
BLACK AMERICANS' VIOLENT STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES: A SCRUTINY OF STEPHEN COONTS'S UNDER SIEGE**MANKOU Paul Marie and N'ZAMBI-MIKOULOU Donald**

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ABSTRACT

The examination of Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege* has enabled us to discover that Aldana and his black fellows are the first characters who organize a violent struggle against racism in the United States in order to achieve their civil rights denied to them for years by their white counterparts because of their black skin color. They, for example, start bombing on Whites' stores and killing even white American authorities who refuse to see them as full American citizens. Unfortunately, this violence which gives to the author's text the form of a historical book does not provide them with their needs. For, many of them are caught, punished, and killed under the white American authorities' order. Such is the case of Aldana who is persecuted several times and tortured mercilessly by Whites for his committed crimes as a way for the latter to give a lesson to all Blacks in case of disobedience. This black character's violence which also results in the spread of drug in all the spheres of the United States urges white American authorities to fight against drug business in this powerful nation.

Keywords: Blacks, Whites, Racism, Violent Struggle, Drug business.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines black Americans' fight against racism in the United States in Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege*. Published in 1991, this novel tells the story of a young black man named Chano Aldana, who, after being tired of enduring the American Government's racist system, works with some black gangsters to integrate the American society that rejects them because of their blackness. Our choice of Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege* for this research work is justified by the author's portrayal of Blacks' violence against Whites due to their rejection and victimization by the latter, as a form of their integration in the United States. Linn Fayette who first scrutinized it, considers it as "*a fratricidal war between Blacks and Whites because of the latter's hatred and injustice in the United States*".¹ This quotation evidences that Steven Coonts's *Under Siege* is a reverberating cry for racial redress strongly objected by Whites who consider their black peers as foreigners on the American soil. Such a wrongful consideration which makes Blacks feel inferior to all Whites in American society urges us to concentrate on the answer to the following question: To what extent is Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege* the reconstruction of black Americans' violent struggle against racism in the United States? We hypothesize that Aldana and his black fellows' challenge against the white man's system attests of the author's contextualization of social conflicts which bring about violence in this great nation.

Being conscious of the fact that the novel studied is linked to the history of Blacks in the United States and to their minds wounded by the treatment inflicted on them by their white peers because of their blackness, we find it necessary to resort to the new historicism, the sociological and psychological approaches to conduct the above hypothesis. The new

historicism helps us examine some points of history incorporated by Stephen Coonts into his novel, for according to Greenblatt and Gallagher “*New Historicism evaluates how the work is influenced by the time in which it was produced*” (Greenblatt and Gallagher: 2015 ,119). This quotation shows that the new historicism consists in establishing the intertwining between history and fiction within a given work of literature, as Foster states: “*In the novel, we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life*” (Foster: 1962, 70). The sociological approach enables us to examine the relationship between Whites and Blacks in the United States as portrayed in *Under Siege*, for “*art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community*” (Krutch, quoted by Wilbur: 1962, 123). The psychological approach, however, helps us analyze the wounds that black characters have in their minds because of the white man’s wrong view over them, for according to Scott Wilbur, “*psychology can be used to explain fictitious characters*” (Wilbur, *ibid.*, 71-72).

Four main points are examined in this paper. The first is black characters’ violent struggle against racism. The second refers to their persecutions and arrests by Whites because of their cruel acts and blackness. The third deals with their recurrent death viewed as the consequence of their violent struggle. The last tackles the American government’s struggle against drug business which is regarded as one of the causes of criminality in the United States.

1.1. Black characters’ violent struggle against racism

Stephen Coonts’s *Under Siege* begins with the description of violence implied by characters called snipers or terrorists. One of these snipers is a black male character named Charon who, after being recruited by the drug businessman, Chano Aldana, receives an amount of money for his job as a killer. Thanks to this money, he also recruits other professional killers like Tasson who, in making the list of the people to kill, starts with the President of the United States: “*Bush was merely the first name on the list. The other five, they would have to be killed after presidential hit*” (US, p. 69). This quotation evidences not only Tasson’s readiness to kill the Head of the White House, but more that of all Blacks who are fed up with the white man’s racist system. What Tasson means is that Bush is the source of Blacks’ suffering in the United States, for he does not make his people respect the fundamental principles of the American democracy, which state that all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

George Bush is viewed by Blacks as the root of evil in the United States. It is indeed with regard to this view that Tasson is determined to shorten his life so as to free not only himself, but more all his black fellows who are victims of discrimination in this land of “democracy”: “*If Tasson just wanted George Bush assassinated, that would be a large enough challenge to satisfy anyone*” (US, p. 69). Through this quotation, Coonts draws the reader back to the history of the United States, for one knows that George Bush is an actual personality who was hated by some Americans because of his position as the Head of the White House. His portrayal of Chano Aldana as the embodiment of cruel acts gives to *Under Siege* the image of a tragic novel which shows Blacks’ anger against the white man’s evil. This black male character is presented as a menace to the peace and liberty enjoyed by white Americans because of his capacity and courage to tell them the truth:

I am Chano Aldana; he said with a noticeable Spanish accent. I am your worst nightmare come to life. I am the faceless, starving masses whom you refused food. I am the slave you delivered in chains to merciless altar of the moneylenders. I am the sick you refused to heal. I am the beggar you turned

away from the feast. To me has been given the key to the bottomless pit. And I have opened it (US, p. 85).

