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HCOM-346

Final Essay

One of the many controversial topics regarding African American life is the publicity and perception of their actions in a legal setting. Social perception is heavily invoked in this instance, as social perception almost always influences the nuances behind legal prosecution. Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World And Me* serves as a key summary of the fears and hopes of contemporary African Americans. By reflecting the same fears that James Baldwin expresses in *The Fire Next Time*, Coates showcases a lack of progress in the situation of black people in the U.S. Coates' fears are given greater context in the HBO documentary *3 ½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* as it explores the nature of controversial court cases involving African Americans, a subject that rationalizes the fears that Coates expresses.

Both Coates and Baldwin employ looking back on the past to educate their audience. Both authors identify their generation and the generation before them as significant examples of the world that the younger generation will face. While Coates goes into much greater detail than Baldwin, both authors view their history with a somber lens tinged with disappointment and sadness. One key difference is that Baldwin's story seems to place more emphasis on the future as a remnant of the past. Baldwin calls for his nephew to not allow the echoes of the past to distract him or defeat him. Baldwin argues for his nephew to continue living as a human within a black and white country. While Coates' message is similar, it is not identical to Baldwin's. Coates chooses to focus on the present

instead of the future and his caution seems to stem from a deeper fear than Baldwin. Coates uses his experiences as examples to show his son why being cautious as an African American teenager is a matter of life and death.

One of the reasons that Baldwin's story and Coates' story align is that they are written for a similar audience. Both authors write their message not to educate a greater audience (in the context of the self-contained narrative), but to connect to a singular person. Moreover, this target audience in both books is a family member of the author, who is someone that the author shares a deep, personal connection with. This causes both works to emphasize their love and connection to their intended audience. This often materializes as the author reaffirming their shared experiences with the recipient, primarily using emotions to reinforce their familial bond. Another significant similarity between the intended audiences is their age. While their exact age is not important, this fact marks that both recipients are going through similar stages in life. This also identifies the purpose of the authors' message. Each respective author writes their letter to someone that is coming of age. This transitional stage in life is often marked with certain realizations of cruelty, disadvantage, and unfairness within the world. Contrarily, this stage of life is also marked with one beginning to aspire to greater heights and discover their place within the world. This manifests itself in the authors' mentorship-like tone, which gives away their objective. The authors attempt to prepare and guide the recipient through what they identify as an unfair society for African Americans by empathizing with them and advising them on how to act.

The message that each author attempts to convey differs slightly, but both messages are within the realm of urging caution towards their younger counterparts. Baldwin's message is more future-oriented as he warns of being defeated by the ghetto he grew up in. Baldwin ultimately wants to prevent his nephew from becoming a defeated man as his grandfather or father had been. Baldwin ultimately warns against the condition of defeated members of the African American community. Baldwin wants his nephew to remain as a proud human being with a right to aspirations and a happy life despite the extrinsic circumstances. In contrast, Coates' message attempts to serve as a prevention of unfair injustice. As Coates often recollects on previous legal battles involving African Americans, such as Michael Brown's case, his ultimate message is one of warning his son about the possible consequences of his actions in forms of legal or social prosecution. Both authors indirectly warn of a loss of life due to the conditions of the world around them. Baldwin focuses on an emotional loss of life manifested through the belief that one is inferior because they are black. Baldwin wants his nephew to protect his humanity from a world that would whittle it away. Coates focuses on a physical or social loss of life, albeit indirectly. He worries about the possible dangers his son could face as an African American in the public theatre. Both authors also ask their respective audience to hold on to love despite their situation. The authors express frustration and lament the situation that the next generation has been born into, yet they call upon the younger recipients to be above blind hatred and they push them to love all people and declare that negativity will not win over how they should treat themselves or treat others.

The similarities of Coates' story and Baldwin's story paired with the 50-year gap between show a sad progression of events in the role that African American parents must serve as their children become young adults. Instead of freely giving their children the confidence to flourish and establish themselves as proud members of society, African Americans are continually expected to attach an asterisk to their children's lives so they can warn them that their lives have a heavier risk and responsibility simply because of their skin color. Coates focused on the weight of the African Americans' actions and how they can be easily misconstrued or taken out of context. Coates focuses on the legal ramifications of being misinterpreted before a fearful and unknowing public. Baldwin's work marked the beginning of what can be greater public importance in the legal prosecution of African Americans. In the years following, the media expanded with news stations that began to cover controversial cases more feverishly and the more recent advent of social media gives many people a stage to dissent or agree with any action of any party. By observing the subtle differences in each author's story, one can see that the context of the caution that these authors ask for has slightly changed, but the ultimate reason that they ask for caution is unchanged.

The HBO documentary *3 ½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* serves as an extended look into one of the sources of Coates' fear for his and his son's lives as African Americans. When using the example of Coates' childhood as a backdrop, the tale told in the documentary seems like an unfortunate progression of events. When African Americans are born into rough environments such as ghettos and areas ruled by "street law", their actions and stories are dangerous and worthy of fear despite African Americans simply being a product

of their environment, not vice versa. This negative predisposition towards African Americans as creatures of danger and violence filters down into the public mindset and those who do not interact with African Americans become the accidental murderers in cases like the Davis case. While the Davis case ends in what many would consider a victory for justice, the fact that the case became controversial points to the fact that the danger that Coates fears have not disappeared, it has only been recognized in the eyes of the government as an unfair injustice that is punishable in a court of law. Thus, the caution that Coates warns his son of is still relevant and will continue to be so.

African Americans have always faced a large disadvantage in many aspects of life. The modern examples of *Between the World and Me* and *3 ½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* contain echoes of the past persecution of African Americans. These stories repeat the theme of requiring African Americans to prove themselves before being considered equal even though they are not given the appropriate resources to do so. When European settlers began the slave trade, many believed that Africans were savages simply because they had different traditions and were not as industrialized as Europe. These Africans were not given a chance to prove their viability against a foreign evaluation system. This carried over to the U.S. and lasted throughout slavery. When slaves were freed in the South, they were not seen as deserving to own land or vote unless they passed unfair reading tests of a higher caliber than the education available to them. African Americans were not seen as possible literary or artistic geniuses until the Harlem Renaissance, and even in that context, they were observed as new and exotic. Finally, in the examples of Coates' book and the Jordan Davis case, African Americans have a certain risk that is associated with them due to the

portrayal of their race in media. They are not often given a chance to disprove this until it is too late.

However, in all the examples of injustice inflicted on African Americans, there is a silver lining of small victories. Through the upheaval of their way of life, Africans proved that they are a resilient people and, in some small cases, created a wonderful blending of African life within an American setting. Since the voting laws have passed, African Americans have become an important political demographic that now has the power to determine elections. With the case of Jordan Davis, the American public has an example of public and governmental recognition that predisposed negative perception of African Americans is not an excuse for violent repercussion. Even as the cycle of disadvantages and mistreatment continues, it is the undying spirit within the African American community evidenced in these stories that will elevate the status of their skin color and push for a more just society.