

Bintou Kane

Program: Freedom & Citizenship at Columbia University

University: SUNY Binghamton

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

Bio: Bintou Kane was born and raised in Harlem and attended Frederick Douglass Academy 1 high school. She graduated from Columbia’s Freedom and Citizenship program in 2018 after gaining fundamental knowledge needed to succeed in her college journey. She is now a junior (class of 2022) at Binghamton University ready to start her nursing clinical. She enjoys watching mystery movies and babysitting because she loves kids.

Profile: For Bintou Kane, the Teagle Humanities Fellowship was a way to explore her own lived experiences in an academic and historical context. In her application essay, Bintou explained how reading Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* shed light on the tensions and separations between white and black people. Having grown up in a majority-black neighborhood, Bintou wrote, “I was aware of the separation that was happening right in front of me.” While she noticed a “them vs. us” mentality growing up, she also found comfort in a world where her teachers, friends, and neighbors all looked like her. It wasn’t until she went to college at a predominantly white institution that she first found herself as the only black person in a room. “I thought they wouldn’t like me because I didn’t look like them,” she wrote, “and as a result I stayed to myself.” When one of her white classmates invited her to a party and then became a good friend, Bintou’s perception of her world shifted, and she realized she had separated herself in the ways Thomas’ novel described.

Bintou used her Teagle Humanities Fellowship to further explore her experience moving between her all-black neighborhood and predominantly-white college. She chose two texts that dealt particularly with education and double consciousness: Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* and W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folks*. With her mentor, Benji de la Piedra, Bintou drew parallels between these historical experiences of blackness and her own, noting that, “like Coates and Du Bois, I wasn’t born to a wealthy household but I did use what was given to me and made the best of it.” But also like Coates and Du Bois, these revelations made her question her world more, not settle into it.

Bintou set out to explore this question of equality in her readings, noticing in particular that Du Bois’ idea of double consciousness was something she’s experienced in her own life. Through Du Bois, she analyzed her own attempts to hide and quiet her African identity in college, saying of her peers, “I wanted them to see me in a way that was comfortable to them.” On this point she associated especially with Coates who speaks of his self-education in *Between the World and Me*. Bintou connected with Coates’ assertion that he was “made for the library, but not the classroom,” as she similarly struggled “growing up in a school system that didn’t give the kids much hope” while still loving to learn.



Bintou used her final essay not only to understand her place on a college campus, but to grapple with the tragic incidents of police violence this summer. She wrote about the murder of George Floyd and how unsettled she was to see how “none of the officers moved a muscle while he was on the floor saying he couldn't breathe.” Here again she felt communion with Coates, and related to the idea of “losing your body,” writing that “over the past decades they have been taking lives (predominantly black lives) instead of saving them.” Saddened by the way the course of history has led to the loss of life, Bintou advocates for education to address these tragedies: “This is the time where everyone should reflect on and acknowledge the past so that there can be a better future for all races.”