Ta-Nehisi Coates \textit{Between the World and Me}

(Spiegel & Grau, 2015)

\textit{From MACARTHUR FELLOWS BIO} https://www.macfound.org/fellows/931/

Ta-Nehisi Coates (b. 1975, Baltimore)

National Correspondent, \textit{The Atlantic} Published September 28, 2015

Ta-Nehisi Coates is a journalist, blogger, and memoirist who brings personal reflection and historical scholarship to bear on America's most contested issues. Writing without shallow polemic and in a measured style, Coates addresses complex and challenging issues such as racial identity, systemic racial bias, and urban policing. He subtly embeds the present—in the form of anecdotes about himself or others—into historical analysis in order to illustrate how the implications of the past are still experienced by people today.

In a series of blog posts about the Civil War and a long-form print essay on “The Case for Reparations” (2014), Coates grapples with the rationalizations for slavery and their persistence in twentieth-century policies like Jim Crow and redlining—the practice of denying loans and other financial services to African Americans. In “Reparations” Coates compellingly argues for remuneration for the economic impact on African Americans denied the ability to accumulate wealth or social status for generations. At once deeply felt and intensely researched, the essay prompted a national conversation.

Coates opens a window to the formation of his worldview in his memoir, \textit{The Beautiful Struggle} (2008), a reflection on race, class, and masculinity told through the lens of growing up in Baltimore as the son of a former Black Panther. Coates describes the evolution of his views on constructions of race in \textit{Between the World and Me} (2015). In this passionate and lyrical book-length essay addressed to his teenage son, he unflinchingly articulates the physical and mental experience of being a black man in America today. A highly distinctive voice, Coates is emerging as a leading interpreter of American concerns to a new generation of media-savvy audiences and having a profound impact on the discussion of race and racism in this country.

Ta-Nehisi Coates attended Howard University. His articles have appeared in local and national publications, including the \textit{Village Voice}, the \textit{Washington City Paper}, the \textit{Washington Post}, the \textit{New York Times Magazine}, \textit{Time Magazine}, \textit{The New Yorker}, and \textit{The Atlantic}, where he is currently a national correspondent. He was a Martin Luther King Jr. Visiting Scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2012 and a journalist-in-residence at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism in 2014.

\textit{The New York Times}

"Ta-Nehisi Coates’s ‘Between the World and Me’ Is Coming to the Apollo"

OBOM READING NOTES:

Dedication: “For David and Kenyatta, who believed.” Kenyatta is Coates’s wife. David is David Carr, Coates’s Editor at the Atlantic.

Title: Richard Wright: 1935 poem, “Between the World and Me”

Between the World and Me
by Richard Wright

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled
suddenly upon the thing,
Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by scaly
oaks and elms
And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting
themselves between the world and me....

There was a design of white bones slumbering forgottenly
upon a cushion of ashes.
There was a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt
finger accusingly at the sky.
There were torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and
a scorched coil of greasy hemp;
A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat,
and a pair of trousers stiff with black blood.
And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches,
butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a
drained gin-flask, and a whore’s lipstick;
Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the
lingering smell of gasoline.
And through the morning air the sun poured yellow
surprise into the eye sockets of the stony skull....

And while I stood my mind was frozen within cold pity
for the life that was gone.
The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by
icy walls of fear--
The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the
grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods
poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the
darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:
The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves
into my bones.
The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into
my flesh.

The gin-flask passed from mouth to mouth, cigars and
cigarettes glowed, the whore smeared lipstick red
upon her lips,
And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that
my life be burned....
And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth
into my throat till I swallowed my own blood.
My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my
black wet body slipped and rolled in their hands as
they bound me to the sapling.
And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from
me in limp patches.
And the down and quills of the white feathers sank into
my raw flesh, and I moaned in my agony.
Then my blood was cooled mercifully, cooled by a
baptism of gasoline.
And in a blaze of red I leaped to the sky as pain rose like water, boiling my limbs
Panting, begging I clutched childlike, clutched to the hot
sides of death.
Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in
yellow surprise at the sun....

