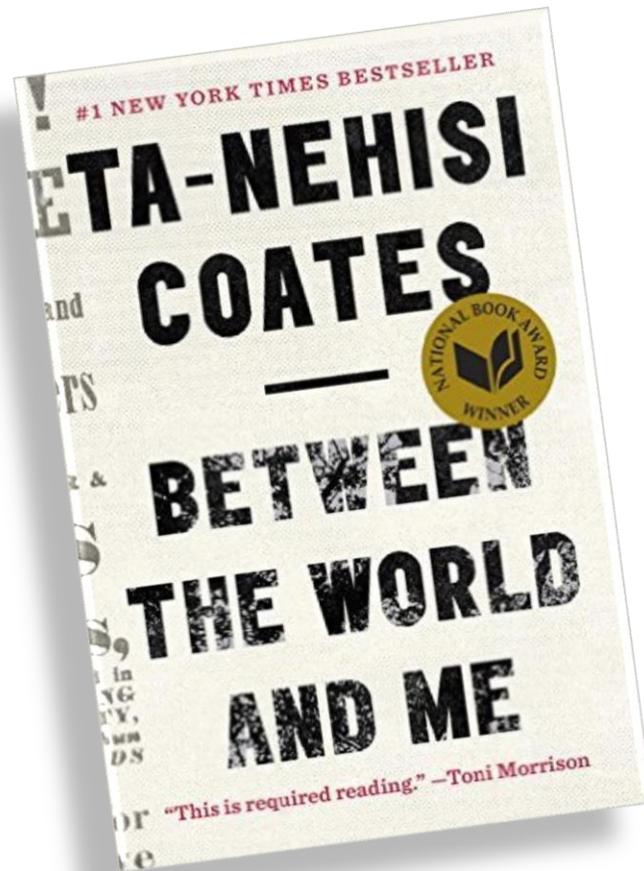


Share the Experience



The Common Book at UCLA provides a way for new Bruins to read a great book over the summer and then explore the many issues raised in the text during True Bruin Welcome and beyond. It's just one way new Bruins experience **UCLA's Principles of Community.**



<http://www.firstyearexperience.ucla.edu/>

firstyearexperience@orl.ucla.edu

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Overview (*Common Book as a vehicle for community building*)

The Common Book Program allows students to share and understand diverse perspectives, build community and critically consider their role in creating a just society.

Common Book Program Goals

Students will have an opportunity to:

- Share and understand diverse perspectives in a respectful way.
- Build a community of intellectually-engaged learners.
- Explore their role in creating a just society.
- Consider critical action steps that can be taken in response to their Common Book experience.

Facilitator Expectations

As a Common Book facilitator, your role is to engage your audience around the themes of *Between the World and Me* in relation to the Common Book goals (listed above). For a deeper discussion, it is recommended that you focus your discussion on one Common Book goal/theme, rather than attempt to accomplish all of the above. It may be beneficial to develop a broader discussion on how this book has impacted your participants so that you can incorporate their diverse perspectives and experiences. Although you can certainly address specific content in the book, be cognizant of expanding the discussion to encourage more participation from your audience. Utilize this facilitation guide as a resource and allow it to support the objective(s) of your discussion.

True Bruin Values, Principles of Community

(We ask that these be integrated into your facilitator trainings/discussions)

True Bruin Values:

Integrity
 Excellence
 Accountability
 Respect
 Service

Principles of Community:

Education
 Research
 Service
 Diversity
 Open-mindedness
 Inclusiveness
 Tolerance

Facilitation Pointers (From the UCLA Library)

Adapted by Dr. Nafpaktitis, UCLA Library

Before the discussion

Decide what you want your group to get out of your discussion (goals). Do you want them to share their responses with each other? Make new connections? Plan to take further action based on their reading?

Use the goals you have identified to draft a core list of questions/activities to have with you to get discussion started (or to jump start it again if it stalls).

Gather whatever materials you think you might need for the session (your copy of the book, pens/pencils/chalk, flipchart, paper...?).

