

Analyze the Status of Black People in *Gone with the Wind*

Shen Ying

Sichuan Southwest Vocational College of Civil Aviation, Chengdu, China

Abstract: *This paper analyses the black people's status showed in the novel, *Gone with the Wind*. It argues that their status is revealed through the novel's black character image creation, the presentation of the social system and the Yankees' attitude toward black people. About the black people image creation, the author created various types, including absolute loyalty to white people, stupid and violent knowingly to smear the black image. In the novel, the position of the black people is also quite marginal. Besides, they had been discriminated against and trampled on in their social relations and couldn't enjoy the same rights and obligations as the white people. At the same time, the author oppugns the purpose that the North gave black people freedom and points out the Yankees treated them even worse like abusing. Margaret through the perspective of Scarlett, well presents the situation that Northerners utilized black people and they never trusted them,. Therefore, compared with Northerners' behaviours, it can achieve the aim to protest the superiority of slavery. On these details revealed in the novel, this situation has a root in the author's prejudice. She lives in a society which discriminates against black people and that certainly becomes her attitude toward black people.*

Keywords: *Black People; Social Status; the Civil War; Slavery*

1. Introduction

Margaret Mitchell, born in Atlanta, Georgia, is an America notable writer and journalist in America. All her family were interested in American history and she grew up in an atmosphere of stories about the Civil War. The result is that she used ten years to put all the stories on paper which is called *Gone with the Wind*. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937. This book, a record bestseller, was her only published work, but this one is enough to be a masterpiece in the world literature.

Gone with the Wind is set against the dramatic background of the American Civil War and it tells a story about an unforgettable tale of love and loss, of a nation mortally divided and a people forever changed? What we can never ignore is the "slaves" who suffering discrimination which captured much my attention. It's surprising that Margaret used a sympathetic eye on the slave owners which is very different from other Southern writers who strongly objected to the slavery. Although she did not make clear any attitude that she advocated slavery in public in her life time, her work indicates her hate to the Northerners and nostalgia to the old life including the slavery. She neither thought the slavery is a bad thing nor did she agree with the claim that the black is equal to the white. From Mammy to black hoodlums in the woods, the images of black people in the setting in her writing are various. And all of them suffered an unfair treatment in political status and social status, even those northern people who gave their freedom disbelieved them. So we can easily bring forth a conclusion that there is discrimination against black people in *Gone with the Wind* and the blacks' status is very low.

Based on some discriminatory descriptions of *Gone with the Wind*, this paper will reveal the American black people's status in the novel *Gone with the Wind* through the discriminated the black people characters' creation, the unfair treatment in politics and society, and the attitudes of Yankees.

2. Discrimination in the Black People Image Creation

In this book, there are three groups of people in America with their different characters. The first type is northern people which are much more than savage while the southerners, the second group, are much gentler. The third group is the black people that are subordinate to the owners of plantations. Through the story we can comprehend that images of the black people are really interesting, especially compared with their so-called owners and northerners. They are neither clever nor brilliant. Servility

can be seen everywhere and most of them shows their slavishness in all condition, thus the prejudice towards black people was revealed by author's discriminatory description.

2.1 The Type of Blind Loyalty

In this masterpiece, Mammy is a typical exemplification of "loyalty", the loyalist servant of Tara, who suffered taking care of three generations of Tara from Scarlett's mother Helen to Scarlett's daughter Bonnie with her full love and respect. From the book we can also get that Mammy's image is also distinctive from others. Among the black people, she is a house slave whose social status is higher than those one who work in the field, so she is more close to the plantation's family members and has a stronger emotion with their owner. Sometimes we might misunderstand her status that she acts like a mistress and spirit guide of the girls, she knows the moral of being a decent white and she also knows how to be a competent black for her high status among black people which makes she more appreciate her being a slave in the house.

Pork, is another of the most loyal servants of the Tara, who even would like to sacrifice everything to repay what the family O'Hara had done for his family. At the beginning of after-Civil-War, the plantation Tara was in vain and everything of home was waiting for reconstruction. They were suffering starving and being dressed in miserable rags and tatters until one day they could get something to eat. "The family ate it with relish but a sense of guilt, knowing very well Pork had stolen it, as he had stolen the peas and corns." [2] And in the following the author wrote: "Negroes were provoking sometimes and stupid and lazy, but there was loyalty in them that money couldn't buy, a feeling of oneness with their white folks which made them risk their life to keep food on table." [2] That is Pork who would always be loyal to his owner no matter what happened to them and what he could do for the family even referred to crime.