PART I:

Sonia Sanchez poem:

Malcolm, 1965
by Sonia Sanchez

do not speak to me of martyrdom,
of men who die to be remembered
on some parish day.
i don’t believe in dying
though, I too shall die.
and violets like castanets
will echo me.

yet this man,
this dreamer,

thick lipped with words
will never speak again
and in each winter
when the cold air cracks
with frost I’ll breathe
his breath and mourn
my gunfilled nights.
he was the sun that tagged
the western sky and
melted tiger-scholars
while they searched for stripes.
he said, “fuck you, white
man. we have been
curled too long. nothing
is sacred, not your
white face nor any
land that separates
until some voices
squat with spasms.”

do not speak to me of living.
life is obscene with crowds
of white on black.
derth is my pulse.
what might have been
is not for him/or me
but what could have been
floods the womb until I drown.

Book is addressed to Coates’s son, Samori Maceo-Paul Coates (Named after Samori Toure, who fought against the French (68). Influenced by James Baldwin’s novel *The Fire Next Time*, addressed to his nephew. In a long tradition in American literature of epistolary memoirs/autobiographies/essays like Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (also addressed to his son), and Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (in which he defines the American and the American Dream and articulates the melting pot metaphor to describe American identity). See also the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X.

Asked by interviewer about losing his body, the “answer is American history” (6).

“Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as defined, indubitable feature of the natural world” (7).

“But race is the child of racism, not the father” (7).

“America believes itself exceptional, the greatest and noblest nation ever to exist, a lone champion standing between the white city of democracy and the terrorists, despots, barbarians, and other enemies of civilization. . . . I propose to take our countrymen’s claims of American exceptionalism seriously, which is to say I propose subjecting our country to an exceptional moral standard” (8).

Coates’s son is 15 years old, the same year “you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes” (9). Also the same age as James Baldwin’s nephew when he wrote him a letter.

“But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that is dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions al land, with great violence, upon the body” (10).

(setting the stage for the murder of his friend, Prince Jones)

The people believing themselves to be white.

The Dream: 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. And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies” (10-11).

Central question: “How do I live free in this black body?” (12).

Fear inherent in all the people he knew: “The fear lived on in their practiced bop, their slouching denim, their big T-shirts, the calculated angle of their baseball caps, a catalog of behaviors and garments enlisted to inspire the belief that these boys were in firm possession of everything they desired” (14).
Also in: customs of war, music and boom boxes, girls’ loud laughter and earrings, Nana’s hard manner, father’s belt whippings, clutch of his mother’s hand (16-17)

In 1986 Baltimore, the “boy with the small eyes” and gun (19). “He had let it be known how easily I could be selected” (19).

The streets of constant danger and “near-death experience, is thrilling” (22).

Survival techniques.

“If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left. Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave up your body now. But fail to comprehend the schools and you gave up your body later. I suffered at the hands of both, but I resent the schools more” (25).

WHY DOESN’T COATES SEE THE SCHOOLS AS A SOLUTION TO THE STREETS?
- regulation and control
- subjects (“Algebra, Biology, and English”) “were not subjects so much as opportunities to better discipline the body, to practice writing between the lines, copying the directions legibly, memorizing theorems extracted from the world they created to represent” (26)
  - felt distant
  - “drugging us with false morality sot that we would not see, so that we did not ask: Why” (2)

- “those who failed in the schools justified their destruction in the streets. The society could say, “He should have stayed in school,’ and then wash its hands of him” (33).
  - personal responsibility (33)

SEE FOUCALUT ON SCHOOLS AND PRISIONS AND DISCIPLINING THE BODY.

- 60% of black male high school drop outs go to prison (27) “Penal Warehousing” (26)
- Religion and Schools could not help (29)
- Father was a Black Panther (30)
- Civil Rights, passive resistance, “The black people in these films seemed to love the worst things in life—love the dogs that rent their children apart, the fire hoses that tore off their clothes and tumbled them into the streets” (32).

“Why are they showing this to us? Why were only our heroes nonviolent?” (32)

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

“I loved Malcolm because Malcolm never lied, unlike the schools and their façade of morality, unlike the streets and their bravado, unlike the world of the dreamers” (36).

