

**Dylen Marcelle**

**Program:** Freedom & Citizenship at Columbia University

**University:** Boston College

**Texts:** *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*; James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*; Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

**Bio:** Dylen Marcelle is from New York City and specifically the Bronx. He participated in Columbia University's Freedom & Citizenship program in 2019 and graduated from Democracy Prep Charter High School in 2020. In Fall 2020, Dylen began attending Boston College where he intends to major in Political Science. In his free time, he enjoys playing basketball and hanging out with friends.

**Profile:** When Dylen applied for the Teagle Humanities Fellowship, he wrote about his experience reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. He wrote about how the protagonist of the work, Dr. Jekyll, "is a high-class and profound doctor who faces an internal moral struggle." For Dylen, who used to believe strictly in moral absolutes, the text helped him learn "that life is very complex and filled with nuances." Following Dr. Jekyll's journey he came to understand why a "doctor of such high stature" could even be capable of such "immoral desires," let alone act upon them. Dylen came to understand the complexity of Dr. Jekyll's mind and considered how the character's own development and social pressures shaped his urges as an adult.

Dylen brought his newfound appreciation for nuance and compassion to his reading this summer. With his mentor, Zachary Roberts, he chose three texts: *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin, and *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Dylen read these texts in light of protests by the Black Lives Matter movement, as he saw his social media feed fill this summer with calls to end racial injustice. As his Instagram filled with black squares, he started to believe something big was really happening. While he felt so optimistic about the scale and scope of the invigorated BLM movement, he had his doubts as well, and he wondered what Baldwin and King, especially, would think about this historic moment and how it is playing out on social media.

In *The Fire Next Time*, Dylen noticed a call for conversation, compassion, and love that is absent in the "cancel culture" of the internet today. Dylen quoted Baldwin: "these men are your brothers--your long lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it." To Dylen, "cancelling" others over misunderstandings or assumptions leads to shaming "but no actual productive conversation." "If there is no forgiveness or guidance to help [people] correct their actions, no peace will come forth," he wrote. From the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., Dylen found yet another critique of modern online activism, or "clicktivism" as its detractors have coined it. Social



media, he wrote "creates the notion [that] reposting brings about definite change." It raises awareness, he argues, but too often it falls short of achieving tangible results. Using King's words as support: "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." Dylen calls on us all to do more: "Reposting simply isn't enough," he states, "it's not a true form of action against racial inequality because it can be done with ease."