



The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race

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National Book Award winner Jesmyn Ward takes James Baldwin's 1963 examination of race in America, *The Fire Next Time*, as a jumping off point for this groundbreaking collection of essays and poems about race from the most important voices of her generation and our time.

In light of recent tragedies and widespread protests across the nation, *The Progressive* magazine republished one of its most famous pieces: James Baldwin's 1962 "Letter to My Nephew," which was later published in his landmark book, *The Fire Next Time*. Addressing his fifteen-year-old namesake on the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Baldwin wrote: "You know and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon."

Award-winning author Jesmyn Ward knows that Baldwin's words ring as true as ever today. In response, she has gathered short essays, memoir, and a few essential poems to engage the question of race in the United States. And she has turned to some of her generation's most original thinkers and writers to give voice to their concerns.

The Fire This Time is divided into three parts that shine a light on the darkest corners of our history, wrestle with our current predicament, and envision a better future. Of the eighteen pieces, ten were written specifically for this volume.

In the fifty-odd years since Baldwin's essay was published, entire generations have dared everything and made significant progress. But the idea that we are living in the post-Civil Rights era, that we are a "postracial" society, is an inaccurate and harmful reflection of a truth the country must confront. Baldwin's "fire next time" is now upon us, and it needs to be talked about.

The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race Details

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From Reader Review The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race for online ebook

BookOfCinz says

Thanks Netgallery for the advanced copy of this book.

First let me say, everyone should read this, especially if you are an American and if you love spectacular writing. The essays in this book were well thought out, personal, moving, raw and in more than one ways inspiring. Yes, the topic covered- Racism in America- is an ugly one and its been covered time and time again but these essays give a very fresh personal look at the subject.

I personally loved "Black and Blue" by Garnette Cadogan mainly because he gave a more realistic view of the subject for me. Being a Jamaican and reading if his reference to Jamaica and his reality of how walking in one of the most dangerous ghettos in Jamaica is safer than walking while black in America, blew my mind. His piece really gave me a greater appreciation of what the black community is currently going through. This was a great reference point for me as a Caribbean national, specifically Jamaican. Thanks Cadogan.

I honestly do think this is a must read. Please pick this one up.

Cheri says

4.5 Stars

I'm very grateful for the opportunity to read this collection of essays, a topic that seems to be everywhere, in the news, as well as nonfiction and fiction books. The Fire This Time by Jesmyn Ward is timely as a topic, but it's tragic that it needed to be written.

Some of these essays are better than others, but all are worth reading. You'll recognize the names of people you've read about, heard some of the details of their tragic stories. The details of areas where the high racial tension has made the news, where the body count keeps rising for crimes no greater than "Walking while black." Most of these essays have a deeply personal essence about them, even when they are not always talking about themselves. It's personal. It's all personal. Some are stories told to them by other family members, parents, grandparents, events witnessed. Stories, not surprisingly, about police brutality.

Inspired by James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time, Ward has put together a thought-provoking group of essays. As in any group of writing by different authors, some of these are better than others, but all are more than worthy of your time.

Contributors include: Carol Anderson, Jericho Brown, Garnette Cadogan, Edwidge Danticat, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, Mitchell S. Jackson, Honoree Jeffers, Kima Jones, Kiese Laymon, Daniel Jose Older, Emily Raboteau, Clint Smith, Natasha Trethewey, Wendy S. Walters, Isabel Wilkerson and Kevin Young.

Pub Date: 2 August 2016

Thank you to Scribner, NetGalley and to editor / author Jesmyn Ward for providing me with an advanced copy for reading and review.

Udeni says

I finished this superb collection of essays and poems in a single sitting. The theme of all the essays is the personal experience of being black in today's America. The introduction itself, which tells the complicated story of how the editor resented, but then came to love James Baldwin. It is worth the price of the book alone. Some essays are straightforward political arguments. Others are surreal meditations, playing with language and meaning. The quality of writing and urgency of the message binds what could be a disparate selection into a coherent collection. Essential reading for anyone trying to make sense of today's America.

