

# Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

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## An open poem to my non-black friends

Rodney Coates

Rodney D. Coates, born in East St. Louis, Ill., received his B.A. from Southern Illinois University, a M.A. in sociology and anthropology from the University of Illinois, a second M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago. He holds the rank of professor of sociology, social justice and gerontology and is the interim director of Black World Studies. Dr. Coates specializes in the study of race and ethnic relations, inequality, critical race theory, and social justice. He serves on the editorial boards of the *Critical Sociology*, *Social Problems*, *American Behavioral Scientists*, and *Race, Class and Gender*. Coates is the recipient of several national and university awards. In 2010, Coates received the Sociologist without borders Edward Said award for his scholarship and activism. In 2013, Coates was awarded the Global Teaching and Learning Award for his path breaking course that linked Miami students with students from 18 different countries in a course on Globalization, Social Justice and Human Rights. He was honored with the 2014 Founder's Award for Scholarship and Service from the American Sociological Association. And this past September, Miami University awarded Coates with the Distinguished Teaching Award.

**An open poem to my non-black friends**

I want neither your guilt nor your sympathy,  
Neither your empathy nor your understanding.  
Let us not rehearse your condescension  
As you attempt to feel my pain  
Let's not pretend that you would trade places  
Even if you could.

No, I am not pissed at you  
Nor am I looking for you to make amends  
Forget all the platitudes  
And the attempts at rectitude  
Let's not interrogate this moment  
Again –as you pretend that it just couldn't happen.

I want you to be pissed off  
I want you to raise the roof  
I want you to want to break something  
I want you to stand in the middle of the street  
And shout –damn right, never again.

Then and only then, will you get it  
Will you understand, that pity and sympathy  
Empathy and understanding, condescension  
And platitudes - do nothing but pour salt on  
Open wounds, oil on deadly fires, and kick dirt  
Onto my grave....my dear, non-black friend,  
Then you will truly understand.