

## Chapter 5

# Black Bodies in Schools: Dewey's Democratic Provision for Participation Confronts the Challenges of 'Fundamental Plunder'

Sue Ellen Henry and Kathleen Knight Abowitz

### Abstract

In this chapter, we read Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015) against Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) to glean insight into how Deweyan transactionalism can help theorize greater democratic participation for the corporeally disenfranchised, that is, those persons who experience sociocultural and/or political marginalization due to the racialized status of their bodies. We argue that transactionalism carries promise to help interrupt current, systemic practice that negatively reifies Black bodies and reasserts Black bodies as central, full participants in democratic action. An analysis of transactionalism as interpreted from *Democracy and Education* and other Deweyan writings is followed by an analysis of Coates' memoir, *Between the World and Me*, focusing on his experiential understanding of how Black bodies exist in educational institutions. We conclude the chapter with possibilities for an embodied ideal of democracy, and some educational practices that can follow from it.

**Keywords:** Transactionalism; habits; race in education; democratic participation; embodiment; racial privilege

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## Introduction

In this chapter, we read Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* against Dewey's *Democracy and Education* to glean insight into how Deweyan transactionalism might help theorize greater democratic participation for the corporeally disenfranchised, that is, those persons who experience sociocultural and/or political marginalization due to the racialized status of their bodies.

Coates' memoir of an African American man living in twenty-first-century United States of America is cast in the style of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and has become a touchstone text in a time of intense racial tensions in US society. While there is perhaps no time in American history in which racial tensions were absent, the Black Lives Matter movement and other new movements for racial justice in the face of ongoing police brutality of the modern era have made Coates' memoir extraordinarily timely. It has been lauded by critics, well-received by American readers, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and won the National Book Award. Critic James Hamilton calls the book, written in the form of a letter from Coates to his 15-year-old son, 'a love letter written in a moral emergency' (Hamilton, 2015).

Coates tells us how contemporary US democracy looks from the body of a Black man. The democratic ideal – described so reverently in relation to education in *Democracy and Education* – is analysed by Coates with frank disappointment. This juxtaposition presents a unique opportunity for some fresh analysis of Deweyan democratic education. Coates narrates the story of his life, telling of his growing up in urban Baltimore, his college experience at Howard University (a historically Black university in Washington, D.C.) and coming to consciousness as a Black man growing up in a family of Black nationalists, living in context of the so-called American Dream. Coates wrestles openly with democracy's promise, in prose beautifully rendered with equal parts of anger and despair, providing a moving contraposition to Dewey's staid, and largely race-blind analysis.

In this treatment, we will not revisit Dewey's broader scholarly or personal record on race, racial analysis or racism as a corrosive social reality among democratic communities. This analysis has been commendably done by others. Thomas Fallace, most notably, demonstrates that Dewey's views on race around the time he wrote *Democracy and Education* can be best characterized as ethnocentric (2011). Revealing the deeply Darwinian hold over intellectuals like Dewey during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Fallace has shown that

Dewey's thinking reflected the view that other races were deemed socially deficient and not yet evolved. While his later work demonstrated a much more thoroughgoing cultural pluralism, in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey's ideas were less sophisticated. We take Fallace's analysis as a given and a starting point.

In this chapter, we are most interested in bringing Deweyan transactionalism to bear upon Coates' contemporary analysis of racism in the United States. Building on insights from philosophers Shannon Sullivan and Sarah Stitzlein, this chapter argues that transactionalism carries promise in interrupting current, systemic practice that negatively reifies Black bodies and reasserts Black bodies as central, full participants in democratic action. We begin with an analysis of transactionalism as revealed (in an early rendering relative to Dewey's later works on the topic) in *Democracy and Education*, laying out the relevant concepts and perspectives it contains for understanding racism and racialized bodies in US society. We then turn to Coates' text to understand what it means to carry a Black body in a society organized as a nominally democratic state wherein racialized violence thrives. We focus especially on Coates' discussions as they touch upon educational environments, and conclude the chapter with possibilities for an embodied ideal of democracy, and some educational practices that can follow from it.