Perry says

"My only sin is my skin, ... What did I do, to be so black and blue?"

Fats Waller, "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue?"

The title of this choric collection of prismatic prose and poetry convoking for equality, compassion and freedom from fear, written by some of today's prominent and talented African-American writers, derives from the title of James Baldwin's groundbreaking *The Fire Next Time* which he ended with the fiery memorable passage:

"If we...the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others--do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by the slave, is upon us: ***God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!***"

I will never know the pain and fear and rage felt by African-Americans, including the artists who contributed pieces to this innovative anthology full of timely contributions to the current critical conversation on racial relations in the U.S. Nonetheless, if this book can be a bridge to better, fuller understanding by me (which, I think, it most definitely is) and others similarly situated, such a comprehension of the unknown being, after all, one of the main goals of artists and writers, then maybe it will help us all play some part in changing ourselves and perhaps the world for the common good.

"Be the change, you wish to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi.

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Leo Tolstoy

Jesmyn Ward, the editor and an author of parts of this book, won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2011 for her novel *Salvage the Bones*. She begins the book with her hope that:

"this book makes each one of you, dear readers, feel as if we are sitting together, you and me and Baldwin and... all the serious, clear-sighted writers here--and that we are composing our story together. That we are writing an epic wherein black lives carry a worth, wherein black boys can walk to the store and buy candy without thinking they will die, wherein black girls can have a bad day and be mouthy without being physically assaulted by a police officer, wherein cops see twelve-year-old black boys playing with fake guns as silly kids and not homicidal maniacs, wherein black women can stop to ask for directions without being shot in the face by paranoid white homeowners.

I burn, and I hope."

Ms. Ward grew up about an hour from me. She wrote an affecting essay entitled "Cracking the Code," which really made me think about many of us in the United States who don't really know their full ancestry, including me, how this country is truly a melting pot, as it reminded me of how ridiculous and hateful it is that some people still judge others by the color of their skin. In it, she discusses a relatively inexpensive genetic testing company called 23andMe, that she and some other family members used not long ago to find out their ancestry. She grew up as "black" but her dad looked as much Native American as black, and she has relatively light skin for an African-American. Anyway, she talks about how she felt upon finding out that's she's more European than sub-Saharan African; specifically, 40% European-mix of British, Irish, French, German, Scandinavian, Iberian, Italian, and Ashkenazi-- 32% sub-Saharan African, a quarter Native American and less than 1% North African.

Another essay I found particularly thought-provoking, in a book full of poignant essays and verse, was one called "Blacker Than Thou," by Kevin Young, considering the question of Rachel Dolezal:

"It would be one thing...if in her house, to her pillow or family, Dolezal said she felt black... It's when that somehow translates to what she does, when she teaches black studies as if she's a black person—not a teacher, but a mind reader—that it becomes a problem. She wears the mask not to hide but to gain authority over the very thing she claims to want to be. How very white of her!"

This anthology has improved my understanding on matters of race and thus effected a change in me. I highly recommend it for anyone seeking to gain different perspectives on race and racial relations in our current political climate.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." MLK, Jr.

Taryn Pierson says

I read *The Fire This Time* with great urgency. The murders this week of two more innocent black men at the hands of cops, followed by the sniper attacks on Dallas police officers, are a kind of nightmarish call and response that demand reflection and action.

It's hard to know what to do when the problems in our country seem so huge and insurmountable. I want so badly not to be part of the problem. I want to quit agonizing over my privilege and do something that matters. But what can one person do to dismantle such an enormous, seemingly immortal machine of systemic racism and oppression?

Obviously, I don't have the answer, if there even is one. But one thing I keep coming back to is art. Most of my greatest insights on difficult subjects have come from music, poetry, essays. In the wake of each new tragedy, artists create. Their creations dredge beauty from destruction. Their generative force counters evil and death not by forging against it but by taking root in and growing out of it. How is that even possible? I don't know how, but I know that it is so.

