

A Fresh Look At The Democratic Primary

A Conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates

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Welcome to a podcast from the Center for Emerging Media. I'm Marc Steiner, and I'm speaking today with Ta-Nehisi Coates. You might have come across his name in a number of things that he's written. He's a regular writer for the Village Voice. He had a piece just this month in the *Atlantic Monthly* on Bill Cosby. And in *The Nation* Magazine that we'll talk about today. He's written for *Time* Magazine, the *New York Times* Magazine, and the *Washington Post*. He's a Baltimore native, grew up on the west side of our town, and his father's Paul Coates, who is the founder of Black Classic Press and one of the early leaders of the Black Panther Party. He joins me today on the phone from New York City, where he's made his home. And Ta-Nehisi, welcome, good to have you with us.

Oh, thank you for having me.

So the article that got my attention first was in the *Atlantic Monthly*, that you wrote about Bill Cosby. And then I read the article you wrote that was a critique of Shelby Steele's book on Obama.

Yeah, yeah.

In *The Nation*.

Yeah.

And the—it was kind of the—both were very interesting, and I'd like to just start off with your *Atlantic Monthly* piece.

Okay.

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And kind of because—you actually—you can actually put the two together and meld an interesting story between the two of them, I think. The—there's this divide in America and inside the black world around Bill Cosby and what he says, and what he said from that famous NAACP speech that got him started. The Pound Cake Wars. And anyways, people are calling him because he—what did he say—that people are dying over—shooting each other over a piece of pound cake. And part of this to me it seems—and I'd like you to talk to this—is almost generational. It's a way of looking at the world from the—the perspective of somebody like Cosby or somebody like yourself, coming from growing up in very different ways.

Right, right, right. Yeah, I think there's definitely a sort of generational divide. And it's hard to, you know, sort of decide what is actually, you know, legitimate, 'cause, you know, probably some of it is and some of it definitely reflects frustration that I think a large swatch of African Americans feel and then, you know, sort of trying to decide what about it is just the sort of angst that you know, the older generation always feels toward the young. And I think there's definitely some of that in the message also.

But I wonder—I mean, where do you—I mean, you come up with a historical analysis saying that this kind of struggle around the behavior of black people, its sexuality, violence, is age-old in America.

Yes, yes, yes. And you know, and I think, you know, part of that is this—you know, this sort of ancient question of look, are we going to be citizens or are we not, you know, and, you know, there's always the, you know, stretching back to DuBois—probably even further than that, but I stretch it back to DuBois—the strong argument for African American citizenship, that that must be the primary sort of statement that we're making to the broader country that we insist on all our rights as citizens. And, you know, one of the arguments that Booker T made—and, again, this probably stretches back past him is this idea that you'll get your citizenship if you achieve economic power first, that that's the most important thing. And once you achieve some measure of economic power, your political power will then come with it. And Cosby, you know, although—in some respects, he's saying economic power, but it's not just economic power, it's more—how shall we say, self-regulation. You know, self-policing. You know, make yourself respectable. And then you'll achieve all these sort of other things that you want, and that's really the argument that Cosby's making right now.

But—the--I was trying to juxtapose the argument about Cosby, some people thinking he went over the top mocking people's names, talking about the effect of gangster rap, talking about violence in the streets, unwed mothers, fathers not being in the home, but even in your other writing, in the blogs I've been reading that you've been writing on your website, you—in one website, in one blog you talked about growing up in Baltimore at the—the death of gangster, I think what the the blog was about. And you talk about your own struggles with those who were like, the gangster rappers, ones who—those who—the young new thugs in the street, and you were a very different kind of young man, you weren't that way, and how tough it was for you, and about how the growth of—of families, in your own world, around you—not your home, but I mean, in the neighborhood, of absent fathers was growing even as you were growing up.

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Yeah, yeah, and you know I definitely sort of feel those same issues. I guess, you know, as I said in Atlantic, I mean, this thing is so deep I mean, I got into an argument with my Dad about it.

He told me that. He said you two argued about this point. He was telling me that.

Oh, yeah. I mean, to this very day. We're still on, you know, probably two different places on this. You know, and that's a good thing. You know, I mean, I think that was sort of how it should be. You know, I don't think he would want me to be an automaton, you know, mindlessly following after him.

No, and your father Paul Coates, he would not want you to be an automaton.

No, no, no. And he's never been anyone's automaton, no, no.

Amen to that. That's right.

