

***BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME* GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

To guide you as you are reading *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, the Advising and Summer Reading Committee compiled a list of questions*. Please answer and reflect on these questions as you read. Questions have been organized in sequential order of the quotations from the text. You are encouraged to bring your responses and reflections to the small group discussions you will have with your Gateway classmates and University community members (faculty, staff, alumni, and student leaders) during Turning Titan: New Student Orientation 2017.

- 1) Coates states, “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined indubitable feature of the natural world...But race is the child of racism, not the father” (p. 7).
 - a) What do you think Coates means when he defines race in this way?
 - b) How does this assertion compel us to think about the history of race and racism in the United States and globally?
 - c) When were you first aware of your racial identity?
 - d) Have you had conversations about race with your family? Your friends? Acquaintances? If so, what did those conversations look like?
 - e) How has your race impacted your access to resources, education and/or income? If it hasn’t, why do you think that is?

- 2) “When the journalist asked me about my body, it was like she was asking me to awaken her from the most gorgeous dream. I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways. The Dream is treehouses and the Cub Scouts. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake” (pp. 10-11).
 - a) What do you consider to be the American Dream?
 - b) Do you think everyone has equal access to the Dream?
 - c) How does Coates’s version of the Dream differ from other, idealized versions of the Dream favored by popular media, literature, and other outlets?

- 3) Coates writes of schools that “were not concerned with curiosity. They were concerned with compliance” (p. 26).
 - a) How does the author see the education system as complicit with a power that continues to divide America into separate worlds?
 - b) Do you have personal experience with a school that was or was not concerned with curiosity?

- 4) When talking about race and privilege, Coates writes: “‘White America’ is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes this power is direct (lynching), and sometimes it is insidious (redlining). But however it appears, the power of domination and exclusion is central to the belief in being white, and without it, ‘white people’ would cease to exist for want of reasons” (p. 42). How do you react to this statement?

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- 5) Coates writes, “But you are a black boy, and you must be responsible for your body in a way that other boys cannot know. Indeed you must be responsible for the worst actions of other black bodies, which somehow, will always be assigned to you” (p. 71).
 - a) Why do you think he is so intentional in mentioning the word “body”?
 - b) How does the idea of the black body fit into contemporary conversations about race (e.g., the Black Lives Matter Movement, etc.)?

- 6) “The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear, and whatever we might make of this country’s criminal justice policy, it cannot be said that it was imposed by a repressed minority” (pp. 78-79).
 - a) Do you agree with Coates’ sentiment about the criminal justice system? Why?
 - b) How would you characterize the United States’ criminal justice system?
 - c) How do you think it compares to those of other nations?

- 7) “...perhaps the defining feature of being drafted into the black race was the inescapable robbery of time, because the moments we spent readying the mask, or readying ourselves to accept half as much, could not be recovered” (p. 91).
 - a) What does it do to the psyche of a person when they feel that they have to wear a mask every day of their lives?
 - b) How can we judge the success of a person or a race when so much time is lost in living a life in this way?

- 8) In what ways does history, or the media (TV, newspapers, internet, social media, etc.), tell us who or what matters? Who counts and who does not? What are some examples?
 - a) As a member of the Titan community, what is your role in shaping/affirming/complicating/confronting these messages?
 - b) When interacting with any form of media, how often do you question what you are being told/shown?
 - c) How can one be a discerning consumer of media and recognize biases or ways in which a story is spun in order to influence its audience?

*Some questions have been copied and/or adapted from [UCLA’s *Between the World and Me* Facilitation Guide 2016](#).