So, I read. I listen. I try to understand. I try to imagine what life is for other people. Books like *The Fire This Time* help me do those things. It's especially effective because it's an anthology, a collection of many voices. I learned a lot from it, and it made me hungry to learn more.

If you only read one book this year, it should be this one.

With regards to Scribner and NetGalley for the advance copy. On sale August 2. Mark your calendar now. Put in your library request. Hit the pre-order button. Do whatever you have to do, just read this book.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Ellie says

I started this book today intending to read one or two essays. I found I couldn't put it down, even when the cumulative pain and rage expressed made me want to.

Every essay is outstanding. I was particularly struck by Edwidge Danticat's description of Haitian refugees from the Dominican Republic and comparing it to African-American "refugees" in the United States. But also an essay that describes the perils of walking while black. Another that deals with the loneliness of being black in America.

Ward's introduction to this volume addresses the debt owed to James Baldwin whose *The Fire Next Time* is the inspiration for the title of this book. How to survive being black in America. The essays testify to the power of black culture and family relationships in the face of unrelenting hostility.

The essays are challenging even when not directly trying to be. To witness so much pain is difficult, especially if the reader is part of the problem. But they are compelling, so that despite my discomfort I was unable to step away.

They are stories of hardship but also of survival, for strategies of living even when the larger society does not seem to want to, is actively killing your loved ones.

Important reading. Because we all are a part of this situation. If you're a person of color, these essays can be a companion in your life. If you're white, you should just read them. As Ward writes in her introduction, maybe it will help you be a little more compassionate. And if you already are, these essays may just open you even more.

Trudie says

I have been reading plenty of great fiction about issues of race inequality - *Homegoing*, *The Underground Railroad*, *Sing*, *Unburied Sing*, and *A Kind of Freedom*. Fiction is such a great portal into worlds and minds far removed from my own experience. I have learnt so much from each of these novels. But even so, some nuances will always be lacking when you don't hail from the American South or in my case America at all and it is then that I turn to non-fiction to fill in some much needed historical and contemporary perspective.

The *Fire This Time* is a perfect introduction to contemporary issues of race in America or at least it was for me. This slim but weighty anthology of essays filled in the gaps in my knowledge about life in America for a person of colour. I got something out of every single essay and poem.

Details of the various cases of police brutality, come up often and are almost a constant strand through this entire book. The essay with the photos of murals taken in NYC boroughs extolling you to Know Your Rights! ! to avoid getting harassed by the police brought home how serious this problem is. It is hard for me to comprehend a citizenry comprising over 42 million people who need advice about how to protect themselves from their own police force in a country that is a democracy.

Arguably one of the best essay's in the book, *Black and Blue* made the point that the author felt more free to walk at night in the crime-filled streets of Kingston, Jamaica, than as a black man in the streets of New York city. This is but one of several exceptionally well made points from contributors of varying backgrounds and writing styles. There are essays on Phillis Wheatley, on slave cemeteries (this one was quite disturbing), on the strange tale of Rachel Dolezal. Almost all pay some kind of tribute to James Baldwin. It is such a wide-ranging collection with many exceptional pieces of writing.

(As a side note, I was reading this at the same time as the 2018 Pulitzer prizes for journalism were awarded and Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah a contributor to this collection won a Pulitzer for Feature writing with this article on the murder, of parishioners in Charlestown, an atrocity that crops up over and over again in this book. It makes a great companion read.)

Alienor ✖ French Frowner ✖ says

4.5 stars. TRUE STORY : I had so many articulated thoughts (I swear, humor me) to explain why I loved this collection of essays and why I thought it was very important to read it - of course if you're Afro-American but also if you are not. **I'll forever advocate for books who make me feel uncomfortable**

because of my own privileged biases - even if I'm not American.