Black ancestors:

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) Free slave and abolitionist.
Nanny Cudjoe (1680-1744) Jamaican national hero
Malcolm X (1925-1965) Black nationalist leader and Muslim, assassinated
Fred Hampton (1948-1969) Black Panther
Mark Clark (1947-1969) Black Panther

COINTELPRO-counter intelligence program, illegal FBI projects (39)

Howard University-his MECCA (39)

WHY USE THE TERM “MECCA”? (center point for Muslim prayer and Islam’s most holy site, the Kaaba in Saudi Arabia). See, too, the role that the Islamic Pilgrimage of Haaj playing in Malcolm X’s life.

“These institutions are related but not the same. Howard University is an institution of higher education. . . The Mecca is a machine, crafted to capture and concentrate the dark energy of all African peoples and inject it directly into the student body. The Mecca derives its power from the heritage of Howard University, which in Jim Crow days enjoyed a near-monopoly on black talent” (40).

“Through The Mecca I saw that we were, in our own segregated body politic, cosmopolitans” (43). Howard Students or Professors: Charles Drew, Amiri Baraka, Thurgood Marshall, Ossie Davis
Doug Wilder, David Dinkins, Lucille Clifton, Toni Morrison, Kwame Ture, Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Brown, Kenneth Clark, Alain Locke,
Others connected to Howard: Muhammad Ali, Ira Aldrige, Donny Hathaway, Donald Byrd

Musicians:
Ice Cube, Michael Jackson, Nas,
NWA “Fuck tha Police”

Saul Bellow quote, “Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?” (43)

Later comes across an essay by Ralph Wiley, “Tolstoy is the Tolstoy of the Zulus . . . Unless you find a profit in fencing off universal properties of mankind into exclusive tribal ownership” (56).


Reading: The Source, Vibe, Children of the Sun, Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire, The African Origins of Civilization, Chancellor Williams’s Destruction of Black Civilization (his Bible), J. A. Rogers, John Jackson

Historical Figures:
Mansa Musa of Mali (1312-37) 10th sultan of the Mali Empire
Shabaka of Egypt third Pharaoh of Egypt, 705-690 BC.
Yaa Asantewass of Ashanti (1840-1921) Queen Mother

Queen Nzinga, 16th Century Central African, resisted the Portuguese (45).

Coates valorizes her power, but learns at Howard that he was closer to the adviser she used as a chair than to her (54).

Other References:
Eric Williams (1911-1981) Caribbean historian
George Padmore (1903-59), journalist from Trinidad and the US
Sonia Sanchez (b. 1934) Af Am poet
Stanley Crouch (b. 1945) Af Am critic and writer
Harold Cruse (1916-2005) Af Am Studies Professor at U. of Michigan
Manning Marable (1950-2011) Columbia U Professor of Af Am Studies
Addison Gayle (1932-1991) Author of The Black Aesthetic
Carolyn Rodgers (1940-2010) Af Am poet, founder of 3rd World Press
Etheridge Knight (1931-1991) Af Am poet
Sterling Brown (1901-1989) Howard University professor and poet
C.L.R. James (1901-89) Trinidadian historian, University of DC
Basil Davidson (1914-2010) British Historian
E. Franklin Frazier (1894-1962) Af Am Sociologist
Melville J. Herskovitz (1895-1963) Af Am Sociologist
Martin Delany (1812-1885) Af Am abolitionist, writer
Alessandro de’ Medici (1510-1537) Duke of Florence
Derrick Bell (1930-2011) Faces at the Bottom of the Well 1992, 1st tenured Af Am professor at Harvard Law
Adina Howard (b. 1973) Af Am singer/songwriter
Exodus (Bob Marley)
Bad Boy-record label by Sean Combs 1993
Biggie (1972-1997) rapper, “One more chance” and “Hypnotize”
Bubber Miley (1903-1932) Af Am jazz trumpet and cornet player
Otis Redding (1941-1967) Af Am singer/songwriter
Sam and Dave, R&B duo from 1961-1981
C.K. Williams (1936-2015) White Amer poet, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry
Carolyn Forche (b. 1950-) White Amer poet (poetry of witness)
Ethelbert Miller (b. 1950) Af Am poet
Kenneth Carroll Af-Am poet and DC’s poet Laureate
Brian Gilmore Af-Am poet and lawyer
Robert Hayden’s (1930-1980) Af-Am poet, “Middle Passage” (51)

**Middle Passage**
**BY ROBERT HAYDEN**

I
Jesús, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy:

Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,
sharks following the moans the fever and the dying;
horror the corposant and compass rose.

