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## Interviews

James Baldwin

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# THE **BLACK**SCHOLAR INTERVIEWS: JAMES BALDWIN

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BLACK SCHOLAR: *Brother Baldwin, you have been involved as an active observer in the movement of black people since 1955. What developments and differences do you see in today's movement?*

BALDWIN: Well, I really date my involvement from my birth, which was 1924, and there wasn't anything called a movement. But when I think about it again, I have to remember that I was born in New York because my father and my people had been driven out of the South. This was after the first World War when black people were undergoing a series of pogroms in the deep South

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JAMES BALDWIN was born on August 2, 1924, in New York City, the first of nine children, and grew up in Harlem where his father was a minister. He graduated from De Witt Clinton High School in 1942 and held a number of minor jobs—handyman, porter, elevator operator, office boy, factory worker, dishwasher, file clerk. At 24 years of age, he left the United States for Europe, returning here occasionally for business reasons. Staying mainly in Paris but traveling to many parts of Europe, he wrote and published his first three books. Baldwin has now written or co-authored more than a dozen novels, plays, essay collections and other works. His stories and essays have appeared in many magazines both in the U.S. and abroad, and four books—*Nobody Knows My Name*, *Another Country*, *The Fire Next Time*, and *Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone*—have been on national best-seller lists. Recognized as one of the country's finest writers, James Baldwin has also gained international prominence as a spokesman for the black freedom movement. This interview took place in October 1973 at his home in southern France.

and when black soldiers were being lynched in their uniforms. It was a kind of convulsion all over the nation which drove my father, among many other people, North. That's why I was born in the North.

So I represent the first generation born in the North, of that massive migration. And you must remember that there was a tremendous dislocation. First, from the land to the city and, much more importantly, from the point of view of the question you are asking me, there was no articulation of what it meant to be black. It was an insult to be called black in those years when I was growing up, and part of my father's disaster and part of the danger which menaced the entire family was our relationship toward our own blackness, which was very painful. It was a matter of humiliation and self-humiliation which was not my father's fault and not our fault. It was the context in which we were born.

By 1955, when I was a grown man, something had begun to change. And what had changed was the relationship that black people had to each other. The fact that from that moment on, let us say, black people began to relate to each other more coherently than they related to white people. From that time on, what a white person's judgment of a black man was began to diminish in value. It did not end! And, it hasn't ended yet! But, it was a tremendous and perceptible shift. In a certain way around that time, which was 18 years ago, black people in America began to depend more on each other and began to

create their own standards. It had become clear that one could no longer live by the so-called standards of white civilization.

By this time, in 1973, a whole new generation has grown up without these crippling handicaps of my generation; with certainly different illusions and certainly different dangers, but with a freedom which barely could have been imagined 49 years ago. And as time goes, that's a very short span of time.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *Why do you think these particular changes occurred?*

**BALDWIN:** I think for one thing, the breakup of the black family unit, which is tragic and one of the reasons that so many boys and girls are on the needle; why so many of us have been lost. But, perhaps like every convulsion, it had a positive side, too, in the sense that one is forced to deal with the city streets. The brutality of the South is extreme, but the brutality of the North is extreme, too, and utterly impersonal. It's the same spirit but the technique is different and therefore you have to evolve different techniques to deal with those brutality problems as distinguished from the brutality of Georgia.

In this way another consciousness began to evolve. Something colder than it had been before. Something, in a word, more revolutionary, though that's a very hard word to use. If you had to come from Mississippi to Chicago or from Georgia to New York, you had to deal with questions you might not have in the South. The moment one begins to ask those questions, another sensibility begins to evolve; in the dark, as sensibilities always do, as many seeds of convulsions begin. But it began then, and by 1955 it had put down roots and was beginning, in a sense, to blossom. This may seem a misplaced word in such a grim context, but in short, black America had changed in those years and had changed forever. In some ways for the better and in some ways, perhaps, for the worse. But, then, that is something you can never really be definite about. In my point of view, it's for the better, on balance, because we know more about each other than we did before.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *Who do you see as being important leaders today? And why?*

**BALDWIN:** One of the things that has happened in the last five to ten years is that black people have begun to realize that a great many people who were called their leaders weren't, and we know that a great many of our real leaders were murdered. So, I think there's a general, though unspoken reluctance on the part of many black people, and certainly on the part of the young, to identify a leader, because identifying him is almost like putting the finger on him. In any case, I think the time for that kind of leader is probably past.