I had all these articulated sentences ready to burst on the page, talking about how I will never truly know what it is to be black in the US, no matter how many books I'll read, because **all my knowledge will always be borrowed and never experienced**. Then I would have stressed how vital it is to acquire this knowledge all the same.

The "one-drop rule" would probably have led me to talk about my father, who was biracial (French-Algerian) and yet never really accepted it (even if it has nothing to do with it and I'm not saying it has). I tried, over the years, to understand why - was it because his father, who couldn't stay in France, abandoned him? Was it because of the racism he faced when growing up in a foster home? Or was it something different entirely? I'll never know. My father was a complicated man, but I loved him. His story will always keep its hidden parts, and I've made peace with it.

I would have mentioned the crazy number of times my last name makes people stop, because it's kabyle and I'm that whiter than white, light-haired light-eyed package. How people would frown when hearing my name and then smile so big when seeing me. Or how they would create an entirely different origin for my name because that made them feel more comfortable. I would have also explained why I never identified as POC because nobody identified me as such and because I simply didn't have the living experiences nor the culture (I still feel that way, but it only concerns ME. Everyone is the best judge to know how to identify). I grew up with the looks, the privileges, and the French/European culture of a white woman. I am white, and I would feel fucking dishonest if I said otherwise. How I always felt as if appearances were the most important thing in the world for racist people. Way more important than, I don't know, LIVES.

Keeping your privileges and keeping the appearances, a racist novella, endlessly rewritten for hundreds of years.

Would all that have been relevant? Ha, I'm not sure. Probably not. But it would have been clearly written.

Then I got the flu and my mind is a mess. Can you tell? XD

Remember to read it, though.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Book Riot Community says

This anthology has a stellar list of contributors, including Edwidge Danticat, Kiese Laymon, Claudia Rankine, Isabel Wilkerson, and many more. It's fabulous. The pieces are varied, ranging from essay to memoir to poetry. They are consistently moving and powerful, each capturing a different perspective on what it means to be Black in America today. Readers will come to this book for different reasons, but it remains essential reading for everyone who cares about the American experience, past, present, and future.

— Rebecca Hussey

Esil says

The Fire This Time blew me away. It's an odd experience to read a collection of essays that's hard to put down – reading past my bedtime, early in the morning, and at my desk at lunch. Why? The incredibly timely subject is only part of it – the writing and the personal quality of the essays is what had me glued to this collection. Inspired by James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, the editor has collected a series of personal essays and poems written by African Americans about race in the US today. The writers speak from personal experience, about the experience of parents and grandparents, about reactions to recent acts of police brutality and other ways in which racism remains pervasive, about the limited hope brought by Obama's election, and about fear and hope for children and generations to come. So many of the essays were superbly written – many having a feel of spoken word poetry – expressing anger, frustration and fear, but somehow resonating with positive energy. These essays are ridiculously timely and should be read by anyone of any race in the US and elsewhere – but really, unfortunately, these essays have been timely for years... Not all essays were 5 stars, but most were. Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Monica says

This is perhaps the best essay collection that I have read thus far. Not that I've read a significant number of essay collections; but it's becoming an appealing genre for me. I approached this book with one thought in mind: What do young people think about race? Do they get it? Of course the title to me implies young people 30ish or so. I recently read *The Fire Next Time*. It was tremendously affecting in that the mood and thoughts on race back then, were strikingly similar to where we stand today. It didn't occur to me that I would be (am) part of the "new generation" that speaks about race here. Time and the way we view ourselves within its stream just messes with my head a little. So much of what James Baldwin wrote about is still going on. Conceptually it's hard to view the struggles of his time as that different from the struggles ongoing today. Is there really a generational difference with regards to race? I guess the views are expressed differently, but the foundations are so incredibly strong and familiar. This book really drove these points home with me. It's an eclectic collection that captures so much that is familiar and quirky and unique and youthful and classic. The essays are interspaced with poems and vignettes of African American life. It's just brilliant...

