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Racial Hegemony in Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Ashok Chaudhary has completed his thesis entitled "Recial Hegemony" under my supervision. He carried out his research from July 2017 to April 2018. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Racial Hegemony in Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Ashok Chaudhary, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research paper explores the issue of the suppression, exclusion, and struggle of Afro- American people in America. It presents the condition of Afro- American people in the contemporary Baltimore society where they were dominated in terms of their skin color. It investigates how the American white elitist consistently denied the humanity of blacks in order to maintain their superiority in the society. Social, political power and position as well as religious norms and values imposed by the white people are the cause to marginalized black communities in America. To illustrate these things, this research takes upon the narration of the incidents faced by Ta- Nehisi Coates as a victim. In addition, to clarify white elite's supremacy, construction of class and race, the researcher draws a concept from subaltern theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Homi K. Bhabha, Gyastry Chakravorty Spivak, and so on. By analyzing the oppression of subaltern voice and racial hegemony, this research presents that the root cause of racism is political and cultural hegemony rather than fatalistic concerns as represented in the memoir. Therefore, it gives a message to black people for resistance in order to rectify the subtle forms of hegemony imposed on such subaltern groups of people in the society.

Key Words: Racial hegemony, Superiority, Bitter struggle, Suppression, Political power

Abstract

Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* illustrates the life experience of the writer as an Afro-American in the white-dominated American society. It is a memoir in which the writer addresses his son about his first-hand experience about what it was to be associated with the black community in United States around 1960s. In this memoir, the writer expresses the state of mind of the black people among the white community, so called the superior race. Furthermore, Coates recapitulates the American history and explains to his son the racist violence that has been woven into American culture. Coates provides details about the whites' treatment towards blacks in different institutions like the school, the police, the churches, the prison and even the public streets of Baltimore. For this the writer offers abridged autobiographical account of his youth in Baltimore on how the white people acted upon to disembody black men and women. Throughout this memoir, Coates also presents how black men and women were shackled, beaten, tortured, raped, and sprayed by the whites with the misuse of their superiority. The blacks had no right to have their own interests and desires but they had to act upon the strict rules and regulations forced by the whites. Through such details Coates leaves some serious points to be sorted out about the ideology behind such dominating actions over black by whites in the American society.

White Americans always regard themselves as superior, civilized, educated and mannered people whereas they regard black people as savage, illiterate, unmannered and treat them as an object. The memoir, *Between the World and Me* has the details of the childhood memories of its writers around the streets of Baltimore and his sufferings because of his skin colour. The writer narrates the inability of the people of his community to live the life as the white people did and gives evidences

through his own experiences. Coates had not got chance to get proper education even though he was so curious person through his childhood. His friend, Prince Jones had to get killed for no reason by a Prince George's County Police while the murderer did not get any punishment for being white. Likewise, Coates had to experience many more incidents which are evident for the inhuman behavior of the white Americans. This research work dissects such incidents how the afro-American people were Othered in the so-called democratic American society.

This present research work deals with the issue of the suppression, exclusion and struggle of Afro-American people in America. It investigates the condition of Afro-American people in the contemporary Baltimore society where they were dominated in terms of their skin color in the shade of the American Constitution which advocates of guaranteed rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for every citizen. It interrogates how the American white elitist consistently denied the humanity of blacks in order to maintain their bogus "Dream". It also focuses on the impact of the whites' violence and terror on the child psychology through the narration of the incidents faced by Ta-Nehisi Coates as a victim. In addition, it discusses about the marginalized black communities in America through social and religious norms and values imposed by the white community. It analyzes the events and visuals as described in Coates' memoir *Between the World and Me* which demonstrates the pathetic condition of black Afro-Americans in the then white dominated society. Moreover, this research emphasizes the study of subaltern to show the unequal relationship between the elitist white and non-elitist black in the American society. Therefore, by depicting the white elite's supremacy, construction of class, caste and race, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* shows the root cause of racism is political and cultural hegemony rather than fatalistic concerns as

represented in the memoir and suggests for resistance in order to rectify the subtle forms of hegemony imposed on such subaltern groups of people.