Check out the space you're going to be in. Rearrange the furniture into a circle or semicircle ahead of time, if you can, to encourage conversation.

During discussion

Every group of people is different with its own chemistry. Sometimes, all you have to do is ask, "So, how'd you like the book?" and before you know it, people are answering and responding and sharing opinions with one another and an hour flies by. Other times, you can ask the very same question, "So, how'd you like the book?" and it thuds onto the floor right in front of you and sits there like a cold, hard brick. There's not much you can do about that fundamental chemistry, but you *can* use some strategies to involve participants more actively in discussion.

Keep in mind conversations about racism and other forms of oppression may be challenging in a group setting. In order to facilitate this type of dialogue, you might want to build on more innocuous questions at the onset and later address these topics. You may also want to select questions which allow for a variety of responses so that your audience feels more freedom to engage.

Group Activities: Here are a few activities you could try to get participants engaged, interacting with one another, and prepared to move into a deeper conversation:

- Ask each participant to say their name and an adjective that describes the book with the same letter as their first name. This can serve as a lighter icebreaker before leading into discussion questions about the book.
- “Step into the Circle If” Game: This activity does not require participants to have read the book in its entirety, but instead allows for a shared experience around topics related to the book. Each participant “steps into the circle if” based on whichever prompts you devise (e.g. step into the circle if you liked the book, if you read the entire book, if you follow Coates on Twitter, if you’ve traveled abroad, etc.).
- Ask each person to think of a moment when they felt less than perfect in their lives (a moment that they will be comfortable sharing), and to describe that experience and how they were able to gain strength from that moment with the person sitting next to them. (If you have an odd number of people, you can make one group of 3.) You can use this as an introduction/ice breaker and even take it one step further by asking each person in your group (depending on the size of the group – any more than 12 people and it would probably take too long) to introduce the other person and provide a one-sentence summary of that other person’s “imperfect” experience. (“This is Margarita, and she felt imperfect when she received a “C” in her chemistry exam, but she decided to go to her professor’s office hours to get advice on how to improve her performance.”)

Why this works: 1) participants learn something about each other; 2) establishes a point of entry into the book that everyone can “relate” to on some level.

- Hand out paper/index cards and pens and ask people to write down 3 adjectives that describe the book. Then ask them to choose one of the adjectives and write 2-3 sentences about why they chose that particular adjective. Ask for volunteers to share their adjective and the reason why they chose it.

Why this works: 1) it’s not time consuming for participants to write; 2) you get LOTS of discussion-generating raw material to work with; 3) you avoid the “deer in the headlights” effect because everyone’s already prepared in advance to give you an adjective.

Discussions take shape in the moment, so the best we can do as facilitators is to “surf” that moment even if it leads in some unexpected directions. Here are some tips on how to do that:

- Do not be afraid of waiting for an answer to a question you have just posed. What feels like forever to you in front of the group always feels much shorter to participants busily thinking about how to respond. Literally count to 10 before reframing your question or giving in to the impulse to answer it yourself or moving on.
- Questions that start with “How...?” or “Why...?” Tend to generate more meaningful answers than “Where...?” or “When...?”
- Ask questions that have more than one answer.
- Avoid questions with “yes” or “no” answers because that is pretty much all you will get.
- Some good phrases to build on responses to encourage more participation:
 - *“What is another example from the book that supports what X just said?”*
 - *“How could we see this issue in a different way?”*
 - *“What other perspectives do group members have?”*

Do what you can to create an inclusive environment: Make eye contact with everyone in your group and try to offer each of them a chance to speak (which might mean saying to a particularly vocal contributor, “Let’s hear from someone else first”). If discussion starts to head in a direction that seems to be making some people in the group uncomfortable, identify it, acknowledge it, and redirect the conversation. Preface your discussion by stating it is okay if some students have not read the book or just part of it. Explain to your audience the purpose is to engage with the themes of the book and not regurgitate information from the book.

Provide some closure: summarize (or ask your group to help you summarize) the main conclusions you all reached during the discussion and why they’re important.

And always, always end on time (even if there is more to say)!