## Using Dewey's Transactionalism as a Lens for Interpreting Racial Embodiment

The concept of transactionalism in Dewey's philosophy is not fully realized in *Democracy of Education*; it would be over 30 years after that text that his most complete thinking on the subject would be published with Arthur Bentley in *Knowing and the Known* (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). Yet Dewey's notions of both democracy and education in the 1916 text are laden with transactional foundations: with Dewey's naturalistic philosophical assumptions, with his broad and social views of education, with his anti-dualistic philosophical method, in his notion of habits, and with his vision of democracy as associational, social and moral. These foundations, described more fully below, set the stage for bringing *Democracy and Education* into conversation with Coates' analysis of his experiences of racial embodiment in US society.

Dewey's naturalism takes many forms in *Democracy and Education*, starting on the very first page in his description of education as a necessity of life itself – that every living thing uses energy to convert matter



in their environment into means for growth. The organism physically exists in and through its environments in continuous processes of change, growth, conversion of energies and transformation of forms. The human organism exists physically in a larger context of experience: 'customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations' (Dewey, 1916, p. 2). One of these human contexts is the custom, institutions and beliefs about race, racialized identities and racial power.

Dewey's naturalist account of education rejects strong notions of individualism and the atomistic views that have shaped notions of personhood in philosophy and in education (Fesmire, 2015; Garrison et al., 2016). This naturalism enables the text to express racial understandings. As living organisms, persons are fully connected to, act upon and are derived from their environments and social contexts, including the environments which produce 'race' as a powerful construct. This naturalist foundation provides the context for Dewey's broad view of education as a social function, the main component of *Democracy and Education's* argument in the first third of the text. Because educators working in formal education often neglect education's social function by disconnecting subject matter from students' life experiences, in the text Dewey stresses the importance of a proper balance between the formal and informal, incidental and intentional aspects of education in schools. It is through this balance that the three functions of schooling, all social in nature, can be realized: simplifying and ordering the factors of disposition educators wish to develop; purifying and idealizing existing social customs; and creating a wider, better balanced environment through which young people will develop (ibid., p. 22). Too often, schools will reproduce our current social relations rather than purify or idealize social customs. This point is particularly salient with regard to racial relations and customs. Racist constructs, which tend to be narrowed, restrictive views on human possibility, are often simply unreflectively reproduced in schools. Deweyan naturalist notions of the environment as the educational medium can help remind us that racialized habits and dispositions might be intentionally reshaped by educators in schools.

Dewey's naturalist account of growth relies on experiential inquiry, which Dewey develops through disabusing his readers of classic dualisms in epistemological and moral thinking: body versus mind, individual versus community, physical versus emotional and spiritual. In particular, Dewey's notion of mind as a social, embodied concept is particularly useful for thinking through racial identity, power and agency.

In the chapter 'Aims in Education', he says that mind is 'purposeful activity controlled by perception of facts and their relationship to one another' (ibid., p. 103). This concept of mind is active and transactional in its weighing of present conditions to ends in view and present relationships to probable consequences. It has a body, whose experiences in the world propel reflection which can bring intelligence to our actions. Notions of embodied experience, linkages between learning and environments, the importance of formal and informal educational settings and the social functions of schooling towards a wider and better balanced world will all be useful, as we look at Coates' commentary on his schooling years in Baltimore public schools and later at Howard University.

In naturalist accounts of racial learning and social growth, the idea of habit is important. Our racialized performances and relationships are often the product of habit, that is patterns of routinized and often unreflective action. The idea of habits receives focused treatment from Dewey in *Democracy and Education* in chapter 4, 'Education as Growth'. As living organisms, our growth is hinged upon our plasticity, which is our power to 'modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences'; we 'learn to learn' and to adapt to constant changes in circumstance and environment (ibid., pp. 44–45). But we also acquire habits, or efficiencies of doing, which brings 'economic and effective control of the environment' (ibid., p. 46). Habits are embodied intelligences that typically harden into unconscious action and thought, but can be brought to the light of reflective consciousness through the use of mind. In such light, a new habit can become a new site of agency. Drawing from Dewey's analysis of habit, Stitzlein's excellent treatment of racial and gendered performances in schools shows how our performances around racial identities are strongly habituated (Stitzlein, 2008). Racist ideology does indeed exist, but often, for US educators, racism is a product of not so much a set of conscious beliefs but below the level of consciousness: 'this includes shaping the ways in which we habitually enact our own races ... and interact with those who are different from ourselves' (Stitzlein, 2008, p. 3). Race is 'defined and inculcated by habit', requiring educators to carefully consider the unconscious patterns of thinking and acting racially, and creating new conditions for reflecting on and changing the conditions of these school transactions (Stitzlein, 2008, p. 5).