Ta-Nehisi Coates is an American author, journalist, and educator. Coates is a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, where he writes about cultural, social, and political issues, particularly regarding African Americans. Coates also is a well-known writer of autobiographical literature. He has worked for the Village Voice, Washington City Paper, and Time. Coates first autobiographical memoir is *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons*, released in July 2015. It won the 2015 National Book Award for Non-fiction. These two autobiographical memoirs are known as some of his renowned novels. Coates also has been written different newspaper articles which are compiled in Afro-American peoples suffering and pain. Almost all of his literary works are set in the Baltimore place of America. His works generally portray the day by day life of ordinary individuals of Afro-American people. The narrative of *Between the World and Me* is set in Baltimore of America.

Coates' *Between the World and Me* asserts the childhood experience of his own and how the black people of his community were dominated by so called white powerful one. In this memoir Coates explains his suffering as the time of up growing period in his life. In first part of this memoir the writer begins by telling a story of how he was interviewed for a popular news show and asked what it means to lose his body. The actual question was why he believed the progress of American and Coates replied that progress of American was based on looting and violence. He talks about how he learned the language and rules of the street. The school was presented not as a place of learning self-discovery but as an escape from death and prison. The writer also talks about his family rules and regulation which always used to teach their children to keep respect to white people in the society. The school was not allowed to

read and choose the subject as the interest of black students but black students always used to learn about the morality and how to respect white one. Not only at school but also at home the writer remembered that his grandmother used to make him to not complain against bad rules in school.

Similarly, in second part of the memoir the writer talks about his own culture and tradition which are more valuable than white one. In the name of being educated, civilized, conscious, cultured, and developed white always dominate over black but all things are valueless in front of black people's spiritual bond with each other which they behave other as dearest one. In the last part of this memoir the writer makes his son to be bold to face the human sufferings. Coates also encourages to all black people to struggle and live a meaning life at the present society.

Ta Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* raises the issue of suppression and marginalization of black subaltern people in Baltimore, United States. They are hegemonies from white elitist. The writer, his family and whole black American society are trapped in the white elitist authority. White people construct class, race and gender in order to rule over black people in the society. The world of Coates' is divided into two part, blackness and whiteness. In these two worlds he finds huge demarcation between white and black people's human right, freedom and justice. Coates' analyzes it as the construction of race by white. To strengthen this idea about the racism Ellen Scheible shares her argument as:

Coates emphasis on black bodies and the corporeality of historical violence resonates deeply with my research on gender and sexuality and how I teach about female bodies as narrative fears. His memories style, a letter from father to son connoting the powerful influence of inheritance, juxtaposed with his claim that whiteness is a social

construct, not an inherited physical trait, leave me nodding in agreement, ready to pen my own manifesto about inequality and the dangerous, misinformed discourse that perpetuates it. (39)

This is the explanation that how whiteness is a construct because it gives them their power and privilege. Blackness, then, is also a construct. It was created to make sure there was a “below” a mass people that lays the foundation for the privileged group to stand upon. So race is constructed it is something to which an absolutism is attributed but in reality is blurry. Therefore, racism is primarily enforced through the plundering and subjugation of the black body.

Ta-Nehisi Coates makes his own son and reader to look in American; it is traditional to destroy the black body. Coates makes it clear that no institutional force in the U.S.A. stands outside the machine of white supremacy that continues to grind down black bodies on a daily basis. The police, the schools, the churches, the media, the prison, all play the role in shackling black Americans, and this is not accidental failure, this is by design. Bill Yousman in his article “The Fire This Time”: Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* brings his ideas about political injustice of black people. Yousman states:

And there is deep, deep sadness in this book as well, especially when Mr. Coates writes about the police murder of his friend from Howard, Prince Jones. And he points out that every black person killed by the police is another indication not of a “few bad apples” or “lack of training” but a systematic policy supported by the majority. (3)

These above lines show that violence from the side of white's majority over black repressed minority. From this argument we can understand that how the condition of black people are dominated by white. Black people's voice is voiceless because they

are controlled by the authority of white police. It means the police behave black African as an object.