In this passage, the author informs the reader about the past of black people in the United States, for Aldana's recognition of his being a slave, a faceless and starving person attests of all Blacks' reality during slavery in this great nation. His anger here is that of a former slave who does not understand why the country he belongs to continues to reject and victimize him after his emancipation. This victimization urges him to order his gangs to kill Whites mercilessly: "*Sixteen people in the room were dead and seventeen wounded. Only three people escaped without bullet wounds*" (US, p. 87). What is worth knowing is that most of these gangs are black individuals who are trained to kill people. Aldana who is their leader believes in violence against white authorities in order to get his black sisters and brothers out of suffering in American society. His leadership in this fight differs from that of Martin Luther King who extolled a non-violent struggle for the achievement of Blacks' freedom and equality in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as evidenced by John Calvin Marshall, the double of King, in Julius Lester's *And All Our Wounds Forgiven: "Freedom can come only when we forgive the wounds inflicted on us by other"* (Lester: 1994, 56). While Marshall relies on forgiveness for the full integration of Blacks in the United States, Aldana in *Under Siege*, however, encourages his gangs to shoot on Whites as a way to reject the inferior position they occupy in this nation: "*These maniacs are murdering each other with guns*" (US, p.13). This quotation evidences not only the presence of violence in the streets of Washington, but more the killing of white Americans by black gangsters who are determined to integrate the American society by any means necessary.

When the narrator, for example, explains that "*the crime remained unsolved*" (US, p. 32), he shows the incapacity of white American authorities to solve this racial conflict which is the cause of their white citizens' death. This incapacity urges Blacks to put the country into an artificial disaster under Aldana's leadership: "*Referees and star players on rival teams had been assassinated on his order*" (US, p. 33). In this quotation, "referees" and "star players" are white Americans who are murdered by Aldana's black gangsters. For the latter, these referees and star players constitute a menace to their life in the United States, because they never share their pain, as confessed by the narrator in Julius Lester's *And All Our Wounds Forgiven: "White people don't share Blacks' pain, they don't want to share it, they don't want to even know about it"* (Lester: 1994, 136). Seeing this lifestyle, some Blacks would prefer death to life, as Frederick Douglass, a former black slave argues: "*For my part, I should prefer death to hopeless bondage*" (Douglass: 1845, 124). In Coonts's *Under Siege*, Aldana is pictured as one of black characters who share this preference, for despite his awareness of the danger he runs when killing his white counterparts, he never gives up this type of civil rights struggle which gives to the country the image of a battlefield. This means that in *Under Siege*, the position of second zone citizens given to Blacks by their white peers is the cause of racial conflicts which result in recurrent killings: "*I hope to God you lose and this man pays for his crimes. He has murdered and assassinated and bribed and done God knows what-all and he must be put somewhere so he can't keep hurting innocent people. Thousands of innocent people*" (US, p. 99). This quotation shows that Aldana who is the embodiment of Blacks' violence against Whites because of the latter's wrong view over them is responsible for the mourning events observed in the United States. His cruel acts are viewed not only as a form of fight against this nation's racist system, but more as a proof of Blacks' endeavors to integrate it by force with the color of their skin. In the passage below, for instance, the author continues to show how Aldana is determined not only to kill Whites, but more to destroy the United States with the use of bombs:

A vicious enemy of the law-and-order forces battling the cartels for control of Colombia, he had ordered airlines and department stores bombed, judges murdered, and policemen tortured. Yet this monster had a human side: he liked soccer and controlled several teams in the central Colombian league (US, p. 113).

