

James A. Baldwin

Quotes

*People, Men, Thinking, Writing, Country, Mean, Inspirational, World, White,
Real, Way, Life, Order, Justice, Reality, Literature, Believe, Change, Art,
Children*

Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.

~James A. Baldwin

I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do.

~James A. Baldwin

It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.

~James A. Baldwin

I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.

~James A. Baldwin

Fires can't be made with dead embers, nor can enthusiasm be stirred by spiritless men. Enthusiasm in our daily work lightens effort and turns even labor into pleasant tasks.

~James A. Baldwin

The place in which I'll fit will not exist until I make it.

~James A. Baldwin

Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.

~James A. Baldwin

Trust life, and it will teach you, in joy and sorrow, all you need to know.

~James A. Baldwin

If the relationship of father to son could really be reduced to biology, the whole earth would blaze with the glory of fathers and sons.

~James A. Baldwin

You have to decide who you are and force the world to deal with you, not with its idea of you.

~James A. Baldwin

Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up.

~James A. Baldwin

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.

~James A. Baldwin

The American idea of racial progress is measured by how fast I become white.

~James A. Baldwin

To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.

~James A. Baldwin

The establishment of democracy on the American continent was scarcely as radical a break with the past as was the necessity, which Americans faced, of broadening this concept to include black men.

~James A. Baldwin

I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.

~James A. Baldwin

The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.

~James A. Baldwin

There are so many ways of being despicable it quite makes one's head spin. But the way to be really despicable is to be contemptuous of other people's pain.

~James A. Baldwin

It is astonishing the lengths to which a person, or a people, will go in order to avoid a truthful mirror.

~James A. Baldwin

A civilization is not destroyed by wicked people; it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless.

~James A. Baldwin

Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality.

~James A. Baldwin

It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.

~James A. Baldwin

Most people... find a disorientating mismatch between the long-term nature of their liabilities and the increasingly short-term nature of their assets.

~James A. Baldwin

The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim: he or she has become a threat.

~James A. Baldwin

I've always believed that you can think positive just as well as you can think negative.

~James A. Baldwin

A liberal: someone who thinks he knows more about your experience than you do.

~James A. Baldwin

You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read.

~James A. Baldwin

People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction.

~James A. Baldwin

The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose.

~James A. Baldwin

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.

~James A. Baldwin

Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters?

~James A. Baldwin

The purpose of education...is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions.

~James A. Baldwin

It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive.

~James A. Baldwin

We are responsible for the world in which we find ourselves, if only because we are the only sentient force which can change it.

~James A. Baldwin

Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves; the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his.

~James A. Baldwin

It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate.

~James A. Baldwin

Be careful what you set your heart upon - for it will surely be yours.

~James A. Baldwin

Hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated, and this was an immutable law.

~James A. Baldwin

Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.

~James A. Baldwin

Nobody is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart; for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.

~James A. Baldwin

It is very nearly impossible... to become an educated person in a country so distrustful of the independent mind.

~James A. Baldwin

Talent is insignificant. I know a lot of talented ruins. Beyond talent lie all

the usual words: discipline, love, luck, but, most of all, endurance.

~James A. Baldwin

People who treat other people as less than human must not be surprised when the bread they have cast on the waters comes floating back to them, poisoned.

~James A. Baldwin

It is dangerous to be an American Negro male. America has never wanted its Negroes to be men, and does not, generally, treat them as men. It treats them as mascots, pets, or things.

~James A. Baldwin

No man is a devil in his own mind.

~James A. Baldwin

Freedom is not something that anybody can be given. Freedom is something people take, and people are as free as they want to be

~James A. Baldwin

American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.

~James A. Baldwin

There is a 'sanctity' involved with bringing a child into this world: it is better than bombing one out of it.

~James A. Baldwin

God be thanked for books! They are the voices of the distant and the dead.

~James A. Baldwin

This is the charged, the dangerous moment, when everything must be re-examined, must be made new, when nothing at all can be taken for

granted.

