

The Fire is Upon Us Discussion Questions

The unforgettable account of a debate that continues to illuminate America's racial divide today, *The Fire is Upon Us* is an especially compelling selection for reading groups. The questions that follow are meant to enhance your personal understanding or group discussion of this remarkable story of race and the American dream.

1. Compare and contrast Baldwin and Buckley's upbringings. How did their environments differ? What values did they share?
2. Buccola mentions many notable figures, both academic and otherwise, that greatly influenced both men in their twenties. Who were their mentors, and what impact did they have?
3. Buckley and Baldwin published numerous writings about events that occurred within the Civil Rights Movement. Which piece struck you the most, and why?
4. Discuss the different strands of Baldwin's "Down at the Cross". How did Buckley respond? What were the impacts of religion on their views surrounding race?
5. Discuss Baldwin and Buckley's speeches at the Cambridge Union. Were there any moments that Buccola recounts that surprised you? Which points were most convincing?
6. About Baldwin's "I picked the cotton" line of reasoning in his speech at Cambridge, Buccola writes, "When Cambridge undergraduate Christie Davies...heard these words, he thought to himself, 'He's won.'" (page 257) Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. In his speech, Buckley says, "I am asking you not to make politics as the crow flies." (page 273) What does he mean? What does he suggest should be done instead?
8. How is the debate topic "the American dream is at the expense of the American Negro" still relevant today? Do any of Baldwin and Buckley's points still apply? Why or why not?
9. Discuss the public reception of the debate. What were the lasting effects of the debate on American society?
10. Were you familiar with the Baldwin v. Buckley debate before reading this book? If not, what was most surprising about the event?