourgeoisie cannot be ascribed to a difference of degrees in "white consciousness….The difference was rooted in the objective fact that in the British West-Indies there were too few laboring class Europeans to embody an adequate petit bourgeoisie while in the continental colonies, there were too many to be accommodated in the ranks of that class (vol. two, 240 and 243).

Let's return to the Calhoun quote. Coates himself shows the quote is false when he notes that ¾ of the whites in the South in 1860 did not own slaves. Of the ¼ who did, most of those owned one or only a few.

The justification of slavery by Calhoun, George Fitzhugh and others attempted to present slavery as the best of all possible worlds. But Calhoun's ideological statement did not represent the views of all Euro-Americans in the United States. With the consolidation of capitalist slavery in the United States, the hatred of one class against another was intense. As Abram Harris and Sterling Spero observe:

"The poor white envied the slave's security and hated him for his material advantages, while the slave envied the white man's freedom and hated him for the advantages of his whiteness. Each group, in an effort to exalt itself, looked down upon the other with all the contempt which the planter aristocracy showed to both. The slave was a 'nigger' and the poor white was 'po' white trash."[26]

For centuries, historians, philosophers and sociologists have debated the character of antebellum slavery in the Old South. One thing is certain. While all slaves were necessarily Black, not all exploited people in the United States were Black. It is generally agreed that the majority of slaves were owned by 4 percent of the Southern white population.[27] The historian Mark R. Cheathem further explains:

> …in 1860, almost half of the South's slaveholders owned fewer than five slaves. Only 12 percent (approximately 46,000) owned more than twenty. Around 1 percent (approximately 3,800) owned fifty or more slaves. Owners of over 100 slaves numbered 2,292. There were only fourteen with 500 or more slaves, and just one with more than 1,000. Interestingly, of the fourteen largest slave owners, nine were rice planters; the largest, Joshua Ward, was a South Carolina rice planter (Parish 1989, pp. 26-28; U.S. Census). These figures indicate that by 1860, the typical slaveholder owned few slaves, but the typical slave lived on a sizable plantation.[28]

The majority of Euro-Americans were engaged in subsistence farming on small plots of land. According to the 1850 census, there were only 347,525 slave owners out of a total white population of about six million in the South; there were a total of 23,191,876 people in the United States with a total slave population of 3,204,313. When we include the total population of the United States in 1860, which was 31,443,321 people, the percentage of Euro-Americans who owned slaves decreases further. (In 1860, it is caluclated that there were 3,953,761 slaves, representing 12.6% of the total population.) As of 1860, one-third of Southern white people had no assets of any kind, including slaves and land.[29] On the other hand, among the ruling class, for fifty of the first sixty-four years of United States history, the president was a slave owner.[30] Between 1789 and 1850, eighteen of thirty-one Supreme Court justices were slaveholders, from the Old South or ideological representatives of the plantation bourgeoisie, most notably, John Jay (New York), John Marshall (Virginia) and Roger Taney (Maryland).[31] The planter aristocracy vis-à-vis the common white yeoman was a dominant force in national politics prior to the Civil War.

Hinton Rowan Helper's 1857 book *The Impending Crisis and How to Meet It* provides a counter-narrative to both Calhoun and Coates. Helper was no friend of "the Negro." In protest against the poverty and powerlessness of the Southern nonslaveholding class, he exposed the relationship between Black subordination and the class rule of the plantation bourgeoisie. Helper argues: "The lords of the lash are not only absolute masters of the blacks, who are bought and sold, and driven about like so many cattle, but they are also the or-

acles and arbiters of all nonslaveholding whites, whose freedom is merely nominal, and whose unparalleled illiteracy and degradation is purposely and fiendishly perpetuated." For Helper, the only solution to the "impending crisis" was a social revolution in which the white nonslaveholders of the South overthrew the planter bourgeoisie and destroyed slavery, "the frightful tumor on the body politic."[32] Moreover, in calling for the abolition of slavery, Helper proposed that slaveholders be taxed in order to colonize all free Black people in Africa or Latin America.

Calhoun as pro slavery ideologist may have said that slavery was "the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world," but a New York Tribune editorial, in a statement representative of the Republican position, commented that "the slavery question" was "a question whether the mass of Americans would retain their liberty or whether it would be nullified like that of the poor whites in the South."[33]

And Richard Wright has noted in *12 Million Black Voices* analyzing the antebellum period:

> But as we blacks toiled, millions of poor free whites, against whom our slave labor was pitted, were rendered indigent and helpless. The gold of slave-grown cotton concentrated the political power of the Old South in the hands of a few Lords of the Land.... To protect their delicately balanced edifice of political power, the Lords of the Land proceeded to neutralize the strength of us blacks and the growing restlessness of the poor whites by dividing and ruling us, by inciting us against one another.[34]

Later, Wright argues:

> …poor whites are warned by the Lords of the Land that they must cast their destiny with their own color, that to make common cause with us is to threaten the foundation of civilization…And so both of us, the poor black and the poor white, are kept poor, and only the Lords of the Land grow rich…The Lords of the Land stand in our way; they do not permit the poor whites to make common union with us, for that would mean the end of the Lords' power.[35]

Wright clearly outlines how racism (in both its ideological form and material practice) is used as a means of social control by the "Lords of the Land," that is, the antebellum plantation ruling class. Wright was not alone in assuming that racism, by dividing the working class along ideological lines and differential oppression, harmed the class interests of both white and Black workers. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass stated unambiguously of slaveholders, "They divided both to conquer each."[36] Douglass elaborated, "Both are plundered and by the same plunderers. The slave is robbed by his master, of all his earnings above what is required for his physical necessities; and the white man is robbed by the slave system, because he is flung into competition with a class of laborers who work without wages."[37] However, with Coates (and by default Calhoun) the planter *class* be-

comes representative of the ruling (white) *race*, and class is transformed into caste.

Housing Discrimination as Slavery by Other Means

In the "Case for Reparations," just as Coates moves "smoothly" from Bacon's rebellion to Calhoun's quote taken as real social analysis, he also moves from slavery to housing, as if housing is the modern equivalent of slavery in terms of its reproduction of white supremacy. As our analysis of the statistics indicates**,** the cases are only misleadingly analogous. Slaveowners made up ¼ of whites and slaveowning was greatly concentrated within the Southern population. Homeownership reached much higher proportions (60% by 1960) and of course, sizes of houses obviously differed with differences of wealth among whites. Black people for all practical purposes did not own slaves; but Black people do own homes. Coates draws a further analogy between slaveowners purchase of *De Bow's Review* and today's homeowners purchasing *This Old House* (*CR*, V: The Quiet Plunder). Coates' point is to suggest that slaveowning and homeownership were part of the American dream (a theme taken up in *BWM* by the Dreamers), and thus aspirational. As we have seen in the stunning use of Calhoun and Wilkes Booth as historians offering evidence for his view of white supremacy, Coates faulty historiography involves treating American ideology as if it's actually true, substituting ideology for history. In effect, to treat slaveowning and homeowning as continuous is to treat aspiration as reality, American dream for reality. It is well known for example that one form of American idealism comes in the form of the hopes of college students to be millionaires. In surveys, roughly 1/3 of college students see themselves as millionaires. But what Americans aspire to is not equivalent to reality.

Though much of the housing discussion in CR focuses on the racist profit making behavior of real estate figures in Chicago, Coates again smoothly transmutes the focus to all whites benefitting from housing discrimination against Black people, and if we slide some of his assumptions over from *BWM*, this discrimination comes from "the democratic will" of (white) Dreamers. The dynamic Coates describes is economic**.** He notes that even wealthy Black folks, those making over $100,000 per year and living in mostly Black neighborhoods, live in neighborhoods equivalent to whites making $30,000 per year (Coates subtly conflates Black people making $100,000 per year with those living in predominantly Black neighborhoods, thus excluding Black people with the same income who do not live in predominantly Black neighborhoods). He notes that Black people are on average much more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods (many of which are hypersegregated—usually defined as areas with under 10 % whites**)** than white people. As Cedric Johnson notes, his analysis of housing discrimination reduces to whites viewing black people as a "contagion." Rather than discussion of the role of capital flight, Coates would have us focus on the free will of whites and so-called "white flight."

First, the mechanisms of housing segregation, including the process of Black stigmatization, need explaining. It's not enough to

point to contagion as if that's its own explanation. The explanation involves not the democratic will but powerful real estate interests allying with the government in the production of at once the federal highway system and suburbanization, a process driven by racism. These mechanisms involved block busting (orchestrated by real estate companies) and redlining (denying home and business loans and insurance to people in poor and segregated neighborhoods) and racist law and when laws were passed banning such discriminatory behavior, enforcement was lax.[38] Interestingly, while Coates uses the term "contagion," suggesting that "white flight" is an instinctual racial process, what he shows is actually quite similar to what we have described above, with big real estate interests spreading panic among whites so that they sell cheap to real estate agents who then turn around and sell dear to people of color.[39]

In a recent Forbes article, the author noted that neighborhoods began losing value when Black people reached 10 % of the neighborhood population. She noted also that housing values in rich Black neighborhoods were 18% below that in rich white neighborhoods. What to make of these statistics?[40] The 10% statistic appears to confirm the contagion notion of Coates. But serious analysis should not accept this reification as an explanation. Is there really evidence of an internal barometer in whites which causes them to flee Black people unless whites outnumber them 9 to 1?[41] Coates' statistics about Blacks and whites growing up in poor neighborhoods need scrutiny because the shape of American racism changes. Coates notes that for those born between 1955 and 1970, 62% of Blacks grew up in poor neighborhoods while only 4 % of whites did, but to capture racism's changing shape, one we contend is incompatible with a caste analysis, you have to then ask the same question about the next generation just as you would ask about the prior generation. What the numbers seem to suggest is complex, with segregation decreasing overall and hypersegregation increasing. We hope to explain this dynamic below. Coates does not explain it; his history is cherry picked to eliminate variation, class stratification and class struggle.

Now, while little to nothing is being done to transform "American apartheid" (in fact, it is being exacerbated by mechanisms we will explain), that is, those neighborhoods where racialized poverty is entrenched, America as a whole is becoming more diverse and it is this mixture of diversity at some levels and segregation at others that needs explaining and it cannot be explained on a caste analysis. Nearly all white neighborhoods, defined as 90 % or more white, declined markedly from 1990 to 2000, from 38 % to 25 %. Neighborhoods however that were 90% minority or more did not decline but in fact increased from 9 to 12 percent.[42] Mixed neighborhoods are on the increase. More recent statistics, based on a GAO study, indicate that from 2000 to 2014, the percentage of schools with so-called racial or socioeconomic isolation grew from 9% to 16 %. Isolated schools are "those in which 75% or more of students are of the same race or class." The Civil Rights Project at UCLA notes that the percentage of "'hypersegregated schools, in which 90% or more of students are minority, grew since 1988 from 5.7% to 18.4%."[43]

Meanwhile, diverse neighborhoods are spreading and there is some evidence to show that the most diverse neighborhoods are

characterized by appreciating housing values. In a recent study comparing diverse neighborhoods to alternatives, the "more diverse neighborhoods have higher population growth and stronger price growth in the past year and they're a bit more expensive to begin with."[44]

The author notes correctly such appreciating neighborhoods are likely to drive poorer people of color out. In other words, diversity that leads to housing appreciation is likely inseparable from gentrification processes, that this kind of diversity cannot be understood apart from the social class of the multiracial gentrifiers. *A complex process whereby racialized poverty in neighborhoods could be amplified while gentrified multiracial cosmopolitanism expands is what needs explanation*. And it's not that hard to explain. For professionals with enough resources to make lifestyle choices, cosmopolitanism may not just be a social preference but a real professional benefit, especially in a context of neoliberal globalization. Just as we should expect to see more corporate diversity, we should see professionals seeking more diversity. This kind of diversity carries much benefit and little cost, either to capital or to the professionals seeking to move into diverse neighborhoods in urban and suburban areas. Once these neighborhoods get under way, resources will flow in. Very little in the way of egalitarian incentive structures would have to be set up. However, to produce working class diversity, with stable home prices not subject to precipitous devaluation etc. in neighborhoods made impoverished by both historical legacy and the battening processes of neoliberal deindustrialization (whether we are talking about the bigger problem of hypersegregated racialized poverty or the left behind white working class areas in the Rust Belt) would require major social investments, including something like a massive insurance program to buttress homes against devaluation, a necessity to discourage flight and encourage entry. *In other words, diversity consistent with market forces will be fostered while diversity inconsistent with it will be discouraged*.