Social Justice Terminology

Please consider reviewing these social justice terms to familiarize yourself with the topics and content discussed in the book. Although some of these terms may not have been officially discussed in Coates' book, they will help frame discussions around the themes of the book.

- **Social Justice:** both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 2007).
- **Privilege:** unearned, often invisible benefits and advantages available to members of the privileged group because of their social group membership (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 2007).
- **Racism:** oppression against individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived racial identity ("Social Justice Terminology", 2015)
- **Microaggressions:** brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group (Derald et al., 2007).

About the Book

“This is your country, this is your world, this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it.”

In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation’s history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of “race,” a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

Between the World and Me is Ta-Nehisi Coates’s attempt to answer these questions in a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children’s lives were taken as American plunder. Beautifully woven from personal narrative, reimagined history, and fresh, emotionally charged reportage, *Between the World and Me* clearly illuminates the past, bracingly confronts our present, and offers a transcendent vision for a way forward.

-- Description from Random House Academic Services

Themes of *Between the World and Me*

Below are some of the key themes discussed in *Between the World and Me* that are used to frame the following facilitation questions. Please note, this list is not an exhaustive list of all themes within the text.

- Family
- The College Experience
- Gender
- Race
- American Culture & History
- The Criminal Justice System
- The Role of Media

***Between the World and Me* Discussion Questions**

(From UCLA Faculty-in-Residence)

The diversity you encounter as you become part of the Bruin community is one of our strengths, and we are committed to developing a community that values and learns from the richness of our experiences, histories, dreams, and contributions. The Common Book experience provides a great opportunity for reflection, conversation and learning about each other. As you read *Between the World and Me*, please consider the following introductory questions, created by members of our Faculty in Residence program. We encourage you to reflect on the questions and the issues raised, and prepare for enlightening conversations with other Bruins.

1. What is Coates' definition of race on p. 115? Do you agree? What other populations might this definition apply to globally, beyond those in the United States? If race is not a biological reality, then what is it?
2. Coates is careful to avoid assuming that whiteness is a given. Rather, he calls attention to the contractedness of race when he describes families and individuals who “believe themselves to be white” or children who are “raised to be white” (10). At the same time, whiteness is a powerful social force, a descriptor for a community of those who have “maximum power and minimum responsibility,” those who have the power to take the lives of others without punishment (80). What role does race play in your self-understanding? How does your understanding of yourself and your identities connect to Coates’ discussion on historical and social constructions which have defined race in the United States?
3. Coates writes that “...race is the child of racism, not the father” (7). What does the author mean by this? How does this assertion compel us to think about the history of race and racism in the United States? How does this apparent reversal of common sense compel us to rethink the history of race and racism in the United States?
4. Coates writes of schools that “were not concerned with curiosity. They were concerned with compliance” (26). How does the author see the education system as complicit with a power that continues to divide America into separate worlds? Do you have personal experience with a school that was or was not concerned with curiosity?
5. What does Coates mean by “the Dream”? Why does he urge himself to be “wary of every Dream” (53)? What do you think the author means when he writes that “the Dreamers...would rather live white than live free” (143)? Against the Dream, what does it mean to be “conscious citizen[s] of the terrible world” (108)?
6. In what ways does history, or the media, tell us who or what matters? Who counts and who does not? Give examples. As a member of the Bruin community, what is your role in shaping/affirming/complicating/confronting these messages?

Between the World and Me General Discussion Questions

Family

- (1) This novel was written in the form of a letter from a father to his son discussing race relations in the United States. Have your parents or family members ever talked to you about the topic of race? Are your views different from theirs and have you ever had a dialogue about this with them?
- (2) What are some of the worries your family may have as you embark in this new chapter of your life?
- (3) Imagine you are a family member writing a letter to yourself about being a first year college student at UCLA. What would you say to yourself in this letter? What advice would you give?
- (4) How has your experience growing up in your hometown different or the same from your parent(s)/guardians?
- (5) Family legacies can have lasting impacts on many generations. What is something your family has passed down to you that you would like to pass along to the next generation?