Middle Passage:
voyage through death
     to life upon these shores.

“10 April 1800—
Blacks rebellious. Crew uneasy. Our linguist says
their moaning is a prayer for death,
ours and their own. Some try to starve themselves.
Lost three this morning leaped with crazy laughter
to the waiting sharks, sang as they went under.”

Desire, Adventure, Tartar, Ann:

Standing to America, bringing home
black gold, black ivory, black seed.

*Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,*
*of his bones New England pews are made,*
*those are altar lights that were his eyes.*

Jesus Saviour Pilot Me
Over Life’s Tempestuous Sea

We pray that Thou wilt grant, O Lord,
safe passage to our vessels bringing
heathen souls unto Thy chastening.

Jesus Saviour

“8 bells. I cannot sleep, for I am sick
with fear, but writing eases fear a little
since still my eyes can see these words take shape
upon the page & so I write, as one
would turn to exorcism. 4 days scudding,
but now the sea is calm again. Misfortune
follows in our wake like sharks (our grinning
tutelary gods). Which one of us
has killed an albatross? A plague among
our blacks—Ophthalmia: blindness—and we
have jettisoned the blind to no avail.
It spreads, the terrifying sickness spreads.
Its claws have scratched sight from the Capt.’s eyes
& there is blindness in the fo’c’sle
& we must sail 3 weeks before we come
to port.”

What port awaits us, Davy Jones’
or home? I’ve heard of slavers drifting, drifting,
playthings of wind and storm and chance, their crews
gone blind, the jungle hatred
crawling up on deck.

Thou Who Walked On Galilee

“Deponent further sayeth The Bella J
left the Guinea Coast
with cargo of five hundred blacks and odd
for the barracoons of Florida:

“That there was hardly room ’tween-decks for half
the sweltering cattle stowed spoon-fashion there;
that some went mad of thirst and tore their flesh
and sucked the blood:

“That Crew and Captain lusted with the comeliest
of the savage girls kept naked in the cabins;
that there was one they called The Guinea Rose
and they cast lots and fought to lie with her:

“That when the Bo’s’n piped all hands, the flames
spreading from starboard already were beyond
control, the negroes howling and their chains
entangled with the flames:

“That the burning blacks could not be reached,
that the Crew abandoned ship,
leaving their shrieking negresses behind,
that the Captain perished drunken with the wenches:
“Further Deponent sayeth not.”

Pilot Oh Pilot Me

II
Aye, lad, and I have seen those factories,
Gambia, Rio Pongo, Calabar;
have watched the artful mongos baiting traps
of war wherein the victor and the vanquished

Were caught as prizes for our barracoons.
Have seen the nigger kings whose vanity
and greed turned wild black hides of Fellatah,
Mandingo, Ibo, Kru to gold for us.
And there was one—King Anthracite we named him—
fetish face beneath French parasols
of brass and orange velvet, impudent mouth
whose cups were carven skulls of enemies:

He’d honor us with drum and feast and conjo
and palm-oil-glistening wenches deft in love,
and for tin crowns that shone with paste,
red calico and German-silver trinkets

Would have the drums talk war and send
his warriors to burn the sleeping villages
and kill the sick and old and lead the young
in coffles to our factories.

Twenty years a trader, twenty years,
for there was wealth aplenty to be harvested
from those black fields, and I’d be trading still
but for the fevers melting down my bones.