The analysis as stated would explain increased market friendly diversity but it would not explain increasing (not just ongoing) segregation coupled with concentrated poverty. But this increasing segregation is well explained by books like Matthew Desmond's *Evicted,* which offers us a host of positive causal forces (in addition to the negative forces, those absent forces that are absent since they conflict with market mechanisms and profit desiderata) that work to reinforce the combination of segregation and concentrated poverty. [45]

Desmond's study focuses on Milwaukee's renters and within this population studies ethnographically a "poor white" trailer park (and its white landlord) and poor Black renters (along with respective Black landlords) in Milwaukee's North side "ghetto." Desmond makes clear that poor women bear an enormous eviction burden, but that poor Black women are especially burdened. And as we will see, evictions augment both concentrated poverty and reinforce prior segregation thru mechanisms that punish the poor, especially the poor with children, but are largely race neutral, though always inequality reinforcing. The eviction rate in general and the racialized differentials in particular have little (though not nothing) to do with

the differential [i.e. racist] behavior of current landlords, who generally want their rent money.[46]

Black women in the poorest Black neighborhoods are 9 times more likely to be evicted through the court system (many evictions do not pass thru the court system) than poor white women living in the poorest white neighborhoods. In general, in Milwaukee, Desmond finds that Black renters have a one in five chance of eviction compared to 1 in 12 and 1 in 15 for Hispanics and Whites respectively.[47]

In the Milwaukee case, the high rate of evictions among poor women is closely connected to the devaluation of single motherhood. Poor single mothers in Milwaukee and the U.S. (and poor single mothers with more children) are more likely to be evicted than poor single women for a host of reasons: one is for the simple reason that poor single moms are on average poorer, in part because they generally require more expensive (however substandard) housing but also have more difficulty on average keeping a job, precisely because of childcare responsibilities assumed to be the sole responsibility of the parent in the absence of a social commitment to universal daycare. Desmond notes that in Milwaukee circa 2009, high quality and low quality rental housing differed in price by an average of only $275.

This high price of low income housing is itself the result of the deterioration of affordable housing stock not just in Milwaukee but nationally. So the upshot is that substandard rental housing is very expensive comparatively; and two bedroom and up rental housing is even worse. So those struggling to make ends meet have the burden of more expensive housing, making nonpayment more likely. Insofar as Black women are more than three times more likely to be single moms than white women (for reasons themselves related to prior racism), they are more likely to be evicted.[48]

Single moms with children are generally more vulnerable, thus easier to evict; insofar as children themselves in poor neighborhoods can be hard to "control," their perceived "bad" behavior often leads to eviction. "Nuisance laws," which put increasing responsibility on landlords to police their tenants mean that child-related complaints, either made by other tenants complaining about the children of (more vulnerable) single moms or made by the moms in defense of their children, often lead to eviction.

Poor women of color in Milwaukee, especially black women, with an eviction on the record, are more likely to end up in less stable, more dangerous, more segregated neighborhoods. Once a person is evicted, it goes on the record available to landlords, who then of course are likely to reject those with prior evictions or prior criminal records. The rental agencies use screening process software sensitive to prior eviction and criminal records of you or those living with you. Thus, any poor person with prior records directly or indirectly in these areas will be forced into worse neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. And both events make it harder, for different reasons, to find and/or retain low wage employment.

The role of Milwaukee's legacy of segregation can perhaps be understood in the following way. If we control for poverty, single motherhood, and number of children, working-class Black single mothers

from Milwaukee with an equal number of children to their white counterparts—with an eviction history or not—are more likely to be steered in the direction of hypersegregated neighborhoods, which have historically by design been less stable and more dangerous. These poor single moms are then more likely than their white counterparts to be evicted or evicted again. The more vulnerable the neighborhood, the more vulnerable the renter to landlord action, whatever the race of the landlord.

Current racist mechanisms would involve landlords illegally charging higher rents to Black people or reserving properties in worse condition for Black people while charging the same price that would be charged to non-Blacks for nicer properties (on the racist argument that Black people don't take care of property as well as non-Blacks). After observing such behavior on the part of a landlord, Desmond reported the person (he never was contacted). Were this problem remedied, the race neutral mechanisms battening on past unremedied discrimination would still continue to reproduce the worsening status quo.

It is worth noting, as it makes more precise the dialectic of class and race, that with the dissolution of old Jim and Jane Crow, working-class Black folks lost network resources as better off relatives could move out of segregated neighborhoods. "Normal" processes of class formation among the Black population made things worse for those left behind. Finally, it is extremely important to point out that this correlation of single motherhood and poverty is not inevitable and in fact much less likely to be found in countries with stronger social safety nets.[49] *Single motherhood does not cause poverty; it is associated with poverty in societies which punish single moms*.

If housing is the new slavery for Coates, as the Calhoun quote would suggest, Coates must view white and Black poverty as not merely different in degree but in kind. Coates offers a single piece of evidence from white and Black poor neighborhoods in Chicago. This single example will function as a synecdoche for the claim that the white and Black poor live in different universes. In *CR*, he cites a study where "a black neighborhood with one of the highest incarceration rates (West Garfield Park) had a rate more than 40 times as high as the white neighborhood with the highest rate. 'This is a staggering differential, even for community-level comparisons,' Sampson writes. 'A difference of kind, not degree'"(*CR*, II. "A Difference of Kind; Not Degree). While we will not question this particular statistic's accuracy we do question its rhetorical function as representative, that is, synecdochic. The point of Coates' statistic is to support a thesis that imprisonment is not a problem among the white working class, nor is poverty. The differences in imprisonment rates in this example are stark and clearly not representative of the overall situation since the white/black differential in imprisonment rates is between 5 and 6 to 1, not 40 to 1. Coates uses statistics to *maximize disparity between whites as a group and blacks as a group*. As we will see, the cherry picked use of shocking disparity in imprisonment rates will facilitate his caste interpretation of the prison industrial complex. But the reality is, following our Marxist thesis on differen-

tial oppression, that the extreme oppression of Black workers makes things worse for all workers, in part by making it seem as if white workers live in a different universe, or in Coates interpretation, are part of Calhoun's Upper Class. A book like Desmond's which details racial inequality in housing but also shows the panoply of race neutral mechanisms affecting the black and white poor alike refutes Coates analysis. Instead of just averages, the statistic most susceptible to synecdochic distortion, we suggest thinking also in terms of departures from average, i.e., distributions, with means and standard deviations and outliers; and mechanisms, racialized, race neutral, and entangled.

The Numbers Game: Playing Games with Statistics

The notion of "white skin privilege,"—that is, all whites share a common interest in upholding a system of white supremacy—is foundational to Coates' outlook.[50] From the "rosy dawn" of slavery until now, we are told that the white population, "the Dreamers," benefit both psychologically (though he is ambiguous about this overall) and materially from the domination of "Black bodies." Coates uses the concept of "the Dreamers" to characterize all whites or as he puts it "these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white" (7). White people exist in a "liberated" white galaxy, where "children [do] not regularly fear for their bodies." We are told that, today, the white galaxy is suburban and "endless." As opposed to all Black people, white people qua Dreamers reside in "perfect houses with nice lawns," living a dream that "smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake" (20-21).

Those people who believe they are white became white through a process, "through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor, and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents; the destruction of families; the rape of mothers; the sale of children; and various other acts meant, first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own [Black] bodies" (8), He notes that "white America" is "a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies." And that whiteness is inseparable from this "domination and exclusion," without which "white people" would cease to exist. The difference between "their world" and "ours" is that we (black bodies) "did not choose our fences."[51]

Coates places the "long war against the black body" at the center of his social analysis. (98) The "Black body" is "enslaved by a tenacious gravity," governed by "cosmic injustice" and disciplined by violence and fear. The "Black body" is in "constant jeopardy." (18) The "Black body" is caged by the prison of racism (or what Coates sometimes refers to as white supremacy). The "Black body" is putatively the site of the concrete, the specific, and the particular. There is no biological essentialism to this "lived body."

In the hands of Coates, the "Black body," which seems to be a corporal, material body, is in fact a reifying abstraction severed from the historical materiality of class struggle, the divisions of labor and

social relations of production. The abstract concept of the "Black body" replaces the concrete – and contradictory – experiences of the Black lumpenproletariat, working-class, petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. We are to believe that the "Black bodies" of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and Rekia Boyd are the same as Barack Obama, Susan Rice, Ursula Burns, Rosalind Brewer, Richard Parson, Sheila Johnson, and Michael Steele—all, along with Coates and his son, at the "bottom of the well."

The key point about this letter to his son is that it functions as a false concrete universal. Coates' son is at once intimately particular, immediate, proximal and on the other hand abstract universal. He is there not only in the form of an abstract Black body, but also as a particular instantiation of the Black body's miraculous diversity. (In fact, we only become aware of his son's existence after reading sixty-eight pages of the book.)

By implication, Coates offers a dual systems theory with racism existing relatively independent of and distinct from capitalist relations of production. As the sociologist Oliver Cox noted—so many years ago—this approach "lumps all white people and all Negroes into two antagonistic groups struggling in the interest of a mysterious god called caste. This is very much to the liking of the exploiters of labor, since it tends to confuse them in an emotional matrix with all the people."[52]

As such, for Coates, non-white people can never be members of the ruling class in the United States – even if they are President, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or a billionaire. Based on this presupposition, he argues as we note above that the gut wrenching nature of Black poverty is qualitatively distinct from white poverty. The reader could be led to the conclusion that white poverty really doesn't exist at all.[53]

A good part of the narrative surrounding *Between the World and Me* (*BWM*) is the story of Prince Jones, a former classmate of Coates. Jones, 25, was shot to death in September 2000 by Cpl. Carlton B. Jones, an undercover Prince George's County, Maryland, police officer. Cpl. Jones fired off 16 shots into Prince Jones' car. Prince Jones' body was riddled with six bullets. One shot ripped into his arm; five shots struck him in the back. The officer suspected Jones of being a drug dealer. Not only was the officer's suspicion mistaken, everything points to the possibility that he acted criminally in shooting Jones and that his plea of self-defense was fraudulent. Coates writes that the killing and the immediate absence of any subsequent prosecution of the officer "took me from fear to a rage … and will likely leave me on fire for the rest of my days." (83) What Coates leaves out of his letter to his son is the role that collective political struggle played in garnering justice for Prince Jones. In the aftermath of Prince Jones' murder, community activists, Howard University students and leftist organizations (like Revolutionary Communist Party—United States and the Progressive Labor Party) held rallies and marches seeking justice for Jones. We would note, and will return to this point below, that this omission on Coates' part is no accident.