Similarly, in the society of black they used to be control own self as taught by white elitist. The writer's parent use to make him just to be honest and follow the rule and authority without any question. To support this idea Ayesha Siddiqi argues as, “Coates critiques black parents who advice their children to be twice as good, in order to succeed. Nobody tells privileged white children, he points out to be twice as good. Instead, I imagined their parents telling them to take twice as much the message a sound and sensitive one” (5). From this line we can understand that black people always need to respect white and do not get angry with their cruel rule. It means in black community honesty is the only respect to the white. The children at home and at school, always only learn about the moral education to respect white.

Post-colonial theory is the theoretical tool which examines the authoritative domination of the colonial powers of the world heavily representing the western communities over the non western people. Under the different religious and technological enhancement by the Europeans made them to rule over the Non-European people that included African and Asian communities. This theory primarily focuses on the effects of colonialism even after the physical colonization perished from the world. The colonization put forth by the western countries hegemonized the different cultures which forced them to resist through different practices such as post-colonial writings. According to the “General Introduction” of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin:

Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. As a consequence, ‘post-colonial theory’ has existed for a long time before

that particular name was used to describe it. Once colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being. (1)

This indicates during and after the period of colonization, the literary works of colonized people tried to overcome the adverse effects of colonial domination by attacking over the colonizers' cultures, languages, educational system, values, belief system and religion. They attempted to illustrate their wretched conditions, troubles of hybridity, cultural dislocation, slaughter of history and identity, disembodiment and other aspects due to the colonial domination. Post colonial writings are the writings of colonized perspective in order to strengthen their history, culture and national identities that had been more or less destroyed by colonizers. In this regards, Leela Ghandi argues, "Postcolonialism also holds out the possibility of thinking our way through, and therefore, out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter" (176). The historical and cultural tension between the empirical powers and colonized communities has led to colonization and the domination. Post-colonial theory gives a way to the dominated groups to rise up over the inequalities of the colonizers exercised on them. Thus, postcolonial theory analyzes literature and writings of non-European which explicitly and implicitly depict the suffering faced by them.

The subaltern studies as a discipline of post-colonial studies has been come into the surface from the idea of hegemony as coined and popularized by Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is known as a ruling ideology of the ruling class which behaves to other classes as the common and exerts their interests

over them as they are their property. According to *Key Concepts of Post Colonial Theory* edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin “Hegemony, initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within a confederation, is now generally understood to mean domination by consent” (116). Furthermore, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* discusses about two faces of the term “hegemony” by Gramsci as:

On the one hand it is contrasted with “domination” (and as such bound up with the opposition State/Civil Society) and on the other hand “hegemonic” is sometimes used as an opposite of “corporate” or “economic-corporate” to designate an historical phase in which a given group moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defense of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social arena. (79)

In together, hegemony is the domination exerted by leadership in political and social arena. Hegemony is done through persuasion by the upper class people to the lower class people to follow their ideology, values, and lifestyles with the help of power, educational institutions, religion and mass media. Gramsci terms the non-hegemonic groups or classes as “subordinate”, “subaltern” or sometimes “instrumental.”

Subaltern studies is originated through the Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony has been popularized by the sub-continental theorists as Gayatri Spivak, Edward E. Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Ranajit Goh and others. The subaltern includes the groups and classes which are socially, economically, politically and geographically at the margin due to the hegemony of the ruling groups or classes. According to *Key Concepts of Post Colonial Theory*, “Subaltern, meaning ‘of inferior rank’, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who

are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic' power" (215). This gives sense that the groups and classes of the people which are regarded as the inferior one by the ruling class or group are known to be subaltern. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* quotes Gramsci's concept of subaltern as, "[not simply an oppressed group] but lacking autonomy, subjected to the influence or hegemony of another social group, not possessing one's own hegemonic position" (59). This makes a point that every suppressed group in a society by a supreme or ruling class or group can be considered as subaltern. This concept also includes the suppression of the black community under white supremacy in America as discussed by Ta-Nehisi Coates in his autobiographical work *Between the World and Me*.