One sees how Aldana is presented by the author as the enemy of white American authorities, for he is the one who calls into question some laws of the American Government which prevent them from enjoying the full fruition of life in the United States. This prevention urges him not only to kill judges and torture policemen who encourage injustice, but more to bomb airlines and department stores as a way to express his discontent with regard to the wrongs of his white peers over Blacks: *"This man could order the murder of hundreds of people. He could kill them himself"* (US, p. 118). Such a violent struggle portrayed in *Under Siege* is far from being from the author's personal imagination, because in *Invisible Man*, too, one sees how Ralph Ellison describes it through Tod Clifton, a black male character who, being faced to the refusal and resistance of Whites to accept Blacks as true American citizens, starts beating his white sisters and brothers to express his disenchantment about segregation: *"But you see, there was a rally and some hoodlums tried to break up the meeting, and in the fighting brother Tod Clifton got holt to one of the white brothers by mistake and was beating him; thought he was one of the hoodlums, he said"* (Ellison: 1952, 381). Through this quotation, Ellison demonstrates Blacks' anger against their white counterparts who always take them for granted. Such an attitude of Whites towards Blacks is what pushes Told Clifton to beat this white character in a very cruel way without knowing his social belonging. The narrator's expression "by mistake" recalls the reader of some white Americans' engagement in the Blacks' side to ban segregation and discrimination in the American society. Unfortunately, this engagement is sometimes objected by some Blacks who no longer rely on their allies because of their wrong view over them. That is why in the need to avenge their ancestors and to observe justice in all the spheres of the United States, they do not hesitate to beat any white American who dares to stand before them, be him ally or opponent, as N'zambi-Mikoulou confesses it in these terms: *"This fight for justice in the United States is thus seen as an opportunity for Blacks to avenge their black brothers and sisters dead in the battlefields"* (N'zambi-Mikoulou: 2020, 56).

In *Under Siege*, Coonts illustrates this revenge through Aldana, a strong-black character who calls for violence and organizes attacks in different cities of the United States. His attacks urge other characters like Jack Yocke to compare him to the German Adolph Hitler: *"By all accounts Aldana was an amazing man, a Latin Capone with several of Hitler's worst traits thrown in for seasoning"* (US, p. 113). This quotation attests of the author's incorporation of actual historical facts into his work of fiction, for one knows that Hitler was a powerful German Sergeant who killed many people during the Second World War. The reference to such a historical personality shows that in writing *Under Siege*, Coonts was deeply inspired by the history of Germany and the United States during the wartime. Aldana's criminality which intertwines with that of Hitler is nowhere more evident than in the passage where he orders the killing of the presidential candidate of Colombia: *"Rumors had it he had personally executed over two dozen men and had ordered the murders of hundreds more by name, including candidate for president of Colombia"* (US, p. 113). This character's engagement in the murder of his white counterparts attests of his rancor against the American Government which refuses to see Blacks enjoy the full fruition of its democracy and be judged according to the content of their knowledge, regardless of the color of their skin.

The theme of Blacks' violent struggle against racism in the United States is so excessive that in the passage below, one sees how Coonts continues to account for it through Aldana who holds armies of hired killers: "*He's instance and has armies of hired killers that have murdered hundreds of politicians, and police in Colombia. They have blown up airlines, bombed department stores and newspapers, and assassinated dozens of journalists who refused to be quiet*" (US, p. 87). As it can be seen, the author through this quotation shows how Aldana rejects Martin Luther King's philosophy of nonviolence to shift to violence. He relies on the motto stating that "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" extolled by some emblematic figures of the Civil Rights Movement like Malcolm X. The application of this motto by Aldana and his gangsters is a way not only to fight for Blacks' freedom in the United States, but more to prove Whites that Blacks also represent a force capable of challenging them with violent strategies. The narrator's utterance "*They don't care who they kill*" (US, p. 87) shows that Blacks who have long been disciplined and nonviolent in the struggle for democracy on the American soil, are now fed up with this attitude and find it better to respond to the white man's violence with violence. That is why the remembrance of Blacks' plight caused by the white man's racist system is, for Aldana, a great stimulus to fight back Whites. For him, any attempt of these Whites to insult or give a bad name to a Black is likely to bring about fighting, for he is no longer ready to accept such humiliations from them.

The novel reads that in the process of social integration, Blacks shift to more damageable deeds. They assemble themselves in the streets in huge groups to cause sorrow, and spread their rage to classify glasses of shops and stores, rendering the selling impossible while causing an economic decrease to the Whites' affairs. Some Blacks become fully armed and exchange shootings with the white policemen: "*Young males in streets gangs-black males, by definition in the inner city-began breaking windows and looting stores, and when soldiers showed up, they threw rocks and bottles and everything else they could readily lay their hands on*" (US, p. 561). What Stephen Coonts demonstrates here is Blacks' sabotage to prove their discontent about racial discrimination in the United States. Their violence which is not limited to the destruction of shops and stores, but continues to be observed with the burning of houses and public administrations is viewed as a way for them "*to force the government to do their will*" (US, p. 391) in this "so-called democratic nation". Such a chaotic atmosphere is illustrated by the narrator as follows:

Along the sidewalk curb were bullet-shaped concrete barricades linked together at the top by a heavy chain. Henry Charon correctly assumed they had been erected to impede truck-bomb terrorists. Similar barricades were erected around the White House gates, to his left and right, down toward the corners (...) They have blown up airlines, bombed department stores and newspapers, and assassinated dozens of journalists who refused to be quiet (US, p. 87).