The most interesting facts about the Prince Jones shooting are the following: Prince Georges County was and is the wealthiest Black-

majority county in the United States; there were Black officials in the highest positions in local government; both the County Executive and the County Prosecutor were Black, as were many elected officials; and the cop who shot Prince Jones was a Black man.[54]

The Prince Jones shooting had a tremendous impact on Coates. How could a member of the Black petit bourgeoisie with a future – who was not doing anything criminally wrong – lose his life at the hands of a Black police officer in a county run by Black folks in control of their own bodies? Coates describes Cpl. Jones as a "force of nature, the helpless agent of our world's physical laws." (83) Coates writes: "I knew that Prince was not killed by a single officer so much as he was murdered by his country and all the fears that have marked it from birth." (78) He later claims:

> The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear, and whatever we might make of this country's criminal justice policy, it cannot be said that it was imposed by a repressive minority. The abuses that have followed from these policies – the sprawling carceral state, the random detention of black people, the torture of suspects – are the product of democratic will. And so to challenge the police is to challenge the American people who send them into the ghettos armed with the same self-generated fears that compelled the people who think they are white to flee the cities [see the contagion metaphor above] and into the Dream. *The problem with the police is not that they are fascist pigs but that our country is ruled by majoritarian pigs*. (79, italics added)

In *CR*, it is clear that those to be sued by the victims of racism are not the ruling class or "elites," but the citizens, assumed to be white. These citizens morph into Dreamers or majoritarian pigs in *BWM*. One interpretation of what is said above is that the murderer of Prince Jones had no free will but was the vehicle of the Dreamer's democratic will (who nevertheless cannot help themselves), those who "need to be white." Whether the Dreamers include the Black petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie who reside in Prince George is never made clear, but following the logic of the above quote, since Black agency that reinforces the status quo is erased, and is made the puppet of the Dreamer's majoritarian agency, the answer here would seem to be no. If state violence and police shootings are a force of nature, that is, inevitable, why should we resist what is inevitable? And yet, though as noted Coates omits this, there was resistance, a resistance to which we will return later. We might note briefly that Coates lambastes Richard Wright for his naturalism in *Native Son*, turning social forces into natural forces, because it robs Black people of agency. Yet that is exactly what he does here.[55]

After discussing the tragic murder of Eric Garner, Coates writes to his son: "All you need to understand is that the officer carries with him the power of the American state and the weight of an American legacy, and they necessitate that of the bodies destroyed every year, some wild and disproportionate number of them will be black" (103). Now, this statement is significant because it expresses what has been taken as an "article of faith" in political circles, media coverage and social media.

Since the shootings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Tamir Rice, the world has been focused on the "wild and disproportionate" number of police shootings in the United States. What is striking about the media coverage around these shootings is the assumption that white people are *basically unaffected by the problem of police shootings and by extension the criminal justice system.* This assumption, prominent throughout the media, characterizes the "Black Lives Matter" movement and not surprisingly, Coates' writings. What is of note is that media coverage has focused almost entirely on Black victims, making it seem as if police shootings operate in a near caste-like manner. On the Black Lives Matter's understanding of white supremacy and white privilege, media coverage of Black victims should be underreported quantitatively and qualitatively; media coverage of white victims should be over-reported quantitatively and qualitatively. But media coverage has focused on Black victims over white and Latino/Hispanic victims—ironically given *BLM*'s focus on the misleading racist character of "all lives matter," and the demand for Black particularity with the slogan "say the names." Given the media coverage generally, most people paying attention know the names of Black victims: Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, William Gray in Baltimore, and past victims, from Sean Bell to Amadou Diallo to Oscar Grant.

One of the common claims made primarily through social media is the following: "Black males aged 15 to 19 are 21 times more likely to be killed by police than white males in that age group."[56] This statistic has become a synecdoche, often standing in for people's perception of the whole problem, particularly activists associated with "Black Lives Matter." We saw above how Coates' use of statistics is cherry picked to emphasize "wild and disproportionate" racial disparity.

This statistic comes from a ProPublica analysis of federally collected data on fatal police shootings. While this statistic has circulated widely through social media, there has been relatively little discussion of the flaws in ProPublica's analysis of the data. First of all, the authors of the study – Ryan Gabrielson, Ryann Grochowski Jones and Eric Sagara – examined more than 12,000 police homicides stretching from 1980 to 2012 contained in the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Report. Yet, their major statistical finding is selectively focused on 1,217 deadly police shootings during a three year period from 2010 to 2012. And even more than that they only report on male shooting victims from the ages of 15 to 19.

Second, the authors acknowledge that FBI database is flawed because there are often more police shootings in the United States than are reported by the FBI database and, yet, they report their statistical findings as if they are representative of what is actually happening or probably can happen. If we take the FBI data—for what it is worth—the data shows that the Black male-white male disparity over the past 15 years is much lower than the three-year period featured by ProPublica. The 21:1 ratio is the result of the way ProPublica parsed the data. We would point out that the reason that the three-year period cited by ProPublica gave such a high ratio is *that only one non-Hispanic white was reported as killed* in 2010, skewing the

figures. By only analyzing a three year period rather than a total of fifteen years, eliminating Hispanic youth from the category of whites and focusing on young victims rather than all victims, we arrive at a fantastical probability or ratio – a "wild and disproportionate" racial disparity.

Third, there is a methodological error in the study which, interestingly enough, is tucked away in a footnote in the article. The authors observe: "ProPublica calculated a statistical figure called a risk ratio by dividing the rate of black homicide victims by the rate of white victims. This ratio, commonly used in epidemiology, gives an estimate for how much more at risk black teenagers were to be killed by police officers. Risk ratios can have varying levels of precision, depending on a variety of mathematical factors. In this case, because such shootings are rare from a statistical perspective, a 95 percent confidence interval indicates that black teenagers are at between 10 and 40 (the interval is large due to the small sample) times greater risk of being killed by a police officer. The calculation used 2010-2012 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey."[57] So the 19 to 21 figure is taken as the mean of the confidence interval without giving the range, and the numbers are based as noted on a small sample (three years) of a flawed sample (the FBI database), with the small sample containing a number (one non-Hispanic white killed in 2010) which is almost surely a fiction as we will see and at best an extreme statistical outlier. It is also important to note that risk ratios are usually associated with epidemiological studies characterized by far larger sample populations.[58]

In contrast to Coates and others, we contend that police shootings, police brutality and racial profiling—on the part of police—are not merely an example of irrational white hatred of the "Black body." Racial profiling is an ideological justification for the usage of repressive state power for the purposes of social control. We are told that police—in their role as armed agents of the bourgeois State—are merely fighting a necessary evil, in the aftermath of the infamous 'War on Drugs,' in order to keep crime down or to thwart the threat of gang violence by "urban terrorists."[59] What is class-based racial profiling becomes just good ole' preventive police work.

The police in conjunction with the military function to enforce the rule of the bourgeoisie. It is working-class—principally white, Black and Latino—communities that are most heavily policed—not Brookville, New York (where the average net worth is calculated at $1,670,075) or Rolling Hills, California ($1,647,622) or Belle Meade, Tennessee ($1,578,235).[60]

The expansion and intensification of the activities of the police, the courts and the prison systems over the last 30 years has been first and foremost a *class* phenomenon; it is not a *mass* – broad and indiscriminate—phenomenon. (To highlight the class character of police shootings and the criminal justice system in general is not to diminish the murder of Prince Jones, a member of the petit bourgeoisie, but it is to note that Coates takes Jones situation, an outlier, as representative in order to make his caste argument.) Historically, the State apparatus uses its coercive powers—in the form of the army, police, prisons, and the judicial system—to maintain the hegemony

of the ruling class. The message is simple: "We have the guns, we have the dogs, you will obey."[61] In preserving "law and order," police even draw upon members of the working-class, whether through "community policing" or as employees of the police, prisons and courts. In times like these we are reminded of the words of left-wing prison activist and writer George Jackson. In his 1972 classic *Blood In My Eye* Jackson observed: "Anyone who can pass the civil service examination today can kill me tomorrow. Anyone who passed the civil service examination yesterday can kill me today with complete immunity."[62] Here we should note that Jackson does not use metaphors such as "majoritarian pigs" that blur the true nature of power relations. For Jackson, "anyone who passed the civil service examination" —whether Euro-American, African-American, Asian-American or Latino-American—is allowed to justly kill someone in the name of maintaining "law and order" or, as in the case of Trayvon Martin, "standing your ground."

In the post-civil rights era, it is important to note that the "rule of law" is carried out on behalf of an increasingly *multi-racial/multi-national* ruling class—composed of both men and women—which includes Charles E. Samuels, Jr. (former head of the Federal Bureau of Prisons), Edward Lee (mayor of San Francisco, California), Jean Quan (mayor of Oakland, California), Stephanie Rawlings-Blake (mayor of Baltimore, Maryland), Susan Rice (United States National Security Advisor) and Barack Obama.

The media coverage has led well-intentioned and learned people to make some rather absurd statements. Take for instance the remarks from the Nobel prize-winning author Toni Morrison: "People keep saying, 'We need to have a conversation about race...This is the conversation. I want to see a cop shoot a white unarmed teenager in the back," Morrison says finally. "And I want to see a white man convicted for raping a black woman. Then when you ask me, 'Is it over?', I will say yes."[63]

The framework of this sort of comment is repeated by Coates in his *Atlantic* article on reparations when he suggests "[a]n unsegregated America might see poverty, and all its effects, spread across the country with no particular bias toward skin color. Instead, the concentration of poverty has been paired with the concentration of melanin."[64] Now, as we have suggested, an "unsegregated America" would rob the ruling class of one of its main sources of social control. But putting this point aside for the moment, what is interesting about Coates and Morrison's comments are that they weirdly mirror the neoliberal ideal, which would eliminate racial and gender inequality and naturalize gross class inequality. Both Morrison and Coates' claims are based on some questionable assumptions. In order to get a better grasp of the issue, let's actually look at some of the statistics concerning police shootings.

Race	Raw Numbers	Percentage
White	495	50 %
Black	248	25.1 %
Hispanic	171	17.2 %
Other and Unknown Racial background	101	10.2 %

Source: *The Washington Post*, Police Shooting Database, 2015

Age		
Under 18	16	2%
18 to 29	260	32.5%
30 to 44	292	36.5%
45 and up	215	26.87%
Unknown	17	2.13%

Source: *The Washington Post*, Police Shooting Database, 2015

Age	Total	White	Black
Under 18	18	10	5
18-29	330	120	124
30-44	353	171	91
45 and up	277	190	34
Unknown	12	3	4

Source: *The Washington Post*, Police Shooting Database, 2015

Race	Raw Numbers	Percentage
White	578	51 %
Black	303	27 %
Hispanic	194	17 %
Asian American	28	2 %
Native American	13	1 %
Other and Unknown Racial background	24	2 %

Source: *The Guardian*, Police Shooting Database, 2015

Age	Raw Numbers	Percentage
Under 18	19	1.7 %
18 to 24	189	17 %
25 to 34	359	31.5 %
35 to 44	243	21.3 %
45 and up	326	28.5 %

Source: *The Guardian*, Police Shooting Database, 2015

Number of people killed by police throughout the world in 2015

Country	Total Number	Per million
United States	1145	3.56
Canada	22	.63
United Kingdom	3	.04
China	4	.02
Germany	2	.02
Japan	0	0

Source: *The Independent*[65]

Depending on the source, in 2015 alone, there were between 990 and 1,145 police shootings in the United States—compared to 22 in Canada, 3 in the United Kingdom, 2 in Germany and 0 in Japan. According to the *Washington Post* database, there were a total of 990 fatal police shootings. Of the total number of "fatal shootings," the vast majority of victims were males. Of the total number of fatal shootings, 50% of the victims were Euro-American and 25.1 % were Black people**.** A total of 93 people (or 9.4%) killed by police were unarmed; Black people accounted for a total of 41% (38 of the 93) shot dead compared to 34% (32) who were white.

Now, if we compare the *Washington Post* database to *The Guardian*, there are some interesting differences. *The Guardian* reports that a total of 1,145 people were killed by police in 2015. 224 of the people killed were unarmed compared to 93 as reported by the *Washington Post*. Out of the 224 who were unarmed, 102 of them were white compared to 75 Black people. A total of 33 people armed with a toy weapon were killed; 22 of these people were white and 5 were Black according to *The Washington Post*. On the other hand, *The Guardian* reports that 28 people with a toy weapon were killed in 2015.

These statistics are pretty stark evidence of racism. After all, Black folks are about 13% of the population while white (non-Hispanic) folks make up about 62-4 %. On the one hand, twice as many whites were fatally shot by cops in absolute terms as Black people. On the other hand, Black people were shot 2.5 times more by the police, relative to their proportion of the U. S. population. If we look at the data disaggregated, we find that in the 18-29 group, the numbers as a percentage of the population are roughly 5 to 1 black/white; for under 18, the ratio is roughly 5/2 in 2015. Yet, here is one ignored

statistic: the older people get, the smaller the ratio and in the category of men 45-54, white men are killed at a slightly higher rate.