I think the leader now is to be found in all kinds of places. He might stand on the streets of Detroit, he might be an 18-year-old boy, it might be a 25-year-old woman, it might be a 75-year-old man. A leader is someone who is operative in changing things, and they are to be found in prisons; they are to be found in universities, for that matter, and on football teams. They work, and they must work (the situation being as grave as it is) in a kind of anonymity. Perhaps, if I go to Chicago next week, I might discover two or three leaders in various barbershops there. But, the nation won't know who they are, and the nation hasn't got to know. The nation has no way of reacting to them except with terror. And terror has brought death. The urgent need of the black community is to protect its leaders in order to protect its young.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *What is your evaluation of the civil rights movement between the years 1955 and 1964? What would you assess as its pluses and minuses?*

**BALDWIN:** To tell you the truth, the results of the civil rights movement to me has nothing to do with civil rights. (I'm talking with hindsight. I might not have said this two years ago.) The one thing it revealed to me was a profound nobility, a real nobility on the part of a whole lot of black people, old and young. There is no other word for it.

It was a passionate example. It was doomed to political failure, but that doesn't

make any difference. The example will never, never die. And on another level, it exposed white people. Some of them understood it and some of them didn't. Some of them really understood what it meant to have all those kids cattleprodded and hosed and beaten and murdered and chained and castrated. The moral image of a cattleprod against a woman's breast or against a man's testicles.

It exposed some things for some people and on the other hand most of the people hid. They did not want to see it and don't see it until today. That's how we have Nixon in the White House and we see this hood Agnew on his way to jail. And then, once again, to keep the nigger in his place, they called it law and order. They brought into office law and order, but I call it the Fourth Reich.

I must say, I claim for the black people of America the example of nobility which I have never seen before and no one in this century has seen before. Malcolm was noble. Martin was noble. Medgar was noble and those kids were noble and it exposed an entire country, it exposed an entire civilization. Now we have to take it from there.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *With Stokely Carmichael's Black Power statement in 1966 various forms of militant black nationalism emerged. Do you see this as new development or basically a cyclical response?*

**BALDWIN:** It's such a very hard question to deal with, really, because Stokely at that moment was very, very young. I mean that only a young man would have been able to say it. And only someone who was forged in a crucible outside the United States. It is very important to remember that Stokely, like Marcus Garvey, is West Indian and therefore his relationship to the deep South and all those highways was a very different one, profoundly different one. I admire Stokely very much, but his frame of reference from his childhood was not Georgia or Harlem, it's someplace else. He had another sense of identity which allowed him to say, as Martin Luther King could not and as Malcolm had to

say in another way, that if we don't have power, we can't change anything. That's a very good, logical statement coming from the West Indies, and a very powerful statement coming from the deep South.

It is very important that Stokely said it but what was even more important was the convulsion in the white American breast because he really put his finger on the root of the problem. They ain't never gonna give us anything. Such people never do give. They have to be menaced into doing it. They won't set us free until we have the power to free ourselves. That was the importance of it. What one has made of it is something else, on both sides of what we call the racial fence. The dues that Stokely had to pay behind it were extraordinary because it really got to the heart of the American problem, which is, who owns the banks?

I'll put it another way. When the kids were marching down in the South, the North was vividly in sympathy with them. We knew that if it ever got to the North, the same Northern liberals, who praised all those kids on the highway and sent down all that money, would do the same thing in New York as was being done in Birmingham. And the same thing happened, except in New York, the enemy is in the bank. When the kids sat down in the bank, the very same policemen, for the very same reasons, did the very same things. That is when the movement changed. When Martin Luther King went to Chicago, they threw eggs at him and said we don't want dreams, we want jobs.

