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02/06/20

QCQ 4

Quotation:

“In America it is traditional to destroy the black body—*it is heritage.* Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labor—it is not so easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest. And so enslavement must be casual wrath and random manglings, the gashing of heads and brains blown out over the river as the body seeks to escape. It must be rape so regular as to be industrial.” (pp. 103)

Comment:

This quote comes after Coates is speaking of the civil war and some of American history. I think his emphasis on the “body” is important, especially in how it relates to racism. I think this was also one of the themes that was provided to us in class to look out for, but it was one that I kept noticing. He deals considerably with the theme of black bodies and continues to refer to “bodies”. I think he does so to show, as exemplified by the aforementioned quote, how racism operates through the control, manipulation and exploitation of “black bodies” specifically. He points toward the idea that as a consequence of the racist society in which we have lived black bodies are vulnerable and this traces back all the way to slavery and colonialism. He notes how black people were used for their bodies, exploited for their bodies, and killed because of what their bodies looked like. Because of the unequal way that black people have been treated, as lesser than human, with a value that lays only in what they can provide to white people, the very idea of what it means to be black in a society like that of America’s, is rooted in the danger of “losing” one’s body. Despite the fact that slavery has ended (at least here), the legacy, the history and the fear that went with it remains engrained in black people’s bodies and as such, because of the violence and oppression that has been inflicted upon them, it becomes difficult to separate body from mind from soul. All too often, black people are killed, their bodies are stolen from them, and this is what Coates argues is American tradition: “to destroy the black body.”

Question:

Coats argues that the soul and the mind are not separate from the physical body, how does this affect and/or change the meaning of his use of “bodies”?