The impetus for this book (in addition to a follow up to Baldwin) appears to be a cathartic reaction for the spate of killings of black people (many of them police-related) throughout the country over the past five years. Without a Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Michael Bell, Sandra Bland (the list is far too long and I have many more names); this collection never comes into being. This is a communal, intellectual processing of those events. A few brief thoughts about the essays in the collection: (view spoiler)

Caveat: Because many of these essays speak of current events, I'm unsure of the longevity of this collection. But in this time and place, it's difficult to imagine how it could be better...

I found this collection to be intelligent, emotional, affecting, poignant. In short, simply stunning!!

5 Stars

Lata says

4.5 stars to 5.

I inhaled this collection of essays. This book was a response to a series of killings of African Americans over the last few years, and to the book *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin.

The collection contains essays and some poems. The writing styles of each piece are different, and though many of the works cover similar incidents, each author brings something a little different to the discussion.

Once I started reading this collection, I could not stop. I found the essays were powerful and emotional, and I was often left with a sense of fear and sadness as I read of the authors' experiences. Read this book.

Trish says

In the Introduction to this collection of essays by an impressive roster of writers known for thoughtful and articulate discussion of their experience with race in America, Jesmyn Ward explains that she wanted something more than newspaper accounts or editorials when faced with the events of the past eighteen months in the USA. Her own book on the death of five young men of her acquaintance, *Men We Reaped*, meant that hearing of and *seeing* via public media further deaths of black men by white men was traumatic enough to want to gather friends, neighbors, and most of all, those she admires for their clarity of voice, to ask "How do we deal with this?" "How do we think about this?" "How can we stop this?"

This collection references James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* which is a work that addresses the future in a letter to Baldwin's nephew, and the past and present in an essay about religion. Ward mentions that she intended to gather the commissioned essays in three parts - Past, Present, and Future—but found that most of the essays dealt with the past because the past explains the present and impacts the future. Unless the past is acknowledged and consciously dealt with in the present, the future will always be a question mark. The essays gave Ward hope because words matter. Words help us to cope. I agree with her.

The names of the writers in this collection you will recognize, and if you don't at first, you will in the future. One name I'd never seen before wrote my favorite essay in the collection, called "Black and Blue." Garnette Cadogan quotes Fats Waller at the start

"My skin is only my skin.

What did I do, to be so black and blue?"

Cadogan relates his experience as a Jamaican man in the United States—how he had to learn how to dress (cop-proof and IV league), how to speak, how not to run, or make sudden movements, or wait on the streets for friends...you get the picture. His personality and behaviors had to be twisted to fit the circumstances. In a sense, this happens to all of us, wherever we move, if we want to fit in, but not like that. Not like that. And he said something I'd never heard before when considering a black man's experience:

"I always felt safer being stopped in front of white witnesses than black witnesses."

Apparently the cops have greater regard for the concern and entreaties of white witnesses than they do for black witnesses. I recall the old chant "White Silence is Violence." Cadogan also said that "my woman friends are those who best understand my plight," due to the fact that women are often targeted on the street by men simply because of their sex. And he said that having to be hyperaware of one's environment before speaking, moving, acting is what children do when they are learning, returning adult males (and females) to childhood status, even in cities where they live. My brain fizzes.

Claudia Rankine, poet and author of *Citizen*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry in 2015, has an essay which begins

"A friend recently told me that when she gave birth to her son, before naming him, before even nursing him, her first thought was, I have to get him out of this country."

I totally see where that friend of Rankine's is coming from, and have had that same thought while reading Jill Leovy's *Ghettoside*. Black men in the United States do not have enough of a childhood and they can grow, if they live long enough, gnarly and twisted by society's expectations. This can't be right. I'd get my son out also.

