

Explaining Generational Racism Through the Life of Beauregard Montage

Everyone knows that life is not easy, and it can feel like everything is against us, but when it starts to affect our family, there is not anything that we would not do. For Beauregard Montage, the main character in *Blacktop Wasteland*, by S.A. Cosby, there are no options. The bank is pressuring him, his mom needs money to live, the business is failing, the kids need everything to succeed in life, and his semi-illegal hobby of street racing is not paying off. Beauregard did what he felt he had to do to protect his family, that he was born into this kind of life, and that is all anyone sees him as, a criminal.

In Beauregard's eyes, he has no choice but to live the life of a get-away driving criminal. Life is suffocating him with payments and the desire to get his kids out of the life he used to live. When he got offered this job by Ronnie "fucking" Sessions (nickname given by Beauregard to explain his greed and foolishness), he was skeptical, but as he explained to his wife, "We don't have any choice. We right behind it. If this is legit it might give us some breathing room"(99). The need to always catch up is a lower-class cycle people try to be honest and follow the law, but sometimes, there is nothing else to do in their eyes. Often, many African Americans can not get out of this cycle because a long time ago, that is where they started. After the revolutionary war, African Americans did not have the best jobs, so sometimes that would not suffice, they would have to find other ways to make things work. This continued and became more apparent during the war on drugs and still is continuing today. Of course, this cycle is not exclusive to African Americans. Caucasians, like Sessions, can also get into this trap.

The difference between Ronnie Sessions and Beauregard Montage is there is a history of unconscious bias. Beauregard best put it when telling his son, "Listen, when you're a black man

in America you live with the weight of people's low expectations on your back every day. They can crush you right down to the goddamn ground. Think about it like it's a race. Everybody else has a head start and you dragging those low expectations behind you. Choices give you freedom from those expectations" (183). Beaugard shows his son that his consequence has more weight on their future than most people because they have "the weight of people's low expectations on your back" (183). On top of that, Beaugard wants a better future for his family and lineage. He knows that it is unlikely for his family to one day be upper class, but it takes one generation after another. It is more like a relay race; if someone already has a lead, your goal is to run your best and fastest race, so when you pass on the baton, your member will be closer. To have a good race, the choices you make will determine your speed, and with more good decisions, the more freedom you will get.

Sadly, Beaugard Montage did not have an excellent start to his life. His father, like him, was a fantastic get-away driver. This leads to, like Beaugard, unfortunate situations which made them both have to leave their families for a while. Beaugard remembered what his uncle Boonie said "About how he wasn't like his father. That's what he liked to believe. That they were completely different. In some respects that was true. No matter how intense the pressure got, he didn't run out on his family or his friends. He wasn't Anthony Montage. [...] If he wasn't like his Daddy, why did he miss the Life?" As the book goes on, he convinces himself that like his father, he misses the life so much that "It's a fucking curse, is what it is" (302), that can not break. His family is what saves him. Montage's may be cursed, but he can get out of this generational crisis and help his family by staying alive and being a part of his family.

Beaugard Montage wanted to do what was best for his family, but he did not know what that was. He thought it was money, but when that did not seem realistic, he believed that he

deserved to die that would not help his family but contribute to the cycle of poverty. So before you judge someone, look at their life situation and their history as a race and understand what they are going through.