Intensive students, pick two essay prompts and write two essays of at least 500 words each. Honors students, choose three. Be sure to use evidence (and cite it) from the text to support your answers. Use these prompts as just a springboard for your essay. Don’t tie yourself down to just answering the question but use it to explore your ideas on the book.

1*. Between the World and Me* has been called a book about race, but the author argues that race itself is a flawed, if not useless, concept—it is, if anything, nothing more than a pretext for rac*ism*. Early in the book he writes, “Race, is the child of racism, not the father.”  The idea of race has been so important in the history of America and in the self-identification of its people—and racial designations have literally marked the difference between life and death in some instances.  How does discrediting the idea of race as an immutable, unchangeable fact change the way we look at our history? Ourselves?

2. Fear is palpably described in the book’s opening section and shapes much of Coates’s sense of himself and the world. “When I was your age,” Coates writes to his son, “the only people I knew were black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid.” How did this fear inform and distort Coates’s life and way of looking at the world?  Is this kind of fear inevitable?  Can you relate to his experience? Why or why not?

3. The book—in the tradition of classic texts like Ranier Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*  to James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*—is written in the form of a letter. Why do you think Coates chose this literary device?  Did the intimacy of an address from a father to his son make you feel closer to the material or kept at a distance?

4. Coates repeatedly invokes the sanctity of the black “body” and describes the effects of racism in vivid, physical terms. He writes: “And so enslavement must be casual wrath and random manglings, the gashing of heads and brains blown out over the river as the body seeks to escape…There is no uplifting way to say this. I have no praise anthems, nor old Negro spirituals. The spirit and soul are the body and brain, which are destructive—that is precisely why they are so precious. And the soul did not escape. The spirit did not steal away on gospel wings.” Coates’s atheistic assertion that the soul and mind are not separate from the physical body is in conflict with the religious faith that has been so crucial to many African Americans. How does this belief affect his outlook on racial progress?

5. Some critics have argued that *Between the World and Me* lacks adequate representation of black women’s experiences. In her otherwise positive *Los Angeles Times*review, Rebecca Carroll writes: “What is less fine is the near-complete absence of black women throughout the book.” Do you think that the experience of women is erased in this book?  Do you think Coates had an obligation to include more stories of black women in the text?