Dewey's naturalism in *Democracy and Education* helps him attack dualisms and develop more embodied-mind concepts like that of habit. This naturalism also provides building blocks for his democratic ideal,



one which envisions democracy not as a formal system but as certain types of human associations meeting two criteria: awareness of 'how numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared' and 'how full and free is the interplay with other forms of association' (Dewey, 1916, p. 89). These criteria point to Dewey's conjoining of social, political and moral aspects of his democratic ideal, and also to his sense that democracy is an experiential process of balancing multiple interests and overlapping social groups – including groups with explicitly or implicitly racial meanings – in constant interplay. The associational and moral meanings of democracy for Dewey are the key contention as we bring Coates' condemnations of US historical foundations of racist plunder to interplay with Dewey's ideas.

### What It Means to Carry a Black Body

Dewey's transactionalist theory provides a useful lens for reflection on persistent challenges of racism and its structural legacies in contemporary society. *Between the World and Me* provides the contemporary student of democracy and education with a narrative account of the Black male body in modern institutions, exposing the ways in which habits surround racial acts to perpetuate legitimized violence against Black bodies. Black Americans are killed at 12 times the rate of people in other developed nations (Silver, 2015). US police officers killed 102 unarmed Black people in 2015, five times the rate of unarmed Whites (*Mapping Police Violence*). The consequence of this violence, in all its overt and symbolic forms, shapes our collective experience of race and democracy. Without full acknowledgement of these enduring structural factors in our democratic practice, there is little chance for social justice. Coates' text serves as a powerful, clear narrative of the current situation and paints in stark relief the stakes we face at this moment.

Ta-Nehisi Coates' account of the Black male body as performed and acted upon in the street and school interprets the experience of Black bodies in public spaces and institutions. Starting from the nested corporeal experience of living with a Black body in the American physical and historical context, Coates' challenge for African Americans is to find authentic ways to live that acknowledge this fraught ontological situation.

Written as a letter from father to son, Coates recounts his experience as a young Black man navigating the streets and public schools of Baltimore, Maryland (USA) in his youth, and later, finding an

intellectual and corporeal home at Howard University. Later chapters explore the case of Coates' friend Prince Carmen Jones, the child of a Black family who rose up from poverty to achieve middle-class comforts, who was killed by police officers in Prince Georges County, Maryland.

Coates challenges the post-racial giddiness of an Obama era with a distinct message about the US mythos. Coates' rich narrative drives his message: that the American 'Dream' mythology papers over the grim reality of the 'fundamental plunder' (Coates, 2015, p. 109) of the White classes over Black citizens, starting with slavery and continuing through state-supported and -sponsored violence on the streets and in schools. This habit of plunder has enormous consequences for Black bodies, as Coates attempts to warn his only son of the hazards that accrue. This history and its contemporary reality for the somatic experience of African Americans echo the literary trope of haunting and displacement, a defining feature of the much modern African American literature penned by figures such as Toni Morrison, James Baldwin and Jean Toomer (Parham, 2009). As such, Coates reinforces the contextualized nature of Black and White relations resulting in the construction of race, but maintains that Blacks 'made ourselves into a people' (Coates, 2015, p. 149) largely through the use of Black bodies to write, educate, dance and love in their own way. Coates explores four particular environments central in shaping his experience of carrying a Black body: his family, the streets of Baltimore, the Baltimore public schools and Howard University.

Growing up in Baltimore was, for Coates,

to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease. The nakedness is not an error, nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear. (Ibid., p. 17)

As such, in his formative years on Baltimore streets, there was a 'constant jeopardy' (ibid., p. 18) that resulted in living with/in a Black body. Indeed, a similar but qualitatively different type of violence was present in his own household, which he maintains was ruled by the belt. Yet his home also gave him the rich world of the written word as a tool for education and liberation. His father was a librarian at Howard University. His mother frequently turned a school punishment into a writing





assignment – a moment he remembers as spurring critical thought about his interactions with others.

When I was in trouble at school (which was quite often) [my mother] would make me write about it. The writing had to answer a series of questions: Why did I feel the need to talk at the same time as my teacher? Why did I not believe that my teacher was entitled to respect? (Ibid., p. 29)

The balance of violent streets and school constraints on the body, with the flights of exploration brought by the written words encouraged in his home, posed a significant contradiction and source of development for Coates' self-concept as a Black man.