III

Shuttles in the rocking loom of history,
the dark ships move, the dark ships move,
their bright ironical names
like jests of kindness on a murderer’s mouth;
plough through thrashing glisten toward
fata morgana’s lucent melting shore,
weave toward New World littorals that are
mirage and myth and actual shore.

Voyage through death,
voyage whose chartings are unlove.

A charnel stench, effluvium of living death
spreads outward from the hold,
where the living and the dead, the horribly dying,
lie interlocked, lie foul with blood and excrement.

Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,
the corpse of mercyrots with him,
rats eat love’s rotten gelid eyes.

But, oh, the living look at you
with human eyes whose suffering accuses you,
whose hatred reaches through the swill of dark
to strike you like a leper’s claw.

You cannot stare that hatred down
or chain the fear that stalks the watches
and breathes on you its fetid scorching breath;
cannot kill the deep immortal human wish,
the timeless will.

“But for the storm that flung up barriers
of wind and wave, *The Amistad*, señores,
would have reached the port of Príncipe in two,
three days at most; but for the storm we should
have been prepared for what befell.
Swift as the puma’s leap it came. There was that interval of moonless calm filled only with the water’s and the rigging’s usual sounds, then sudden movement, blows and snarling cries and they had fallen on us with machete and marlinspike. It was as though the very air, the night itself were striking us. Exhausted by the rigors of the storm, we were no match for them. Our men went down before the murderous Africans. Our loyal Celestino ran from below with gun and lantern and I saw, before the cane-knife’s wounding flash, Cinquez, that surly brute who calls himself a prince, directing, urging on the ghastly work. He hacked the poor mulatto down, and then he turned on me. The decks were slippery when daylight finally came. It sickens me to think of what I saw, of how these apes threw overboard the butchered bodies of our men, true Christians all, like so much jetsam. Enough, enough. The rest is quickly told: Cinquez was forced to spare the two of us you see to steer the ship to Africa, and we like phantoms doomed to rove the sea voyaged east by day and west by night, deceiving them, hoping for rescue, prisoners on our own vessel, till at length we drifted to the shores of this your land, America, where we were freed from our unspeakable misery. Now we demand, good sirs, the extradition of Cinquez and his accomplices to La Havana. And it distresses us to know there are so many here who seem inclined to justify the mutiny of these blacks. We find it paradoxical indeed that you whose wealth, whose tree of liberty are rooted in the labor of your slaves should suffer the august John Quincy Adams to speak with so much passion of the right of chattel slaves to kill their lawful masters and with his Roman rhetoric weave a hero’s garland for Cinquez. I tell you that we are determined to return to Cuba with our slaves and there see justice done. Cinquez—or let us say ‘the Prince’—Cinquez shall die.”

The deep immortal human wish, the timeless will:

Cinquez its deathless primaveral image, life that transfigures many lives.

Voyage through death to life upon these shores.
“the Black Aesthetic
“Negritude”

“I went into this investigation imagining history to be a unified narrative, free of debate, which once uncovered, would simply verify everything I had always suspected. The smokescreen would lift. . . . The trouble came almost immediately. I did not find a coherent tradition marching lockstep but instead factions, and factions within factions. Hurston battled Hughes, Dubois warred with Garvey, Harold Cruse fought everyone” (47).

“I was made for the library, not the classroom. The classroom was a jail of other people’s interests. The library was open, unending, free” (48).

Friends:
Joel Dias-Porter (50)

Prince George’s County “PG County”, wealthy black community with their own politicians, and “a police force as vicious as any in America” (53).

Howard Education:

“Perhaps the Irish too had once lost their bodies. Perhaps being named ‘black’ had nothing to do with any of this; perhaps being named ‘black’ was just someone’s name for being at the bottom, a human turned to object, object turned to pariah” (55).

Howard professor who slept with men, whose wife slept with women, and who slept with each other (had a son). (58)

“‘Faggot’ as a word I had employed all my life. And now here they were, The Cabal, The Coven, The Others, The Monsters, The Outsiders, The Faggots, The Dykes, dressed in all their human clothes. I am black, and have been plundered and have lost my body. But perhaps I too had the capacity for plunder, maybe I would take another human’s body to confirm myself in a community” (60).