Coates' memoir evokes the encroachment exerted by colonizing as well as imperial minds of white Americans upon Afro-American people's values, beliefs, norms, principles. It keeps record of how the whites have dominated black society over the years and gives way to get out of it. This effort by Coates brings up a way to resist the hegemonic suppression of the white community through black's attempt to counter the suppressive manner of the whites. Post-colonial critic Stephen Slemon argues, "resistance is an act, or set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppression, and it so thoroughly infuse the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle" (56). The Afro-American resistance is heavily practiced through literature. The struggle between two distinct cultures has tried its best to break the barrier between the two cultures. This research aims to draw brief account of black people's difficult circumstances and their oppression by white elitist in the contemporary American society. Those white elites ruled over blacks whereas the blacks could not go against their immoral activities

rather Subaltern Africans kill themselves remaining silence to each other. Ta Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* tries to show the two human cultures, one is white dominated and other is own voiceless society. This paper explores the oppression of subaltern voice and racial hegemony of the margin in the reference to the subaltern theories of Gramsci's "Subaltern and Hegemony". This research also will touch the theoretical idea of Spivak's "Can Subaltern Speak?" and Homi Bhabha's *Social Power and Relation*.

Ta-Nehisi Coates brings in discussion the ways of suppression over the Afro-American society by the white Americans from very first lines of the text. He opens up his autobiographical work with the celebrated lines of two of the Afro-American writers Richard Wright and Sonia Sanchez. Firstly, He creates an image of Afro-American struggle for life, liberty and pursuit of happiness against the imperial minds of the ruling class white Americans with the lines of Richard Wright's poem "Between the World and Me." The title of the Coates' memoir had been taken after the title of the poem which starts like this:

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled
suddenly upon the thing,
Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by
scaly oaks and elms
And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting
themselves between the world and me . . . (7)

These lines suggest the struggle of the Afro-American people had over the generations within the so-called democratic domain of the America. The poet makes a point that blacks had to stumble against the horror-struck paths of the racist violence and with the false words of American dream. This is the circumstances related with

almost every people in Afro-American community. Secondly, Coates quotes Sonia Sanchez's lines from her poem "Malcolm" written for the fallen black activist Malcolm X as:

Do not speak to me of martyrdom,
of men who die to be remembered
on some parish day.

I don't believe in dying
though, I too shall die.

And violets like castanets

will echo me. (8)

In these lines, the poet makes a point that there is no glory in death because it's inevitable and suggests her world to resist against the oppressors. She tries to glorify the efforts of her fallen hero Malcolm X, who was assassinated for fighting and preaching against racism and violence. She suggests people to hunt for the glory that can be felt at our existence because no one knows about the afterlife. The same thing has been described by Coates to his son in his memoir. Though he addresses his son only but he wants to make aware every upcoming generation of Afro-Americans about his experiences, the historical happenings and the things that might happen in the future and make a meaningful life in order to have some identity and respect within the American scenario.

In the first part of the memoir, Coates creates images of the disembodiment of the Afro-American populations due to the oppressive behavior of the whites. He blames the American history itself as the cause of disembodiment of the blacks over the years. Antonio Gramsci talks on the history of subaltern social groups in his *Prison Notebooks*, regards it is necessarily fragmented and episodic one and further

explains:

There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. (206-7)

Here, Gramsci clarifies that the subaltern groups are used up by the ruling class people and they are dominated despite of the some efforts of equality and freedom. This gives a sense that the changes in the subaltern classes are no easy but they have to keep struggling for it. Similarly, Coates wants his upcoming generations to seek for a way to get rid of the suppression of the whites. In his memoir, he addresses his son from very first paragraph of his narrative where he narrates that he has been asked what it meant to lose his body by the host of a popular news show. He explains what she was expecting and what he replied as:

Specifically, the host wished to know why I felt that white America’s progress or rather the progress of those Americans who believed that they are whites, was build on looting and violence. Hearing this, I felt an old and indistinct sadness well up in me. The answer to this question is the record of the believers themselves. The answer is American History. (10)

In these lines, Coates explains what it feels to tell the well-known truth of any events. The answer is quite simple, the American history, which explains itself as the

supreme independent power with the democratic rules.