One sees here how Blacks are really determined to clash the United States down and install an atmosphere of chaos if only their white peers refuse to grant them the rights denied to them for years in this country which gets itself out as a land of freedom and justice, but ends up manipulating its own inhabitants on behalf of the color of the skin. This atmosphere of chaos which is not from the author's invention, but a true fact of history, recalls that of black characters in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

I cut out, man. A building two doors away started to burn and they had to git the fire department (...) Say, look what's coming, he said, pointing, and I looked through the dark to see a squad of white helmeted police charge forward and break for shelter as a rain of bricks showered down from the

building tops. Some of the white helmets, racing for the doorway, turned to fire, and I heard Scofield grunt and go down and I dropped beside him, seeing the red burst of fire and hearing the shrill scream, like an arching dive, curving from above to end in crunching thud in the street (Ellison: 1952, 531-532).

Being aware of the fact that such a violent fight is likely to bring about a heavy loss of human life in the United States, the author accounts for the role played by the American Government in the eradication of these racial conflicts through Aldana and his black fellows' arrestations, as shown in the section below.

1.2. Black characters' persecutions and arrests

In *Under Siege*, Stephen Coonts's portrayal of Aldana's arrest and trial leaves the reader with the impression that this black male character who orders violent attacks against Whites is, to some extent, encouraged and protected by the American Government, for when he is arrested in Colombia for his crimes, one sees how white American authorities reject the proposal made by Colombians for his trial in public. They do their best to take him back to Washington where is judged without the presence of reporters whose wish is to see him jailed and killed:

You can't keep us out, we're the press. I don't give a fuck who you are. The only people who get in are people on the list. The sergeant stabled the sheet of paper on the counter in front of him with a rigid finger. You ain't on it. Now get the hell outta here or we'll find a cell for you. And turn off that fucking spot light. This is America. Read my lips, Asshole! Out (US, p. 82).

The author's mention of this passage is a way not only to portray the black leader's arrest and trial for his committed crimes, but more to evidence the lack of true democracy in the United States. For, one sees how the press is excluded from the court. This exclusion attests of white American authorities' fear to let the truth be discovered by all people around the world. What is true is that Aldana's arrest does not occur at random, for before he is persecuted and caught in Colombia, some white Americans plan not only for the search for him, but more for that of all Blacks who shorten the life of several innocent citizens in the United States. The author illustrates this plan in a very small passage when he writes: "*We know who these people are. We'll find them and arrest them. They will answer for their acts*" (US, p. 584).

The decision to arrest Aldana and his black fellows shows the determination of white American authorities to restore peace viewed as a powerful tool for their country's development: "*We are going to have to guard the public buildings regardless, and as many of the shopping areas as we can find people for. And we can use the troops to search for these Colombians*" (US, p. 391). If the first reason which reinforces the American police officers' determination to persecute Aldana and his gangsters is linked to their crimes committed, the second, however, refers to their blackness on the American soil. It is exactly because of this second reason that in Matt Taibbi's *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*, too, the American police officers find it better to get rid of Eric Garner in the United States by pretending to have caught him with drug. One of his arrests, he argues, while writing a letter to his mother from a jail cell, took place in 2007 in New-York City:

Ave, Heberton stopped me for reasons of their own. I was ordered to my hands on the back SUV in which they were riding in. I complied with no problem. Officer William Owens then patted me down by ways of going through my pockets and socks and not finding anything illegal on my person (Taibbi: 2017, 32).

As it can be seen, Eric Garner's persecution attests not only of his plight as a black person on the American soil, but more of all African Americans who unceasingly endure the white man's racist system. Their aim is, in fact, to remind them of "*their inferior position in a nation that declares itself as a land of democracy, but ends up oppressing its own inhabitants on behalf of the color of the skin*" (N'zambi-Mikoulou: 2021, 69). In Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege*, Aldana and his black fellows' non-acceptance of this inferior position urges them to fight violently for their consideration and recognition as true American citizens. But this violent fight does not bring satisfaction to their lifestyle, for they are persecuted and arrested by the American police: "*Colonel, there is a bunch of people coming down the street (...). Colonel followed the soldier outside. He walked to the gate and looked down the street. Good Lord, the street was filled with people*" (US, p. 582). What the author demonstrates here is the participation of American authorities in the fight against criminality in the United States, for words like "colonel" and "soldier" are taken from the lexicon of the American military force. While the first stands for an officer of a high rank in the Army, the Marines, or the United States' Air Force, the second refers to a low member of this Army who receives and executes orders from his hierarchy.