He gets sick and one of those women takes care of him (61).

Part II:

Amiri Baraka (born LeRoi Jones, converted to Islam)

Ka’Ba

A closed window looks down
on a dirty courtyard, and Black people
call across or scream across or walk across
defying physics in the stream of their will.

Our world is full of sound
Our world is more lovely than anyone’s
tho we suffer, and kill each other
and sometimes fail to walk the air.
We are beautiful people
With African imaginations
full of masks and dances and swelling chants
with African eyes, and noses, and arms
tho we sprawl in gray chains in a place
full of winters, when what we want is sun.

We have been captured,
and we labor to make our getaway, into
the ancient image; into a new

Correspondence with ourselves
and our Black family. We need magic
now we need the spells, to raise up
return, destroy, and create. What will be
the sacred word?

Killing of Prince Jones, (77)
-understood his father’s beatings (82)
“Either I can beat him or the police.”

The police officer and politicians in PGC were black. (83)

Moved to NY “two months before September 11, 2001” (86).

“looking out upon the ruins of America, my heart was cold. I had disasters all my own. The officer who killed Prince Jones, like all the officers who regard us so warily, was the sword of the American citizenry. I would never consider any American citizen pure. I was out of sync with the city. I kept thinking about how southern Manhattan had always been Ground Zero for us... But I did now that Bin Laden was not the first man to bring terror to that section of the city. I never forgot that. Neither should you. In the days after, I watched the ridiculous pageantry of flags, the machismo of firemen, the overwrought slogans. Damn it all. Prince Jones was dead. And hell upon those who tell us to be twice as good and shoot us no matter. Hell for the ancestral fear that put black parents under terror. And hell upon those who shatter the holy vessel” (86-87).

Does not see any difference between the officers who killed Jones and those who died on 911.

“Black, white, or whatever, they were the menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could—with no justification—shatter my body” (87).

“I always had people” (88).

“I saw them lost in conversation with each other, mother and father, while their sons commanded entire sidewalks with their tricycles. The galaxy belonged to them, and as terror was communicated to our children, I saw mastery communicated to theirs” (89).

“be twice as good” = “accept half as much” (91)
Son being pushed by a white woman when he was 5 years old (94): “the woman was pulling rank. I knew, for instance, that she would not have pushed a black child out on my part of Flatbush . . . I turned and spoke to this woman, and my words were hot with all of the moment and all of my history. She shrunk back, shocked. A white man standing nearby spoke up in her defense. I experienced this as his attempt to rescue the damsel from the beast” (94). Threatens him with arrest. He’s ashamed that he made an error: “knowing that our errors always cost us more” (97).

Civil War history and Abraham Brian (101): free blacks during the war who fled their homes. Reference to Faulkner’s “southern boys” who were all white (102).

The Dukes of Hazzard: “‘just some good ole boys, never meanin’ no harm’ – a mantra for the Dreamers if there ever was one” (103).

“You and I, my son, are that ‘below.’ That was true in 1776. It is true today. There is no them without you, and withouth the right to break you they must necessarily fall from the mountain, lose their divinity, and tumble out of the Dream” (105). (See Hegel and master/slave dialectic)

Ref. to Thavolia Glymph (106) Duke history professor of African and African American Studies

“I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world” (108).

His wife goes to Paris “I was bemused at your mother’s dreams of Paris” (117).

Coates goes to Paris (122)

“It occurred to me that I really was in someone else’s country and yet, in some necessary way, I was outside of their country. In American I was part of an equation—even if it wasn’t’ a part I relished. I was the one the police stopped on Twenty-third Street in the middle of a workday. I was the one driven to The Mecca. I was not just a father but the father of a black boy. I was not just a spouse but the husband of a black woman, a freighted symbol of black love. But sitting in that garden, for the first time I was an alien, I was a sailor—landless and disconnected. And I was sorry that I had never felt this particular loneliness before—that I have never felt myself so far outside of someone else’s dream (124).

“I wanted you to have your own life, apart from fear—even apart from me. I am wounded. I am marked by old codes, which shielded me in one world and then chained me up in the next” (125).