Whereas, the American law always seems to be biased for the non-whites. Coates brings the words of Abraham Lincoln on democratic America as, “the battle of Gettysburg must ensure, “that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth”” (11) and interrogates what “the people” mean as, “In 1863, it did not mean your mother or your grandmother, and it did not mean you and me. Thus America’s problem is not it’s betrayal of “government of the people,” but the means by which “the people” acquired their names” (11). Through this explanation, Coates tries to make his audiences understand American history was always inclined towards the white Americans. Later on he suggests his son to think of the struggle as, “History is not solely in our hands. And still you are called to struggle, not because it assures your victory but because it assures you an honorable and sane life” (154). Through this statement, the writer wants to have reformation in their history and the meaning of “the people.”

Furthermore, Coates talks on distinction between race and racism and the emergence of hierarchy between the whites and non-whites. The non-whites which include the Afro-Americans have been subordinated as Other. Race stands for the categorization of human beings in regards of their physicality, biological structure, and genetic behaviours. According to *Key Concepts of Post Colonial Theory*, “The notion of race assumes, firstly, that humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that are transmitted ‘through the blood’ and permit distinctions to be made between ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ races” (198). Race is the distinction which deals with the physicality of the human beings whereas racism is the concept which creates distinction of superiority or inferiority. *Key Concepts of Post Colonial Theory* defines racism as, “a way of thinking that considers a group’s

unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, causal way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, and which on this basis distinguishes between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ racial groups” (199). Racism is a belief system which has been in existence with the existence of human beings because there always exists hierarchy along with the family structure. Similarly, Coates talks about the delusional belief of the American people about the race and racism and states, “race is the child of racism, not the father. And process of naming “the people” has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old” (12). In this line, he clarifies that the racism is above the race and further states, “The new people were something else before they were white – catholic, Corsican, Welsh, Mennonite, Jewish – and if all our national hopes have any fulfillment, then they will have to be something else again. Perhaps they will truly become American and nobler basis for their myths. I cannot call this” (13). In this statement, the writer hopes American whites to rise up above the racial encroachment in reference to their skin colour and keep brotherhood in all the races. Thus, the delusional belief of the American people can be regarded as one of the reason for exerting the cultural hegemony over the non-whites or Afro-American people.

Likewise, Coates gives some of the examples of the racial domination exerted by whites on the Afro-American people. He is deeply concerned with his own up growing time in America that devalues and destroys black bodies. He talks on the harsh treatment of the PG County Police and the discriminatory laws to the non-whites which have put their lives in danger. Franz Fanon in his book *Black Skin White Mask* states about discriminatory laws of America as:

In the United States, the Negro battles and is battled. There are laws that, little by little, are invalidated under the Constitution. There are

other laws that forbid certain forms of discrimination. And we can be sure that nothing is going to be given free. There is war, there are defeats, truces, victories. (172)

These lines show the white American people's discriminatory rules in the name of giving freedom and reliability. Because of false constitution white were defeated over the black one in then society of America. The demarcation between white and black was itself the false glory of American law. The same scenario has been discussed in this memoir. Coates gives account of such event as, "To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fist, knives, crack, rape, and disease. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear. The law did not protect us"(29). These lines makes us to know the condition of black people as the suppressed by white people. The condition of their day to day life in society which they did not feel comfortable and safe with the system of their country and black were kept under the margin in the society.