All the essays were ravishing and brought me something important, like Wendy Walters' description of the slave graves discovered under a street intersection in Portsmouth, NH. My excitement quickened to see an essay by Mitchell S. Jackson, whose first novel *The Residue Years* was a finalist for the Hemingway/PEN Award, the Center for Fiction's Flaherty-Duncan First Novel Prize, and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. In his essay called "Composite Pops", Jackson talks about male role models in a way that recalled to me Iceberg Slim. Slim was a con-man, a pimp, and a miscreant, but he had self-confidence, the push to succeed, wisdom, and love and he spread all of these around generously. I can think of a far worse father figure than he.

You will recognize the names Natasha Trethewey, Poet Laureate, Isabel Wilkerson, Pulitzer winner in Journalism, Edwidge Danticat, Haitian novelist and MacArthur Fellow, all of whom have essays in this collection. But there will be names new to you in this remarkable collection which will open worlds you have not yet dreamed of. Once again we recognize that the work and thoughts—the *words*—of Jesmyn Ward bring us along, sometimes kicking and screaming in horror, to a new place of understanding. Many thanks.

Thanks to Netgalley and Simon & Schuster/Scribner for a chance to read the advance galley of this title which is due in bookstores August 2, 2016. Order it early and often.

Elizabeth says

What the fuck is wrong with Trent Lott? Jesmyn Ward I have yet to shake that incident. What a repellent human being.

This anthology is dauntless. And the intellect? Not sure which is more impressive that or the talent. Kevin Young ...*I took a black shower and shaved a black shave, I walked a black walk and sat a black sit...* is in top form. But then the same could be said for all of the contributors.

Recommended.

Didi says

The Fire This Time. Police brutality and systemic racism are plaguing the United States as if we hadn't gone through the Civil Rights movement. I living in France, a country without worry or anxiety when I go out, don't have to face so much overt racism, nor too many microaggressions, sit and listen to the countless horrific cases of police brutality ending in fatality. I am almost fifty years old and am proud to have seen a black president and hopefully a female one. However the hate crimes, police brutality, and systemic racism I fear I won't see an end before my death. <https://browngirlreading.com/2016/08/...>

Michael says

Encompassing many subjects, styles, and tones, *The Fire This Time* aims to spark thoughtful conversation about the current state of race relations in America, as well as theorize what forms Black identity and anti-racist activism might take in an increasingly digitalized society. In spite of shared reference to recent social trends and tragedies, the essays in the collection consider a vast span of topics: the nation's cultural amnesia over slavery, white rage, walking while Black, the ethics of public mourning, and more. The essays written by established writers tend to read as more multifaceted than those written by less experienced writers, understandably, but even the weaker essays in the collection still offer interesting perspectives. The collection as a whole seemed to me to get stronger as it went on; whether Emily Raboteau's discussion of NYC's *Know Your Rights* murals or Daniel José Olders's letter to his wife addressing the rise of a new kind of social movement, many of my favorite essays were clustered toward the end, but there were some brilliant essays early on, such as Jesmyn Ward's personal essay on ancestry and identity.

Diane S ? says

it is hard, if not I possible, for person born white to enter the skin of a person of color, to understand how they see things. No matter how sympathetic we are to their plight, no matter how regretful, we cannot see things the way they see them, experience things the way they do. These essays let me glimpse inside, showed me a little of how things have effected them, how the past has colored their future. The color divide is a wide one, I believe, though after all this time it should not be. Not sure what the answers are, nor how to fix this.

Powerful essays, maybe hit me a bit harder since I am reading *A Lesson Before Dying*, which is also a powerful book. Still I am grateful that these essays have further opened my eyes, furthered my understanding.

Jessica Sullivan says

A book like this is more important now than ever. Amid the Black Lives Matter movement, the widespread national anthem protests and the recent election of a racist president, *The Fire This Time* digs deep into the legacy of racism in America and what it means to be black in the past, in the present and in the future.

Curated by National Book Award-winning author Jesmyn Ward and dedicated to Trayvon Martin, it's an anthology divided into three parts: Legacy, Reckoning and Jubilee.

Each writer is tasked with examining what Ward calls "the ugly truths that plague us in this country." The essays and poems contained within are deeply personal in nature, filled with sadness, reflection and hope.

