Part I Questions for Discussion:

1. On page 7, Coates writes: “But race is the child of racism, not the father.” He seems to be suggesting here that racism precedes race and that without racism, there is no category of race. Do you agree?

2. In the same paragraph, Coates puts genealogy and physiognomy in opposition to hierarchy. He writes: “that the preeminence of hue and hair…can correctly organize a society…that they signify deeper attributes…is the new idea…” (page 7). What Coates appears to be saying here is that in a different social system, genealogy (parents, grandparents, etc.) and physiognomy (physical features of the face) would be just that, but in America (and elsewhere to be sure) they determine hierarchy. Is this way of looking at race and racism new to you? Does Coates put words to what is otherwise taken for granted or is he dispelling a myth about American social equality?

3. On page eleven, Coates introduces “the Dream.” What is “the Dream” according to Coates? Who gets to access “the Dream” and who does not? Does “the Dream” seem familiar to you? To what extent is “the Dream” applicable to the American Jewish community? What are Jewish dreams? What has been the most successful Jewish dream of the last one hundred years? Is this dream your dream?

4. Coates writes: “The Dream is the enemy of all art, courageous thinking, and honest writing.” (page 50) What does he mean by this? Is there a relationship between the creative arts (art, writing, music etc.) and being an outsider?