That's not going to happen. But—I have a great degree of emotional sympathy for that argument. My question is—and always, you know, probably will be—and I've been saying about this, you know, as this election season is, you know, going forward, how much of this is structural? Like, how much of this has to do with the fact that we simply have not, you know, closed the wealth gap between the African American community and you know, the broader country? That that still remains, and that, you know, the very concrete efforts that were taken, you know, in the past, to restrict African American wealth, because when you don't have wealth, obviously, you know, you don't have the same sort of safety net, there are certain things that you just aren't able to do. And they have a very real world impact, you know. You know, a very real world impact on people's lives.

Well, in—in your essay that you wrote for *Nation* magazine, where you critique Shelby Steele's book on Barack Obama, you come up with a term, maybe it's not your term, but it's—but I read it in your piece. Civil Rights Industrial Complex—CRIC.

Yeah, I can't take credit for that.

Okay, but that—that's so—talk a bit about—I mean, I'm gonna kind of—just try and bring these two things together. When you talk about the civil rights industrial complex—industrial complex, which is the old civil rights leaders and that mentality from the 50s and 60s. And where it fits in in 2008. You take that piece, those people, think about your Dad, a leader of the

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Black Panthers in the 60s here in Baltimore, Paul Coates. And founder of his own small business, which is really successful, now, Black Classic Press. And you look at—they're from the same generation. And you look at where—how those two critiques of America may be the same or different and how that plays out in your, kind of overall view of where Black America is now, because you—I'm just very curious about that.

Yeah, you know, and I was saying that at a very early point. And I, you know, when I was writing a book, I talked to, you know, my Dad about this. He pretty much withdrew from that. You know, so he's of the same, you know, generation. I would not put him in that sort of CRIC. I think—one of the things that happened with my Dad, and he can probably speak on this is very early on, how shall I say it? I think he lost faith in the idea of protest. And again, this is where my sort of—you know emotional sympathies, I mean, this is how I was raised, you know, lie again with that sort of Booker T argument. I mean, my Dad coming out of the Panther party, his basic critique of the whole movement was, you know, a complete lack of economic power, a complete lack of, you know, decision making and ability to disseminate information. And that, you know, directly lead him to Black Classic Press. I always saw my Dad as—what is the word? Pro-active is the word I'm looking for. Yes. I always saw my Dadas pro-active in terms of African America. I think one of the big problems with CRIC—the Civil Rights Industrial Complex—is that it's pretty much, you know, I guess, one of the many problems, but that it's reactive. That, you know, it's always asking somebody for something. And not even, you know, like substantial policy things. Often things like—you know, whether somebody can fly a flag over a statehouse, you know. And I remember when a lot of this stuff was going on and I was coming up in Baltimore and I was thinking—and as I said in the book, this is in the midst of crack and HIV and I'm thinking, "What in the world does this have to do with me?" Like, what—how is this going to make my school any safer? You know, and I think, you know, one of the things my Dad recognized, you know, very early on, and I've—it's one of the great lessons I've taken from him is that we've got to be much more pro-active.

So—what—I wonder where you think we are, then. I mean, when I was looking at *The Nation* piece, which I thought was really well done, I actually must say I laughed out loud at a couple of places—as you were [laughs] as you wrote it, but you—you write about Obama in a very different way. But—let me start—let me start outside the article here. With this quote that came out the other day, that everyone at the moment is talking about. And I'm gonna just read you the quote, because I don't have—we don't have the, the clip right here. Hillary Clinton: "I have a much broader base to build a winning coalition on." It "found how Senator Obama's support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans, is weakening again, and how whites in both states who had not completed college were supporting me. There's an emerging pattern here."

Yeah. Yeah, it is. That's disappointing. It's greatly disappointing. I don't think it ultimately matters, I mean, I'm one of these people who think the race has been over since February. So I mean, I think, you know, when he racked up those eleven victories, I mean, that was basically it. And, you know, they certainly—you know, people have saw—you know, saw racism and race baiting that maybe I didn't see. You know, racism and race baiting, it's hard, you know, to argue that when she equates white Americans with hard working Americans, as though no one else is hard working, that that isn't race baiting. It's quite sad, though, that the—to see somebody go out like that, because, you know, I must say, I think it's pretty much over. I really, really do.

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But what do you think of the—of what the essence of that is saying? I mean, when you talk in your piece about what you think Obama represents, and we're going to come to that in just a minute, how his representation is different than what most people will realize?