This group of people also had a high morality according the descriptions of the book. They owned a superiority feeling of being the house slave and they scorned those whites who had no slave or few slaves and they were proud of the good names of their owners and belonging to them which indicated that servility had been deeply rooted in their heart. Mammy also pointed out that Scarlett was not like a lady because she played with black kids. The upper class of white implemented the segregation; in the other side the slaves followed the rules strictly even stricter than white done. Those black people had a closer relationship with their owners. They defended their owners' interest thoroughly voluntarily and complied with all rules set by southern white. Never could anyone, even Abraham Lincoln, deprive them from their old owners. The loyal blacks also sniff at The Emancipation Proclamation which allowed them freedom. Being loved and esteemed with genuine praise and trust, they were submissive, loyal, reliable, virtual, capable and experienced. As senior figures among all those blacks, Gone with the Wind perfectly embodied ideal images of that period conformed to slave owners' will. So it is hard to say that those figures can truly reflect the authentic reality of the blacks' living condition.

2.2 The Type of Being Stupid

Being stupid is another important characteristic of the black in *Gone with the Wind* which sometimes really makes people angry with that, but the reason why those silly images of blacks were built is susceptible.

Prissy as a maid of Scarlett was supposed to look after her and her little child. However, this black girl was not as serious and sober as her mother which almost killed Melanie. When the war was coming close to them and Melanie was going to give birth to a baby, she lied to Scarlett that she was experienced in being a midwife. The fact is that "Ah (Prissy) doan know nuthin' about bringin' babies." [2] She also presented that she was confused and sluggish while Scarlett hoped that she could find some help for them. However, she desperately wanted to show off that she had offered significant assistance for Melanie when she was giving birth to the child. Never count on that she could give some comfort or attention to her owner like Mammy or her parents. On the contrary, she always made things more terrible. On the way back to Tara, she was timid and overcautious and always behaved on the small things in panic. She was not as reliable as the most loyal ones and there was no hostility or rebellious in such kind of people.

Big Sam is another kind of black people in that period who would like to rely on their old owner to make a living. After the Civil War they had no choice but to turn to their old owners for help. They regarded the old plantation as a shelter from struggling in this strange world. While the black won their freedom in the South of America, all of them also were facing an influx of innovation coming to their

conversant world. Compared with the new things, they would rather choose to believe the old things, the slavery and the slave owner. He had nothing but a strong respect for his white owner which he reckoned it was his people's obligation.

From the performance of this kind of black people, it is hard to identify there is any positive character on them. They were stupid, but they complied with their white owner and admired them which satirized the emancipation for the black. It can't be denied that the author had a racial stereotype of the black while she defaced the images of some blacks to propagate the theme "white racial superiority". The author who built all those images of black people obviously depreciated the blacks' emotion, sense and sensibility, as well as ignored the right of a freeman and the self-respect of an independent man which made this group of blacks more far away from the mainstream--the freedom of everyone. The negative image designed in another aspect also indicated that the plantation owners of south had a prejudice about blacks. According to the environment of growing up around Margaret, it's not hard to comprehend that it's inevitable that author could pick up on this unjust attitude towards blacks.

2.3 The Type of Being Violent

In the volume two, Margaret tried to reappear in the unrest public of south and all those disturbances were due to the newly liberated blacks and those northerners who harbored evil thoughts. Neither the southerners nor the loyal blacks liked this kind of blacks. Instead they were afraid of them and hated them. The freedom was one of the most vital aspects why they couldn't lead a harmonious and placid life with the "kind" white southerners.

This group of black people belonged to the lower level of the black in that era. Before the Civil War they were working in the field and their status were under the government of senior blacks and the white. The Margaret's description in the book conveyed a piece of important information that blacks should have been still working for the plantation and complying with their owners, but they were relating to the chaos and abandoned their duty of being a competent slave. She wrote: "the free negroes were getting quite insolent"(493) In Atlanta, the blacks had nothing to do but committed all kinds of atrocities to publicize their freedom which was abominated by the honorable Southern gentlemen who believed that was much more horrible than they were slaves when they were under the control of the slave-owners. It's also unbelievable that the Northerners were on the back of them with guns. Scarlett also had been attacked by the black ruffians and the gentlemen of South tried to defend their people by the organization of the Klan which also put all those gentlemen in danger. Those things made those black people more abominable.