Now, imagine if a group focused on this latter statistic and treated it as synecdoche? We might assume whoever did this to be a white supremacist, neo-Nazi or just a news anchor on Fox News. Coates, Morrison and various members of the "Black Lives Matter" movement are guilty of cherry-picking the numbers. What is clear is that the BLM meme of black youth killed at a rate of 19-21 times that of white youth is not supported by the best sources for statistical information.

From a Marxist perspective, police violence is part of a larger crisis within the political economy of monopoly capitalism *affecting all working-class people*. It is not the result of a "white conspiracy" against "Black bodies." In line with the sociologist Loïc Wacquant, we argue that police practices, the courts and prisons "have been finely targeted, first by class, second by that disguised brand of ethnicity called race, and third by place." [66] The *regular* victims of police harassment, arrest, imprisonment and shootings are members of the working class; this includes "disproportionate numbers of the homeless, the mentally ill, the alcohol- and drug-addicted, and the severely handicapped: nearly one in four suffers from a physical, psychiatric, or emotional ailment serious enough to hamper their ability to work."[67] If we focus on the Black-white duality when it comes to the criminal justice system, we will ignore the existence of class disproportionality within both white and Black people as a group. That is to say, members of the Black bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie are far less likely to be victims of police shootings, harassment and arrest. Why? Because of their class position and the places they frequent—their neighborhoods, that is, geographical locations—the Black petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie are less likely to come in contact with police and the criminal justice system. As Bruce Western argues: "while the cumulative risk of imprisonment for African American males without a high school diploma tripled between 1979 and 1999 to reach the astonishing rate of 59%, the lifetime chance of serving time for black men with some college education *decreased* from 6% to 5%."[68]

Note that Western's statistics say little about the Black petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie, as many people attending *some* college are themselves working class and will remain so. But the comment does give some idea of how much education matters even as it is only a weak proxy for class. As Wacquant so eloquently puts it, to focus on the black-white duality in discussions of the criminal justice system "obfuscates the fact that *class disproportionality inside each ethnic category is greater than the racial disproportionality between them*."[69] To be clear, we are not implying that members of the petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie are *never* victims of police shootings, harassment or prison incarceration.[70]

Even though, Coates and others may argue that working-class whites belong to the "master race," and are "Dreamers," should we view their deaths as "justifiable homicides of felons," collateral damage, or the result of friendly fire? Sociologist Paul J. Hirschfield makes a perceptive observation: "Although various forms of racism are

likely important to any valid explanation of America's exceptionally lethal police, they are far from the whole story. American police are also killing whites at alarming rates. Using FE (fatalencounters.org) data, I calculated that 490 non-Latino white Americans were fatally shot by the police in 2013. If German police fatally shot as many people (seven) in 2013 as they did in 2012 (Lartey 2015) and all were white, then white Americans were 26 times more likely to die by police gunfire in 2013 than white Germans."[71] For Coates, the number of Black people killed can only be "wild and disproportionate" because he completely ignores the real number of whites killed.

In order to reach the conclusion that the number of Black people murdered by police is "wild and disproportionate," Coates has to make the United States polity a caste system. This is evident in his Atlantic article, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration." He explains the prison industrial complex in a nutshell as *giving employment to white workers to guard Black bodies.* Black bodies suffer and white workers benefit seems to be the obvious implication. It is further implied that this stark dichotomy updates the relation of white slave patrols to Black runaway slaves. This narrative is reinforced in his response to Cedric Johnson where he notes, as discussed above, that white and black workers live in different universes with regard to the prison industrial complex. If we put the two comments together, we have the following argument: they are in different universes with regard to being imprisoned, but are reunited in the prison in the form of white workers ruling over Black bodies. Coates returns to this claim in *BWM*. The following quote comes as part of a culminating narrative in which Black bodies continually play the same role (the plundered) for the Dreamers:

> In the New Deal, we were their guestroom, their finished basement [note: recall the incessant trope whereby Black bodies are as a group at the bottom of the well, here the image is "basement," and elsewhere it is "dungeon"] and today, with a sprawling prison system which has turned the warehousing of black bodies into a jobs program for Dreamers and a lucrative investment for Dreamers; today when 8 percent of the world's prisoners are black men, our bodies have refinanced the dream of being white. Black life is cheap but in America black bodies are a natural resource of incomparable value. (131)

In "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," Coates notes: "Deindustrialization had presented an employment problem for America's poor and working class of all races. Prison presented a solution: jobs for whites, and warehousing for blacks."[72]

If we look at the statistical data from both *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*, we can only reach the conclusion that Coates has provided us with a "wild and disproportionate" claim grounded in his immediate perception, not objective reality. First of all, there are nearly 900,000 non-Hispanic whites in jails and prisons.[73] One of the implications of a "race first" or "liberal nationalist" analysis of racism, as we have been arguing, is that while the racial disparities (i.e. racism) of the prison system and other U.S. capitalist institutions

are highlighted, the impact on whites, particularly white working class folks, is assumed to be either negligible, irrelevant or a "benefit." Statistics show that the white male imprisonment rate of 678/100,000, while dwarfed by the black male rate of 4300/100,000, would itself lead the world by a comfortable margin. The caste interpretation misses the larger picture of how racism impacts the entire working class negatively and by virtue of this omission, almost inevitably acts to divide the working class further.[74]

Second, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2015, Black people make up 11% of the "judges, magistrates and other judicial workers," 26 % of "bailiffs, correctional officers, and jailers" and 23.3% in the category of "probation officers and correctional treatment specialists."[75] The statistics around police shootings and the prison industrial complex seriously undermine Coates' caste account. For Coates, the statistics expressing the reality of police shootings and the prison industrial complex are all about a one dimensional plunder of "Black bodies" for the benefit of Dreamers, those who think they are white. But the reality we say fits a Marxist view of racism, hurting all workers enormously but differentially.

To be blunt, Coates's focus on the "Black body" lets capitalism off the hook by blaming injustice on whiteness abstracted from class dominance. If the vast majority of victims of police shootings—whether Euro-American, African-American, Latino-American or Asian-American—are from working-class backgrounds, how do you separate racism from class exploitation and domination? To be fair, it is possible to imagine "class differences" without exploitation if we assume that class is Weberian in nature and really about status, income, occupation or education. However, from a Marxist perspective, as Ellen Wood astutely notes, "the difference that constitutes 'class' as an 'identity' *is*, by definition, a relationship of inequality and power, in a way that sexual or cultural 'difference' need not be."[76]

The political scientist Adolph Reed is on the right track to argue that the "race first" position reflects the neo-classical economic presupposition—associated with Milton Friedman, Gary Becker and Thomas Sowell—that "the market is a just, effective, or even acceptable system for rewarding talent and virtue and punishing their opposites and that, therefore, removal of 'artificial' impediments to its functioning like race and gender will make it even more efficient and just."[77]

The "Black Lives Matter" movement and Coates, thru their "race first" analysis, separate out racism from class dominance, and as part of this separation, incorporate liberal versions of whiteness studies and the social construction of race while rejecting Marxism as "class reductionist." One of the most prevalent beliefs emerging from this strain of anti-racist politics has been a level of visceral and vitriolic anti-Marxism. For instance, Marissa Johnson, co-founder of the Seattle "Black Lives Matter," rallied against Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders for being a "class reductionist" and not recognizing that the struggle for racial democracy is separate from issues related to economic inequality.[78] (Of course, we beg to differ.)

As such, it could be implied that the fight for racial democracy is the antipode of socialist democracy, that is to say, addressing grievances that could be construed as specifically racial take precedence over and are separate from issues dealing with the redistribution of wealth or the elimination of capitalism. This position is rooted in the *explanatory* primacy of race.

Whiteness becomes a mysterious property brought into being by the presence of non-white bodies so that the Norwegian, Jew and Irish person are turned white—not by a complex ideological process shaped primarily by the ruling class—but by an impetus triggered by the opportunity to dominate non-white bodies. The new antiracists also incorporate liberal versions of queer theory, thus updating Black nationalism for our neo liberal multiculturalist moment. To return to Barbara Foley's point on what publishing success and the integration of BLM into the democratic establishment narrative indicates about civil society's normative assumptions, Coates' work (assigned to the entering freshman class at Howard University by the way) itself may be helping to restructure bourgeois social control, facilitating the class rule of a neo-liberal multicultural bourgeoisie and fostering divisions within the multi-cultural/multi-racial workers.

Coates' caste analysis in conjunction with the policy suggestions offered by the liberal faction of the "Black Lives Matter" movement never question the legitimacy of bourgeois civil society and the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." They are content to suggest that body cameras, bike patrols, community policing and other such efforts are possible solutions to police shootings. They never question whether these reforms will only further legitimate the use of police in working-class communities. The only real reform—possible under capitalism—is to take away the right of police officers to use legitimate violence against citizens, that is, take away police's weapons. We don't need community policing or more appropriately friendly repressive police tactics. Given their objective role in the reproduction of bourgeois civil society, police can never be "benevolent problem solvers" in working-class communities. As Kristian Williams convincingly argues: "Community policing turns the citizenry into the eyes and ears of the state and by the same means creates a demand for more aggressive tactics. This is where street sweeps, roadblocks, saturation patrols, zero-tolerance campaigns, and paramilitary units come into the picture."[79] In recent years, community policing has gone hand-in-glove with urban renewal, neighborhood revitalization and ultimately gentrification. We need a de-militarization of the police force.[80] We need to do away with "zero-tolerance policing" and take away police officer's militaristic weapons and tactics and access to legitimate state violence. This is not a utopian demand; this is a demand for the protection of our human rights and an end to arbitrary harassment, brutality and arrest. As long as police officers have weapons, violence – or the threat of violence—is implicit in every police interaction with citizens and is more likely to rear its head when it is inappropriate and illegitimate. Any effort to reform criminal justice policy in the United States must have a broad working-class base in order to make a difference.

"A Different World": Howard University and Black Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism

In the discussion of the historically Black Howard University, Coates presents the reader with political commentary in the form of self-criticism. This retrospective on his "student days" at Howard offers a portrait of the political enlightenment of the young Coates, in which he soothes the reader's potential anxiety about his adoption of an essentialist form of nationalism. Since his nationalist dream is torn to shreds at Howard University, Coates would deny that he should be characterized as a nationalist. But the reality is that he reconstitutes his nationalism in a way that might be called postmodernist; that is, he discards racial essentialism with respect to Black people, adopts a social constructionist conception of race, only to replace his conception of Black identity with Black bourgeois cosmopolitanism. The whole process is almost dizzyingly incoherent and so please be patient as we attempt to analyze its incoherence, historical inaccuracies and rhetorical function.

Coates spends a considerable amount of time reminiscing about his time at Howard University, a historically Black college in Washington, DC, which he calls "The Mecca" (a reference full of ambiguities given his professed atheism). "The Mecca," is a "machine, crafted to capture and concentrate the dark energy of all African peoples". He even describes D.C. as "the capital of federal power and black power." In this section, we argue that Coates's discussion about HBCUs functions as a form of ideological mystification about bourgeois civil society.

Coates presents to the reader and his son his initial dalliance with Black nationalism and racial essentialism. The first stage of Coates' political enlightenment ("the cold steel truths of life") comes as a result of being exposed to Black nationalism and/or Afrocentricity through the works of Chancellor Williams, J. A. Rogers, John Jackson and others; he states that the African historian and Howard professor Chancellor William's book *Destruction of Black Civilization* was his Bible.[81] Like so many before and after him, Coates came to accept the myth that all Black people are descendants of African kings and queens.[82] At Howard, Coates finds "the Dream of a 'black race'," as the antipode of the American (white) Dream. Coates' nationalist Dream—"the story of our own royalty"—becomes an intellectual weapon against white supremacy, against the Dreamers. After taking courses in the history department at Howard, however, he is awakened from the false dream of Afrocentricity and/or a naïve form of nationalism.