Stephen Coonts insists on this fight for peace when he refers to white American authorities' eagerness to arrest Aldana and his black brothers because of their committed crimes: "*We have got to find out who is behind this attempted murder and get these people arrested*" (US, p. 372). Through this quotation, the author shows how Aldana and his black peers are viewed by Whites as murderers who have to pay for their cruel acts. It is indeed with regard to these cruel acts that they want to extend the search for them in all the spheres of the United States, as evidenced by the narrator in these terms: "*Looking for terrorists and assassins. We're gonna be everywhere. We will have to cool it for a while, maybe take vacations*" (US, p. 401). This search for black assassins by white Americans recalls the Ku Klux Klan members who used intimidation and violence to achieve their goal of restoring Whites' domination over Blacks in the United States, as explained by Jane, a black female character in Ernest James Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*:

I saw people laying everywhere. All of them was dead or dying, or so broken up they wouldn't ever move on their own... Then I saw Big Laura. She was lying on the ground with her baby still clutched in her arms. I made Ned stay back while I went closer. Even before I knelt down, I saw that her and the baby was both dead (Gaines: 1971, 23).

As it can be seen, the Ku Klux Klan is a group of white people who are highly racist, because they do not accept Blacks as equal to them. They engage themselves in killing not only any black American who desires to organize his life, but more any white man who attempts to help Blacks enjoy their rights of citizenship. While they are persecuted and victimized by Whites after the wartime period because of their blackness, some characters in *Under Siege* are persecuted, caught, punished and tortured by white American soldiers because of their criminality. Such is the case of Aldana who is caught and judged for disturbing peace established in the white man's world. In the following passage, for example, the author shows how Blacks resist to the American police officer's orders while some of them are being arrested: "*Accustomed to these forms of intimidations and eager to fight for justice, black Americans do not go back as the colonel threaten them, but challenge him, as black woman tells go ahead colonel, she said. Tell him to shoot. He can't miss*" (US, p. 584). One understands that Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege* is really the portrayal of racial oppressions endured by black Americans in the United States because of their black skin color, for Coonts demonstrates Blacks' challenge against the white Colonel whose mission is to catch and torture

them mercilessly. This challenge attests of their courage and determination to fight for justice in a country that rejects them. But this fight viewed as a reverberating cry for racial redress is not welcomed by Whites who end up arresting them daily:

The military presence was inexorably rising and would continue to rise until the terrorists were found. If they were here to be found. Score one of the narco-terrorists, Jake Grafton thought. If they have accomplished nothing else, the people inside the beltway were going to get a real taste of military dictatorship (US, p. 526).

In this passage, “terrorists” refer to Aldana and his black gangsters who commit crimes in American society by dint of fighting for the civil rights denied to all Blacks for years for the simple reason that they are black. These cruel acts make the American police persecute, arrest and punish them severely. The author’s account for these terrorists’ persecutions and arrests is so excessive that he continues to demonstrate how Aldana is arrested by the US Army in Colombia: “*It seems that the US Army sent some people to Colombia and they shot it out with Chano Aldana’s bodyguards and arrested him*” (US, p. 189). In arresting Aldana, the US Army shows the superior position that Whites occupy before all Blacks in the United States, for this character’s arrest is for them a way to give a lesson to any black man or woman who may dare to disturb peace established in this great nation. But this lesson is viewed by Blacks as a form of intimidation, for some of them still challenge the white man by throwing rocks and bottles in streets: “*Young males in street gangs-black males, by definition in the inner city began breaking windows and looting stores and when soldiers showed up, they threw rocks and bottles and everything else they could readily lay their hands on*” (US, p. 561).

As it can be seen, the throwing of rocks and bottles by Blacks shows their determination to fight for their American citizenship in the United States which they consider as a heritage left to them by their ancestors. This consideration is therefore what urges them to organize protestations for the liberation of their counterparts who are arrested. They are even helped by some white Americans who object the treatment accorded to them: “*The crowd was mostly black. Some white people, but predominantly black men and women. They ranged from young to fairly elderly. Some of the people were supporting the others*” (US, p. 582). The presence of some Whites in this crowd evidences the latter’s desire to integrate Blacks in American society regardless of their black skin color. It is certainly thanks to this solidarity that the today’s black generations are enjoying the full fruition of the American democracy.

One understands that in *Under Siege*, Stephen Coonts accounts for the theme of black characters’ persecutions and arrests through Aldana and his black gangsters who after fighting violently for their consideration as full American citizens are shocked to find out that violence does not bring satisfaction to their expectation, because the American Government refuses to grant them the civil rights they deserve as human beings for the simple reason that they are black. This refusal which shows the interplay between history and fiction in the author’s novel results in the death of several characters, as evidenced in the section below.

1.3. Black characters’ death

In *Under Siege*, Stephen Coonts accounts for the consequences of Blacks’ violent fight against racism by referring to the latter’s killings by white American soldiers. These permanent killings are viewed as a proof of Whites’ supremacy over the black race. They are killed mercilessly and without any judgement not only because of their crimes committed in the American society, but more because of their blackness which, for Whites, dirties the American nation: “*Inevitably some of the people on the streets were killed by soldiers, most of whom*

were no older than those who were screaming insults at them and hurling rocks” (US, p. 561). This quotation evidences that any violent movement led by human beings on earth is likely to bring about tragedy, for instead of being integrated as full American citizens, one is certainly shocked to see how Blacks are shot dead by white soldiers just like animals in the bush. This tragedy leaves the reader with the impression that in the United States, any Black who dares to claim for his rights, be it peacefully or violently, is often welcomed by violence.