Writing in the 1960s, Frantz Fanon makes the same case for how he came to self-understanding as a raced person. While Coates tracks his racial and gender identity development from the point of view of the body, Fanon works from the position of the mind and body. Describing the consequences of racism for his mind, Fanon writes,

... the white man explained to me that, genetically, I represented a stage of development: 'Your properties have been exhausted by us. ... Study our history and you will see how far this fusion has gone.' Then I had the feeling that I was repeating a cycle. My originality had been torn out of me. I wept a long time... (Fanon, 1967, p. 129)

Central to both these experiences is a deep sense of personal isolation, loneliness, fear, separation and seclusion. Rejecting other traditional communities such as the church, Coates' family taught him to turn to careful observation and writing as a way of knowing and coping, both of which serve as foundational practices of 'interrogation, of drawing myself into consciousness' (Coates, 2015, p. 29). This commitment to 'ruthless interrogation', coupled with wide reading of Black writers, led to a central lesson: 'I was not an innocent. ... And feeling that I was as human as anyone, this must be true for other humans' (ibid., pp. 29–30).

Coping physically for Coates required a different use of his body. 'To survive the neighbourhoods and shield my body, I learned another language consisting of a basic complement of head nods and handshakes' (ibid., p. 23). But these tactics failed him in both the streets and school.

As Coates acknowledges, he was trapped by his body: not violent enough for the streets and too violent for school. What was he to do? He used language, at the encouragement of his family, to 'ruthlessly interrogate' his condition. His family's influence as committed readers and thinkers also drew him to the works of Malcolm X and writings of the Black Panther Party. These writings strongly shaped his racial context and helped to restore the Black body he carried with him as a source of power and capacity, rather than a harbinger of fear and loathing. It also called into question the validity of the treatment of the Black body as it had been historically coordinated into the habits of White privilege.

Coates explains how the schools he attended as a boy did not work in the same way as his family's Black pride. The schools were about further curtailing the work of his Black body. 'Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave up your body now. But fail to comprehend the schools and you gave up your body later. I suffered at the hands of both, but I resent the schools more' (ibid., p. 25). Because the schools had the legitimacy of compulsory attendance and societal support for what it meant to 'grow up and be somebody' (ibid., p. 25), its damning power was both concealed and validated. The results for Black bodies is severe: 'To be educated in my Baltimore mostly meant always packing an extra number 2 pencil and working quietly. Educated children walked in single file on the right side of the hallway, raised their hands to use the lavatory, and carried the lavatory pass when en route' (ibid., p. 25). This state-mandated focus on corporeal self-control is particularly instituted today in 'no excuses' charter schools working with large populations of poor and students of colour (Henry, 2014). Such systems work, in Deweyan terms, by separating mind from body and emphasizing corporeal self-control to repress the mind in coordination with the body. Under these circumstances, Black bodies are flagged a priori as problematic, requiring surveillance, heavy control and discipline, thus furthering their corporeal disenfranchisement.

Fortunately, his family's encouragement to read and write about his experience as a means of understanding his Black body led to Coates' matriculation to Howard University. For Coates and many others, Howard is an African American Mecca. Beyond the institutional aspects of Howard which are concerned about all the typical issues in higher education, there is the Mecca quality that Howard cultivates both in its own history and in its Washington, D.C. location (known as a vibrant, historically dominant African American city) for African American citizens. 'The Mecca – the vastness of Black people across



space and time – could be experienced in a twenty-minute walk across campus’ (Coates, 2015, p. 41). At Howard, Coates was able to strongly critique the notion that Black history was inferior because Black bodies were inferior, a notion made real through the history of enslavement and violence against the Black body (ibid., p. 44). Being at Howard provided Coates opportunities to see the trajectories of power that had been part of his own history, resulting in a recalibration of the notion of the Black body.