Coates' journey contrasts Black nationalist mythologies with the white Dream. Eventually, Coates reaches the conclusion that there is nothing essential about being Black. He notes: "There was nothing holy or particular in my skin; I was black because of history and heritage. There was no nobility in falling, in being bound, in living oppressed, and there was no inherent meaning in black blood. Black blood wasn't black; black skin wasn't even black." (55) He later reaches the conclusion: "To be black and beautiful was not a matter for gloating. Being black did not immunize us from history's logic or

the lure of the Dream. The writer, and that was what I was becoming, must be wary of every Dream and every nation, even his own nation. Perhaps his own nation more than any other, precisely because it is his own" (53). One of the ironies of this quote is the suggestion that even Black people can be Dreamers.

He prefaces his journey beyond naïve nationalism with the comment that the Black World is more than a "photonegative" of "that people who believe they are white." The Black World is full of diversity, teeming with "Ponzi schemers and Christian cultists, Tabernacle fanatics and mathematical geniuses." "The Mecca" is the "crossroads of the black diaspora." (40) All the students at Howard University were "hot and incredible, exotic even, though we hailed from the same tribe" (42). Howard, the so-called "Capstone of Negro Education," becomes the embodiment of Black bourgeois cosmopolitanism for Coates. While Coates admits that he is driven by nostalgia, he, nonetheless, sees Howard as a place of self-discovery and self-invention, "a machine, crafted to capture and concentrate the dark energy of all African peoples" (40). Clearly, this Black self-invention is to be contrasted to white self-invention, with its need to dominate.[83]

Coates' self-criticism of his naïve nationalism is focused on its essentialism, that is, the view that all Black people are essentially the same and qualitatively different from those "people who believe they are white." Despite the fact that essentialism is often counterposed to social constructionism, with Coates we get a modification. Not all members of the Black "tribe" are not identical in every respect. So, a close reading of the book reveals that he does not completely reject nationalism. Rather Coates's nationalism is reconstituted on the basis of an *essential diversity* of Blackness (Blackness as a "herd of dissenters")(50); but it is an essential diversity itself rooted in the dismissal of class "diversity" among Black people and the aestheticization of this diversity as "hot."[84] The Black body is a "spectrum of dark energy" (50). This metaphor, Coates official rejection of Afrocentrism notwithstanding, should remind the reader of the idealist presupposition of Afrocentrism associated with Molefi Asante, Marimba Ani and others. Asante's concept of a "composite African" entails that continental Africans and people of African descent—whether in Cuba, Brazil, the United States, England or Africa—respond to "the same rhythms of the universe, the same cosmological sensibilities, the same general historical reality."[85] Here a concept of Black particularity is grounded on a theory of identity frozen in time that conveniently ignores dialectical change. The essence of identity, for Asante, is not seen as a process of *becoming*; rather it is a fixed, natural, state of *being*. We should take note that Asante's claim is presented as a self-evident fact or apodictic.[86] We would add if African peoples are re-essentialized thru their essential diversity, "whites" are essentially homogenous.

Coates' stroll down memory lane is more fantasy than reality. There is no denying the fact that most African Americans were not allowed to attend predominantly white colleges and universities prior to the elimination of Jim and Jane Crow. Consequently, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) took on the mission of "uplifting

the race" and providing quality education to Black people. The HBCU's motto could be summarized as: "All those who desire an education should have the opportunity to receive one." Even today, HBCU's are marketed as the only educational institutions in the United States which provide nurturing environments for Black students. Yet, today, the missionary spirit of these institutions has died a slow death, the quality of education has declined and they have become completely subordinated to the logic of capital—no different than white peer institutions. Whatever truth there was to the missionary spirit of the HBCUs, these institutions have become "purveyors of super-American, ultra-bourgeois prejudices and aspirations."[87]

All universities and colleges have been and are currently subjected to the pressures of the capitalist market, that is, the drive for profits. As Ferguson has observed:

> University presidents, government leaders in conjunction with 'captains of industry' [have begun] restructuring the university in order to completely subordinate it systematically to corporate and finance capital. The capitalist restructuring of universities [means] that each department [is]…a 'revenue center,' each university course a consumer product, each student a customer, each professor an academic entrepreneur, each administrator a manager, all stakeholders in promoting the university in its never-ending search for profits. A 'new' free-market vocabulary of customers and stakeholders, shared governance, massive open online courses (MOOCs), niche marketing, technology and curriculum innovation, assessments and branding [have become] the governing mantras on college campus[es]…Priorities in higher education [have become] increasingly determined by the bottom line.[88]

This describes any and all institutions of higher learning in the United States – whether HBCU or PWI (Predominantly white Institutions).[89] By ignoring this reality, Coates' portrait of HBCUs becomes as romantic as Spike Lee's *School Daze* or the television sitcom *A Different World*. We are not discounting the rich history of HBCUs. But, this history must not be romanticized. We have to look at the antinomies of HBCUs. Coates willfully ignores the views of John Hope Franklin, Abram Harris, Ernest Everett Just, Alain Locke, Amiri Baraka and too many others who criticized HBCUs, particularly Howard, for being "citadels of political quiescence and paternal authoritarianism," sinking in economic quicksand, led by incompetent and bureaucratic leadership.[90]

The renowned African American historian John Hope Franklin, a member of Howard's history department from 1947 to 1956, was quite critical of Coates' Mecca. Franklin was disgusted with the authoritarian impulses of Howard's first Black president Mordecai Johnson, who rivaled Ralph Ellison's larger than life character Dr. Bledsoe.[91] Based on his experience as a faculty member at Howard, Franklin recalled that Howard's administration ruled as feudal lords through tyranny and bureaucracy, while fleecing any and all money

from the pockets of students. Franklin later recounted that his experience at Howard was nothing short of a "series of frustrations."[92]

Coates writes as if HBCUs have never been in a constant state of impending crisis. Whether Mordecai Johnson's Howard University, Benjamin May's Morehouse or Charles S. Johnson's Fisk or in modern times Wayne A. I. Frederick's Howard University or Harold Martin's North Carolina A & T, these institutions preach a gospel of "make do with less."

In the Age of Austerity, HBCUs are trapped by Booker T. Washington's dream of industrial education. Today, the dream is one of producing more Black engineers or stockbrokers rather than the next Romare Bearden, John B. McLendon, Jr., Kara Walker or Paul Beatty. The business of universities is to construct majors tailored to the marketplace. Institutional funding trickles down to the humanities, particularly English and philosophy.[93] Historically, these institutions languish in the dungeon of anti-intellectualism, heavy teaching loads and underpaid faculty and staff – while every Black chancellor or president is imprisoned with the hope that their institution will be the next "Black Harvard." And, yet, these institutions remain underfinanced and understaffed caricatures of whatever predominantly white institution they have decided to emulate. Students and faculty are left to their own devices when their library resources are a notch above most high school libraries. In fact, scholarly research is virtually impossible without access to the library resources of a nearby predominantly white college or university.[94]

In our "post-racial" times, HBCUs find themselves competing with predominantly white colleges and universities for Black students. Many HBCUs—like Bennett College and Chicago State University—are on the brink of closing their doors because of low enrollment and/or declining state funding. And those HBCUs that are receiving public funding are struggling to retain and/or graduate students. HBCUs awarded 35 percent of the bachelor's degrees Blacks earned in 1976–77 compared with 15 percent in 2012–13.[95] In his flight of fantasy, Coates ignores the ways in which HBCU presidents are paid mid six figure salaries while tuition is rising and the salaries of faculty and staff are stagnating—if not declining. Today, presidents at HBCUs, the Board of Trustees and donors have become prisoners of government and military funding in addition to capital fund projects such as $1.3 million clock towers and lavish multi-million student centers.[96]

While HBCUs do not substantially differ in many respects from predominantly white colleges and universities, the key difference rests in the manner in which the Black College Mystique is used to perpetuate the most fraudulent crime that HBCUs are "crafted to capture and concentrate the dark energy of all African peoples." Such that Coates tells his son: "Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca." (151) What is the "warmth of The Mecca" the reader might ask? We do know that the fictional images that Ellison paints in *Invisible Man* and Nella Larsen in *Quicksand* are closer to reality than "The Mecca" of Coates.

"I Urge You To Struggle" – For What? Coates' Subjectivist Conception of Political Struggle

Coates often utilizes metaphors of natural disaster when describing the horrors that result from the history of racism in the United States. As Lester Spence astutely notes, for Coates, "white supremacy has the impact, the visceral impact, of what Christians would call an act of God. But [Coates] simultaneously believes it is the creation of institutions with very specific man-made roles and powers."[97] As such, Coates' narrative oscillates between voluntarism and fatalism. This is reflective of the age-old antinomy between free will and determinism. This antinomy is largely shaped by Coates' need to see whites (mostly American) as plunderers of "Black bodies" and the Earth. It would seem to derive from a deep and for all practical purposes psycho-cultural essentialism that immunizes the "Dreamers" from change to the extent that they are not worth struggling with. U.S. society is dominated by those who freely invent themselves as white in order to dominate Black folk and mother Earth. And yet they cannot help themselves. Coates' rhetoric thus describes those who need to be white as products of self-making and democratic will on the one hand yet driven by deep psycho-cultural influences they appear largely incapable of resisting on the other—influences that Coates does not analyze, relying on James Baldwin to do the analytical work. White people—who are representatives of the democratic will of America, the majoritarian pigs whose lead the police follow—have willingly plundered "the Black body" and yet they are driven by psycho-cultural forces beyond their control. Black folks on the other hand are faced with their own version of this antinomy: on one hand, those, like Prince Jones, are helpless victims of "cosmic injustice"; on the other hand, others, like Coates and his son, can struggle, but not with the Dreamers, who cannot be reached or are not worth reaching.

Coates, as noted above, claims that racism is "a force of nature, the helpless agent of our world's laws" (83). Coates offers us many reiterations of this point throughout BWM. Here is one example:

> Perhaps one person can make a change, but not the kind of change that would raise your body to equality with your countrymen. The fact of history is that black people have not—probably no people have ever—liberated themselves strictly through their own efforts. *In every great change in the lives of African Americans we see the hand of events that were beyond our individual control*, events that were not unalloyed goods. You cannot disconnect our emancipation in the Northern colonies from the blood spilled in the Revolutionary War, any more than you can disconnect our emancipation from slavery in the South from the charnel houses of the Civil War, any more than you can disconnect our emancipation from Jim Crow from the genocides of the Second World War. *History is not solely in our hands. And still you are called to struggle, not because it assures you victory, but because it assures you an honorable and sane life.* (96-97, Italics added)

While this might seem in isolation compatible with the Marxist view that people make history but not in conditions of their own choosing, it is not. White supremacy becomes naturalized as the product of the curse of whiteness. It is a force of nature, the ultimate form of "cosmic injustice" (106). If white supremacy is an unstoppable force of nature, then there is no objective necessity to engage in political struggle because ultimately "History is not solely in our hands."

He tells his son in essence that the "Dreamers" cannot be struggled with; that the "Dreamers" must struggle with themselves. Engaging in class struggle (a term he never uses) is futile. Having already written off the white working class because they are also "Dreamers," Coates' analysis also writes off the Black working class. We would note here, to return to the events surrounding the shooting of Prince Jones, that Jones' shooting occasioned a fierce and prolonged struggle of multiracial leftist forces against the verdict. And while we noted Coates omission of this struggle above, it is important to note that Coates' text has to omit it as the facts of multiracial antiracist class struggle in protest of the shooting and the behavior of the Prince George police department would absolutely undermine his entire ontology of struggle.

Coates and his son's "Black bodies" are in the "dungeon," or "the bottom of the well." As Coates observes, "You and I, my son, are that 'below.' That was true in 1776. It is true today" (105). Magically, despite their objective class position as members of the petit bourgeoisie, we are to believe that Coates and his son are eternal members of the "wretched of the earth." Moreover, anyone who has a Black body is supposed to be below—politically and economically—whites, the Dreamers, regardless of their class position. In our "post-racial" times, we are to believe that Barack Obama and Sonia Sotomayor (Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court) are "below" a white working class male or female.[98]

In the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008, we find the spectre of right-wing populism (Donald Trump in the United States, Marie Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, as well as True Finns in Finland and UK Independence Party in the United Kingdom) is on the rise. Throughout the world, the anarchy of capitalism has become, as James Joyce's Stephen declared in *Ulysses*, "a nightmare from which [we are] trying to wake." The world is caught in a seemingly bottomless state of crisis in which "Dante would have found the worst horrors in his Inferno surpassed".[99] What advice does Coates give his son (and by proxy the reader) in how to struggle against the exploitation and oppression throughout the world? What advice does he give his son in fighting against the juggernaut of "justified homicides" on the part of police officers – "our friends in blue"?