The importance of what Stokely said, and the importance of what's been happening in the last ten years is that people in the street from Birmingham to New York, especially their children, have learned to understand the nature of the American hoax.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *You are saying, then, that you don't think it was new?*

**BALDWIN:** No, it was old.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *What are the differences that you see in the kind of militant black*

*nationalism that Stokely talked about in 1966 and the kind that Garvey talked of earlier?*

BALDWIN: Well, it is not so great a difference as it would seem. Garvey's era was the era in which I was born and grew up. Garvey was a West Indian adventurer; the boat sank, and we could pursue that but that's another question. The trouble has always been to arrive at some viable identity, some bearable identity, some identity which is not at the mercy of the people who despised you. Garvey was trying to do that. Whether it was wrong or right, and whether his tactics were wrong or right is another question because you cannot speak about tactics in such a tight situation, anyway. It is still a question of whether Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. DuBois was right. I wasn't there, but I know they were both produced by the same circumstances and reacted in different ways, or it seemed to be different ways, to the same trap. And they both bequeathed us something very important. The argument between them now is just as important as it was then.

All were dealing with America. It was a question then; it's a question now. One can't go back to Africa. You would never find your tribe; in any case your tribe would be different. Liberia proves this because American Negroes were used to go back to colonize Africa, and they all ended up working for the rubber plantation, which forbids you to be romantic about a return to any place. Monrovia is one of the most ghastly cities in the world, really, to tell the truth. And everyone in that country is owned by Firestone. Every acre, the rubber, is owned by Firestone.

The hard thing then is to recognize that if you can't go back, you must go forward, you know. And if you can go forward, you may be able to make a real alliance of your past and your present. You cannot possibly do it by going backwards. The past is irrecoverable. The American black man for the first time may be able to move forward into whatever his future is going to be, which means by changing his present. But he cannot do it by a romantic return to the past.

It's very difficult; all these questions have questions behind them. It's a series of

parentheses and it cannot be answered, you know. It can only be faced. I don't have any answers. No matter how we play it, the question is who holds the power; and a deeper question than that is by what morality (and that's a very serious word) does whoever hold the power hold it. Which means, held to what purpose, to what end.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *What direction do you see the movement in the U.S. taking at this time?*

BALDWIN: I think it has become less domestic and more international. Marcus Garvey tried to articulate, after all, quite a long time ago, and even Frederick Douglass, that the situation of the black American slave was tied to the situation of the slaves all over the world. In a book called *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*, not too very many years ago, there was no connection between blacks and Indians. But when blacks started firing back at the Ku Klux Klan, so did the Indians. It was in the same month. That hit me in a very funny way because long, long before our day the Indians and the niggers (the Indians and the slaves) were friends and sometimes even married. I'm part Indian and probably so are you. But the Indians were almost destroyed and we were dispersed. So it is perfectly logical that a certain historical wheel should eventually come full circle; so that what began, arbitrarily speaking, with the black movement in the 1950s would spread first all over the country and then all over the world.

It is clear to anyone who thinks, and maybe even to the junkie who suffers, that the situation of black America is related to the situation of Mexicans, to all of Latin America. It's related to the military junta in Chile; with the misery of the people called the "have nots." It's not an act of God and it is not an accident. It is something which is deliberate. It is something which is necessary for the well being of the "master race" so that the poor of Latin America, or the poor of Vietnam, and we are in the same bag and are oppressed by the same people and for the same reason. And if they can be murdered in Latin America as we have been murdered for years and years in our own country, and

murdered in Vietnam, then something begins to be very, very clear: that the salvation of the black American is also involved with the freedom of all the other slaves. And this, too, begins to evolve very slowly and in the dark, but I think it becomes clearer with every hour.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *What are your views on the sources of the oppression in Africa, Asia and Latin America?*

BALDWIN: My views? How can I put this? It is much more serious than my views. All of the oppressions that you speak of have the same root, have the same reason. Take the Israeli-Arab conflict or the so-called Israeli-Arab conflict because—it is very important, for me at least, to remember that they are of the same tribe, living in the same desert; they are both circumcised and have the same prophets, you know; and, when I was in Israel, fortunately I could not tell the difference between them. Now, all right, people will be what they are. They've been battling out there in that desert for a long time. But the situation became much more crucial at the point that their battle became useful to the Western powers which would use them against each other, which is exactly what has happened in the case of Palestine, now called Israel.