The College Experience

- (1) Coates realizes his college education was very different from what he expected. “It began to strike me that the point of my education was kind of discomfort, was the process that would not award me my own special Dream but would break all the dreams” (52). As you enter your first year at UCLA, what do you expect to learn from your college experience? What dreams do you hope to fulfill during your time here at UCLA?

Gender

- (1) In what ways do you feel gender plays a role in one’s safety in public? In what situations do you experience a clear divide in gender roles?
- (2) Regardless of someone’s gender, do you think all individuals receive equal treatment in our society? In what arenas do you feel, if any, they do not? Why? Should there be equal treatment of gender in our society? Explain your reasoning.

Race

- (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” (7).
 - When were you first aware of your racial identity?
 - Have you had conversations about race with your family? Your friends? Strangers? If so, what did those conversations look like?
 - How has your race impacted your access to resources, education and/or income? If it hasn’t, why do you think that is?
 - How do you think your racial identity plays a role in your everyday life?
- (2) “I had friends who too were part of other worlds...worlds stitched into worlds like tapestry. And though I could never, myself, be native to any of these worlds, I knew that nothing so essentialist as race stood between us” (120).

- What “worlds” do you find yourself being a part of and how much are those “worlds” a part of who you are?
 - For many incoming students, college is the first time in which you will be immersed in a diverse setting with a multitude of identities and cultures. As a first year, how do you hope to engage with this diversity on campus? How do you perceive yourself in fitting into this diversity on campus? What identities do you have that you hope to express and explore here?
- (3) “To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease” (17).
- Have you ever felt like your race and/or ethnicity (or any other identity) has played a role in your personal safety?
- (4) “I wanted you to be conscious, to understand that to be distanced, if only for a moment, from fear is not a passport out of the struggle” (127).
- We are all human beings with many intersectionalities in our identities and, at times, some parts of our identities may be more prominent than others throughout our lives. Have you ever tried to escape, hide, or downplay an aspect(s) of your identity? Why? Were you successful in this endeavor?

American Culture & History

- (1) “They were rebelling against the history books that spoke of black people only as sentimental “firsts” – first black five-star general, first black congressman, first black mayor – always presented in the bemused manner of a category of Trivial Pursuit. Serious history was the West, and the West was white” (43).
- “You cannot forget how much they took from us and how much they transfigured our very bodies into sugar, tobacco, cotton, and gold” (71).
- What kind of narratives were in your history books growing up? What group of people were represented? Which groups did you feel were left out?

The Criminal Justice System

- (1) “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” (79).
- Do you agree with Coates’ sentiment about the criminal justice system? Why?
 - How would you characterize the United States’ criminal justice system? How do you think it compares to other nations?
- (2) “To survive the neighborhoods and shield my body, I learned another language consisting of a basic complement of head nods and handshakes” (23).
- Have you ever had to develop strategies or routines to protect your well-being? What were they? Were they passed down to you or did you create them on your own?
- (3) In the past few years, we have seen an increase of reported incidences in the media of police using excessive force against certain racial groups. Do you feel different races face a disproportionate amount of police brutality?

- What are some strategies you can think of to engage communities into dialogue and reduce this increase in violence both in street crimes and within the law enforcement system?
- (4) Currently, the #BlackLivesMatter movement has gained a strong momentum advocating for the humane treatment of black men by law enforcement ignited by several reported incidences of police brutality against African American males. Why do you feel this movement has garnered many followers? Some individuals have suggested using the broader #AllLivesMatter in order to be more inclusive of all races. What are your thoughts on this alternative movement?

The Role of Media

- (1) “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” (11).
- What do you consider to be the American Dream? Do you think everyone has equal access to this “dream?” Do you see any differences in the ways our culture and media portray the American Dream and how it actually is realized in real life?
- (2) Do you think the media portrays stories/images in an unbiased fashion? Why or why not? What kind of news stories seem to get more coverage on the daily news cycle? Which ones are intentionally omitted? How can we as consumers of the media influence the way media reports information?
- (3) When interacting with any form of media (TV, web, social media, etc.) how often do you question what you are being told/shown? 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?

