

1A (M/Tu)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015), 68-71.

- How does Coates portray slavery and enslaved people? How does his narrative change/ challenge how you have been taught about slavery in the U.S.?
- How does Coates understand history? He says “the god of history is an atheist, and nothing about his world is meant to be.” (71) What does he mean? Do you agree?
 - *Hint:* “Whig” history is a popular view of history that assumes that we always head in a more progressive, more enlightened direction over time. Would Coates agree with a Whig interpretation of history?
- Coates is writing this book as a letter to his teenaged son. How might this influence the examples he chooses and the message he gives? Why might Coates focus on brothers in some places and mothers in another?
- One of the overlapping arenas of race and sexuality is bodies: how bodies get identified, get classified, and get sexual ideologies built around them. How and when do bodies figure in this excerpt?
- Coates writes that: “a world that loudly proclaims its love of freedom and inscribes this love in its essential texts, a world in which these same professors hold this woman a slave, hold her mother a slave, her father a slave, her daughter a slave.” (70) Can you start thinking about how colonial concepts of race and sexuality explain colonists’ assertion of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness alongside the perpetual enslavement of millions?
- What might be the value of reading a piece on modern America when we are starting three weeks on America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? How/ is the past useful for understanding the present?

1B (W/Th)

Transcript from Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano...* (London, 1789), Chapter 2.

Here is a very brief [background](#) on Equiano.

- How does Equiano describe his life in Africa before being kidnapped? What is important to him? Do you see any similarities to Coates’ emphasis?

Humanities Core Prof Block Spring 2017 Week 1 Student Questions

- Note that there are hardly any names or details about individuals on the slave ship. Why might this be? How could this relate to the creation of racial ideologies under American chattel slavery?
- How does the ability to control one's body (or other's ability to control your body) relate to enslavement? (Hint: Look at discussions of suicide and food.) Can you see how the centrality of bodily control might relate to sexuality?
- How does the Middle Passage (the time kidnapped Africans spent on ships crossing the Atlantic) give meaning to racial divisions?