Blacks were liberation, is the root that caused all this misfortune and disaster. Under the instigation of Northerners, they were backing for the government of the North blindly and the enmity began to gather in their mind, and finally the hatred contributed to extreme behaviors such as robbery, rape and murder. In the eyes of the author, those black people who were asked for freedom and rebellion had no idea of what were freedom and the meaning of the Civil War, but they acted as puppets of the North and their appearance was ironical. This novel was set in the background of conflict of the industrial revolution and the plantation of conflict and the racial conflict. However author misled readers to a misunderstanding that there was no fierce racial conflict between the slave and the slave-owner at that time by focusing on the significance of the war itself. Most citizens of the Confederate States of America were occupied with such opinion that what ruined the life of them was not the conflict between white and black but the consequence of the war itself and the Northern improper rules. The fact is that they thought that the black should not be liberated. The freedom just made the life of blacks themselves and whites of South miserable and perfect state was that everything could come to what it used to be, that was to say they'd better still on the condition that slave was still slave and slave-owner still was slave-owners.

3. Unfair Status Revealed in the System

Gone with the Wind was focused on the love stories, family life and career of Scarlett, which exquisitely depicts the great pain of the transition from the plantation class to the capitalism. Margaret used her words to show that they deeply yearned for those happy times in the past which was based on the unfair treatment in social systems, where the black couldn't receive the same treatment as the white. Before the Civil War they were the slave of slave-owner and even after the war they were still living in the lower level of the society as white's servant or political puppet. According to Margaret's linguistic

descriptions, the blacks' unfair treatments in social status and political status will be analyzed and discussed.

3.1 Unfair Treatment in Social Status

Wikipedia explained that Social status is the position or rank of a person or group, within the society [5]. Status can be determined in two ways. One can earn their social status by their own achievements, which is known as achieved status. Alternatively, one can be placed in the stratification system by their inherited position, which is called ascribed status. Unfortunately, blacks couldn't enjoy both achieved status and ascribed status. They were suffering unfair treatment in the following three points. The first is that the blacks, in other words the slaves, were the private property of the owners of plantations by the legislation of most southern states. The second is that the relationship among them which could not be changed because the social status must be inherited generation by generation which could be interpreted that the offspring of the plantation owners were gentlemen and lady while the offspring of a slave was still a slave--the plantation owner's private property. Then next is the difference in education system between them. Compared with those offsprings of plantation owners who could attend college, the black were forbidden to receive any education so that they could not conceive any spirit of rebellion. What's more excessive was that some laws of south also made it clear that it's illegal to have the slave receive education. Exposed to such segregation, blacks couldn't enjoy their full rights as independent freeman in both society and political status. The discrimination could be easily found in this book.

The blacks in the 19th century were also as slave, and the "slave" also represented that they were the private property of their owner. In other words the number of slave was a mark of wealth and status. The more slaves they had, the more prestige they owned. When Mr. O'Hara firstly came to the New World, his dream was to take the possession of many slaves and to be a gentleman. Finally he managed to win Pork by a gamble and then got his land and slaves and his prestige gradually. The images of the slaves in that period were not as a man to stand affront of the world, but as property or merchandise. And what Gerald liked to intimidate Pork was "it's selling you I'll be doing" (50) [2] to make fun. Scarlett also liked Pork a lot. Once she came back to Tara from the war, she felt that "if he (Pork) had been a dog he would have laid his muzzle in her lap and whined for a kind of upon his head." (385) [2] But then he should have been an independent man. Scarlett could think like in this way was completely because the social status of blacks was almost close to the animals like dog whose destiny was just following their owners and living in a dreadful living condition.