Such a lifestyle endured by Blacks in this “democratic nation” is not from the author’s personal imagination, because in Julius Lester’s *And All Our Wounds Forgiven*, too, one sees how the narrator is mercilessly killed because of his position as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s: *“For Blacks the best among them has been killed by the worst among Whites. Without John Calvin Marshall I wonder if all of us Blacks and Whites, will lose faith that we can ever be better than we are”* (Lester: 1994, 48). In this quotation, Marshall is presented as the double of Martin Luther King whose assassination by Whites left many Blacks in despair with regard to their future in the United States.

In *Under Siege*, Stephen Coonts insists on Blacks’ murders by their white counterparts by giving the exact number of the persons dead and wounded in a particular room: *“Sixteen people in the room were dead and seventeen wounded”* (US, p 36). The novelist’s reference to these numbers is a way not only to account for Blacks’ death during their violent struggle, but more to show the degree of the conflicts existing between Whites and Blacks in the United States. The presence of people wounded in the room shows the violent nature of this attack which leaves the black race in different mourning events. These mourning events largely developed by the novelist in *Under Siege* attest of white Americans’ will to victimize their black counterparts in a country to which they also stand as natives because born and grown up in it. This implies that Blacks are not free in the United States, for Whites reject their claims for integration and prevent them from enjoying the full fruition of the American democracy. This is to say that *“when Abraham Lincoln freed Blacks through the declaration of their Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, many Whites found it difficult to cohabite with them. They did not appreciate the fact of seeing Blacks free”* (N’zambi-Mikoulou: 2021, 74). Consequently, many of them find it better to create a white America by killing all those Blacks who dare to fight against the white man’s racist system. These killings are viewed as a way for Whites to perpetuate Blacks’ enslavement on the American soil. It is indeed with regard to this enslavement that in Matt Taibbi’s *I Can’t Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*, for example, Eric Garner reproduces Annan Ibrahim’s famous utterance *“I can’t breathe”* (...) *“I’m serious. I can’t breathe”* (Taibbi: 2017, 3). One sees how Eric Garner has trouble breathing while being brutalized by the American police officers who refuse to hear his cries.

The brutality of Whites over their black peers evidenced through Eric Garner’s torture in Matt Taibbi’s narrative is as the same as the one observed in *Under Siege* wherein Coonts tells of the killing of three innocent young black children because of the color of their skin: *“The column was an epitaph for three young black men, all of whom had died yesterday on the streets and sidewalks of Washington. All three had apparently been engaged in the Crack trade. All three has been shot to death”* (US, p. 58). Through this quotation, one understands that the United States which is described within its constitution as the land of liberty and equality, is unfortunately portrayed in *Under Siege*, as the greatest purveyor of violence against its own black inhabitants whose complaints to white authorities appear as *“a simple claim for their American citizenship, because they have not met their demands due to their blackness”* (N’zambi-Mikoulou: 2020, 56). The three young black children’s killings which, for Whites, are the results of Blacks’ violent fight for integration, take the reader back to what really

happened to three black men in the United States in 1989, as demonstrated by the historians Hampton Henry and Steve Fayer in *Voices of Freedom*:

Among the best-known incidents were the 1986 attacks on the three black men who found themselves in the predominantly white Howard beach section of queens, New York (one of the victims, Michel Griffith, died), and the 1989 killing of black sixteen-year-old Yusuf Hawkins, who went to a white neighborhood in bookly to answer a classified ad for a used car (Henry & Fayer: 1990, 660).

Through this passage, one understands that Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege* is a depiction of Blacks' history in the United States, for his denunciation of these black Americans' killings by their white counterparts which intertwines with that of Henry and Fayer in *Voices of Freedom*, forms a historical core in his work of fiction. These recurrent killings observed in this great nation are what Martin Luther King calls "a system of a far deeper malady within the American spirit" (King: 1967, 41), which means a daily activity of Whites on their black peers. Similarly, a black soldier in John Oliver Killens's *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, refers to the United States as "the United Snakes of America" (Killens: 1963, 87), for it has no mercy when it comes to killing Blacks.

Aldana's decision to fight for racial redress in the United States through the use of violence is not shared by all Blacks, for some of them still wonder why they have to lose life for his crimes committed. For them, white American authorities should leave them alone and focus their attention on Aldana who is the culprit:

We all admire persistence in the face of adversity, but at some point dogged insistence on observing all the arcane niceties of the law becomes foolhardy. Atrocities, bombings, assassinations- how much do we have to endure here in Northern Colombia? What price in blood and flesh does Dan Quayle think we should pay for Aldana's prosecution? (US, p. 527).