Between the World and Me Discussion Example

(Adapted by Sharon Chia Claros, Residential Life)

Below is a sample discussion that can be used to facilitate your own discussion with your residents and/or group; it is intended to be a detailed script to give you an idea of what a Common Book discussion may look like.

Introduction: Thank everyone for coming! Emphasize this is a time and opportunity to build community around the themes of the Common Book by engaging in a community discussion. Because the themes of the Common Book are universal, the primary purpose of the discussion is to share our personal experiences based on the themes of the book. It's a great opportunity to learn more about each other and connect through similarities as well as learn from our differences.

Before you get started, let the residents know that they will create guiding principles in regards to engaging in a respectful discussion. You will share some of the guiding principles from below (choose about 3-4) and then ask your residents to add their own guiding principles.

Guiding Principles:

- Respect people's differences
- One Mic, One Love → Please don't talk over others
- Don't Yuck My Yum → Refrain from putting down another's idea
- Be Reasonable
- Use "I" Statements
- Challenge the Idea & Not the Person
- Operate from a Brave Space rather than a Safe Space
- Actively listen to each other
- Seek 1st to understand and then to be understood
- Ask Residents if they want to add anything

Group Chat & Brainstorm of Themes: (get 8 x 11 blank sheets of paper & markers)

- Tell your residents to get into groups of 4-5 people
- Have them introduce themselves to each other
- Name, where they grew up, & something delightful about them
- After intros, ask them to brainstorm themes from the Common Book as a group and write them down on their blank sheets
- After the group is done brainstorming, ask the groups to report out the themes they came up with

Thank them for sharing the themes and then transition to the FOUR CORNERS activity (Strongly Agree – Agree – Strongly Disagree – Disagree)

Four Corners Activity:

- Tell residents that based on the themes of the book, they will engage in a four corners activity. Let them know that you will be reading various statements and silently they will go to a corner that personally answers the statement for themselves.

- Statements (once they choose a corner, you do dyads → one person talks for a minute and the other just listens and then switch and have small group discussions of 3-4 people for about 3 minutes. You can ask if they want to share what they talked about in their corners to the larger group.
 - I have a parent/family member/guardian who has supported me throughout my educational journey.
 - I have experienced adversity or discrimination based on my social identity (whether it be race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, ability or ethnicity).
 - I have felt like an outsider in a group setting or environment.
 - I feel that social media has hindered my development of relationships with people.
 - I have overcome a difficult challenge in my life.
 - I feel comfortable in the presence of law enforcement.

My 10-year-Old-Self Activity:

In this activity your residents will reflect on their 10- year old selves and connect back to their current identities to hopefully reflect on how much they've grown and learned through the years. Students will share their experiences, which will hopefully spark up some interesting discussions.

Get into small groups of about 4-5 people and give each person a paper with the following sentence prompts. Ask them to fill in the blanks individually as if they were writing to their 10 – years old selves; they should spend no more than 5 minutes completing the sentences.

Once everyone is finished writing, have each student share their sentences to their smaller group. After everyone shares, take 5 minutes to discuss the different answers and reflect why they chose certain responses.

Sentence Prompts:

When you come home from school, I would _____.

Remember you want to be a _____ so don't forget this when choosing your career path.

Although you don't like it when your guardian(s) tells you to _____, he/she is actually doing this because _____.

When you make mistakes, try to _____.

Your true friends are _____.

As you get ready to enter high school in a few years, I suggest you _____.

Don't regret the time you _____.

Going to UCLA will be _____.

Once groups are done sharing, have students discuss as a whole group any insightful moments within their smaller groups. Prompt students to discuss any similarities or differences from each other and from Coates' own letter to his son. End with having students share what they learned about themselves from this activity.

Closing: Ask by a raise of hands who in the room learned something about someone that they did not know beforehand. Affirm their participation and thank them for their engagement and willingness to share their own personal stories and narratives as well as their individual and collective hopes and dreams. Encourage them to continue building community and relationships with each other by sharing their stories with as many community members on the floor.