Contrary to this theory [of inferiority of the Black body and thus Black people], I had Malcolm. I had my mother and father. I had my readings of every issue of *The Source* and *Vibe*. ... Writers Greg Tate, Chairman Mao, dream hampton – barely older than me – were out there creating a new language... This was ... an argument for the weight and beauty of our culture and thus of our bodies. And now each day, out on the Yard, I felt this weight and saw this beauty, not just as a matter of theory but also as a demonstrable fact. And I wanted desperately to communicate this evidence to the world, because I felt ... that the larger culture’s erasure of black beauty was intimately connected to the destruction of black bodies. (Ibid., p. 44)

In pursuit of this claim of Black beauty, Coates follows his family legacy strategy of constructing his own ‘trophy case’ of Black achievers to whom he looked up and wanted to emulate. This approach was critiqued by many of his faculty at Howard; while the culture honoured a deep sense of reverence for the history lost in the ‘amorphous residue of plunder’ (ibid., p. 49), which characterizes Black history and the Black body, through his education, Coates was challenged to recognize the conflicts between his trophy authors around questions of race. For example, what was better, Douglass’s call for integration or Martin Delany’s nationalism?

Such questions bring to the fore the notion of the American ‘Dream’ and its need for continual interrogation. Coates maintains that the ‘Dream’ is a fantasy perpetuated by the habits of White privilege, ensnaring marginalized people into its contradictory message of value through personal achievement and the ignorance of structures that impede individual capacity to gain ‘value’ through these means. In order to cope with these contradictory messages, the Dream traps Black

bodies into internalizing and perpetuating bigotry towards others as a means to personal power in this corrupt system. By building distinct boundaries between the interests of marginalized populations rather than alliances, ‘hate gives identity’ (ibid., p. 60).

In response, Coates advises his son to aim towards allegiance and alliance-building, standing together with others and supporting ‘their’ causes, with the aim to interrupt the corruption by seeing the mutuality of interests among those who share in their marginal corporeal experience. Coates emphasizes that it’s not worth it to wait on ‘Dreamers’ – those advantaged by White privilege – to awaken to the recognition of their Whiteness and all that this White privilege has ‘done to the world’ (ibid., p. 146). Instead, it is essential to focus on the collective inherent in the Black body, through the shared experience of living with a marginalized, victimized body, and to see this position from the power it offers. Reminiscing about a homecoming weekend at Howard, Coates describes the effect of seeing this collective power in the participants, of seeing himself in a community:

And I felt myself disappearing into all of their bodies. The birthmark of damnation faded and I could feel the weight of my arms and hear the heave in my breath... That was a moment, a joyous moment, beyond the Dream – a moment imbued by a power more gorgeous than any voting rights bill... Black power is the dungeon-side view of Monticello – which is to say, the view taken in struggle. (Ibid., pp. 148–149)

Coates reveals here how the collective body–mind becomes the means by which public, social change is made. It requires remembering the power of the past, and not reducing oneself to the present violence of the streets that rule that world.

All the while, Coates is, however, working with eyes wide open. While standing together – allegiance – may be a way forward, Coates is not naive to the threats such a call has for his son who moves in a Black body, viewed through the lens of White privilege as a collective Black body. Chief among the threats to the American ‘Dream’ is the criticism of the police and elected officials. ‘The problem with the police is not that they are fascist pigs but that our country is ruled by majoritarian pigs’ (ibid., p. 79).

Through this analysis, Coates raises our collective consciousness of the body–mind, the ways in which the transactions between bodies–



minds in society work to limit or extend the opportunities for democratic practice. Of particular interest is the juxtaposition between body and mind, education and schooling, identities and interests, habits and artistry, to think and act differently as a democratic body of citizens with desperately unequal access to political, social and institutional power.

### **Working towards Democracy in Education in the Face of 'Plunder'**

In this final section, we sum up how transactional philosophy can bring us insights into how racial embodiments in public spaces and schools can be better understood and engaged. Thus far we have provided Dewey's treatment of transactionalism as he introduces it in *Democracy and Education*: the embodied mind, the social aims of schooling, powerful notions of habit and the associational, moral understandings of the democratic ideal. Coates' memoir shows how his active mind makes sense of life in a Black body, first in the habits of racialized violence and corporeal containment learned in Baltimore streets and schools. Later, Coates reveals the powerful educational possibilities contained in the associational and moral community of diverse bodies at a place like Howard University, in which shared interests and a body/mind working in sync towards chosen ends can yield significant growth. As such, Coates illuminates the tensions those who move with Black bodies face in managing sets of incompatible habits of corporeal violence and corporeal collaboration.