Likewise, Coates explains the colonized bodies of Afro-American population always tried to save themselves of the dangers of racism and violence. Such racism and violence has to be faced by them in the streets, in public places as well as the school. Regarding the psychological struggle of colonized people for saving their bodies, Homi K Bhabha quotes Franz Fanon to his "Forward to the 1986 Edition" of *Black Skin White Mask* as:

I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema . . . I was battered down by toms-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects . . .

I took myself far off from my own presence . . . What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (XXV)

The struggle of the body of an African with black skin is so minutely discussed by Franz Fanon in his book. This is the same case with the Afro-Americans living in the so-called democratic America where they have to save their bodies from different sorts of threats. In the same way, Coates gives many incidents that have made him to struggle for the safety of his body. He compares his son's age with his own and says that he is sure that he "have had to I am sure that you have had to deal with the occasional roughneck on the subway or in the park" (40) and gives details of what he had to face at his teenage as:

when I was about your age, each day, fully one-third of my brain was concerned with who I was walking to school with, our precise number, the manner of our walk, the number of times I smiled, who or what I smiled at, who offered a pound and who did not – all of which is to say that I practiced the culture of the streets, a culture concerned chiefly with securing the body. (40)

In these lines, he explains the state of the mind of a Negro teen going at his school. He furthermore says, "The streets were not my only problem. If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left" (41). He makes clear that the education system at the school is not beneficial for the Negro children and they ultimately have to come on the street. He quotes the lines from American hip-hop artist Nas as, "Ecstasy, coke, you say it's love, it is poison / Schools where I learn they should be burned, it is poison" (43). This directly indicates that the life in school was not suitable for the Afro-American children. The same thing was in the public places. Coates gives

account of such events as, “The meek shall inherit the earth” meant nothing to me. The meek were battered in West Baltimore, stomped out at Walbrook Junction, bashed up on Park Heights, and raped in the shower of the city jail” (47). This gives a sense that Afro-American’s safety was nowhere, they had to face unpleasant environment at every moments of their life. This makes a point that they did not feel intimacy with the systems of their country and they were kept at margin.

The marginalization of Afro-American could not be possible only because of the white but it got possible because of some people of their community who misused their powers gained through their community. Such kind of incidents has been found in the people who gained power and misused the power to act like the whites. Though these people had black skin they wore the white masks and ruled over their own people in order to show themselves superior beings. Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* points out, “The black man wants to be white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence” (178). This shows the mentality of the Afro-Americans to gain the position of the white and their misused the powers gained through their own people. The same incident is discussed by Coates in his memoir about the assassination of the Prince Carmen Jones, a Howard University scholar by the Prince George’s County Police as:

I wrote about the history of the Prince George’s County Police.

Nothing had ever felt so essential to me. Here is what I knew at the outset: The officer who killed Prince Jones was black. The politicians who empowered this officer to kill were black. Many of the black politicians, many of them twice as good, seemed unconcerned. How

could this be? It was like I was back at moorland again, called by great misteries. (132-33)

Hence, the killer of the Jones, the officer of the PG County Police claimed that he had tried to run him over with his jeep and he was set free and back to his work. The silence of the black politicians was evident that they had no regrets of the death. Coates moans of the death of Jones and states, “Prince Jones, murdered by the men who should have been his security guards, is always with me, and I knew that soon he would be with you” (144-45). This fact gives a sense that the Afro-American leaders also have some responsibilities in subordination of the blacks in their own land. To gain the position as white the newly formed elites, bureaucrats and politicians of the Afro-American societies endanger their own people’s life and try to force their supremacy over their own community as whites did.