In the eyes of people at that time, blacks were born to be instruments of labor and they were supposed to work for their owners to bring them ample food and clothing regardless of what they were suffering, which became deeply ingrained in their mind. So when the Federal Government freed blacks, it was hard for old plantation owners to accept the reality. "All of them, all the men she knew, even the drowsy-eyed Ashley and fidgety old Frank, were like that underneath—murderous, violent if the need arose. Even Rhett, conscienceless scamp that he was, had killed a negro for being 'uppity to a lady.'" (617)[2] When the humblest and the most ignorant dark people transformed into specially privileged and lucky person, it's really extremely hard for the plantation owners of South to accept it. The extract above showed that they were very indignant at the freed blacks. In their inner heart the blacks were born to be their slave to serve them with full respect and obedience. Nowadays, blacks became arrogant who even swaggered before them and jeered at them and affront to ladies, so they should be killed by the side of justice. Therefore, it could easily come to the conclusion that Gone with the Wind significantly presented that the white of South obtained discrimination towards blacks. From their point of view, whites were the upper men out of noble permanently and blacks were ragtag for all good. The dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood was inconceivable for the whites. (231)[1] Tocqueville also marked "The wish that the Europeans and the blacks one day would become one was a daydream. Based on my sense and intellect, the day won't come and I have never seen any signs by my observation." (783) [3]

Under the plantation economic system, compared with other blacks they were just the tools which could speak. To guarantee the availability, it was certainly that the slave-owners would provide them essential living materials such as basements and hamlet. On the opposite, the slave-owners often killed pigs and sheep and they were living in luxury. The slave-owners enjoyed the pork while blacks only had haslet to eat which was beneath slave-owners' notice. Throwing it away would be a waste while giving it to slave it could be a meat diet so that they could also save food supplies, which killed two birds in one stone. Things went on like this as a custom and such meat became the favorite food of the

slave. However, assuming that slave-owners were fond of such kind of food and then there would be no haslet on their dining-table. Since blacks had no access to get meat on the list of their diet, they also had no right to drink spirits. Only on per Christmas, on the mercy of the God, slave-owners would allow slave to have a sip of whiskey to show their benevolence. Those details in their daily life draw the conclusion that the blacks suffering both the unfair treatment in their lives and personal abuse.

3.2 Unfair Treatment in Political Status

The Federal Government made a proclamation to recover the blacks' basic political rights as a citizen according to their Constitutions in 1864 whereas it was unacceptable for the slave-owners. To avoid they might share the equal rights, the whites of South would rather risk their lives preventing it from coming true.

In the book, Tony Fontaine, on his way of absconding for the reason that he shot a black who tried to be rude to a white woman, told Scarlett and Frank that: "You know how he did you about your taxes...but the worst thing was the way he kept the darkies stirred up...Now the Yankees are talking about letting the darkies vote...And if they give the negroes the vote, it's the end of us. Damn it, it's our state! It doesn't belong to the Yankees! By God, Scarlett, it isn't to be borne! And it won't be borne! We'll do something about it if it means another war. Soon we'll be having nigger judges, nigger legislator—black apes out of the jungle--".[2] It's absolutely preposterous to give the blacks the right to vote as well as the right to married a white woman in the eyes of the white of South. Just as almost all white of South thought that it's the most ridiculous thing in the world that those blacks which were used to be their slaves and property, were going to achieve their right to vote to determine their old owners' fate. They refused to admit it. Margaret provided the readers another scene that, "These negroes sat in the legislature where they spent most of their time eating goobers and easing their unaccustomed feet into and out of new shoes. Few of them could read or write. They were fresh from cotton patch and canebrake." [2] Hence one can see that the white thought that the blacks were illiterate and rude just like that they were just climbing from the old-growth forest. Planting the canebrake, cultivating the cotton and serving their owners were their destiny. How could those people join in the authority and let their owners under their rules? The white of South considered that those people were so congenitally deficient with the ability of being the upper class that they could not correctly deal with the rights which here proved to be a waste and an insult to the right. The whites of South also blamed the whites of North for they conducting the conspiracy which can be explained that author wanted to use their indignation for Yankee, ie. the war to cover up their discrimination against the blacks.

Big Sam committed manslaughter when he was wandering after the Civil War, Scarlett came across him and he was scared. It did not enter Scarlett's mind that he was free. He still belonged to her, like Pork and Peter and Cookie and Prissy. He was still one of her slaves and as such must be protected. It is better to say that she was protecting her private property than to say that she was harboring an innocent free man. Furthermore, the northerners also call the Yankees as the blacks' new masters, from the northerners' point of view, which indicated that the blacks were not really freemen, they just changed their masters. It could also be understood as once the blacks were the slaves' property, but then they became the Yankees' property. The proprietors had been changed but the essence of the problem never changed.