Active and Passive Program Ideas

Active Programming Ideas

- *Between the World and Me* with Tea (optional event name “DiversiTEA party”): Having an informal discussion/conversations around the themes of the book
- “Stay Woke” Coffee Chats:
 - Dialogues on mass incarceration, police brutality, how class influences education and job opportunities, the poverty cycle, discrimination based on race and ethnicity, gun/weapon violence, parents-children relationship and how it evolves as children go through puberty, gender and personal safety in public spaces, education system and hyper testing,
- Open Mic Night: Give residents the opportunity to express themselves and share some of their experiences that have shaped them to become the person they are today
- Song, dance, spoken word, poetry, etc. based on themes of the book
- Write A Letter To Your Future Children or the future generation in general
 - Similar to how Coates wrote this book, write a letter to your future children to explain the world. Things that they should be prepared for, tips on navigating the injustices of the world
- Documentary Movie Night
 - Various film genres/topics: documentaries on higher education, social justice, racial inequality, history films, yes!
- Explore a different community outside of UCLA and engage in community service. Co-program with UCLA Volunteer Center for service project ideas
 - Relates to Coates’ adventures abroad
- Have a FIR help facilitate a discussion around the book; Could be done as a Dinner with your FIR
- Between the World, UCPD and Me
 - Meeting local members of UCPD and engaging in a dialogue about safety tips, resources, and discussing larger items such as race and police violence.
- Social media hashtag for your floor and small comment on favorite thing about the book
- Photo Campaign: Stories of Identity
 - Host a photo campaign on campus where people hold a whiteboard that says “I am...”, where they can write words that express their personal identities. Could then use the photos from the campaign for a display somewhere on campus

Passive Programming Ideas

- Passive Board Ideas
 - Black History Month Passive Board; celebrate different leaders and activists (past and present). Suggestion for theme/format: Create a giant newspaper, with headlines and iconic photos of leaders or events, with captions discussing the context/importance
 - Celebrate Black Writers
 - Coates mentions a series of influential writers that he read during his time at Howard University (p.44 - 47). Create profiles for these writers/thinkers, their works and their ideas on black identities.
 - Between the World and Me; having paper cut outs of body/figures where residents can write down things that may affect their “body”; ex. Microaggressions, financial hardships, media’s portrayal of body image, etc. and then another one full of their personal traits (e.g. hobbies, likes, dislike, etc.) that wouldn’t be visible on the human body
 - Context: Coates discusses the black body and how his son needs to learn how to protect his body. Body can serve as a larger representation of one’s soul, beliefs, wellness, safety, etc.
 - What is Privilege?: A board explaining different types of privilege and what that means in the context of a community and the world
 - (Similar to above) Short descriptions of what oppression, social justice, intersectionality, micro-aggression, cultural appropriation, etc. means. Format could be flaps with the definitions inside.
 - Lessons from my Guardian (not specifically to fathers for inclusivity)
 - To encourage resident engagement, have residents write a brief letter or note about the most important lesson that they learned from the parent(s)/guardian(s).
 - Study Abroad Information Board
 - Drawing upon Coates’ experiences abroad and what he learned from his travels.

Additional Resources

- [Coates' Website](#)
 - Includes a biography, related articles, links, and more!
- [Follow Coates on Twitter](#)
- Other Writings by Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - [The Case for Reparations](#) in *The Atlantic*
 - [The Return of the Black Panther](#)
- Interviews with Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - [Episode 29: What's On Your Reparations Tab? \(with Ta-Nehisi Coates\)](#)
 - In this BuzzFeed podcast, Coates speaks with hosts Heben Nagatu and Tracy Clayton about the critical reception of *Between the World and Me*, and his relationship to black writers James Baldwin and Richard Wright.
 - [The Daily Show with Trevor Noah](#)
 - Coates describes how a progressive examination of crime in America was co-opted to
- An article about Coates:
 - [The Anger of Ta-Nehisi Coates](#) By: Darryl Pinckney