Oh, it's playing into the caricature of Black America, and how that relates to Obama, and this is—you know, in terms of symbolism why I've been such a shill for Barack Obama, is I think he really reveals the complexity of Black America. When he first thought of running, you know, even though he's always, you know, said, you know, quite loudly and I think proudly, he's a biracial black man, and first thing he's not really black, and what that has to do with is that Barack Obama's story is so complicated, has so many twists and turns, if I can just speak broadly—white mainstream media thinks that they know what Black America is, even though most of these folks probably can't remember the last time they sat down to dinner with a black family, as I say in the piece.

Right.

You know, they think they have a beat on what Black America is, and a lot of that is [laughs] based on stereotypes, it's based on, you know, talking to the same people over and over again, who are highly quotable, and Barack Obama was just so different, and his story was so, so different—and yet, in him, and this is what I talk about in *Nation's* piece—I saw a lot of myself, I saw a lot of the young people who I went to school with at Howard University, specifically, I—to me, he embodies the great, great complexity that is within the African American community, and specifically, where we're at at this moment, right now. A moment when I think a lot of African Americans are concerned about really practical things. The economy, jobs, health care, the war in Iraq. I think those are the sort of issues that we're really concerned about. It's not to say that, you know, other more explicit sensational issues aren't on our minds, too, but I think, as I said in the piece if you stop any brother and sister, you know on Lennox Avenue up here in Harlem where I live, or you know, on Liberty Heights, down there in Baltimore, I think—and you said, well, what are you concerned about? You know, I think that they would list very similar things to what the broader country is concerned about. And so we're sort of at this great moment, where as an African American, I think one of the things Barack Obama has really recognized is that African American concerns are American concerns. That there are very few things that black people really really, in their hearts, want, that most of America does not want. And I think he's been one of the—the first people to recognize that the broad base of Black America is very similar to—to broader America. And so, to me, again, what's so depressing about that commentary is this sort of idea that White Americans are the heart of America, that that's true America, hard working, you know. I got a post on the blog where I talk about black people can never be working class. There is no such thing, much in the same way that black women can never be women. You know, black people are never working class. So, you know, we apparently don't believe black people even if they are—you know, if they're middle class—clearly all of them got there by affirmative action, you know, if they're poor, or if they're, you know, working, they really aren't working, you know, they're layabouts and so—to sort of go back to that, you know, ancient iconography, you know, from the culture—was just—it's depressing. It's depressing.

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So, how do you, then, take this, make this leap? How do you think America takes this leap when you think about, not that you have all the answers, but nobody does. But when you, when you look at the quote that Hillary Clinton just said, and—realizing that the heart of Black America is as working class is the heart of white America, it really is a working class culture, period—how you bridge that, how you take, how you take what is being separated out here in the Democratic Primary and bring that to a point where people see their commonality because that's what divided the Union movement, it started dividing the Civil Rights movement—it divided almost every movement you can think about in the history of America, race was the dividing line.

Yeah. I guess I'm just optimistic. I don't think so, this time. I just don't, I mean, I don't—my Dad would probably club me, but... [laughter]

Maybe not *club*, but...

I'm—I'm just—I'm terribly optimistic. I really am. You know, he says that's—that's the difference of being young. I really am. I think I'm—and, again, it's one of the things that, you know, I really tried to push him in the Obama piece as a naysayer. I don't think white folks are as bad as we often think they are, and I don't think black folks are as bad as we think they are either. I think—you know, in our hearts is actually great, great, great, great commonality. Especially at this point in time, given what's happening in this country, given how worried people are. I mean, if you look at what happened with the gas tax, which is a sort of classic pander that everybody expected to work, classic demagoguery, and, you know, folks basically said it's a gimmick—I got no time for this, I really got no time for this. I think we're in a good place to be open to the bridging of that sort of gap.

But now, you—in the piece in *The Nation*, let me just stay with this tact for a minute and then we'll go to some other stuff you wrote in *The Nation*—you talk about how Obama is seen as somehow other than black. Like, as you say, the—Christopher Buckley wrote in the *New York Times*—called him the new Tiger Woods of American politics. And William Saletan in *Slate*, you write, says “Obama isn't exactly black.” And—and you even write in the—later in the article about—when you—the young people, you went to Howard with, that they knew a lot of white people while growing up, but the white people around them would be assured that they were not “really” black, or at least were not like “other blacks.” So—that's an element in all of this.