The fear of death in the marginalized people of America makes them to be strict in their families. They try their best to avoid the possible threats to their bodies at the street or public places of the American territory. To be black was the more challenging to walk on the road. To walk on the road and public place was unpredictable human violence of Afro-American people. Ziauddin Sardar in his book *Why Do People Hate America* gives an account of the streets of the America as:

America is not only a nation in which random violence is an everyday occurrence; in which the possibility of being shot by a mugger for the sake of a few dollars or a wristwatch is a routine fear of any citizen; in which drive-by shootings and armed road rage are common. It is also a country in which disaffected teenagers take their guns to school and shoot people, a place where mass slaughter has become a commonplace for the depressed, disaffected and disturbed. (188)

The same scenario has been discussed by Coates in his memoir. He accounts different sort of happenings on the streets of Baltimore which makes people anxious of the streets. This makes them to be strict to their children in order to save their bodies. Defending his body colour, Coates argues, “There is 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 wasn’t black, black skin wasn’t even black” (90). These lines describe that how the black people were suppressed from the super structural level of the white dominant society. The created meaning of black was difference in front of so called white elitist. Therefore, the hierarchy of powerful white elitist over weak and inferior black seems to as the racial hegemony because black people always kept in boundary in the society.

Similarly, Coates explains that the Mecca, University was the only educational institute for white not for black boys and girls. There was no importance of education system to blacks. He talks on how the American white elitist consistently denied studying technical and professional subject in order to maintain their superiority over black people. Further, Coates provides details about the white's treatment towards black at school as:

The world had not time for the childhoods of black boys and girls. How could the schools? Algebra, Biology, and English were not subjects so much as opportunities to better discipline the body, to practice writing between the lines, copying the directions legibly, memorizing theorems extracted from the world they were created to represent. All of it felt so distant to me. I remembered sitting in my seventh grade French class and not having any idea why I was there.

(42)

These lines present fact that how the writer and other black students had deprived to gain practical education at school. The writer did not get chance to study as his own interest and capable subjects in school. The distance between black students and the curriculum of subjects seems to very different to each other. Furthermore, Coates describes about injustice system of his school and says; "I was a curious boy, but the schools were not concerned with curiosity. They were concerned with compliance" (43). This shows the school's pressurized rule of black students where they only learn moral education. Because of this rule the write felt himself as, " I sensed the schools were hiding something, drugging us with false morality so that we would not see, so that we did not ask: why- for us and only us- is the other side of free will and free sprits an assault upon our bodies?" (43). These lines show the discriminatory rule and system of school where Afro-American students could not get chance to study as their ability and inquisitiveness. The reason behind to teach only morality at school to black students was to maintain whites superiority over black in the society. Therefore, school is also considered as the place of injustice to the black people which helps to keep marginalize in the society.

Furthermore, Coates describes about the colonized body of Afro-American people who always used to get physical torture by white people. About the black people's physical torture, violence, beaten incidents were represented through film, cinema, and documentary. Such, incidents used to represent to black people in the streets, in the public places as well as in the schools. The representation of the documentary was quite subjective and intentional to show the heroic role over the black people. Regarding documentary as the subjective interpretation, Stuart Hall in his book *Representation; Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* as:

Examples might include a journal or diary, someone's written account of their experiences, a 'documentary' film about a person's life, and a picture story in a magazine. In this context, the document's informational value is mediated through the perspective of the person making it, and it is presented as a mixture of emotion and information. Indeed, it is in creating images which have the power to move the viewer, to retain their attention through the presentation of a telling images, that this form of documentary works. (83)

This explanation shows that how representation is manipulated in meaning making process of a person. In this context representation is all about subjective. By taking help of representation of film documentary, whites intended to show them as more superior than black. Further, Coates describes about the hidden objective of whites representation of black bodies in the film to black as: "Every February my classmates and I were herded into assemblies for a ritual review of the Civil Rights Movement. Our teachers urged us toward the example of freedom marchers, Freedom Riders, and Freedom Summers, and it seemed dedicated to the glories of being beaten on camera" (50). This cinematic representation shows the nature of black being beaten by whites. Further Coates argues as, "The black people in these films seemed to love the worst things in life- love the dogs that rent their children apart, the tear gas that clawed at their lungs, the fire houses that tore off their clothes. They seemed to love the men who raped them" (51). By watching this all movies, Coates interrogates himself and says, "Why are they showing this us? Why were only our heroes nonviolent?" (51). But answer is that by cinematic representation white elitist tried to circulate their racist ideologies over lower black people.

