



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRE NEXT TIME BY JAMES BALDWIN

1. What is the significance of the book's title, the titles of its two sections, and the epigraphs that precede the book itself and the second letter?
2. What are the details of the spiritual geography of Baldwin's adolescence as presented in the first part of "Down at the Cross"? How are they related to his advice to his nephew in "My Dungeon Shook"?
3. What was the young James Baldwin running from and what was he seeking in his turn to religion as a fourteen-year-old boy in Harlem?
4. What are the reasons for and circumstances of the seventeen-year-old Baldwin's renunciation of his religious calling and of Christianity itself?
5. How does Baldwin personalize history and the issue of black oppression in the United States? Does this personalizing result in too narrow a focus or does it intensify his account's impact and our response?
6. What is Baldwin's purpose in prefacing the long "public" essay-letter on the Nation of Islam with his shorter, personal letter to his nephew?
7. What is Baldwin's attitude toward the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad? How does that attitude relate to his previously expressed observations on race relations and racial discrimination?
8. What are the links among sexual awakening, crime, religion, racial discrimination, and self-realization in *The Fire Next Time*? What are their personal and public implications?
9. What techniques and devices of expository prose does Baldwin employ to develop the structure and flow of *The Fire Next Time*? How successful is his use of these techniques and devices in terms of coherence and persuasiveness?

Questions provided by the publisher.



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