Yeah, it is, and that's a tactic to allow you to be comfortable in your own prejudice. I think that's really—if anything has come out of the sort of association with the term, I write, everybody now agrees Barack Obama's black. [laughter] Don't debate anymore, like, that's what I think. I mean, there were people who thought he would get a you know, a sort of leg up, you know, because he was biracial, because his father was from Kenya. And I never thought, I never—I never thought that's it—you wait, you wait 'til it hits the fan, they're gonna figure it out real quick that he's black. And—the beautiful thing, though, if you accept him as black, you know, then you have to accept certain things about black people. I think, at least subconsciously, on some level you have to accept that maybe you don't know as much as you thought you

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knew. In the media, there's sort of this idea that black folks are just, you know, this mindless army of zombies following whatever Al Sharpton or whoever's, you know, president of Black America at that very moment. You know, what is—you know, black folks to do? And, again, I think one of the great things about this is it really is exposing the complexity. I mean black people really threw a lot of the writers for a loop because if you remember, just about this time last year, they were all printing stories about how black folks weren't gonna support Obama, they didn't think he was black enough. That they were going to support Hillary Clinton. And Shelby Steele was going on TV, and I think in one clip he actually said that Hillary Clinton was somehow blacker than Obama, and—I mean, I thought it was folly then, but you know, it's clearly been exposed no—this is black, people that, you know, can stand up and speak intelligently and be articulate about issues, I mean, I think for the first time, arguably in my lifetime, you know, that the most famous African American in this country is not an entertainer and is not an athlete. It's just a fascinating time.

It is, indeed. It's very different than we've seen, I think ever, in the history of this country. Something people—I think it was in one of your pieces, you said that Barack Obama may be the—the like Fredrick Douglas, biracial, and how the biracial part, you write, you think plays more heavily in the white world than in the black world.

Yeah, I mean I guess—it probably plays to some extent in the black world. I'm not biracial, so I'm—I don't want to minimize anybody experience, you know, with African Americans, because, you know, I bet to some extent it does. You know. And this thing I said in the piece, I think, you know, what white pundits want to do is whenever somebody's biracial and there's credit to be claimed, then suddenly they become "biracial" but—Barack Obama's said this, you know, if he was a notorious criminal, he'd be black. No one would care. You know, the—no one would really, really care. I guess, you know, in some measure, maybe being biracial also helps him, you know, bridge that divide. I've heard that—that I just don't know. I can't really speak on that.

Well you, you do think—say that that whole issue, and I think as you put it in your piece, about him not having a chance to win in Black America, because of who he is, countering people like Mary Andrew Young that you write about, who came out for Hillary, and who questioned in, as you wrote in your piece, the—the blackness of Obama. You said anybody who actually thought he didn't have a chance to win is and was laughable. And you go on to write about Shelby Steele. Which is what—I mean, I think—you use the Shelby Steele book as a, as a kind of good excuse to write about what you want to say about Obama, which is okay! [laughs] But you said Shelby Steele's book, *A Bound Man: Why We Are Excited About Obama And Why He Can't Win*, it's an interesting quote, and I want you to explain this. You write: Steele declines to refit his spectacles for the post-9/11 era, and instead reaches for the same rusting frames he's been using for almost two decades. "The post-sixties black identity is essentially a totalitarian identity," This is Steele's quote. "It wants to be an activist identity; it wants black protest to be built into each black person's sense of self." Talk about that, the contradiction you see there.

Yeah, I wish. [laughter] What did he say? He wanted it to be an activist identity?

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Yes.

People like me wish that—the African American was an activist identity. You know, I think that's one of those sort of things. You know, a lot of times intellectuals and writers, you know, we don't want the actual people to get in the way of our pieces. And it's very interesting to me that he says the post-1968 Black Identity—as though there's been no changes since then. You know, as though that—that was Black Identity was forged right then, with Black Power, nothing happened after that. And it even assumes that Black Power was that big, and you know, across the floor, not just another—you know, a small groups of activist. You know, obviously not to demean Black Power, I think anybody involved in the movement would say one of the big problems, I mean, is that black folks didn't always buy everything that, you know, was being put out there. I'm saying all that to say I think that actually says more about Shelby Steele than it says about Black America or about Barack Obama. I wasn't born in 19—I wasn't alive in 1968, you know. So, you know, I can't—what that says about Black America and specifically about the people voting for Barack Obama, I mean, it was just so cartoonish. I mean it felt like it came out his head and not out of any kind any sort of actual time around, you know, people who might actually vote for Barack Obama or might not.