At best, Coates' answer is pessimism clothed in apparent realism: Son, get along the best you can in a country "lost in the Dream." At its worst, his answer is escapist, driven by an "irrepressible desire to unshackle [his] body and achieve the velocity of escape" – and ultimately go to France (21). Unfortunately, Coates does not tell his son to join the ranks of working-class Black youth and engage in the struggle against police violence. He does not tell his son to commit

"class suicide" and fight to make the lives of working-class people better. There is not one mention of socialism, class struggle or anti-capitalist struggles throughout the book. He doesn't tell his son to link the fight for the national democratic rights of Black people with the struggle for decent jobs, quality integrated housing, education and health care for all. At best, we get a call for reparations based on the historical wrongs done to Black people. At his worst, Coates gives us the following:

> I do not believe that we can stop them, Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves. And still I urge you to struggle. Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom. Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca. Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name. But do not struggle for the Dreamers. (151)

Throughout *Between the World and Me*, the question lingers, what is Samori to struggle for? What is the struggle that Coates wants us to engage in? His warning—to his son—that he should not "struggle for the Dreamers" leads us down the path of political quietism and inertia. The end-result of Coates' political odyssey is nothing more than stoicism, subjective passivity in the wake of objective crisis.

The trope of the "Black body" allows Coates to avoid offering a class analysis of the World writ large. We never get a sense of the social totality from Coates. In a period in which the "outdated antagonisms" of class struggle are staring him in the face, his vision is blind to the necessity for a leftist critique of bourgeois civil society and class dominance. Coates is perhaps the latest incarnation of the Black public intellectual—interpreting the hidden injuries of living in a Black body for the white (liberal bourgeois) public.[100] Ultimately, despite his call for his son to engage in struggle, the reader of his book is left with a *subjectivist* conception of political struggle grounded on bourgeois cosmopolitanism, existential pessimism, moral suasion and a politics of empathy seeking to invoke white guilt. Coates' son is the victim of his father's antinomies: "Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca…But do not struggle for the Dreamers."

Coates' work focuses on the *political* and *cultural* representation of racial differences and, in turn, relegates the *economics* of difference to the margins of the theoretical universe. From a Marxist perspective, class differences are not reflective of differences in terms of status, lifestyle or income. Class denotes one's objective relationship to the means of production. And exploitation, from the standpoint of Marxism, derives from one's objective relation to the means of production where power is attached to owning the means of production. Because the working-class is not in possession of the means of production, they are subject to exploitation in the sphere of production. Because of the objective phenomenon of socialized production which is privately appropriated by the bourgeoisie, both Black and white workers are exploited under capitalism. This workers share in common despite racism, differences in culture, chauvinism on the part of white workers, etc. The struggle to overthrow

capitalism and the fight against racism and racial chauvinism are not mutually exclusive but integrally united. This is not a purely academic question which can be politely ignored given the fact that the vast majority of Black people are members of the working class.

A class analysis of racism begins with the presupposition that in class societies power is not distributed equally. Power is always constituted at the level of production—at the level of the separation between those who own the means of production (as a class) and those who do not own these means of production and thus are forced to sell their labor power in order to survive. Power is a structural relation deployed (particularly through the mediation of the State) for the purposes of exploitation and not a free-floating abstraction to which all people, regardless of their position in the social division of labor, have access.

We must acknowledge that not all Black people are subject to exploitation in the Marxist sense. Some Black people as a result of their relationship to the means of production are exploiters and oppressors. Here we could mention Oprah Winfrey (CEO of Harpo, Inc., and OWN network), Janice Bryant Howroyd, Stephen L. Hightower (founder and CEO of Hightowers Petroleum Co.), TIAA-CREF President and CEO Roger W. Ferguson Jr., Harold Martin (Chancellor of North Carolina A & T), Kenneth I. Chenault (Chairman and CEO of American Express), Chairman and CEO of Xerox Corp., Ursula Burns, Carl Horton (CEO of the Absolut Spirit Company Inc.), Attorney General Loretta Lynch, former Attorney General Eric Holder, Merck Chairman and CEO Kenneth Frazier, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, or Robert Parsons (CEO of AOL Time Warner).

Despite the fact that Coates divides the world into Black bodies and the (white) Dreamers, he tells his son: "It does not matter if the agent of those forces [that assault the Black body] is white or black – what matters is our condition, what matters is the system that makes your body breakable." (18) Yet, Coates does not offer us much detail on "our condition," or "the system." We might note that Coates use of the term "system" trades on more radical connotations; but it is senseless on the caste interpretation he commits himself to. This is yet another example of the incoherence, which if not pointed out for what it is, allows him to seem liberal, nationalist, anti- essentialist and radical all at once or more appropriately a "Black radical liberal."

Leading up to the 2016 presidential election in the United States, there is much to "justify" the "radical Black liberalism" of a Coates. Social media and news pundits have given voice to a fraction of the ruling class—fueled by the rhetoric of Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, Richard Nixon, Pat Buchanan, Ronald Reagan, Rudy Giuliani and Donald Trump – which appeals to the "Silent White Majority," pitting one segment of the working class against the other in the hopes of "making America great again."

On the other hand, a significant, yet often ignored, reality today is that the ruling class and its political allies and especially its ideologies are multi-racial in character. The power relations of class domination and racial inequality are being mediated by the articulation of a multiculturalist ideology. Corporate multiculturalism is function-

ing as a new model of social control. Corporate diversity or multiculturalism can facilitate capital accumulation and reproduction. But it should not be inferred that corporate multiculturalism will lead to the elimination of racial inequality nor the redistribution of wealth in order to destroy class inequality. This new form of social control is a form of "benign neglect" of class inequality; while integrating more non-whites into the ruling class, the exploitation of a segregated multi-racial working-class continues.

The advance of a few individuals into the ranks of the petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie should not signal the end of racial inequality. Rather, it is a sign of the restructuring of class domination. So, while racial inequality has not disappeared, the Black petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie is playing a significant role in the reproduction of racial inequality via its support of finance and corporate capital. The social consciousness of this new Black bourgeoisie differs from that of the old Black capitalist class because its economic existence depends to a greater extent on finance and corporate capital. It does not market its services or commodities exclusively to the Black community and it has a weaker affiliation with and interest in the political, social and economic development of the Black working class.[101] The increased immiseration of the Black working class goes hand in glove with the growing political power and wealth of the Black bourgeoisie.

Clearly, we are not arguing that we live in a post-racial society. We are arguing that the manner in which racism is reproduced has definitely changed. Historically, the existence of the 'Color Line' as a system of oppression ostensibly involved the *exclusion* of non-whites, particularly Black people, from participation in bourgeois (white) civil society at all levels. In the post-Civil Rights era, however, deepening class conflict within the Black class structure has greatly impacted the reproduction of racism.

The ongoing class struggle for political and ideological hegemony is reflected in the appropriation of multiculturalist discourse. This multiculturalist ideology is not tokenism but a systematic process of political incorporation. Multicultural tolerance of difference has become something practiced by the ruling class; it is not just an ideal. (Even Trump has Latino and Black supporters like Katrina Campins and conservative pastor Darrell Scott). Tokenism has become dialectically sublated by multiculturalist ideology and corporate diversity has come to function as an ideological smoke-screen for the reproduction of class domination and racial inequality. Political strategies organized around the politics of identity discount the political economy of differences, that is, class inequalities, or pit "race" against class, while distorting both.

In today's times, images of diversity are everywhere including news staffs, advertisements, presidential campaigns, sports coverage, entertainment and popular television shows. It is common to witness companies such as Google, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Qualcomm and EMC Corp. denouncing North Carolina's recent anti-LGBT legislation, the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act (NC HB2). In April 2014, Donald Sterling, then-owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, was stripped of his ownership, banned from the NBA for life and

fined $2.5 million by the league after private recordings of him making racist comments were made public. Ultimately, Sterling was forced to sell 100% of the Clippers to former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer for $2 billion; Sterling made a record profit since he purchased the struggling San Diego Clippers (the predecessor to the Clippers) for $12.5 million in 1981. It has become a common practice of both political parties to run political candidates that are multi-racial, women and even gay, who are not politically radical but committed to the reproduction of bourgeois social relations of production. Multiculturalist discourse celebrates diversity without fundamentally changing power differentials between the working-class and the bourgeoisie. It functions as a smoke-screen for the continuation of racism with the participation of a multi-racial ruling class—composed of both men and women.[102] One has to look at the irony of corporate executives coming out to oppose North Carolina's HB2 law, but no corporations have come out in opposition to a plethora of voter ID laws—which primarily impacts the participation of working class people in the political process—passed by state legislatures in the past few years.

Why has Coates' "middle-class" Black rage and consequent appeal to white guilt propelled him to his success? One answer would be that Coates' ideas are now hegemonic, reflecting the ideas of a fraction of the ruling class, namely, the liberal bourgeoisie, which has had to respond to and incorporate a host of movements from below. Coates' social commentary and political ideas represent an attempt to combine bourgeois liberalism and bourgeois nationalism as an answer to the crisis of capital. While he publicly entertains the idea of a "beautiful struggle" for social democracy, he silently accepts that the vampire of capitalism is here to stay. This would, perhaps, explain why Coates has become the doyen of "Black radical liberalism."[103]

Conclusion

As noted briefly above, Coates sees the plunder of black bodies being extended to the plunder of the earth. That the Dreamers threaten the planet is on the one hand an absurdity. But if we take it seriously, this makes his position on struggle even more incomprehensible and certainly incoherent.

Although our focus here is on the relation between Coates essentialist (however updated) understanding of whiteness and blackness and its implications for his understanding of struggle, it ought to be pointed out how misguided it is to analyze climate change as deriving from flawed national character (the need to plunder) and not capitalism's triple imperative of constant growth, competition and maximum profit. The problem of constant growth should be obvious on a finite planet while competition fueling the growth imperative almost guarantees that global cooperation (including the sharing of genuinely green innovations) required to solve this problem will not occur.[104] And of course the profit criterion makes the problem of sunk capital a very serious one since massive investments in fossil fuels are not likely to be written off: witness the serious problem that

China has with its relatively recent coal plants they've built, totaling according to Vaclav Smil upwards of 300 billion dollars.[105] It is well known that at this point, the world's leading emitter of greenhouse gases annually is China, and India is pretty likely to pass the U.S. as well. Will we now be condemning three national characters or arguing nonsensically that the Chinese and Indians have become themselves "Dreamers"?[106]

It has been our point all along that Coates omits class struggles from his narrative. And—similar to Cedric Johnson's critique—Coates leaves us with white liberal guilt (like Baldwin) instead of class solidarity. In response to Johnson, Coates asserts that "exclusion promotes solidarity" too. Coates notes: "…whiteness confers knowable, quantifiable privileges, regardless of class—much like 'manhood' confers knowable, quantifiable privileges, regardless of race. White supremacy is neither a trick, nor a device, but one of the most powerful shared interests in American history."[107]

Our response to this is the following: There is the solidarity of multiracial working class unity, where anti-racism is made central to the forging of such unity, rooted in the understanding that divisions in the working class always operate in the interests of capital. And then there are class collaborationist, even fascist, forms of solidarity like white supremacy. Solidarity in the interests of human flourishing cannot be equated with solidarity rooted in rhetorics and strategies of fear and insecurity. And these rhetorics and strategies to the extent that they gain power cannot be laid at the feet of ordinary workers**.** As Wright notes in *Native Son*, solidarity can go in many directions: Bigger is as attracted to fascism as he is to the rather embarrassing reds Wright offers us. Bigger fantasizes being a Mussolini type whipping people into a "tight band." Are these two solidarities equivalent? Does Bigger have a shared interest in both? Why not? Coates collapses questions of solidarity with questions of interest, a conflation that underlies his tendency to take the appearance for the reality.[108]

Johnson's reference to white guilt does not deny the material effects of racism as Coates supposes. To say that "whites" get democracy while Black bodies get plundered means white liberal anti-racism necessarily takes the form of guilt. This guilt then forms the basis for the moral appeal underlying the case for reparations, even as, to articulate one of Coates numerous antinomies, such an appeal is undermined by the ontology of struggle presented in *BWM*. One of the reasons Coates central metaphor of the "Black body" carries such fetishizing, synecdochic power is because it registers what Johnson has called the "morally powerful but historically specious view of universally felt racial injury." The problem with universally felt racial injury is that it, in our current moment, makes (nationalist) class collaboration *feel right* and multi-racial working class unity, where common class interests must trump the absence of common experience, *feel wrong*.