There is a level at which one can say that the guilty conscious of the Christian Western nations helped to create the state of Israel. A Jewish Zionist won't admit it but an anti-Zionist Jew will, that most Zionists who are not Jews are anti-Semitic, and in that sense the creation of the state of Israel was false. Many people knew it in France and America. It was a kind of final solution, and in any case was very useful for the Western powers. In a certain sense, the state of Israel was created to keep the Arab in his place. It's a very cruel way to put it but that is the truth. In any case, it is not acceptable to me that the people who have been in refugee camps for the last twenty-five or thirty years have no equal right to the land of Palestine where Jews and Arabs have been together for so long. I am not myself deluded that, *either*, in the case of

Israel or in the case of Vietnam that the Western powers are fighting for anybody's freedom. They are fighting to protect their investments.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *Several people have seen the famine in the areas of Chad, Mali, Senegal, Niger, etc., as being a planned act of genocide. Do you believe such was the case?*

BALDWIN: It could be a planned act of genocide, but it is much more important to realize that it didn't have to be. The disasters of which you speak are built into the system of which we are speaking. A Western banker hasn't got to be wicked or even very clever, you know. Genocide is on one level, if you like, planned, but it is unplanned at the moment of real conflict. The rise of capitalism and the rise of Christianity created a dynamic which made genocide inevitable. The preacher and the missionary, individually, may be very honest and very sincere, but the dynamic they represent is what makes genocide inevitable. Whether or not they like it or whether or not they know it, that is what it was built to do.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *In your writings you have remarked that both black and white Americans are victims of an historical process which they do not understand. Further, you indicate that white America refuses to acknowledge the "horror," as well as the "beauty" of its history, especially in reference to race. Do you still hold this view?*

BALDWIN: Yes, I still hold that view except a little more emphatically. White America is unwilling to recognize its history. I don't think they can. I'm speaking about the generality, but the exceptions must be noted. You must consider that a lot of white people in America understand what's happening, especially young kids. But then to the extent that they understand it and to the extent that they act on what they understand, they become indistinguishable from the nigger. Indistinguishable, because, in a sense, they are worse than the nigger because they are traitors.

History is a very strange crucible and I don't pretend to understand it; but I do understand at least in my own mind that you are lucky if you are forced to understand your own history. A black American who has, in effect, or who is told he has no history has achieved some kind of identity in any case. And then you begin to recreate your history out of weapons you didn't know you had. This is what happened to black Americans, I think. I don't think that we were born with any particular sense of history. Yet when I realize that something had brought me from birth to maturity, someone had created me, and it wasn't anything I had been taught in school; it wasn't any history which was at anybody's fingertips. It was history which had been, in a sense, handed down to me, invested in me, and when I say me I mean all black kids.

History was someone you touched, you know, on Sunday mornings or in the barber-shop. It's all around you. It's in the music, it's in the way you talk, it's in the way you cry, it's in the way you make love. Because you are denied your official history you are forced to excavate your real history even though you can never say that's what you are doing. That is what you are doing. That is one of the reasons for the life style of black Americans, which is a real life style as distinguished from the total anonymity of white Americans who have so much history, all of which they believe. They are absolutely choked with it. They can't move because all the lies that they have told themselves, they actually think is their history.

We were able to raise our children because we had a real sense of the past. That is because we had to have a very real sense of the present and to have a hell of a lot of apprehension for the future so that the kid had to be prepared. All you have is your history, and you had to translate that through everything that you did, so the kid would live. That is called love, too. You try to become in a sense a model.

