

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

“God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!”

My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation

Quotes

“Well, he is dead, he never saw you, and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him.” (Loc 34)

“You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a nigger. I tell you this because I love you, and please don’t you ever forget it.” (Loc 34)

“No! This is not true! How bitter you are!”—but I am writing this letter to you, to try to tell you something about how to handle them, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist.” (Loc 54)

“Your grandmother was also there, and no one has ever accused her of being bitter. I suggest that the innocents check with her. She isn’t hard to find. Your countrymen don’t know that she exists, either, though she has been working for the all their lives.” (Loc 54)

“To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, bit if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children.” (Loc 59)

“You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus expected to be set forever.” (Loc 65)

“You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity.” (Loc 65)

“Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry.” (Loc 70)

“If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.” (Loc 70)

“Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear.” (Loc 70)

“There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you.” (Loc 75)

“Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, and an immovable pillar: and as he moved out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.” (Loc 85)

“And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.” (Loc 85)

“You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer. One of them said, The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off.” (Loc 90)

“You know, and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon. We cannot be free until they are free.” (Loc 90)