Notes

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chapter 10 "The Working Day," section 7 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 301.

[2] Quoted in Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 115.

[3] Gaby Wood, "Toni Morrison interview: on racism, her new novel and Marlon Brando," *The Telegraph* April 19, 2015. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/toni-morrison-interview-racism-brando/ (Last accessed May 31, 2016) The statistics from the *Washington Post* and *Guardian* below belie Morrison's simple assumptions about race and criminal justice. A recent example from Leonard Pitts adds texture to the contemporary tendency to eliminate police violence against the white working class from our purview. See his Feb. 2, 2016 Miami Herald story on Caroline Pitts, a working class white woman with mental health issues whose shooting at the hands of police was covered up. Pitts notes that "her death was every bit as outrageous as those of Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Freddy Gray and Tamir Rice but has received only a fraction of the attention."

[4] Dave Boyer, "Obama says Michael Brown's death in Ferguson 'stains the heart of black children'," The Washington Times September 28, 2014

[5] Today, North County is home to Boeing's Defense, Space & Security unit and Emerson Electric Company. See Walter Johnson, "Ferguson's Fortune 500 Company," The Atlantic (April 26, 2015). See also, Tim O'Neil, "Look Back 250 • Factories and foundries once powered St. Louis payrolls," St. Louis Dispatch January 11, 2015. http://www.stltoday.com/news-/local/metro/look-back/look-back-factories-and-foundries-once-powered-st-louis-payrolls/article_31fd26e3-442b-56ce-bec8-6ffe6208a164.html (Last accessed May 7, 2016); Lisa Brown, "Sara Lee selling North American bakery business," St. Louis Dispatch November 10, 2010. http://www.stltoday-.com/business/sara-lee-selling-north-american-bakery-business/article_a4de47a0-2d35-5a22-a74e-56263316b391.html (Last accessed May 7, 2016).

[6] Stephen Gandel, "The economic imbalance fueling Ferguson's unrest," Fortune August 15, 2014. http://fortune.com/2014/08/15/ferguson-income-inequality/

[7] The hashtag "Black Lives Matter" was created by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors. For an overview of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, see Jelani Cobbs, "The Matter of Black Lives," *The New Yorker* March 14, 2016.

[8] See Barbara Foley, "Rhetoric and Silence in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*," *Cultural Logic* (2009).

[9] Quoted in Cedric Johnson, "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals Who Love Him," *Jacobin* February 3, 2016

[10] Barbara Foley, "Rhetoric and Silence in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*," *Cultural Logic* (2009), 18.

[11] See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016), 210. For Coates, it would seem that all white people are either Bill Gates, Alice Walton or Donald

Trump. Or, more poetically, every white person is the "American Psycho" Patrick Bateman, aspiring to be Donald Trump, imprisoned by their whiteness and a psychological desire to destroy the Black body!

[12] Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* 2014, part IV.

[13] Also quoted in Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* 2014, part IV, "The Ills That Slavery Frees Us From."

[14] Quoted in Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, vol two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, New York: Verso, 1997, p. 249. Its companion is volume one, subtitled *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, 1994. Further references to this volume and its companion in text.

[15] Allen, Volume One, 18-19.

[16] Allen, Volume One, 18.

[17] Allen, Volume One, 20.

[18] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 31.

[19] Allen, Vol. 1, 18-19.

[20] Allen, vol. two, 146.

[21] Allen, Vol. two, 147.

[22] Allen, Vol. two, 146-7.

[23] See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

[24] Allen, Vol. 2, 240.

[25] Allen, Vol. 2, 242.

[26] Abram Harris and Sterling D. Spero, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Antheneum, 1974), 4.

[27] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 38.

[28] Mark R. Cheathem, *Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2008), xii-xiv.

[29] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race*, 38.

[30] The list includes the following presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, James K. Polk, Zachery Taylor, Andrew Johnson, and Ulysses S. Grant.

[31] William L. Richter, *The A to Z of the Old Sout*h (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 12.

[32] Quoted in Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. (New York: Knopf, 1979), 123-24. Thanks to Malik Simba for bring this point to our attention.

[33] Bernard Mandel, *Labor, Free and Slave: Workingmen and the Anti-Slavery Movement in the United States*. Introduction by Brian Kelly, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007 (originally published in 1955).

[34] Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 16-17.

[35] Ibid., 46-47.

[36] Frederick Douglass, "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass," in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 267.

[37] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Edited by William L. Andrews (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 188.

[38] On the role of the real estate industry, see Kevin Fox Gotham. *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900 - 2010*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014; and Mary E. Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

[39] It should be noted that recently, the Supreme Court updated the fair housing act of 1968 by stating that disparate impact (neighborhoods where people of color live being devalued relative to neighborhoods where most whites live) was the basis of remedy. http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/25/417433460/in-fair-housing-act-case-supreme-court-backs-disparate-impact-claims

[40] Dorothy Brown, "How homeownership keeps blacks poorer than whites," *Forbes*, December 10, 2012.

[41] Coates himself notes that ordinary white homeowners, given the set up equating black presence with devaluation, would have had to be self-sacrificing to contest racism in isolation. In the case of the Myers' family attempt to move into Levittown, Coates notes that neighbors "had good reason to be afraid" as "housing policy almost guaranteed that their neighbor's property values would decline" (*CR*, V, *The Quiet Plunder*).

[42] Margery Austin Turner and Lynette Rawlings, *Promoting Neighborhood Diversity: Benefits, Barriers and Strategies*. August 2009, Urban Institute, 6.

[43] *USA Today*, May 18, 2016, 3A.

[44] Jed Kolko, "America's Most Diverse Neighborhoods and Metros," http://www.forbes.com/sites/trulia/2012/11/1-3/finding-diversity-in-america/print/. Kolko notes that among the 100 largest metros, 17% of the population lives in diverse neighborhoods, where median price per square foot is 157 dollars compared to 142 dollars in other neighborhoods. The study measures diversity as follows: "the share of a metro area's or ZIP code's population in its largest racial or ethnic group: the smaller the share of the largest group, the more diverse the neighborhood is. For instance, an area that is 70% White (the largest group), 20% Black, and 10% Asian is less diverse than one that is 60% Hispanic (the largest group), 30% White, and 10% Black" (2).

[45] Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City.* New York: Random House, 2016.

[46] On the prior segregation that forms the all-important backdrop to the analysis of eviction mechanisms, Desmond notes that "the ghetto had always been more a product of social design than desire…always been a main feature of landed capital, a prime moneymaker for those who saw opportunity in land scarcity, housing dilapidation and racial segregation." Location 3918, chapter 20.

[47] Desmond notes that "[w]omen from black neighborhoods made up 9 percent of Milwaukee's population and 30 percent of its evicted tenants." Note that this mismatch is severe but far less severe than the comparison of "poorest areas," whose differential is nine rather than ~3. The difference here is inseparable from the legacy effects of prior segregation and current neglect. The race neutral mechanisms discussed here work on the raw material of prior conditions, reinforcing them. Though it is reasonable to assume at

some point on sheer demographic grounds that "undesireable" multiracial neighborhoods will begin to form. For Desmond's statistics, see chapter 8 and loc. 4709, Epilogue.

[48] "Living Arrangements of Children, by Race and Hispanic origin, 2015." http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=family-structure

[49] See http://www.ncdsv.org/images/LM_PovertyRatesSingleMothersHigherUS_6-2011.pdf As the tables show, the U.S. poverty and near poverty rate for single mothers is 1.88 and 1.61 times higher than the average of 16 high income countries. Compare the 49% poverty rate to that of Denmark, 8%.

[50] Historian David Roediger helped launch this academic trend with the publication of his 1991 book, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

[51] We agree that "white identity" is a distortion and, following Allen, has been inseparable from racism. Note though the ease with which Coates conflates, following his caste analysis, ruling class practices with non ruling class practices. And note how he overpathologizes white identity, a practice that facilitates a psycho cultural analysis of identity instead of a materialist one.

[52] Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, & Race; A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), 520.

[53] See Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Enduring Solidarity of Whiteness," *The Atlantic* February 8, 2016.

[54] Jonathan W. Hutto and Rodney D. Green, "Social Movements Against Racist Police Brutality and Department of Justice Intervention in Prince George's County, Maryland," Journal of Urban Health 93 (April 2016), 89-121.

[55] Coates makes the following comments about Richard Wright via Twitter: "I kinda hate Native Son. There I said it." He goes on to complain that Wright's literary naturalism is "too deterministic" in that "I thought his basic point—racism destroys black humanity—just wasn't true. It misses one of the lovlier aspects of black life." https://storify.com/sjemery/opinions-on-richard-wright-s-native-son (Last accessed May 31, 2016) Coates difficulty accounting for the murder of Prince Jones should be compared to Michelle Alexander's much more convincing discussion of minority police officers and police chiefs in *The New Jim Crow*, 237-8. Alexander (see note below) compares such police officers and police chiefs to black slave drivers and black plantation owners. We think, despite the decided advance over Coates, this is where her caste metaphor gets her into trouble. Contemporary class formation among U.S. Blacks is different post Jim Crow and pre Jim Crow. Under Jim Crow, there was no black ruling class. Period. Now, there is. And police officers and police chiefs are not part of an under caste, though the people they dominate are often members of a hypersegregated working class.

[56] Ryan Gabrielson, Ryann Grochowski Jones and Eric Sagara, "Deadly Force, in Black and White," October 10, 2014. https://www.propublica.org-/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white (Last accessed May 31, 2016).

[57] Ibid.

[58] We will be looking at the *Post* and *Guardian* data momentarily, but to give you a sense of how easy it is to cherry pick as synecdochic possibly unrepresentative samples, when we last looked at the Post database, it listed thru May 388 shootings for 2016. In the 45 and up age group, whites killed by the Police outnumbered blacks 51 to 5. Imagine the headline, if this statistic were taken as representative of the relation of race and policing and

widely publicized? Some statistical terms: The standard deviation represents the typical distance from any point in the data set or distribution to the center (mean, average) of the distribution. Given a bell curve or normal distribution, one standard deviation from the mean delimit 68 % of the variation in the distribution; 2 standard deviations account for 95% of the distribution and 3 standard deviations, 99%. The confidence interval is for judging whether or not a hypothesis (that police shootings are shaped by "race" for example) is statistically significant. The standard for statistical significance is by convention often though not inevitably chosen at 95%. A textbook example might involve estimating the number of people in a population who drive red cars. If you sample at random 1000 drivers, and you desire 95% confidence, your sample must have a margin of error above and below that sample number of 2 standard errors (SE measures how much a sample statistic deviates from its mean in the long term). This means that if you sampled drivers over and over (say 100 samples of 1000 drivers each), 95 of those samples on average would fall within your margin of error. To quote the old reliable *Statistics II for Dummies*: "a confidence interval represents the chances of capturing the actual value of the population parameter over many different samples." Small sample sizes are unreliable and if your sample statistic is based on a small sample, the confidence interval will be large, as in this case.

[59] See Mike Davis, "Los Angeles: Civil Liberties between the Hammer and the Rock," *New Left Review. Vol. 170, July/August 1988.*

[60] "Wealthiest Towns in America," http://www.bloomberg.com/ss-/09/03/0317_richest_zips/2.htm

[61] Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 74.(New York: Verso, 2000).