For example, I remember my grandmother because there was something she was trying to tell me and I knew she loved me. She scared me, you know. My father scared me, too. My

mother sometimes scared me, but I knew they were trying to tell me something, and I began to listen, which is the way a black kid grows up. You don't always know exactly what's happening or why it's happening but you do grow up respecting your father, whether or not you get along with him, and you do respect your mother and you begin to see when you get to be a man what they were trying to tell you, because now you've got to tell it. That's how history is handed down. You've got to be a model like they were a model. You've got to spank the baby; you've got to be responsible for him.

Someone told me once that there were no orphans in Africa and I didn't know what they meant until I got to Africa and it was true. You can tell from the way the kids treat you. The kids treat you, in Africa, as though you automatically belong there because you are grown up. When I was growing up, the neighbors used to beat me and my brothers and my sisters when they thought we were doing wrong and would tell my mother or my daddy that "I just beat him." All of us brought up everybody else's children, you know, and none of us had any bastards.

Bastardy is a commercial concept which is among the most obscene in the world. It means that you can't inherit family property. Beyond that it also goes a long way towards explaining the disaster of the South and the disaster of America, because it was white people who have had black children whom they have lynched, knowing them to be their children. If people can do that, they are doomed.

As Stevie Wonder says in his song (It will take a long time before white America can understand what his music is about at all; it's almost like a code. They don't really know what Stevie is singing about or what Stevie is saying. They can't afford to know.) Stevie says, "I ain't gotta do nothing to you; I ain't even gotta do nothing to you; you cause your own country to fall." And that's what's happening. Now, the rest is up to us because we are responsible *for* each other and *to* each other. We are responsible to the *future*, and not to Chase Manhattan Bank.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *How have you, a black man, found the experience of racism here in France as compared with the United States?*

BALDWIN: Well, it is very important to remember that *America* was *settled* by Europe. You know, it takes about five minutes for a European to become an American, and, as Malcolm said, the first word he learned was "Nigger." That puts it a little brutally, but it is very accurate. A black man from America in Europe is exotic. He doesn't pose any threat. In the first place, there aren't very many black Americans in Europe, when you take into consideration the population of Europe. Many of them are distinguished, one way or another, leaving aside of course the GI, but they don't depend on Europe. Therefore, they are no menace to Europe.

I was very poor when I got to Paris. I slept in the streets and under bridges and I slept with the Africans, the Algerians and the underside of Paris. It was very good for me. It was frightening, but it was very good for me. In France, the Algerian is the nigger. That's because of the relationship of France to Algeria for 130 years: A very complex relationship in which Algeria simply belonged to France and when an Algerian came to France, he was treated and is treated as a mule, especially now because he is doing all the dirty work that the Europeans no longer want to do. They need him for his labor, but they don't want him here as a man, they want him here as a mule. He didn't have his children. He had to work and send money back to Algeria. Of course, it is possible that something else begins to happen because the Algerians have been here long enough to have children and this begins to change the whole structure of France. France reacts the way England reacts, the way Americans have always reacted—with panic, and panic means cruelty, you know, death to the Arab. That overstates it a little, but not very much.

The French have (I can only speak of the French with some authority because I have lived here so long) one difference, which is not, when you examine it, a very great difference. They don't have the sexual hysteria of

the English and Americans. They don't like Mohammed's presence, they don't want him to marry their daughters, but they don't have the American paranoia about your asking his daughter to marry you and her usually saying "yes," because she's just waiting to be asked. French men are too egotistical to imagine that anyone can take their women from them. But that doesn't make any difference in the day-to-day life of the garage worker, the factory worker, the mason. The difference is something which only I would observe, which makes no difference in their lives at all.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *What do you find is the level of political consciousness of Africans living here in France?*

BALDWIN: It depends on which African you are thinking of. The African laborer is articulate; I'm sure he's talking to his comrades. The African student or professional varies according to the extent to which he takes his standards from Europe. Many of them are still schizophrenic, which is perfectly understandable. The American black man has an advantage over him, having been born on the mainland, so that he does not discover when he is thirty that he is a nigger. He discovers it when he's five, or six, or seven. It's very different to be born in a colony and to be bright and to be sent to school in the mainland and then discover you are a nigger. It's much harder to get over. If you do get over it, you become a valuable weapon. Many people never get over it. One has to face that, too. I think that the generation you represent is freer from these hang-ups than my generation because it is much clearer for your generation how bankrupt the Western world is.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *Brother Baldwin, how do you see yourself as a black man here in the "sunny hills of southern France" and your relationship to black people who are struggling all over the world against racism and exploitation?*

BALDWIN: The south of France is not as sunny as people think it is.