From all the evidences, the blacks were just treated as their instruments of labor not as an independent man, so not mention that they could have the right to vote and stand for election. The discrimination against the black in political status was so easy to find out.

4. The Prejudice of Yankees

Yankees, who freed the slaves, were supposed to be the friends of the blacks and treated them as equal as the white. However, they did not regard the blacks the same as them, so the blacks not just suffered unfair treatment from the whites of the South but also the white of the North. The following will focus on the features of the relationship between them.

4.1 Distrusted

Not like the owners of the plantation in the South who trusted in the slaves with one hundred percent and treated them with sympathy, the Yankees would never choose to trust them and depute them any work, although they made the law to free them.

Compared with the whites of the South, the Yankees were much more unwilling to acknowledge of the status of black. They freed them to some extent, but they couldn't manage to solve the subsequent problems. They made the black become vagrant and homeless which was much more terrible than they were working for the slave-owners in the field. It's hard for them to make a living by themselves without the help of their old owners. In the chapter 38, there was a wife of an officer who was consulting some information about whether there was a suitable nurse for kids. Scarlett tried to recommend black women for her; however the reply of the Maine woman surprised her. The Maine woman said that:

“Do you think I'd trust my babies to a black nigger?”

“I wouldn't trust them any further than I could see them in my house. The idea!”

“Look at that old nigger (Uncle Peter) swell up like a toad,” she giggled, “I'll bet he's an old pet of yours, isn't he?” [2]

Scarlett listened with calm contempt to condemn what Yankees had done for the blacks as if the white of South and the slaves were standing on the same side. Scarlett appraised them trustworthy while the whites of North called them toad for they thought they were as ugly as animals, the spoiled pets and the black kids like scared animals in the street. When they talked about Uncle Tom's Cabin, the white of South rejected the disharmonious relationship between slaves and slaves-owner. Once the white of South used warm and sympathetic eyes to look upon the slaves, all the sins of the slavery became not worth mentioning, instead the Yankee became the source of the evil. However, those words distorted the fact that the blacks had suffered kinds of unfair treatments in the past and it also didn't change the situation that the blacks were living in the world having no personality and not being respected. Although they were liberated by the edict of the Federal Government, they still were unacceptable by most of Northerners. Even if they are free, occasionally kindly treated by plantation owners, they are still unable to change the objective existence of the fact that they are still private property of them. The slaves-owners seemed kind-hearted, but they often used their slaves to abreact their bad mood and Scarlett slapped Prissy when she was angry. When they were happy, they would like to call slaves as “blacks”, but the most time they called them as “slave”, “things” and “darker”, according to statistics there are near 400 words of slave in the book. Both sides in such contexts never trust blacks as their people, for in their eyes the fact that this is the case.

4.2 A Pawn of the Game of Politics

The story was based on the Civil War and developed by the development of the war, thereinto, the status of the blacks had made a great difference and one of the most important reasons was that the States proclaimed that they could own the basic rights of a citizen, yet from the book there's no evidence to show that they really had gotten any benefits.

From the description of Margaret, the free blacks chose a wrong way from the very beginning to the end. The Federal Government had proclaimed them freedom was mainly for two reasons according to *Gone with the Wind*. There was a more important reason, the federal government counted on blacks could change their stance on the battlefield and helped them win the war, eventually some "stupid" black indeed also invest in them. So did them. Secondly, they could control regime by taking the blacks into legislation to make an amendment and giving them the right to vote in congress so that they could push the Confederate out of the congress and regime. And those blacks also voted only for the damn Yankee. So it was just a political trick of the Yankees who wanted to control the South. However, the sagacious black like Mammy and Uncle Peter would believe anything but the freedom and right to vote and insisted that it's not a right issue. If they don't agree with this policy applied to them, then it's not necessary to continue to carry out such a policy, this would be more persuasive than slaves-owners pointed out.

