

Racial stereotypes in the fire next time novel

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During the mid-twentieth in century America, racial tensions had risen to a level rarely encountered in recent history. White prejudice and hatred came face to face with blacks fighting for true equality. Although all are supposed to be created equal, many, including James Baldwin, experienced the sad truth; nobody is truly equal. Baldwin becomes a preacher in the church when he is a young boy to learn more about life as well as himself. The experiences that Baldwin encounters however, seem to contradict what he preaches. In his novel “ The Fire Next Time”, James Baldwin offers thoughts and ideas about equality and the race relations. However, in order to fix these problems, America will need to fight religious hypocrisy that has a stranglehold on true equality and find solutions to these local and global issues

Many times during Baldwin’s novel, he preaches about the hypocrisy in the United States. The hypocrisy he sees not only damages race relations, but religious and gender relations. James Baldwin was a Pentecostal Christian, a religion that not as well-known as other denominations. Pentecostals differ from other Christian religions in its origin, services, and unique features. It originated around the Holiness Movement to try and perfect the Christian religion (Queen, Prothero and Shattuck 763). Their services are extremely charismatic and often spoke in glossolalia, or speaking in unknown tongues (Queen, Prothero and Shattuck 764). Pentecostals devoutly follow of the words of Jesus and use it to justify their points of view. Due to their seemingly blind following of the bible, many groups of people have suffered. Baldwin notes early in his work that blacks “[were] a descendant of Ham... and was therefore predestined to be a slave” (Baldwin 36). He also notes

that the Bible was written by the white man. If all black Christians believed this were to be true, why should they work hard and fight for change? His actions to defy the Bible can either be seen as heroic, or defiant of faith. This experience was the first of many where he realizes religion to not have the best intentions. As he grows older he, begins to see big problems within the church. Religion and churches in general seem to preach love and acceptance, but only of a certain group of people. Baldwin notices this when he walks the streets and is harassed for being African American. Although he preaches love, and his harassers' religion may as well, its effect is not shown. Baldwin wishes to fight against tradition and usher in a future that his parents would be proud of and his children would be proud of.

Baldwin also reminds the reader that location can predestine a person as well. Back in the early colonies, whites held the power and even slaves. White's used religion as means to gain control over other groups of people, and an excuse to take over an entire continent. After slavery was abolished during the mid-nineteenth century, African's were without basic education and skills because of their enslaved past. Then during the Great Migration, Black's flocked to the earliest cities as the work was most plentiful there. Since the earliest cities, most minorities lived in areas of poor housing or ghettos because they could not afford to be in nice houses or neighborhoods. This was still true in the mid-1900s. Many blacks were born and raised into poor ghettos. This in turn resulted in poor living conditions, food, and schooling. If they tried to escape these wretched conditions and better themselves, they might receive hate filled comments such as " Why won't you n*****s stay in uptown where you belong" among other racial slurs and

comments (Baldwin 19). These horrible conditions and treatment are prime examples of the black man's struggle in America. The ideas that the United States entails; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, seem to only apply to whites, and nobody else. If religion was not hypocritical and destructive, the United States and history may have changed forever. Mr. Baldwin wishes all to be a spark plug of change, to make a difference for future generation. Nobody should be born into a situation they cannot get themselves out of. African American's have the ability to " make America what America must become" (Baldwin 10).

After discussing the problems he has witnessed firsthand, Baldwin attempts to offer solutions to what he sees as dangerous to the future. He first wishes to address the church and Christianity in general. He believes that many of the beliefs and ideas taught are possibly destructive to society. The only way to solve this problem, is to completely ignore and stop teaching Christianity (Baldwin). This point as controversial as it might be, but proves relevant to today's society. Many times in modern media, there is something on about homosexuality, race related violence, and other pressing topics. If

Christianity was abandoned and open mindedness and love was brought to younger generations, people would be more open to new things and ideas. The closed-minded white America he believes is another issue. Every person is molded by their experiences and will affect their judgment and opinions differently. Baldwin believes both blacks and whites are being blinded by their experiences. A small town farmer from Wyoming will typically have a much different opinion than a black woman living in a large city. Baldwin wants people to open their minds beyond what they have seen and heard,

challenge what they know. Everything people have been taught or forced to believe is a potential problem for personal, interracial, and international issues. Fighting for the truth and not being complacent is extremely important to make today into a better tomorrow.

“ The Fire Next Time” by James Baldwin encaptures problems and possible solutions to them that affect every-day life in the United States. For many people, this novel opens their eyes to a side of life little known to them. Realizing what is wrong is the first step in solving the problem. It is society’s responsibility to better not only itself, but those within it. By embracing differences and being a catalyst for change, we will change America into what it must be.