I know why I'm here but I could say, you know, that I have found a haven although I know very well that that's not true. You have to remember, first of all, that the world is very small, and it is no longer possible for an American, and certainly not an American black man, or an American black writer, and certainly not James Baldwin, to leave America. You have to remember that France and America are friendly nations and it may cost me more to live here than I am willing to tell. In any case, the most difficult thing for me to accept in my life was that I am a writer and that there are no excuses. I must get my work done. It is not up to the world to tell me how to do it, it is up to me. The important thing is the work. The world's judgment is something I have to live with. I learned how to do that a long time ago. In the meantime, I'm working. I can't do more than that and I am *not* in exile and I am *not* in paradise. It rains down here, too.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *Do you consider political themes or rather the influence of politics as playing an integral role in your writing process?*

BALDWIN: Politics was not very real to me when I was 19, 20, 22. It wasn't real to me because my situation was too tight and I was trying to survive in New York and I had my family to worry about and the rent to pay and I was dancing one step ahead of the devil. I still am but the difference is that when I moved out from America, I began to see it from a different perspective, which is very difficult to describe. I can see now what had happened to so many people who had perished around me and I could see that it was a political fact, a political disaster, and that I, myself, was in any case a political target; and menaced by forces which I had not seen as clearly when I was in America.

I also realized that to try to be a writer (which involves, after all, disturbing the peace) was political, whether one liked it or not; because if one is doing anything at all, one is trying to change the consciousness of other people. You're trying also to change your own consciousness. You have to use

your consciousness, you have to trust it to the extent—enough to begin to *talk*; and you talk with the intention of beginning a ferment, beginning a disturbance in someone else's mind so that he sees the situation, which is what Malcolm was doing. Malcolm and I were very good friends, but we're not at all alike, and I am not comparing myself with him. What Malcolm was trying to do was make black people see their situation and then they could change it for themselves because Malcolm was only one man and I'm only one man.

A change, a real change is brought about when the people make a change. The poet or the revolutionary is there to articulate the necessity, but until the people themselves apprehend it, nothing can happen. When the people have taken the necessity, when the movement starts moving, then the world moves. Perhaps, it can't be done without the poet, but, it certainly can't be done without the people. The poet and the people get on generally very badly, and yet they need each other. The poet knows it sooner than the people do. The people usually know it after the poet is dead; but, that's all right. The point is to get your work done, and your work is to change the world.

BLACK SCHOLAR: *Is the poet necessarily one who is a literary figure, one who writes and composes poetry, or can a poet take other forms?*

BALDWIN: When I say poet, it's an arbitrary word. It's a word I use because I don't like the word artist. Nina Simone is a poet. Max Roach is a poet. There is a whole list of people. I'm not talking about literature at all. I'm talking about the recreation of experience, you know, the way that it comes back. Billie Holiday was a poet. She gave you back your experience. She refined it, and you recognized it for the first time because she was in and out of it and she made it possible for you to bear it. And if you could bear it, then you could begin to change it. That's what a poet does. I'm not talking about books. I'm talking about a certain kind of passion, a certain kind of energy which people produce and they

secrete in certain people like Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, and Max Roach because they need it and these people give it back to you and they get you from one place to another.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *How do you see the role of the artist in general?*