Now, you—you, going back to the beginning of what you wrote before I come back to—as we close out a bit here, you wrote about both Barack Obama and his wife Michelle, and you wrote that Michelle Obama—let me read this quote, again, let's talk about for a minute, “is not merely a black woman but a black woman bearing the diction of that particular tribe of overachieving South Side Chicago blacks who, as children, were corrected with old adages like 'ain't is not a word.’” And so, probably it makes me think that may be how you grew up as well. [laughter]

No, it actually isn't how I grew up.

But, but—

And that was sort of the point, you know. Again, you know, I wrote that to just reflect that there are all different ways to come up. You know. I met a lot of black people at Howard—when I went Howard, I met a lot of African Americans and I didn't come up like that. You know, but—there are all sorts of different ways, and there's a particular aesthetic among African Americans on the south side of Chicago that isn't that the same aesthetic in west Baltimore, isn't the same aesthetic up here in Harlem or up—or down in Atlanta. There's—it's a specific thing. You know. There are all different, you know, ways and different lenses that you know, people see being black just like being an American or being any other ethnic identity.

So do you see the Obama campaign as somehow, it seems what your saying, somehow is that he allows the complexity of Black America to come to the fore, and maybe the complexity of

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america to come to the fore. And is that for you a unifying factor, or something that further divides?

Yeah, I think it's a great unifying factor, because I think what comes out of complexity is humanity. You know, I mean that just is the essence of being human. You know. And I think one of the things that racism depends on is a dehumanizing factor, you know. It depends on putting, you know, everybody into a—you know, a box. I mean, that was some really hideous thing about, you know, Shelby Steele's book for me, was that it dropped like, these broad swaths of people. I mean, if black folks agreed as much as he, you know, displayed us as you know, agreeing—I mean, I guess somebody like me would be really happy. But, you know, in reality, that's not true. People bicker, people argue, people dispute, some people see things this way, some people see things another way, and that's what means to be human. That is the essence of being human, originality. And so—one of the—again, one of the great things about Barack Obama is he says yeah, you know, I went to—you know, ivy league law school, you know, my Mom's white, I was raised out in Hawaii, you know, I live on the south side of Chicago, got a black wife, I got—and I'm an African American. All of that is true at the same time, you know, it's not either or. You know, it's not—you know, I went to the ivy league and thus I'm not black. It's not, you know, I was raised in Hawaii so I'm not black. It's not I live in Chicago, so now I'm not American. All of those things can be true at the same time. It's just this great moment of forcing people to deal with the great complexity, you know, the exists within us. And I think—especially in the realm of politics, that's something that people really don't do. You know, people try to get to a specific message. And I guess he's holding on to a specific message too, that being change. That all this represents, you know, change. But people are usually reductionists. I mean, if you look at Hillary Clinton, at one point it was women. You know, at this point, you know, it's—it's white working class older people, it's a very sort of reductionist, narrow cast way of looking at the world. And I think one of the great things about Barack Obama is that it's a broad way of looking at the world. It's a very inclusive blackness, and it's a very inclusive, I guess, Americanness also.

Well, I wonder then, in that spectrum, you talk about several people in this piece, and two of the people you talk about are Shelby Steele, obviously, who—and Al Sharpton. One from the old civil rights era, but—actually, I don't know I want to put Al Sharpton there, but—there, and Shelby Steele, both of whom—for a very conservative thinker—both of whom are held up by the established media as spokespeople that are trotted out all the time to talk about the black world. So how does that fit into this complexity of yours?

I think that Barack Obama is a big threat to both of them. And it's not just Barack Obama, it's people like Barack Obama. A big threat, you know, to both of them, because should the president of the United States be African American, the African American movement to other positions throughout this country. It's not that we don't need people to offer institutional critique, we certainly do. Should Barack Obama became president, I'll be the first to jump up and—I'll even—you know, I'm a writer, so I'm on the outside, I'll immediately begin my critique of his administration. We'll always need that, but at the same time, you know, displaying this sort of complexity. I think that's a full—you know you can't go to one person constantly and say "This is what black folks think." You can't have your one little black friend in media and say, "Oh, this is what black folks think." I mean, people shouldn't even, you know, take what I'm saying. You know, I could be full of myself. You know, you got to go out and actually spend time amongst folks. You know, and get some sort of clues as to where people are. You just can't put, you know, these sort of spokespeople. I want to say that's not just a function of race, that's a function of how media is right now. I mean, we get, you know, this person or that person and they're supposed to speak for this particular

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group. I think all sorts of cross sections of America can make a very similar argument. Saying, well, I'm, you know, I'm not that. I mean, people look at the political analysts and folks talk about beer tract, wine tract, NASCAR Dads, and I see that stuff and I say, well, I drink beer! I drink wine! [laughter] I mean, I do—where am I? Where am I in that? You got Scott Horsley and like, he's like, either, you know, either you're Dunkin' Donuts or you're Star—what does that, what does that mean? You know? How is that, you know, demonstrative of what this country actually is? A very reductive, dehumanizing sort of thing that happens there, and again I think, you know, one of the great things about the Obama candidacy is that it appeals to our complexity, it appeals to our humanity, it doesn't appeal to our smallness.