White people in America (myself included, of course), can never truly understand what it's like to endure unfathomable injustices based on the color of our skin. I believe that we have a responsibility to listen to black voices and become more empathetic and aware. *The Fire This Time* joins Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* as an important work of non-fiction that can help us do that.

TheSkepticalReader says

*We scream **equality** and **freedom** while unabashedly modeling our actions on the fathers of genocide.*

The Fire This Time is a really good collection of essays on race, inequality, police brutality, and the stigmatization of Blacks. The title takes inspiration from Baldwin's words, *The Fire Next Time*, and brings the old voices into today's political context (which isn't all that much different). Having never read *The Fire Next Time*, it is possible that I lost a deeper connection to this book in some way but I do admire Baldwin and his works so I *will* be reading *The Fire Next Time* very soon.

Not all essays were particularly strong to be honest, but I took a little away from even the least interesting one. Some of my favorites, including the introduction itself, were "The Dear Pledges of Our Love": A Defense of Phillis Wheatley's Husband' by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, 'Blacker Than Thou' by Kevin Young, 'Black and Blue' by Garnette Cadogan, and 'The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning' by Claudia Rankine. Most of these feature in the second half of the collection so I seemed to have grown to enjoy it more as I read on.

Jeffers' essay had an interesting point to share about how we've relied on the account of a white woman to tell the story of a Black man and it kinda shook me to realize how I myself have never questioned this 'history.' Wheatley's poem, 'On Being Brought from Africa to America', was one of my favorite poems in school so one can imagine why this essay will resonate with me a long time. I was taught to be skeptical by slave narratives because of their sketchy publication process so it was a bit of shock that I never questioned this fairly stereotypical portrayal of Wheatley's husband told by a white woman.

Claudia Rankine's touches on the matter of dead Black bodies equating to a 'normal' or an 'average' day in America, and most certainly for white Americans, which was a brutal but honest observation. Garnette Cadogan makes a reflection, which I've heard multiple times before, about how being Black in America is distinctly different to being Black in Jamaica (and I'd argue anywhere else too). Kevin Young's essay also brought up another delicate subject of 'Blackness'. He writes,

Every black person has something "not black" about them. I don't mean something white, because despite our easy dichotomies, the opposite of black is not white. This one likes European classical music; that one likes a little bit of country (hopefully the old stuff); this one is the first African American principal ballerina; this one can't dance. Black people know this—any solidarity with each other is about something shared, a secret joy, a song, not about some stereotypical qualities that may be reproducible, imitable, even marketable. This doesn't mean there aren't similarities across black people or communities or better yet memory—just that these aren't exactly about bodies and not really about skin at all, but culture.

He also talks a fair bit about Rachel Dolezal and since I mostly avoided that mess of ~~garbage~~ drama, I was very engrossed with his opinion of the entire situation. I have tabs and notes marked all over his essay and I can share quotes from it for a long time but I'll leave the review with this last one I loved,

*Being black is not a feeling. **I don't always feel colored.** Nor is it simply a state of mind.*

Blackness: a way of being.

HBalikov says

"A New Generation Speaks about Race" is the subtitle of this collection of essays, memoirs, poetry, etc. A number of my GR friends have reflected on the powerful nature of this material. I agree with many of their observations concerning the way, here in the USA, we have not been able to treat all as equal.

There is little in this book that I can find to make me believe that things, in the near term, will be getting better. There seems little as a non-black that I can hope to change except this:

I will listen (just listen) to anything anyone wants to share about their personal experiences and try to understand how their experience has affected their life.

I will not offer any solutions that come from my experience because those will not be well received, even if well intentioned. (And, because they come from my experience they may not be as helpful as intended.)

I will support all initiatives that offer a chance for open discussion and those that stand for equal justice.

Your thoughts?

Addendum

A report this week on the impact of NYC's Children's Services taking children away from their mothers is a chilling example of inequality and raises the question of how often this is done in other parts of the USA.