~James A. Baldwin

All over Harlem, Negro boys and girls are growing into stunted maturity, trying desperately to find a place to stand; and the wonder is not that so many are ruined but that so many survive.

~James A. Baldwin

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

~James A. Baldwin

People can cry much easier than they can change.

~James A. Baldwin

People who believe that they are strong-willed and the masters of their destiny can only continue to believe this by becoming specialists in self-deception.

~James A. Baldwin

You cannot fix what you will not face.

~James A. Baldwin

I can't be a pessimist, because I am alive.

~James A. Baldwin

The young think that failure is the Siberian end of the line, banishment from all the living, and tend to do what I then did - which was to hide.

~James A. Baldwin

Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.

~James A. Baldwin

People pay for what they do, and still more for what they have allowed themselves to become, and they pay for it, very simply, by the lives they lead.

~James A. Baldwin

One cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own.

~James A. Baldwin

Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.

~James A. Baldwin

You've got to tell the world how to treat you. If the world tells you how you are going to be treated, you are in trouble.

~James A. Baldwin

To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.

~James A. Baldwin

The power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions.

~James A. Baldwin

But the relationship of morality and power is a very subtle one. Because ultimately power without morality is no longer power.

~James A. Baldwin

The white man discovered the Cross by way of the Bible, but the black man discovered the Bible by way of the Cross.

~James A. Baldwin

The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

~James A. Baldwin

There are people in the world for whom "coming along" is a perpetual process, people who are destined never to arrive.

~James A. Baldwin

The role of the artist is exactly the same as the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see.

~James A. Baldwin

Artists are here to disturb the peace.

~James A. Baldwin

Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel.

~James A. Baldwin

Not only was I not born to be a slave; I was not born to hope to become the equal of the slave master.

~James A. Baldwin

Hatred is always self hatred, and there is something suicidal about it.

~James A. Baldwin

Education is indoctrination if you're white - subjugation if you're black.

~James A. Baldwin

Nothing is more desirable than to be released from an affliction, but nothing is more frightening than to be divested of a crutch.

~James A. Baldwin

One day, to everyone's astonishment, someone drops a match in the powder keg and everything blows up.

~James A. Baldwin

No people come into possession of a culture without having paid a heavy price for it.

~James A. Baldwin

The world is before you, and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.

~James A. Baldwin

It is a great shock at the age of five or six to find that in a world of Gary Coopers you are the Indian.

~James A. Baldwin

A writer has to take all the risks of putting down what he sees.

~James A. Baldwin

The moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

~James A. Baldwin

And love will simply have no choice but to go into battle with space and time, and furthermore, to win.

~James A. Baldwin

The interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world.

~James A. Baldwin

Neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind.

~James A. Baldwin

A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled.

~James A. Baldwin

The trick is to love somebody.... If you love one person, you see everybody else differently.

~James A. Baldwin

If I am not what you say I am, then you are not who you think you are.

~James A. Baldwin

I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also, much more than that. So are we all.

~James A. Baldwin

Drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides.

~James A. Baldwin

True rebels after all, are as rare as true lovers, and in both cases, to mistake a fever for passion can destroy one's life

~James A. Baldwin

Remember, to hate, to be violent, is demeaning. It means you're afraid of the other side of the coin -- to love and be loved.

~James A. Baldwin

If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.

~James A. Baldwin

The hope of the world lies in what one demands, not of others, but of oneself.

~James A. Baldwin

To be with God is really to be involved in some enormous, overwhelming desire, and joy, and power which you cannot control, which controls you.

~James A. Baldwin

The only thing that white people have that black people need, or should want, is power-and no one holds power forever.

~James A. Baldwin

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.

~James A. Baldwin

Whoever is born in New York is ill-equipped to deal with any other city: all other cities seem, at best, a mistake, and, at worst, a fraud. No other city is so spitefully incoherent.

~James A. Baldwin

There are few things under heaven more unnerving than the silent, accumulating contempt and hatred of a people.

~James A. Baldwin

The making of an American begins at the point where he himself rejects all other ties, any other history, and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land.

~James A. Baldwin

A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven.

~James A. Baldwin

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