Let me talk about how you close this piece that you wrote for *The Nation*. And with two other quotes from your piece, if that's okay. You write this writing about Obama, you write: He is positing—"What he is positing is blackness as a valid ethnic identity with its own particular folkways and yet still existing within the broader American continuum." And then you close the article, in a more general way, saying, "Our forebears, God bless them, held blackness like an albatross, which they sought to affix around the neck of white America. But this generation, Obama's generation, holds blackness like a garland, sure in the knowledge that the only neck it belongs around is our own." Let's—

Yeah, that's probably a bit of a reductive description by me of people that are older than me.

[laughs] I figured that was part of it, but...

Yeah, that's probably a bit of an overstatement. We can't..

So let's talk about what these two things mean to you, though. What it—I mean, starting with the identity question, I mean—that you have this great piece, where you talk about Joe Lieberman is not thought post-Jewish American, Mel Martinez is not post-Cuban American, and that post-racialism that they put on Obama and how you're talking about—he's creating a new valid ethnic identity, that maybe brings more to America. What it—talk about that.

Yeah, I mean, again that just has to do with—people's desire to not deal with, again, as I said, the sort of complexity of black people. You know, no one has to say "post-Jewish" for Joe Lieberman because it's our, it's all—you know, already accepted that Jewish can mean five, ten different things. You know, no one has to say "post-Cuban American" to Mel Martinez, because, you know, his humanity is accepted. It's fine, it's okay. But black humanity has always, I think, been a problem. So that's—that sort of post-black or post-racial idea comes from and—I don't know maybe I'm seeing threat where it's not, but—but that's what I read in that. In terms of that generational thing, I do think that, you know, even though that's probably an overstatement in that piece, I do think that there's a difference. I think that people of my generation are much more likely to have broader group ethnically of friends than people of—of an older generation,

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and so I think because of that, you know, there were certain ways of looking at race, you know. I took from my upbringing, even though, you know, I—I, you know, living in west Baltimore, I really didn't have too many white people around me. You know, I took, you know, great pride in who I was, you know, being how I was raised and everything—and in being Black. And then once I got out into the broader world, I realized that I could still have that pride. I could be friends with whoever I wanted, but I didn't have to surrender that. You know, I can have both at the same time, that it wasn't, again, one or the other. I could be very happy with being Black. You know, and at the same time, be—you know, very happy knowing whoever I wanted to know. And I think a lot of, you know, we have the luxury of being complicated in a way that I think people before us may not have had. I guess that's what I was trying to get at.

And—so—let me just kind conclude here on some of this complexity, because I was really, I thought a lot about you're last sentence in that piece that you wrote in *The Nation*. That the—the idea that the old generation kind of held blackness for racism, and race like an albatross around the neck. But in many ways, the—that the garland you refer to for your generation seeming was also around the neck, because it was that—it was this sense of pride, like you talk about Cosby and others being race men, that that was—there's a pride there, it wasn't just an albatross. And the other side, this garland is there, on this new generation, I think. Your generation. And that tenures around you, either way, maybe. And—and, but at the same time, maybe, if you look at the heart of the inner city, what racism and dislocations in America is an albatross.

Right.

Do you know what I mean?

Right. No—yeah. I think your right. I'm just gonna submit. [laughter] Sometimes I'm wrong. I mean, I think that probably sounds better than maybe the logic actually works out to be. So I'm just going to submit and say you're right.

But I will tell you, Ta-Nehisi, you're a lovely writer and it's been a real pleasure to spend this time with you here. For the people to hear what you have to say.

Thank you, thank you much.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, the author of the *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and the Unlikely Road to Manhood*. We will be talking to him again about that book along with his father, Paul Coates, who he writes about in that book. And his blogs are at www.ta-nehisi.com. But you can find them all on our website. Ta-Nehisi, thank you so much.

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Thank you.

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-transcript by Judith Lloyd