

Do Black Lives Really Matter: Disembodiment By Jerred Anderson

Disembodiment. When TaNehisi Coates first introduced the word, I had no idea what exactly he meant. Like a lot of the vocabulary he uses, I went ahead and looked it up. Disembodiment means to divest (a soul, spirit, etc.) of a body. For Coates, disembodiment was a “kind of terrorism,” and it “alters the orbit of our lives” (114). He argued that it was “intentional.” What Coates does so beautifully is that he puts things into words that you usually couldn’t think of by yourself. What has been happening to the black community, my community for so long has been put into words. So I started thinking, and that can be dangerous because I can start to put puzzle pieces that don’t even exist together. However, this puzzle was real and I was finally piecing it together. Like Coates said, “be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world” (108). In many cases America, specifically white America, has terrorized Black America for years. This was in fact intentional. There was no mistake behind it. The disembodiment of black people in America was real. Constant cases of police brutality, a unjust justice system, slavery, the War on Drugs, the underdevelopment of black communities, this was all too real to see and to hear about. Disembodiment was meant to take away the soul of black people.

My eyes have been opened to how little black lives really matter to America, specifically the black youth. Not much. Not much at all. I know I matter. I matter to my family and my friends, but in the retrospect of things, do I really matter? Do they see Jerred Deiontay Anderson or they just see another black boy on the street? Does my

black skin really matter to the world around me? Trayvon Martin didn't matter. I remember sitting at my Aunt Sharon's house with my Mom, brother, my cousin, and my other aunt, watching the verdict of the Trayvon Martin trial. I didn't know too much about the case honestly, but I remember my Aunt Rhonda and my brother Jeffrey swearing up and down that George Zimmerman was going to be found not guilty. I knew that a man killed this black boy because he had his hood up as we were walking home from a local 7Eleven with an Arizona Tea and a pack of Skittles. Coates points out how "amazed that death could so easily rise up from the nothing of a boyish afternoon" (20). I was not only amazed, but I was disturbed how easily death could stalk black youth. Within a few minutes Trayvon's confrontation with Zimmerman his life was taken. His parents would never kiss their son goodnight again. They couldn't see him off to college and could see him get married. I had really sat there and digest that. His life was over and that could have easily been me, that's the scariest part.

In my opinion, that was enough to get a guilty verdict. I had wishful thinking just like Samori. Why didn't my family have faith in this? I haven't been exposed to the corrupted criminal justice system, so I put my hope in this trial. Oh how naïve I was. Sitting there on my Aunt's couch, watching CNN, I heard "In the case of blah blah blah, we the court finds George Zimmerman...not guilty!" My heart dropped. A deep wail came out of my Aunt Rhonda's spirit. I guess even though she knew what was going to happen, it still hurt. The rest of my family was still, like me. I guess they knew too. I wish I would've known. Maybe it wouldn't have hurt so much. If I knew maybe that tear wouldn't have rolled down my cheek. That was my first time I realized that Amerikkka has disembodied black people so much, that we can't even get a fair trial over a murder.

That wasn't the first, and unfortunately that will not be the last. Trayvon Martin was just one of the many bones America has put in their basket.

I see the disembodiment of my people in my history. We've been deprived of natural human rights and natural freedoms that white people have been afforded since the beginning of America i.e. slavery and the era of Jim Crow. "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body it is heritage" (103) and this heritage of killing a man because of his skin color was continuous. To rape a woman as her children watched in absolute fear was heritage. To sell a child like it was a box of popcorn from the movie theater was heritage. To emplace laws to prevent black people from reaching their God given potential was heritage. This way of thinking that black people is the enemy and must be stopped at all cost was heritage. This systemic racism that was created by White America's hate was visceral.

We've been denied a proper justice system, and it's just not fair for us. I hate to say it, but this government was built to destroy us. Even the War on Drugs was made to destroy the black community, because they just don't care about us. The War on Drugs was meant to prevent drugs from coming in America, and to prevent drugs from destroying communities. However this war should have been named the "War on Black Families," because that's who was affected the most. Police and the government paid special attention to eradicate and make money off of black families and communities. To so easily separate and assault black families only supports Coates' statement that, "Black life is cheap, but in America black bodies are a natural resource of

incomparable value” (132). Nothing more than a speckle on White America’s box that they seem to live in.

Black families separated, and black children being forced to sell drugs to keep a float was nothing more than a cerebral attack forged by White America. It created a harsh cycle that black families still feel the effects today. I still feel it. My cousins on my mother’s side saw the tortures of prison because of a so called antidrug initiative. My uncle, my father’s brother, who is serving time because he fell into the harsh cycle. Mass incarceration has attacked the black family and stopped it from being able to thrive. To disembody black people, is to disembody America because we are America. It was literally built off of us. All this pain in the black community because of the “assumed inhumanity of black people” (110). The country that my ancestors built is the same country that has been depriving black men, woman, children, and everyone in between for years.

I see the disembodiment of my people in schools. Why is it that the schools in Baltimore City are in a completely different shape and status, than a school in Baltimore County? I think I have the answer, two words; skin color. They, being the framers of White America, don’t want to see people of color thrive. The government would rather invest millions of dollars in white youth than black youth. Impoverished black youth are written off as future drug dealers and future jailbirds. White America sees black youth as predators. White youth are said to be the next politicians, or tech wizards, or engineers. How can we do that to our youth? Why do we push education on white kids, but we don’t put the same pressure on black kids? Why can’t the youth of Baltimore City have the same chances of succeeding as a youth in Baltimore County? How can we elect

politicians who would rather build a prison for me to rot in, but won't invest in schools?

Coates has almost the same questions when he says, "Fully 60 percent of all young black men who drop out of high school will go to jail; this should disgrace the country, but it does not" (27). So many questions, but so little answers. That's not remotely fair, but that's what's going on. I see the disembodiment of my people when I drive into the city; bordered up houses, drugged out communities, and crime. The government won't even build up these communities back up. They'd rather make it into another statistic.

Disembodiment has allowed America to continue their practice of controlling black people. We have faced police brutality, a unjust justice system, slavery, the War on Drugs, and the underdevelopment of our community, but it still leaves me with the question, do black lives really matter? Coates suggest, "White America is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control of bodies" (42). Like much of what Coates has said about the state and being of our black bodies, he is right, and he pushes us to ask, is it because white people are scared that they will lose their control, and maybe torturing black communities is their way to stay on top? I only hope that the wall White America has placed in front of Black America becomes more and more transparent, so we can see if our circumstances in America will ever change. Will this systemic racism that has profoundly been a factor in whether or not we thrive become a nonfactor? I wonder if America really cares about us. Whatever, my eyes are now open, and this puzzle I call "Being Black" still has a few pieces left for me to put together. I have to stay woke so the disembodiment of my people will be a thing of the past because you can be woke, but still be sleep walking.