Societies are formed of bodies; bodies populate and bring social forms of consciousness into action. One essential lesson to emerge from the overlay of Coates's description of the lived reality of Black bodies and Dewey's transactionalism is the emerging co-constitutive nature of bodies and societies. Dewey's work describes this fundamental transaction in the early chapters of *Democracy and Education*, and Coates' book thoroughly explores the contemporary realities of raced bodies in social relations. Viewing experience from this position illuminates the body—mind continuum, and offers a critical understanding of the 'fundamental plunder' experienced by Black bodies.

A transactionalist 'body—mind' framework takes aim at the racist critique held by many Whites: that Black bodies are under siege *because* they participate in activities that require social discipline, that is crime, poverty, drugs, resistance to education. Indeed, rather than questioning whether Coates is 'accurate', a transactional position starts from that

the phenomenology of the statement as a given description of another's lived experience, and then goes further to wonder what happens to society and other lived experiences as a result. Transactional inquiry demands a holistic view of how lived experiences and resulting perspectives are intertwined and interrelated. It demands far more than examining our individual intentions as educators, as Coates points out:

It does not matter that the 'intentions' of individual educators were noble. Forget about intentions. What any institution, or its agents, 'intend' for you is secondary. Our world is physical. Learn to play defense — ignore the head and keep your eyes on the body. Very few Americans will directly proclaim that they are in favor of black people being left to the streets. But a very large number of Americans will do all they can to preserve the Dream. No one directly proclaimed that schools were designed to sanctify failure and destruction. But a great number of educators spoke of 'personal responsibility' in a country authored and sustained by a criminal irresponsibility. (Coates, 2015, p. 33)

Further disabling the discourse of 'personal responsibility' and good intentions are transactionalist tools for understanding racialized power. Sullivan (2001) argues that a transactional position raises the important questions of resources and access to power, which then leads into querying habits that sustain barriers associated with these social features. The benefit here is not just that individuals are believed when describing the consequences of living 'across and through' various historically marginalized bodies, though that is certainly one improvement. A more critical benefit is that a transactional point of view has the notion of power at its core. Such an orienting beginning takes direct aim at those discriminatory social habits that serve to manufacture and maintain ingrained, yet unconscious, oppression. Sullivan explores this capacity to expose such a pattern of internalized, habitualized oppression when examining the category of 'disabled' from a transactional frame: 'It has become a question of what different resources do people with different physical conditions need to function effectively, why are resources distributed the way in which they currently are, and who has the authority to make decisions about the distribution of resources' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 24). The power of this example is that it illuminates the different questioning framework that a transactional position asserts: starting first with deep



questioning of social thinking norms that corporeal differences linked with notions of power, which by extension then allows for their possible interruption.

One further advantage of this transactional frame is that it allows a more thoughtful investigation of the habits — corporeal and cognitive — of privilege, and the political, historical and social dynamics associated with these unearned advantages. Applied to racial phenomenology, Coates argues that what makes someone White or Black is their experience, the power dynamics and the associated social habits that influence their existence, not physiognomy:

... race is the child of racism, not the father. ... Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible — this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white. (Coates, 2015, p. 7)

Powerfully here, Coates charts the historical trajectory of the habits of White privilege, and how they are made and remade through the transaction of bodies and society.

It is this set of White privilege habits that creates conditions of ‘fundamental plunder’ for Black bodies. These collective habits endure in individuals as well as in social structures that constitute society. Such racialized habits become unconsciously internalized by individuals and institutionalized, hardened in rituals and routines, encased and then normalized. As Stitzlein analyses in her work, these racialized habits of discrimination and White privilege have deep historical roots and are embedded in corporeal habit. ‘Many historians have studied race in terms of how the body *appears*, but few have studied race in terms of what the body *does*’ (Stitzlein, 2008, p. 32). Instead, utilizing Dewey’s idea of habits and transactionalism, Stitzlein sketches a picture of the making of race and the legitimizing of racial discrimination based, via corporeal habit, on actions and beliefs that become naturalized, the ‘default and seemingly natural ways in which [racial discrimination] acts, moves, and communicates’ (ibid., p. 32). Put simply, ‘habits reproduce the historical meanings of race’ (ibid., p. 32).

