

## SUMMER ASSIGNMENT

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- I. This essay is in a narrative style, and is broken into several parts. Summarize part I in one paragraph, using 120 words or fewer. Note: The purpose of this exercise is to complete the summary in no more than a certain number of words. What key moments stand out in your mind? What is the central realization of the author at the end of the section?**

The essay begins with the death of Baldwin's father. The funeral was held on Baldwin's birthday, and that same day a race riot broke out in Harlem. Baldwin's father, a preacher, was a difficult man with a bad temper who had trouble connecting with others. When Baldwin was young, one of his teachers took an interest in him and supported both the young Baldwin and his family; however, Baldwin's father was resistant to this arrangement, as he didn't trust the teacher because she was white. Once Baldwin had been denied service in a whites-only restaurant and, filled with rage, he threw a glass of water at the white waitress. He was disturbed by the incident and began to fear that the hatred inside him could lead to his death.

- II. Repeat exercise 1, but instead use only twenty words. What happens in part I of the essay?**

The essay highlights Baldwin's experiences about racial discrimination and poverty during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century in America.

- III. Consider part III. Construct a tract of writing that a) defines and explains the poison metaphor the author describes at the funeral of his father, b) identifies the author's "cure" or cures for the poison, and c) provides several pieces of supporting evidence for the identification of the author's cure.**

In the essay, "Baldwin describes hearing the eulogy the minister gave at his father's funeral. He begins thinking about how difficult it is to be a parent and how children often do not understand why their parents can act harshly. African American parents in particular see the everyday world of racism, poverty, and injustice as a kind of poison. They seek to protect their children from the poison of

"avenues, side streets, bars, billiard halls, hospitals, police stations," but there is no clear antidote. Adding further meaning to the metaphor, Baldwin writes that "perhaps poison should be fought with poison," meaning that sometimes hate itself might be the best response to hate. He later explains at the end that the most important struggle is within one's own heart, and not against any external factors. It is Baldwin's way and style of writing that reveals the choice of antidote for the poison. Baldwin concludes the last part of the essay by highlighting the fact that although injustice is inexorable, one must fight against racial discrimination till their last bit. He after all chose to write and use a pen as his weapon as it's mightier than a sword in the "fight that began within the heart".

**IV. *Consider the final part of the essay, when the author describes the fight in the Hotel Braddock. Write a tract of between 200-400 words on the author's treatment of evidence and facts. What does the author have to say about the importance of facts about the fight to the people in that neighborhood? Notice the author's writing takes on the tone of a reporter regarding the ensuing riot. What facts stand out regarding the outcome?***

After the funeral, while Baldwin was downtown celebrating his birthday, a black man and a white policeman got into a fight in Harlem. A rumor circulated that the black man was shot in the back while defending the honor of a black woman, although Baldwin was not certain that that actually was what had happened. Regardless, it sparked a riot, and white businesses in Harlem were damaged. Baldwin lamented the fact that the riot destroyed much of the little wealth that Harlem had, although he understood why the riot happened: "To smash something is the ghetto's chronic need." If the violence was ever redirected away from the ghetto and aimed at white people, Baldwin didn't doubt that the rioters would be massacred instantly. However, it was unlikely that white people would've ever been the target, in part because African Americans' relationship to white people was not entirely defined by hatred but rather something far more complex. Here, Baldwin framed the riot as an expression of the rage that he describes as living in the hearts of the black community. Simply because the rage existed, it was necessary that it had some kind of outlet. However, the riot was also

the perfect example of the way in which rage was generally a self-destructive force, rather than a way of making actual change in the world. Baldwin characterizes hatred as a negative, destructive (and particularly self-destructive) force. However, anger can be useful if it motivates people to oppose injustice.