

**Karen Wu**

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

**University:** Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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

**Bio:** Karen Wu is an 18-year-old who has lived in New York City her whole life. She participated in Columbia University's Freedom & Citizenship program and graduated from Dominican Academy in 2020. This fall, Karen will be attending Hobart & William Smith Colleges where she intends to major in Chemistry (and potentially something else). She enjoys eating poké and looking at the current trends on Twitter, but she doesn't have any social media.

**Profile:** In her application to the Fellowship, Karen wrote about her notions of community and interdependence. Her essay on Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* gave insight into her own ideas of connection: "The reality is you can't make it anywhere in life without having to rely on others." To her, living in accordance with values of compassion, family, and friendship are incredibly important to leading a good life. Because of this, Karen keeps a copy of *The Giving Tree* where she can always see it, "so that I can constantly be reminded of the type of person I aspire to be: someone who knows how to value and appreciate others."

As a Teagle Humanities Fellow, Karen's focus on community care played a role in her essay on Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*. With the support of her mentor Angela Xue, Karen looked at Coates' work in context of the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent exposé on race relations in America. "The question is," Karen wrote, "Why is it that we continue to allow these things to happen?"

Karen particularly appreciates Coates' honesty in speaking about racism with his teenage son. When Samori is struggling with the murder of Michael Brown, Coates knows not to sugarcoat it. Karen connected this moment to the larger systems of injustice in America: "Although Coates wanted to console Samori at heart, [...] Coates knows that this is what the reality is and that he should not give his son false hope since the way it shatters expectations makes it more heartbreaking."

Echoing the themes of *The Giving Tree*, Karen hopes that these injustices can be addressed and corrected for the betterment of the community as a whole. Like the titular tree that sacrifices everything for the protection and prosperity of a boy who is like a son, Karen's work yearns for a world where all are equally valued and appreciated.