

Ashleigh Carrington

Program: Citizens, Thinkers, Writers at Yale University

University: University of Connecticut

Texts: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*

Bio: Ash Carrington is a resident in New Haven, Connecticut. She participated in Yale University's Citizens, Writers, Thinkers program and is now a student at the University of Connecticut, where is double majoring in English and American History. In her free time, she enjoys reading poetry and listening to various comedy podcasts.

Profile: Ashleigh Carrington came to the Teagle Humanities Fellowship with the conviction that books could be her key to understanding the world. In her application essay, she wrote passionately about James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, a book which she says "brought me peace when my country was dealing with the painful reality of the brutality against black men and women each year." Baldwin's words stayed with her as she participated in Yale's Citizens Thinkers Writers Program.

Inspired by Baldwin, Ashleigh chose to read Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folks* this summer with her mentor, Stephanie Nevin. A curious and politically-aware reader, Ashleigh focused on the limits of education in achieving equality. Like Du Bois, Baldwin, and Coates, Ashleigh believes education can open doors for individuals, push societies beyond their limits, and offer a key to self-discovery. Coates' description of libraries as "open, unending and free" resonated with the young scholar, but she could not ignore education's shortcomings. She wrestled with the stories Du Bois and Coates included of educated black men killed despite being model citizens. These haunting tales, coupled with the police violence Ashleigh has witnessed in her own life, led her to wonder whether a person needs to be safe before they can truly receive the benefits of education and freedom itself. Ashleigh explains this problem succinctly: "The body and mind need each other to function." Without physical safety, black Americans lack freedom, as Ashleigh pronounces, "it is crucial then for us to recognize what W.E.B. Du Bois explained to us a century ago: that we must understand that 'the spirit of the thirteenth amendment is broken.'"

Ashleigh is committed to finding the solutions to these major issues, and used the texts to explore possibilities for the future of America. She is not satisfied with seeing education as a singular solution for racial equality, because, as she stated, "the known disparities of people of color in education [have] become more apparent than ever before." Removing police from classrooms, celebrating black diversity beyond "one month a year," and replacing the "constant pressure" of examinations with an emphasis on community-building are three suggestions she offered.