

James Baldwin: My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to my Nephew

In 1962, the Progressive Magazine published a letter James Baldwin wrote to his nephew. The letter is excerpted from his novel, [The Fire Next Time](#), published in 1963. In this letter Baldwin shared his thoughts for his nephew's future in a nation with a history of racism.

Throughout the month of February, the full letter as well as reflections and other readings or videos will be on the church's website. [CLICK HERE](#) to access those materials. Our hope is that you will hear the words and the sentiment expressed in this letter and ask yourself why Baldwin felt he needed to write this letter and what we can do to make this kind of letter unnecessary.

Week One Reflections – February 7, 2021

Early in the letter, Baldwin says “It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.” Reflect on what innocence Baldwin is referring to. Who is innocent? Who isn't? How has the innocence changed since this letter was written?

Additional Studies

Read this piece in [Medium by Jenny Justice](#) on the importance of this letter. Justice opens her piece with this statement and question.

“Imagine having to write a letter to a child you love preparing them for the racism they will encounter in their lives? Imagine it.”

Can you imagine it?

Watch [this interview](#) of Baldwin by Dick Cavett in which they discuss racism and other things. Read [this recap](#). Reflect on the different perspectives. What do you make of them? Do you think they would be different today? Why? Why not?