

Quotes and Questions from Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*
Compiled by Mary Leighton, City Club of Eugene for its community book chats

“Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism—the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them—inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature....But race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming ‘the people’ has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy.” (*Between the World and Me*, p. 7)

Explain why you agree or disagree with Coates, in this statement.

The names that many Indigenous People use for themselves means “the people.” Do you think that is also covered by Coates’ description above?

“I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways....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.” (*Between the World and Me*, p. 11)

Do you view “the dream” in the same way that Coates does—surrounded by picket fences?

Do you know of a different example of “the dream” that does not rest on the backs of “the other” (i.e., not “the people”)?

“Schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them.”

“I came to see the streets and the schools as arms of the same beast. One enjoyed the official power of the state and the other enjoyed its implicit sanction. But fear and violence were the weaponry of both.”

(Between the World and Me, pp 27 & 33)

In your experience of school, was truth revealed or concealed, for the most part? In what ways?

To what extent, in your own experience, were “the streets” and “the schools” arms of the same creature? What kind of creature(s)? How did that influence you?

Between the World and Me [Excerpt]

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....

Richard Wright, July/August, 1935, Partisan Review

In your life, or a life that's familiar to you, describe something that might be said to have thrust itself in front of the world, shaping its appearance and meaning?

This is the first stanza of a longer poem. Why do you think Coates used only this part? (Read the full poem at http://edhelper.com/poetry/Between_the_World_and_Me_by_Richard_Wright.htm.)