



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR GOING TO MEET THE MAN BY JAMES BALDWIN

1. "Going To Meet The Man" sees Baldwin connect violent racism, white supremacy and sexual fantasies in the life of Jesse, a white, male police officer. How did the portrayal of these interconnecting themes make you feel while reading and why? Knowing Jesse's perspective was used to examine these, do you think Baldwin made an effective argument or did it leave you unconvinced?
2. Putting yourself in Jesse's shoes, how do you interpret his understanding and defense of the white supremacy myth? Do you agree that his sense of masculinity is deeply connected to his violence and oppression against black Americans? Support your stance with textual evidence.
3. Baldwin focuses heavily on the dehumanization of black Americans through sexual violence to highlight to what extent this contributed to Jesse's sense of power and white masculinity. Do these themes make the book a tougher read and do they enhance or lessen the impact of Baldwin's message?
4. By invoking a play on both Jim Crow and Jim Clark through Big Jim C., how effective do you think Baldwin was in showcasing the pervasive nature of structural racism? Do you think this metaphor deepens our understanding of Jesse's behavior, especially his anxiety at the changing societal norms?
5. The theme of racial and sexual violence intertwining can be seen as a provoking and grim fact of history. Do you think that Baldwin communicated these themes effectively through Jesse's experience or was it overly graphic? Discuss why you feel either way.
6. Given Jesse's upbringing and exposure to violent racism from a young age, should we consider him a victim of his environment, and thus sympathize with his choices? Or can he still be held accountable for his actions, despite his personal upbringing?
7. The story shows Jesse's distorted perception of black people as being inherently sinful according to his interpretation of the Bible. Does this reflect a broader issue of how personal bias can twist religion to legitimize harmful actions or beliefs?
8. How does the juxtaposition of Jesse's self-proclaimed "God-fearing" nature and his cruel actions challenge the traditional notions of morality and goodness? What can it tell us about the anomalies of human behavior when influenced by societal norms and beliefs?



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9. Despite the brutal beating he endured, Mrs. Blossom's grandson expresses a strong determination to continue resisting racial oppression. Is this a realistic portrayal of the concept of resilience in the face of adversity? Do you feel his actions further inspire or discourage activism in seemingly hopeless circumstances?
10. Baldwin expertly links Jesse's sexual fantasies about black women and his violent racism. Are Jesse's perverse sexual desires a manifestation of his paternalistic racism, or do these elements of his character operate separately? How can we better understand this intersectionality within a historical context?
11. "The sound of black voices singing forms a recurring motif in "Going to Meet the Man," signaling both peaceful protest and unsettling power. Based on your understanding, is singing an effective method of defiance against oppressive power, or does it merely heighten the paranoia and hostility of the oppressors? Share your perspective using examples from the book."
12. "Jesse is agitated by the singing of the African-American protestors and resourcefully utilises it to evoke horror from his past. What does this in perception reveal about Jesse's psychology and his relationship with the black community? Are there instances in modern society where art forms are manipulated to incite fear?"
13. "Jesse recalls that the older black people 'sang for mercy for his soul, too'. Considering this, is Jesse, as a protagonist, simply a product of a racist society or is he accountable for his own beliefs and actions? Justify your stance using moments from the book."
14. "The singing is likened to a 'monstrous howling' brewing within Jesse. Do you agree that art (here, singing) can have a transformative or disruptive effect on someone's consciousness? Discuss with references to both this book and personal experiences."
15. "The song 'Wade in the Water' sung by the black community after the lynching incident establishes a chilling end to a searing memory for Jesse. How does this use of song connect to broader issues such as historical erasure and collective memory? Can we ever truly bury a shameful past or does it, like the singing in the book, continue to resonate?"

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