[62] George Jackson, *Blood In My* Eye (Baltimore, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1990), 7.

[63] Gaby Wood, "Toni Morrison interview: on racism, her new novel and Marlon Brando," *The Telegraph* April 19, 2015. http://www.telegraph.co.uk-/books/authors/toni-morrison-interview-racism-brando/ (Last accessed May 31, 2016) The statistics from the *Washington Post* and *Guardian* below belie Morrison's simple assumptions about race and criminal justice. A recent example from Leonard Pitts adds texture to the contemporary tendency to eliminate police violence against the white working class from our purview. See his Feb. 2, 2016 *Miami Herald* story on Caroline Pitts, a working class white woman with mental health issues whose shooting at the hands of police was covered up. Pitts notes that "her death was every bit as outrageous as those of Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and Tamir Rice but has received only a fraction of the attention."

[64] Coates, "The Case For Reparations"

[65] Tom Baird, "Stop the killing: Fatal police shootings in Canada," *The Independent*. April 14, 2015 http://theindependent.ca/2015/04/14/stop-the-killing-fatal-police-shootings-in-canada/

[66] Loïc Wacquant, "Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America," *Socialism and Democracy* 28(3) (2014), 41.

[67] Wacquant, 43.

[68] Ibid., 43.

[69] Wacquant, "Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America," 44.

[70] Robert Fikes, Jr., "Breathing While Black: Rude and Frightful Encounters with the Police Recalled by Distinguished African Americans, 1860-2012," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5(5) (June 2012), 41-65. Wacquant himself shows that blacks with some college education are nearly seven times more likely than whites with some college education to be victims.

[71] Paul J. Hirschfield, "Lethal Policing: Making Sense of American Exceptionalism," *Sociological Forum* 30(4) (December 2015), 1112.

[72] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *The Atlantic* 316(3) (October 2015), 75.

[73] The total numbers of imprisoned people have varied between 2.2 and 2.3 million for around the last decade, the high year being in 2008. "Non Hispanic whites" make up .39 percent of the prison population (compared to .40 and .19 for Blacks and Hispanics respectively). So this would mean the population of whites would vary between 858,000 and 897,000. Statistics show that the white male imprisonment rate of 678/100,000, while dwarfed by the Black male rate of 4300/100,000, would itself lead the world by a comfortable margin. See http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports-/pie2016.html for statistics.

[74] It is commonly accepted, and rightfully so, that what brought the racist character of the prison system clearly into view had much to do with Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. While her book focuses on the panoply of mechanisms producing racial disparities in imprisonment, it also suggests, even as it uses the caste metaphor repeatedly, that this system of racial control as she calls it (we would call it racial control as social control in the service of class rule) hurts poor whites or working class whites. And she further suggests that affirmative action has actually functioned as a kind of "racial bribe" akin to whiteness that has helped to obfuscate the racist character of the prison system.A couple of comments as this is not the place for an extended discussion of Alexander's important book. Because the focus is so much, and for good reasons, on racial disparity, the raw numbers can get lost: that the U.S. imprisons a larger percentage of its population than any other country by far, and that this number includes large numbers of non-Hispanic whites. Alexander's own racial metaphors actually screen from view—thru a synecdochic reduction not entirely dissimilar to Coates despite the superiority of her overall analysis— the very negative impact of the prison system on the "majority" population, to emphasize the far more negative impact on the black population, especially the black working class and poor. And even here she occasionally, in her analysis of the trope of the "black criminal," resorts to synecdoche so as to erase the class component emphasized by Wacqant. While her overall argument about affirmative action as racial bribe is provocative, with even revolutionary implications—she notes that its combination of "meager material advantages" and "significant psychological benefits to people of color" are exchanged for "the abandonment of a more radical movement that promised to alter the nation's economic and social structure"—her parallel between affirmative action as racial bribe and the racial bribe of whiteness has its limits (232). She includes the role affirmative action has played in helping to create a black elite—CEOs graduated from Harvard and Yale, Rice, Powell, Obama, but calls this the "black middle class."(235) So she has perhaps conflated members of the ruling class with the middle class and that in turn with the bribe of "whiteness." This kind of mistake is actually of a piece with the conflations more systematically carried out by Coates.

[75] See U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race,

and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm (Last accessed May 16, 2016)

[76] Ellen M. Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 258.

[77] Adolph Reed, "The Limits of Anti-Racism," *Left Business Observer* #121, September 2009. http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Antiracism-.html (Last accessed May 31, 2016)

[78] MSNBC, NewsNation, August 1, 2016. https://youtu.be/-ajWs3z8rs0 (Last accessed March 31, 2016)

[79] Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (Brooklyn, New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004), 256.

[80] For a good discussion of the increased militarization of the police in the United States, see Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.

[81] Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 45.

[82] For a critique of the Afrocentric thesis that all Black people are descendants of African kings and queens, see Stephen C. Ferguson, "The Utopian Worldview of Afrocentricity: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy," *Socialism and Democracy* 25(1), 44-70. For a critique of Afrocentricity as a form of philosophical idealism, see Stephen C. Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

[83] Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 43.

[84] The process of re-essentializing blackness as essential diversity is not a smooth one. Coates learns from his Professors at Howard about Queen Nzinga, who treats her slave as a chair. This example is key to his abandonment of his Afrocentric nationalism. While a striking example of class "diversity" among black people, it does not impact his analysis of U.S. history, however, where class quickly gives way to race (defined incoherently at once in class and caste terms, as our essay shows). He also learns from his Professors about the Irish, a group not always viewed as white. But what he learns about the Irish has little conceptual impact on his understanding of whiteness as something that Europeans do to themselves, as perverse democratic self-invention. For a detailed critique of the thesis around Irish white self making, see Kelly's introduction to Mandel.

[85] Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 4.

[86] For a critique of Asante's notion of a "composite African," see Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Coates offers us potentially interesting references to both class and "racial" diversity: the case of Queen Nzinga treating a servant as a table (p. 54); and the case of the Irish (p. 55) as non white. But these references are anomalies that fail to overturn his caste conceptuality and function rhetorically to bolster his social constructionist credentials.

[87] Christopher Jencks and David Reisman, *The Academic Revolution*, 425. As Ralph Bunche argued – so many years ago: "It is not likely that any Negro school could include a sympathetic course in labor tactics, involving an honest account of labor strikes, picketing and boycotting. Negro schools can offer courses designed to prepare students for business and professional leadership, but they would be quickly embarrassed if they were to incorporate a course in workers' education, or in training leadership for mass protest

against injustice and oppression." See Ralph Bunche, "Education in Black and White," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5(3) (July 1936), 356.

[88] Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 55.

[89] For a class analysis of universities, see David N. Smith, *Who Rules The Universities? An Essay in Class Analysis*. New York: Monthly Review, 1974.

[90] Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 25.

[91] The African American historian Rayford Logan makes the following observation about Mordecai Johnson: "There is, however, one view about [Johnson] on which friends, adversaries, and neutrals tend to agree – that he possessed a "Messianic Complex."…This Messianic attitude became increasingly evident in President John's public statements…In certain "Messianic Moments" he would tell the late E. Franklin Frazier the kind of sociology to write or the late Abram Harris the kind of economics to study." Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 249.

[92] See Yohuru Williams, "John Hope Franklin's Troubled Tenure at Howard University, 1947-1956, Professor of History," *Negro History Bulletin* 61 (3-4) (July-December 1998), 72-76. See also, Michael R. Winston, "Through the Back Door: Academic Racism and the Negro Scholar in Historical Perspective," *Daedalus* 100(3) (1971), 678-719.

[93] Most recently, Howard University contemplated getting rid of its philosophy department – the academic home to Alain Locke, Eugene C. Holmes, and William A. Banner. See Charlayne Hunter-Gault, "Hard Times At Howard U.," *The New York Times* February 4, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/education/edlife/a-historically-black-college-is-rocked-by-the-economy-infighting-and-a-changing-demographic.html?_r=0 (Last accessed May 31, 2016)

[94] Ironically, Black college presidents were at the forefront of crushing academic freedom; to promote academic freedom could jeopardize monetary gifts from bourgeois liberal philanthropists and capital donors. Ironically, Black colleges and universities have been a safe haven of sorts for both white and African-American left-radicals, socialists and communists (such as Lee Lorch, Forrest Oran Wiggins, Eugene Holmes, Oliver Cox) who became so completely burdened with heavy teaching loads that they were and are nearly rendered politically impotent. Fisk president Charles S. Johnson was in the forefront of fighting against the threat of communism and fired professors suspected of communist affiliation. Philander Smith College (Little Rock, Arkansas) hired Lee Lorch to be chair of the Mathematics department – after he was fired from Fiske. Dr. Marquis L. Harris, philosopher and then-president of Philander, forced him to resign after his involvement with the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas – under the risk of losing financial support from white donors and philanthropists. See autobiographical entry on Lorch at The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture:http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=8396 See also Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

[95] National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667 (Last accessed May 31, 2016)

[96] John Newsom, "NC A & T Campus To Get Clock Tower," *Greensboro News & Record* October 30, 2014; and Kristin Zachary, "One of the largest construction projects in this university's history is moving closer to reality," *Triad Business Journal* June 2, 2015.

[97] Lester Spence, ""Coates Is a Realist, Not a Pessimist": Lester Spence Responds to Melvin Rogers," *Dissent* August 13, 2015 https://www.dissent-magazine.org/blog/ta-nehisi-coates-is-a-realist-not-a-pessimist-lester-spence-melvin-rogers (Last accessed May 31, 2016)

[98] Coates is committed to this view given his caste categories, but he does not really believe it and so notes that Obama's daughters have opportunities beyond the wildest dreams of white workers, but then changes the subject and suggests that the black wealthy like the Obamas should not be compared to white workers but to the Bush kids, where Coates then assumes that the black rich have to work twice as hard as the white rich. It would have been more interesting had Coates compared Obama's daughters to Chelsea Clinton. Will the Obama daughters have to work twice as hard as she? What sort of statement is this? It appears empirical, but no evidence is forthcoming for the claim. It is meant as a crowd pleasing assumption, enabled by the comparison with the silver spooned Bush progeny.

[99] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 353.

[100] For an excellent critique of "Black public intellectuals," see Adolph Reed, "What Are the Drums Saying, Booker? The Curious Role of Black Public Intellectual," in *Class Notes: Posing As Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (New York: New Press, 2000), 77-90.

[101] Thomas D. Boston, *Race, Class & Conservatism*. Boston, Massachusetts: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

[102] See Sahay, Amrohini. "Transforming race matters: Towards a critique-al cultural studies," *Cultural Logic* 1(2) (1998).

[103] For representative examples of "Black radical liberalism," see Tommy Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005; Charles W. Mills, "Black Radical Liberalism," PEA Soup http://pea-soup.typepad.com/peasoup/2015/02/black-radical-liberalism-and-why-it-isnt-an-oxymoron.html

[104] Minqi Li, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy*. New York: Verso, 2009.

[105] Vaclav Smil, *Energy Transitions: History, Requirements, Prospects*. New York: Praeger, 2010.

[106] We would also note that this depth psychology explanation, deriving either from national character or the European mind (Silko) has tended to look very unfavorably on nuclear power, especially associated with domination on this view, not just due to the association with bombs but with mining. This is a serious problem for the world as on our view, nuclear is the only clean source of power that is reliable enough and energy dense enough to power a modern society, capitalist or anticapitalist. This kind of analysis also blinds people to the huge material (including mining) requirements and fundamental unfeasibility of a wind, water and solar economy.

[107] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Enduring Solidarity of Whiteness," *The Atlantic* February 8, 2016. In opposition to "white Marxism," the Afro-Caribbean philosopher Charles Mills proposes such a dual systems theory with racism existing relatively independent of and distinct from capitalist relations of

production. The Racial Contract (or white supremacy) – we are led to believe by Mills – has an agency all its own. Under the guise of "black radical liberalism," Mills argues racial exploitation vis-à-vis class exploitation stems from the unequal distribution of wealth among whites and African Americans. See Mills, *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997.

[108] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1940), 130.