“As slaves we were this country’s first windfall, the down payment on its freedom. After the ruin and liberation of the Civil War came Redemption for the unrepentant South and Reunion, and our bodies became this country’s second mortgage. In the New Deal we were their guestroom, their finished basement. And today, with a sprawling prison system, which has turned the warehousing of black bodies into a jobs programs for Dreamers and a lucrative investment for Dreamers; today, when 8 percent of the world’s prisoners are black men, our bodies have refinanced the Dream of being white. Black life is cheap, but in America black bodies are a natural resource of incomparable value” (132).

Part III:

And have brought humanity to the edge of

Oblivion: because they think they are white. James Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time

Goes to see Dr. Mable Jones, Prince Jones’s mother. 138-
“They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people” (149).

“I do not believe that we can stop them, Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves. And still I urge you to struggle. Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom, Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca. Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name. But do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them. Pray for them, if you are so moved. But do not pin your struggle on their conversion” (191).

Last lines coming back from Dr. Jones’s home in Philadelphia.

“They were the same ghettos I had seen in Chicago all those years ago, the same ghettos where my mother was raised, where my father was raised. Through the windshield I saw the make of these ghettos—the abundance of beauty shops, churches, liquor stores, and crumbling housing—and I felt the old fear. Through the windshield I saw the rain coming down in sheets” (152).

COMPARE TONE AND MESSAGE TO BALDWIN’S LETTER TO HIS NEPHEW.


January 1, 1962

I have begun this letter five times and torn it up five times. I keep seeing your face, which is also the face of your father and my brother. I have known both of you all your lives and have carried your daddy in my arms and on my shoulders, kissed him and spanked him and watched him learn to walk. I don’t know if you have known anybody from that far back, if you have loved anybody that long, first as an infant, then as a child, then as a man. You gain a strange perspective on time and human pain and effort.

Other people cannot see what I see whenever I look into your father’s face, for behind your father’s face as it is today are all those other faces which were his. Let him laugh and I see a cellar your father does not remember and a house he does not remember and I hear in his present laughter his laughter as a child. Let him curse and I remember his falling down the cellar steps and howling and I remember with pain his tears which my hand or your grandmother’s hand so easily wiped away, but no one’s hand can wipe away those tears he sheds invisibly today which one hears in his laughter and in his speech and in his songs.

I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it and I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. One can be—indeed, one must strive to become—tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been best at since we have heard of war; remember, I said most of mankind, but it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.

Now, my dear namesake, these innocent and well-meaning people, your countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago. I hear the chorus of the innocents screaming, “No, this is not true. How bitter you are,” but I am writing this letter to you to try to tell you something about how to handle them, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist. I know the conditions under which you were born for I was there. Your countrymen were
not there and haven't made it yet. Your grandmother was also there and no one has ever accused her of being bitter. I suggest that the innocent check with her. She isn't hard to find. Your countrymen don't know that she exists either, though she has been working for them all their lives.

Well, you were born; here you came, something like fifteen years ago, and though your father and mother and grandmother, looking about the streets through which they were carrying you, staring at the walls into which they brought you, had every reason to be heavy-hearted, yet they were not, for here you were, big James, named for me. You were a big baby. I was not. Here you were to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard at once and forever to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that. I know how black it looks today for you. It looked black that day too. Yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other, none of us would have survived, and now you must survive because we love you and for the sake of your children and your children's children.

This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that for the heart of the matter is here and the crux of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits to your ambition were thus expected to be settled. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence. You were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do and how you could do it, where you could live and whom you could marry.

I know your countrymen do not agree with me here and I hear them saying, "You exaggerate." They do not know Harlem and I do. So do you. Take no one's word for anything, including mine, but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear.

Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words "acceptance" and "integration." There is no reason for you to try to become like white men and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them, and I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love, for these innocent people have no other hope. They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men.

Many of them indeed know better, but as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case the danger in the minds and hearts of most white Americans is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shivering and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar, and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.