**BALDWIN:** The role of the artist is exactly the same role, I think, as the role of the lover. If you love somebody, you honor at least two necessities at once. One of them is to recognize something very dangerous, or very difficult. Many people cannot recognize it at all, that you may also be loved; love is like a mirror. In any case, if you do love somebody, you honor the necessity endlessly, and being at the mercy of that love, you try to correct the person whom you love. Now, that's a two way street. You've also got to be corrected. As I said, the people produce the artist, and it's true. The artist also produces the people. And that's a very violent and terrifying act of love. The role of the artist and the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see. Insofar as that is true, in that effort, I become conscious of the things that I don't see. And I will not see without you, and vice versa, you will not see without me. No one wants to see more than he sees. You have to be driven to see what you see. The only way you can get through it is to accept that two-way street which I call love. You can call it a poem, you can call it whatever you like. That's how people grow up. An artist is here not to give you answers but to ask you questions.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *Speaking of black artists and writers, you were very close to Lorraine Hansberry. Is there anything you would say about her life and work?*

**BALDWIN:** It is hard for me to talk about Lorraine in a way because I loved her. She was like my baby sister, in a way. I can't think of her without a certain amount of pain.

Every artist, every writer goes under the hammer. But under ordinary circumstances, since a writer's real ambition is to be anonymous and since his work is done in pri-

vate, one arrives at some way of living with the hammer. But the black writer is by definition public, and he lives under something much worse. The pressure of being a writer is one thing, but the pressure of being a public figure is another—and they are antithetical, too. The strain can kill you. It is certainly one of the things that killed Lorraine, who was very vivid, very young, very curious, very courageous, very honest. But she died, as you know, subsequent to the eruption in Birmingham, as the country, in fact, began to go over the cliff. Many of us began to realize then that there was no way of redeeming the American Republic. It was bent on destruction.

This was one of the things that killed her. It was the incomprehension of her country and the disaster overtaking the nation, which, after all, she, like I, had many reasons to love. We were born there, and our ancestors paid a great deal for it.

**BLACK SCHOLAR:** *What closing words would you like to leave with THE BLACK SCHOLAR readers in several countries around the world, and particularly brothers and sisters engaged in active struggle wherever they might be?*

**BALDWIN:** This may not answer your question exactly but it's the only way I can get into it. I have an actor friend, a black actor friend who lives in California with two or three kids who are my godchildren, and a beautiful wife. The faces of his children, his three boys, when they look at their father, are very proud faces. They are very proud of him, in a way that was very rare, very rare to see when I was growing up. And they don't care if he's poor. They are not upset by that. They know who he is and what he's trying to do and he's their daddy. That all gives me a certain resurgence of consciousness that I was trying to talk about before; and also the necessity that we have to take care of each other because no one else is going to do it.

The importance of the black family at this hour in the world's history is to be an example to all those others dispersed all over the world because in a sense, the American Negro has become a model. In a very funny

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way the vanguard of a revolution which is now global, and it does begin with what you call the black family. My brother in jail, my sister on the street and my uncle the junkie, but it's my brother and my sister and my uncle. So it's not a question of denying them, it's a question of saving them.

I think the revolution begins first of all in the most private chamber of somebody's heart, in your consciousness. I think that what is happening now is that a new vision of the world which has always been there, but a new vision of the world, is beginning to be born. And if that is so, then the little boys that I am talking about will be the architects of that world.

There have been civilizations which have lasted for thousands of years without policemen, without torture, without rape, where gold was an ornament, not the summit of human desire. It has happened before and it can happen again. I really begin to look on the 2,000 year reign of the theology of this system, which is coming to its end, as a long aberration in the history of mankind, which will leave very little behind it except those people who have created an opposition to it, if that makes sense. What it can give it has given. In America, what it gave was us and the music which comes to the same thing. Now, it's not even worth translating. It has translated itself. It was doomed. But those three little boys who are living in California, my godchildren, will not be doomed. We must take our children out of that civilization's hands. That will be easier than we think it is because this civilization is on its death bed.

There are new metaphors, there are new sounds, there are new relations. Men and women will be different. Children will be different. They will have to make money obsolete; make a man's life worth more than that. Restore the idea of work, which is joy and not drudgery. People don't work for money, you know. You can't work for money. When you work for money, something awful happens to you. But we can work, and understand. The world begins here, entrusted in your head and in your heart, your belly and your balls. If you can trust that, you can change the world, and we have to.