What urges Aldana to engage in the fight against Whites is the latter's promises asserting that they would free Blacks from their enslavement and give them the possibility to belong to America as full American citizens with their dark skin color. The fact of seeing these promises not coming true pushes him and some of his black fellows to lose hope and start challenging the white man in diverse ways. But this challenge results not only in their arrests and killings, but more in that of innocent characters, as evidenced in this quotation: "We're all victims, we all lost somebody, a son, a daughter, wife, maybe even our own souls. We lost because we expected someone to fight the evil for us and we waited and waited and they never did, oh they talked, but..." (US, p. 592).

Stephen Coonts is not the only author who denounces Blacks' killing by Whites in his novel, because other novelists like Ernest James Gaines in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, too, shows how a black man is whipped and killed in the bush by patrollers on his way to Ohio to enjoy freedom and the full fruition of the American democracy: "They came in on horses and mules, and soon as they saw the slow-wit they surrounded him and started beating him with sticks of wood (...). They beat him, he covered up, but they beat him till he was down" (Gaines: 1971, 21). This scene recalls the historical plight of Blacks in the United States that Steve Estes terms "the denigration of the race" (Estes: 2005, 17). That is why one sees that in *Under Siege*, characters like Aldana and his black fellows who react violently to the injustice observed in American society are not only blamed or punished, but killed like wild animals. For Whites, these characters' violent reaction constitutes a nuisance to their life. This

means that Blacks have to pay in blood and flesh for their rebellion which also contributes to the spread of drug business in all the spheres of the United States.

1.4. The American government's struggle against drug business

In Stephen Coonts's *Under Siege*, Blacks' violent struggle for integration leads them to use drug as a stimulus of their courage while challenging their white counterparts. While some of them use it in the battlefield, others use it as a means to earn money thanks to which they feed their respective family. The more they use and sell it throughout the United States, the more it spreads in this part of the world. This spread finally urges the American Government to struggle not only against its use, but more against its selling in all the spheres of this nation. For some white American authorities, the struggle against drug business is a way to put an end to criminality which gangrenes the American society. It is indeed with regard to this opinion that Georges Bush, the American President considers this struggle as his personal challenge. But when he decides to act against drug business, he is shocked to find out that Aldana and some organizations such as Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I) object his decision. For, they believe that prohibiting drug business is a byword for hampering the evolution of these organizations:

I think it's time we called in some of those markers for donations we been making to those senators and congressmen. I was wondering when you might want to do that. Now is when. Putting the DEA and FBI together is not going to help us businessmen (US, p. 289).

This passage is an extra of a dialogue between Jefferson Brody, an American congressman and Mc Nally, a drug dealer in the United States. While George Bush, the head of the White House gives orders to his government to fight strongly against the use and spread of drug because it brings about cruel acts in this nation, these two American personalities find it impossible to do without it. Although they are aware of the fact that drug business is forbidden in their country because of its drawbacks, they do not hesitate to express their discontent to Bush. This discontent urges them to plan an assassination attempt on him which results in the death of four innocent individuals: *"Four people were dead in the wreckage and four were injured, secretary of State and the national security adviser. One of those critically injured was the President, who had been flown to Bethesda naval hospital by another helicopter"* (US, p. 351). This quotation attests of the white Americans' cruelty, for one sees how they are ready to kill one of them on behalf of their personal interests. The four dead people and four injured ones here are presented as victims of a failed assassination attempt planned on Bush who encourages the prohibition of drug business. The author through this failed assassination attempt shows how white American citizens often react when their President does the contrary of what they want. He means that their reaction differs from that of Africans who rarely call into question their leaders' decisions. But in the following passage, for example, he shows the hypocrisy of white Americans through the assistance they bring to Bush while receiving medical cares in a hospital. This hypocrisy appears through his enemies who, instead of expressing their satisfaction about his state of health, pray for his recovery:

The President of the United States lay in a hospital close to death, and two hundred and fifty million Americans held their breath. It didn't matter if you had voted for Georges Bush or against him, whether you killed his politics whether you even knew what his politics were. You sat and listened (on radio, TV) (...) so on this Sunday evening in December, all over America people collected themselves and took stock. Churches were opened so that those so

inclined could pray and hear words of comfort. Parent told their children where they were and what they were doing when they heard that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated (US, pp. 355-56).

As it can be noticed, the selling of drug which is also condemned in many countries leads some white Americans to try to shorten the life of George Bush for being against it. But what is hidden behind his citizens' cruel act against him is not maybe their objection to his decision to put an end to drug business, but more their hatred for him with regard to his leadership. The prohibition linked to the selling of drug is taken by his enemies as an alibi to take him out of the White House.

