

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

Due September 12, 2022

Optional Summer Assignment

Text: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin (available at the free library and major book retailers)

About the book:

A national bestseller when it first appeared in 1963, *The Fire Next Time* galvanized the nation and gave a passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement. At once a powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, the book is an intensely personal and provocative document. It consists of two "letters," written on the occasion of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, that exhort Americans, both black and white, to attack the terrible legacy of racism. Described by *The New York Times Book Review* as "sermon, ultimatum, confession, deposition, testament, and chronicle...all presented in searing, brilliant prose," *The Fire Next Time* stands as a classic of our literature. (Amazon.com)

Read Baldwin's book and answer the following prompts in complete sentences. You should cite the text using quotation marks and page numbers where appropriate. This is the first writing assignment of the semester and it should be submitted by Friday, September 12, 2022 to your instructor. Please include your name, the date, the assignment title, and your section in the heading on the upper left corner.

1. Baldwin claims that fear is at the heart of racial discrimination. What are your opinions on this issue? What do you think are the causes of racism? How should society address racism?
2. "Whoever debases others is debasing himself" In your own words, explain what this statement means. What examples from your own or others' experiences demonstrate the truth of this statement?
3. The first essay is to Baldwin's 14 year old nephew. The second essay begins when Baldwin is 14. Why is that age so important in terms of growing up? What

ideas, concerns, and decisions happen around that age?

4. How does Baldwin describe his experience with Christianity? What role does he believe it should have in the life of African-Americans? Do you agree or disagree with his assertions? Be sure to defend your position.

5. What is the significance of the title of the book? Why do you believe the author chose this phrase as the title?

6. This book was written in the 1960s, however, many of the issues Baldwin describes persist today. Choose two of these issues and discuss in detail how those challenges are still prevalent in American society.

7. In the text, Baldwin makes several claims about the American Dream. Summarize his position in 35 sentences. What is your definition of the American Dream? Do you believe all citizens have access to it? Why or why not?