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The Good, Racist People  
Coates  
Where Do We Go From Here?

Last year I was in Farmington, Missouri for Thanksgiving with my mother's family. The day before Thanksgiving, it is usually just my grandma, grandpa, mom and I out at the farm, preparing food for the next day. My grandpa and I were having our annual potato-peeling contest when one of my second cousins walked in. My grandpa passed his current potato to him and told him to keep going, and that he was going to check on something. When my grandpa returned, we had each grabbed new potatoes, and the race was on. My grandpa immediately said something that evoked a feeling I had never had before. He said something along the lines of "Beat her Brody. You know girls can't beat guys." Or "A girl could never beat a boy. Girls can never win." I don't quite remember what he said exactly because I soon became blinded, first by shock, and then by rage. I promptly beat Brody.

Farmington, Missouri is my view at classic small-town America. There are high-school football games on Friday nights, where graduates of the high-school come to live vicariously through their children by watching them play in the same stadium they originally did, where the old men in town meet at McDonalds every weekday morning at 6am for coffee, and the women's table is one booth over, where family is valued above all else, where education is rudimentary and where people are born, live, and die. People don't leave Farmington. Out of four uncles, four aunts, fourteen cousins, and an endless count of second cousins and extended family members, no one has left Farmington except for my mom.

The weekends that I have gone down to Farmington, which mainly consist of Easter, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, my grandpa has always taken me out to do things with him, just the two of us. We run errands, fix heavy machinery, go hunting, plow snow, ride four-wheelers or dirt bikes, count cattle, make bails of hay, and spend nearly all of our time outside. During the times that we have spent together, I have learned a lot. I can operate a tractor, use a skid loader, change a tire, and skin a squirrel.

One day when we were up to our usual shenanigans, we were sitting in a deer stand and I asked my grandpa how he and grandma met. He was surprised when I asked because, before he told me the story, he mentioned that I was the only grandchild that had ever wanted to know, and there are sixteen of us. At the time, I instantly knew my relationship with my grandpa was special regardless of whether we lived in the same town, whether he came to my softball games, or whether we ever spoke on the phone at all.

I appreciate the times that I have spend with my grandpa because the skills that he has taught me help me stand out from all of the other "city kids" that I've grown up with. If it weren't for him or the farm, I wouldn't be as well rounded, and I wouldn't be as content in the middle of a field in Missouri as I am in the big city of Denver. Even though I didn't necessarily understand him, our relationship was something.

My grandpa, being from Farmington, has a very different outlook on the world from myself. We have different sets of skills, different values, and different levels of education. Since I was raised in Columbia, Missouri, where the University of Missouri is, and went to a private school from kindergarten through senior year, I value information,

education and exploration; my grandpa values family, wide open spaces, and sticking to what he knows. I was also raised in a car dealership, surrounded by adults without filters. Growing up in these places, my opinion (even as a child) has always been respected, valued, and at times, sought out. But, when I'm in Farmington, where children are to be seen and not heard, my voice is minimally appreciated and starkly different from the norms in the community. As I have grown, it has become harder and harder to keep my opinions to myself, which has caused much tension between my grandpa and me.

Why does your father pay for you to go to that fancy private school? So that I can have the education that he didn't. Why are you even going to college? It's such a waste of money. You should just start working at one of your parents' companies. Because I want to continue my education so that I can get a job that I'm passionate about. Why are you moving out of Missouri? The University of Missouri is right in your town, why would you leave when you have a perfectly good university to go to in your town? Because I feel like the next step for me to continue growing is to leave my hometown. I feel like my intellectual and social intelligence wouldn't prosper as much if I stayed at home for college. I wouldn't be living up to my full potential. No, you're just an entitled little rich girl that wants to waste the money her father has worked hard to earn. Why do you have to be so ungrateful? You're so spoiled.

The moment my grandfather insulted my character, I had no response. I just froze. Silent as questions flooded my brain about every aspect of our minimal relationship, I began to wonder if my grandpa had always made comments like these. Perhaps I had been too young to notice, or maybe my ideology had changed, and his reaction to me had changed with it. Regardless, I spent the rest of the trip asking myself frightening questions about my grandpa that shook me to the core. I wanted to know why he had

bothered spending time with me if he believed in the things he said to me and about me; was he pretending to care? I wondered if my grandpa ever knew who I had been, who I was at the time, or the woman that I aspire to be. I questioned if my grandpa actually loved me, because according to my definition of love, love encourages, it doesn't raze. As I struggled to understand, let go of my anger, and to find a level with my thoughts about my grandpa, I made things worse in my mind.

As a spiraled into this cyclical thought process where nothing makes sense in my mind, and nothing is what it seems and where my grandpa doesn't know me or love me, not a soul noticed that something was wrong, that I was acting strange, or that I was upset. I'm someone who wears her heart on her sleeve, so it's obvious when something is bothering me. This lack of acknowledgement caused me even more frustration and extended the questions I had about my grandpa to my entire family on my mom's side. In hindsight, I can recognize the intrinsic fight that I was having; I got to a place where I question everything, I shake myself, and I can't exit my own mind.

When I returned to Columbia from what seemed like the least bearable weekend that I'd ever spent in Farmington, I asked my dad to hold hand targets for me so that I could box my anger out; I punched harder than ever before, and then broke down in tears. I asked my dad the same questions I'd asked myself, told him that I was frustrated with my grandpa and equally frustrated with myself for allowing what he'd said to affect my happiness so much.

After a long talk with my dad, it became clear that I wasn't ever going to reach a conclusion on my own. I tried for the whole weekend to realize what my mistake was, but I only made things worse. My dad showed me that I was trying to seek approval from my

grandpa that I didn't need. Once I realized that not having my grandpa's approval doesn't change my ambitions, character or drive, I was free from the feeling that I had disappointed someone. My grandpa didn't and doesn't know me nearly enough to make the sorts of judgments that he did. He doesn't know what I did for my community, family and school. He doesn't know what an AP exam is, he's never applied to college, and I doubt he's ever written an essay. I was able to forgive my grandpa because he is ignorant to my way of life and the type of life I want to lead as an adult.

I'm not making excuses for my grandpa, I'd be the last member of our family to do that, but for me to move on, I had to let it go. I had to say to myself, "it's not that your grandpa doesn't love you, he just doesn't know you that well." Similarly to how I don't understand the desire to live in the same town one's entire life.

It wasn't until my high school graduation that I saw some of my grandpa's ignorance chip away. At Columbia Independent School, every high-school graduate delivers a speech at commencement. After I delivered my speech in front of several hundred people, I saw a change in the way my grandpa looked at me. I know he will never admit it, but I think he finally saw a glimpse of why my education is so important to me and what it had done for me up until that point. He may not be able to ever understand my desire to leave home, go to college or travel the world, and he doesn't have to understand or approve for me to continue to dream big, travel and learn.