Stephen Coonts's reference to the white man's fight against drug business appears as a way to show how Blacks endure oppressions from Whites on behalf of the law in the United States. This reference, far from being from his personal imagination, is also evident in *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street* wherein Matt Taibbi explains how the American police take an interest in Eric Garner's life by pretending to have caught him with drug: "*You don't visit me, I'm going to kill myself, he told her by phone. Don't kill yourself because of me, she said sharply. Kill yourself because you want to be dead.*" (Taibbi: 2017, 33). What is conveyed through this quotation is the piece of advice given to Garner by his wife, Essaw who wants him to abandon his selling of drug. For, she thinks that it is because of this illegal trade that he is often put into jail. Aldana and his black gangsters who are also known as drug users in *Under Siege*, are not exempted from the white man's oppression:

The President is going to announce new initiatives to combat the drug business. The White House staff have two proposals that affect the military. They want to increase the number of army teams patrolling the Mexican border, and they want a carrier battle group put into the eastern Caribbean or the Gulf of Mexico (US, p. 277).

This passage evidences George Bush's readiness to initiate some strategies in order to find a solution to the issue of drug business in the United States. His will to do so is proved through his desire to increase the number of soldiers who have to search for drug dealers throughout the American territory. This increasement of the military force is for him a way to restore peace destroyed by Aldana and his black fellows while fighting violently for their consideration as full American citizens capable of being judged not according to their skin color, but to the content of their knowledge.

Stephen Coonts's account for the fight against drug business becomes more evident in a very small passage when he refers to the white American President's utterance: "*We're hunting drug smugglers and drug dealers*" (US, p. 279). As it can be seen, this utterance attests of Bush's personal participation in the fight for the banning of drug business in all the spheres of the United States. For, he means that the less his citizens use drug for whatever reason, the less they commit crimes which are regrettable for the whole country. When he, for example, claims that "*we've got to move heaven and earth to stop this slaughter or this country will come unglued*" (US, p. 392), he shows his personal determination and that of all his staff to partake in the fight against drug by using any means necessary. This determination appears as the result of fear they all have to see the collapse of their country because of the presence of drug. It is indeed with regard to this fear that they are compelled to catch and jail even those who have nothing to do with drug, for they think that as long as the drug users or dealers are not found yet, they cannot cross arms: "*Better to jail some innocent people and turn to them later than let the guilty stay free*" (US, p. 392). The author's endeavors to account for the fight against the spread of drug which, for some Whites, is the result of Blacks' violent struggle for

integration, is also obvious with his reference to Gideon who gives his opinion to Bush in these terms:

Mr President, your good faith has never been in question. Not with me, at least. My point is that the American people want an effective solution to this dope business. A lot of past and present Mexican government officials-including cops, especially cops-are in it up to their eyes. We're not talking about just looking the other way while a load of marijuana goes by- we're talking about the torture and murder of the US law-enforcement officers by Mexican police officials. The voters in this country want it stop! (US, p. 132).

As it can be noticed, for Gideon who is the President's Counselor, it is a must for all American authorities to partake in the fight against drug business which is said to be illegal by their constitution. When he, for example, refers to the torture and murder of the US law-enforcement officers by Mexican police officials, he draws the President back to what happened to his citizens because of the use of drug in the United States. For him, such tortures and murders must cease thanks to the banning of drug business in all its forms in this democratic nation. His point of view which intertwines with that of Bush is also shared by all American MPs and Senators, as he evidences it through his utterance "the voters in this country want it stop". What is hidden behind white American authorities' fight against drug business is the desire they have to stop terrorism which gangrenes the American society, as confessed by Dan Quayle, the Vice President of the United States: "*This may not work, Dan Quayle acknowledged. But we're going to try it for lack of something better. We've got to stop the terrorism and violence. Stop it dead, once and for all. That's what I'm trying to do*" (US, p. 449).

Although it is almost impossible to sort out all the passages developed by the author about the American government's fight against drug business, what is worth knowing is that his denunciation of this illegal trade is far from being from his personal imagination. For, the inclusion of historical names like George Bush and Dan Quayle, to quote only two, attests of the encroachment between history and fiction in *Under Siege*. One knows that George Bush was actually the President of the United States from 1989 to 1993, with Dan Quayle as his Vice-President. It is also known that these two personalities devoted their time to fighting against drug business in the American territory during their reign.

2. CONCLUSION

At the end of this exploration devoted to black American characters' violent struggle against racism in the United States, we have discovered that in *Under Siege*, Stephen Coonts accounts for the theme of violence through Aldana and his black gangsters who are shocked to find out that violence does not bring satisfaction to their expectations, because white American authorities refuse to grant them the civil rights they deserve as human beings. This unsuccessful struggle which has brought not only about the killing of several individuals and the spread of drug in all the spheres of the United States, has urged the American Government to arrest Aldana and his gangsters as a way to fight against drug business. For, this business is said to be illegal by the American Constitution. The participation of President George Bush and his Vice-President Dan Quayle who have engaged in this fight has been, for the author, a way to draw the reader back to the history of this great nation.

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