You don't be afraid. I said it was intended that you should perish, in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go beyond and behind the white man's definition, by never being allowed
to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention and by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality. But these men are your brothers, your lost younger brothers, and if the word “integration” means anything, this is what it means, that we with love shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it, for this is your home, my friend. Do not be driven from it. Great men have done great things here and will again and we can make America what America must become.

It will be hard, James, but you come from sturdy peasant stock, men who picked cotton, dammed rivers, built railroads, and in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer. One of them said, "The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off."¹

You know and I know that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too early. We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, James, and Godspeed.

Your uncle,

James

http://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/

Victims of Racial violence:

Eric Garner—choke hold by NYPD in 2014 for allegedly selling cigarettes, no indictment, family settled out of court.

Renisha McBride—crashed her car near Detroit, Michigan and went to a house at 4:42 am. He shot her and was found guilty.

John Crawford: shot by police officer in an Ohio Walmart store 2014 for hold a toy gun, no indictment.

Tamir Rice: 12 year old, in Cleveland 2014, with a toy gun. No indictment.

Marlene Pinnock: Bi-polar, beaten by California Highway Police 2014, settled out of court.

¹ From an American slave spiritual:

You got a right, I got a right,
We all got a right to the tree of life.
Yes, tree of life.

The very time I thought I was lost,
The dungeon shook and the chain fell off.
You may hinder me here,
But you can't hinder me there.
'Cause God in the Heaven's
Going to answer my prayer.

https://www.marinersmuseum.org/sites/micro/captivepassage/arrival/arr021.html
**Michael Brown**: Ferguson, Missouri 2014, fatally shot by police after robbery. No indictment.

**Elmer Clay Newman**: Prince George’s County, 1999, died in the back of an ambulance from excessive force by police, no indictments because it was not clear which officers were responsible.

**Gary Hopkins**: Prince George’s County, 1999 shot and killed by a Police Officer who was indicted.

**Freddie McCollum**: Prince George’s County, 1997, traffic violation, beaten by 3 officers, won 4.1 million in damages.

**Abner Louima**: Haitian immigrant, arrested in NYC in 1997, then abused by police officers, including being sodomized with a broom handle. The officers were sentenced and Louima won a large settlement.

**Anthony Barez**: a security guard in the Bronx, killed in a fight by/with police December 22, 1994.

**Eric Garner**: recorded as saying, “I can’t breathe,” when in a chokehold by police July 17, 2014, died from a heart attack on the way to the hospital.

**Trayvon Martin**: 17 year old, fatally shot on February 26, 2012 in Sanford, Florida by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer (acquitted).

**Sean Bell**: From Queens shot and killed in November 25, 2006 by plainclothes and undercover NYPD officers.

**John Crawford**: Fatally shot on August 5, 2014 by Beavercreek police officer Sean Williams, in a Walmart store in Beavercreek.

**Jordon Davis**: Fatally shot on November 23, 2012, at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida by David Dunn, over the loud music.

**Kajieme Powell**: Killed by two St. Louis city police officers. Powell, who was mentally ill, came at them with a knife.

**Prince Carmen Jones, Jr.**

**Died:**
Sept. 1, 2000, Age 25

http://www.theppsc.org/Archives/DF_Articles/Files/Maryland/PG-County/Casualties_Since_1990.htm

“A Blue Wall of Silence” Washington Post

“Jones, a Howard University student, was on his way to his fiancee’s house in Fairfax when he noticed a Mitsubishi Montero was following him. The driver of the vehicle was Carlton B. Jones, a narcotics detective in plain clothes. Prince Jones tried to evade the officer’s vehicle by pulling into a driveway and turning off his headlights a block from his destination. What happened next is unclear, but Det. Jones fired 16 rounds into Prince Jones vehicle, hitting him five times in the back. Officials later confirmed that Det. Jones had mistaken Prince Jones for someone else.”

Since 2014 there have been other high-profile cases. Follow this link:
“From Ferguson to Baton Rouge: Deaths of black men and women at the hands of police”

See also, the Friday, June 16th, 2017 acquittal of Officer Yanez in the Philando Castile shooting in Minnesota 2016.