Given this analysis, many questions arise. Are we trapped forever in these systems? Are there reasonable ways to disrupt these habits of

mind and body in order to interrupt cycles of oppression? Many authors advance means by which to ‘unlearn’ racism. Many of these approaches work at the individual level first, helping individuals see the embedded stereotypes operating in their mind. Yet working from Dewey’s pragmatic, community focus takes aim at these cycles from a different angle, one that works on the individual mind—body, while insisting on the mind—body at the community level simultaneously. By highlighting the notion of organisms so characteristic of Dewey’s work on democracy, the body is brought into view as a place of action — the verb ‘bodying’ — rather than ‘body’ as a noun. Different from ‘embodying’, ‘bodying’ exposes the views of others’ bodies from the position of dominant bodies. Such a starting position honours Coates’ description of the movement of the Black body and the impact of others’ bodies of others on it, particularly the construction of ‘fundamental plunder’ both historically and corporeally. Utilizing transaction as a means towards understanding ‘the way one interacts with the world and the way one comes into being’ foregrounds the critical understanding of the consequences of racial oppression on Black bodies from the body—mind perspective (ibid., p. 13). As Sullivan writes, ‘to posit a transactional relationship between the physical and mental is to grant the qualitative impact mental life makes upon human existence, but in such a way that understands mental life as an outgrowth of some of the physical world that is organic’ (Sullivan, 2001, p. 27).

Philosophers in the pragmatist tradition continue to explore ways that transactionalism can shape the educational and scholarly work we do with race, racialized thinking and habits. Educators can enable all individuals to gain greater understanding of how their bodily comportment is sustained and sedimented into concealed habits of racialized action (ibid., p. 94). ‘Keep your eyes on the body’, Coates tells us. Ignore, at least for a while, what people will say about racial bodies and differential treatment and ‘responsibility’ or by extension, ‘grit’. Pay attention to what they do to and with your body, he advises. Coates’ narrative reminds us of the powerful ways that the full and free interests and associations of Dewey’s democratic criteria are material and embodied. Critical as he was about unnatural dichotomies that drove thinking into ditches, Dewey reminds us of the contemporary status of the Black body in school understood as an ‘intruder’.

In part bodily activity becomes an intruder. Having nothing, so it is thought, to do with mental activity, it becomes a distraction, an evil to be contended with. For the pupil





has a body, and bring it to school along with his mind. And the body is, of necessity, a wellspring of energy; it has to do something. But its activities, not being utilized in occupation with things which yield significant results, have to be frowned upon. They lead the pupil away from the lesson with which his 'mind' ought to be occupied; they are sources of mischief. The chief source of the 'problem of discipline' in schools is that the teacher has often to spend the larger part of the time in suppressing the bodily activities which take the mind away from its material. A premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest. (Dewey, 1916, p. 141)

Should students resist this sort of treatment, especially Black student bodies, then both physical and mental violence will likely result. In such a system, the only way forward is disembodiment of the mind, so that the simulation of the 'attitudes of intelligent interest' is manifest in mental activity alone. Only the mind is valuable in this situation because the cultural habits, imbued in the Black body, are seen as generating distractions. In this situation, both the see-er and the seen are racialized, but the see-er gets to hide behind schooled notions of 'pro-social values' and 'positive behaviour', as defined by the school.

Embodied inquiry, and inquiry around the status of bodies in any system, however, reveals personal and cultural truths. In this learning, we might achieve more positive freedom, a required condition of working towards democracy as a form of associated action. Such a position on freedom requires a vision of freedom as capacity *to* act, rather than simply freedom from restraint, and as such requires structures that coordinate, facilitate action. Such is the requirement of democracy. Sullivan considers this work, borrowing from Richard Shusterman's 'somaesthetics', as that which integrates 'bodily practices into the discipline of philosophy itself such that trust and wisdom are pursued through somatic experience' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 112). Sullivan states that 'this is a radical task, one that involves a change in philosophy that deeply threatens its tidy distinctions between mind and body, as well as its sense of what counts as "real" philosophy' (ibid., p. 112). Deweyan democratic ideals continue to demand such radical thinking and practices from us, a century into the influence of *Democracy and Education*.

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# **DEWEY AND EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: FIGHTING BACK**

EDITED BY

**RUTH HEILBRONN**

*UCL Institute of Education*

**CHRISTINE DODDINGTON**

*Homerton College, University of Cambridge*

**RUPERT HIGHAM**

*UCL Institute of Education*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