It could be divided into two groups who got the freedom. The first one were those who were old, ill or disabled and they couldn't make a living by themselves in the new circumstances. Abandoned by the new masters, it was their kind old owners that brought them back home to do what they were used to do. The freedom was a kind of life which was a much terrible life style to them. The other were the black who were robust and silly coming from all sides. They crashed in new Atlanta becoming the vagrants and living in the slums and refusing to work as hardly as whites. They began to cause troubles and the society were full of turmoil while Yankees failed to manage the chaotic situation and their Free Bureau also admitted that they made a mistake on this gradually. The whites also organized a secret party The Ku Klux Klan to resist what Yankees had done for them and to assassinate those culpable

blacks who commit crime to the whites. The whites of South thought the slavery was best for the blacks. The officers who won the election due to blacks began to recede into disgrace.

The situation was that the blacks got their freedom but they could not realize their rights and it continually existed in the South. Racial segregation was still prevalent in the South which kept a deep influence on the society in hundreds years. They were still a group of people with no freedom and the whole process was the Yankees utilizing them as a pawn to earn regime.

5. The Prejudice Adopted by the Author

From this book, we can see that the owners of the slave always keep a good relationship with the black. It seems that the white owners liked them and trusted them. In the book when Scarlett is opposed to open sawmill, our author describes that she (Scarlett) didn't mind what anybody said, except Mammy. In Miss Pitty's house, Uncle Peter with his pomposity is also like a second owner of the house and sometimes even Miss Pitty was afraid of him. Charles had said about that to Scarlett: "He's the smartest old darky I've ever seen and about the most devoted. The only trouble with him is that he owns the three of us, body and soul, and he knows that." [2] From those words, it really seems that the black people can be a most intimate family member of the white in 19th century according to author. Nevertheless, Martin Luther King was still guiding his people to straggle for the equal right with the white in the late 20th century. [1] And why the slaves-owner pined for the slavery era owing to that they were last link to the old days in the ending of the book. The old days related to slavery and plantations which provoked strong surges of nostalgia for the days of yore.

The slave owners treated their slave well and felt regretful what the black had done for them. However they never treated them as their heroes. The black people were no more than the property of them. Although the so-called virtuous slave owners treated them as their own family and relied on them, they still complained that Uncle Peter controlled their body and soul. Who would control others' body and soul? It's absolutely the devil. However the black were just common people neither the devil nor god. Uncle Peter was never said to be a man like a father of the family who raised the two kids of Hamilton but a servile servant.

The southerners (the slave owners) also blamed the northerners who liberated the slave. The book clearly pointed out that "The negroes were far better under slaves than they were under freedom." [2] Not only had the southerners disapproved the freedom of the black, but the black people themselves did not like the freedom. Uncle Pete made it clear that he was not a bit willing to be involved in the referendum and thought some of them were so insolent! By the position of liberated black, they conveyed the message that they would rather be a slave working in the plantation than to be free, just like the big San from Tara said: "Ah wuzaimin' ter come home ter Tara soon as I got de chance." [2] Yet the truth is that the black never had been being free before, so they just did not know how to handle the new situation. However, standing by the prospective of Margret, it's quite ridiculous that slaves could be a freeman.

The reason why the author advocates the harmonious relationship between the slave owners and the slave certainly deserves further exploration. As a white, who yearns the old time of plantation ages in Atlanta, to beautify the real is just the author's dream of old time. This illusion is an anesthetization for the black people who began to wake up and their racial consciousness. Every word of the fiction is the map of Margret's nostalgia for the past.

6. Conclusion

In Margaret's writing, whether it is from their character description, or their relationship between all kinds of the white, it is obvious that the black didn't achieve any social status, also was showed by the ironical descriptions in the book which was what just like Professor Wang Xiaolu said that "Due to ingrained prejudice and the traditional criticism theory which used to be neutral and objective by itself, racial issues in the contemporary literature research is increasingly important and complex. It should be recognized that even in the US and Europe classical literature, racial prejudice is also a common phenomenon." [3] Yet in general, Margaret has made tremendous contributions to art. From a woman's point of view on war and racial she provided a different experience and comprehension which made a probable reference towards the history of the blacks, which realistically reflects the life of the slaves and slaves-owners in the mid-19th century. This paper is mainly focused on the problem of black people's status which expressed in the book which has a significant meaning in learning American past

and gasping it for the moment and joining its future.

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