

**Simone Henderson**

**Program:** Citizens Thinkers Writers at Yale University

**University:** Roger Williams University

**Texts:** Toni Morrison, *Beloved*; Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*; James Baldwin *The Fire Next Time*

**Bio:** Simone Henderson is resident of West Haven, Connecticut. She has participated in programs such as Yale Arts and Humanities and Yale Citizens Thinkers Writers. She is a 2020 Graduate from High School in the Community, and will be attending Roger Williams University in the Fall. She enjoys painting, writing poetry, and singing in her spare time.

**Profile:** Simone approached the Teagle Humanities Fellowship asking big questions about love, morality, and fear. She wrote her application essay on Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” which tells the story of “a city whose happiness relied upon the oppression and misery of a child.” Simone grappled with this moral universe, ultimately unable to come to an answer to whether she would free the child if she resided in such a city: “How can I be the one responsible for everyone else’s demise, but how can I be as selfish to deny the freedom, respect, and happiness of someone [else]?”

Simone’s question and its pertinence to this summer’s political landscape informed her studies at the Teagle Humanities Fellowship, where she engaged with three texts: James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*, and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. With the guidance of her mentor, Stephanie Nevin, Simone reflected on “the baton of racism,” passed down through generations in America. Wondering about potential solutions she considered how “Most people assume that the cure to racism is love. As a Black woman, I personally believe that love is part of the equation, but there has to be another answer because if love was the cure we wouldn’t be in this current state of turmoil.”

Pondering the strength and weaknesses of love across her three readings, Simone was fascinated to discover each author making explicit connections between love and fear. Pulling evidence from Baldwin, Coates, and Morrison, Simone wrote about trans-generational fear in Black American families, stating, “Fear isn’t anything new for Black families as it is something that we are born into; our parents fear for us until we are old enough to fear for ourselves.” She noted that Black families are not the only ones plagued with fear, for white people learn to fear their black neighbors through “stereotypes that have circulated the nation for generations.” “Fear is the barrier between the world and me,” Simone wrote.

Ultimately, Simone determined that there is a place for both love and fear in America’s recovery from racism, expressing, “It is through the eyes of strong inspiring writers like Baldwin, Morrison, and Coates that we see what it means to have to act out of love and fear. They shed light on the disease America has put a mask on. I hope to be a part of history, unmasking the wrong and showing people the way to the right.” She determined that a path



forward is through individuals acknowledging the ways they have caused fear and pain in others. After that, she argued it is simply a matter of changing the narrative: “People have the rest of their lives to make up for the pain they have caused others by simply not passing it on.”