Likewise, Coates describes about the marginalized condition of black bodies

in America through social and religious norms and values imposed by the white people in the society. Black people had not allowed entering into the church because of being black skin color of the body. There was huge gap between the holy place church, God, and blacks because of the strict discriminatory rule of white's elitist in the society. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* gives an explanation about religious values of the whites that dominate the blacks as:

In the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white', on the margins of metropolitan desire, the *founding objects* of the Western world become the erratic, eccentric, accidental *objets trouves* of the colonial discourse - the part-objects of presence. It is then that the body and the book lose their part-objects of presence. It is then that the body and the book lose their representational authority. Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into the sign of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie which reveals the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body. And the holiest of the books, the bible bearing the both the standard of the cross and the standard of empire finds itself strangely dismembered. (92)

This explanation represents the impact of colonial discourse of how whites make themselves as more standard than black in relation to the god's sacrifice in cross. Being black color of the body skin whites kept black Afro-American under the racist gaze. In the memoir, Coates himself represents as the unblessed person from god and discarded by whites as, "I could not retreat, as did so many, into the church and its mysteries. My parents rejected all dogmas. We spurned the holidays marketed by the people who wanted to be white. We would not stand for their anthems. We would not kneel before their god" (47). It shows the white's treatment towards black in the

church because they always tried to be superior in the American society. So, we can say that in the church whites construct the rule as in favor of them and they suppressed blacks.

Similarly, the discrimination and distance between white elitist and Afro-American people was not only in school, in streets in church but also in public bus. To be black in the public bus at Baltimore was to stay back side of the bus. The psychology of black people was constructed as the inhuman behavior of whites and they need to follow without questioning. Because of white's dominated system in every place, black men and women used to suffer in everyday domestic life. Further, the writer provides details about the whites' treatment in public bus as:

My mother and I were going into the city. We got on the Greyhound bus. I was behind my mother. She wasn't holding my hand at the time and I plopped down in the first seat I found. A few minutes later my mother was looking for me and she took me to the back of the bus and explained why I couldn't sit there. We were very poor, and most of the black people around us, who I knew were poor also, and the images I had of white America were from going into the city and seeing who my mother worked for. It became clear there was a distance. (219)

This explanation presents the bitter reality of black people who were kept under the margin because of whites' superiority. It also shows the impact of the whites' treatment on the child's psychology which the child thinks itself as the weaker and poorer than white elitist. The social status of white people was higher than black so the writer's mother could not let him to sit in front of bus. The feeling of inferiority inside the mind of black seems to make superior to the black people. Franz Fanon in his book *Black Skin White Mask* states about feeling of inferiority as, "The feeling of

inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior" (69). This shows how the feeling of inferiority is created in relation to the superiority. Therefore, whites' superior state of mind, values, rules, and regulations always dominated to black people over the years.

To conclude, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* presents the life experience of the writer as an Afro-American in the white dominated American society. In this memoir, the writer expresses the state of mind of the black people among the white community, so called the superior race. Coates also recapitulates the American history and explains to his son about the racist violence that has been woven into American culture. Furthermore, Coates provides details about the white' treatment towards the blacks in different institutions like the schools, the police, the churches, and even in the public streets of Baltimore. Throughout this memoir, Coates also presents how black men and women were shackled, beaten, and tortured by the whites with the misuse of their superiority in the so- called democratic American society. It portrays the struggle of Afro- American people as being black skin color. The events and visuals as described in Coates memoir offers us to analyze the construction of class and race. Instead of cultural and racial hegemony the researcher also can study in the possible subject on the way of oral story telling culture in American culture. Therefore, through the memoir *Between the World and Me* Coates tries to instruct blacks and subaltern groups of people to struggle and resist in order break down the subtle form of hegemony in the society.

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