

## Discussion Questions for Baldwin's "A Region in My Mind"

Text available online at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind>, from the November 1962 issue of *The New Yorker*

*Background: The essay begins with Baldwin recounting himself at 14 years old, suddenly noticing aspects of life in Harlem that he had overlooked up to that point.*

### **Excerpt 1 (from "And I began to feel in the boys" middle of second paragraph to "holding Negroes in subjection"—2.5 paragraphs)**

What are some of the causes of the "wary, bewildered despair" Baldwin and other young men in Harlem experienced?

According to Baldwin, why did participating in criminal activity become an attractive option?

What distinction does Baldwin draw between what Black people want from whites, as opposed to what Whites think Black people want from them?

How do Black servants justify theft, according to Baldwin?

### **Excerpt 2 (from "It is certainly sad" to "and drove me into the church"—1 paragraph)**

According to Baldwin, what are African Americans taught to feel about themselves from "the moment their eyes open on the world"? How does that condition affect the parent/child relationship? (Consider specifically his focus on fear.)

### **Excerpt 3 ("White Americans find it..." to "not to teach your child to hate"—2.5 paragraphs)**

Paraphrase/interpret Baldwin's statement that "White Americans find it as difficult as white people elsewhere do to divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some intrinsic value that black people need, or want."

What is Baldwin's argument about "equality" among blacks and whites? What is interesting or surprising about his perspective? What does Baldwin claim should not be the end result of hundreds of years of black struggle?

What does Baldwin argue is the condition for America to achieve its fully mature identity?

What does Baldwin claim is an unintended effect of "endless struggle"?