

“Dear Mr. Baldwin”

By Ataesheana Storr L’21

Dear Mr. Baldwin,

My name is Ataesheanna Storr, and I am an admirer of your work. While I was not privileged to learn about you in school, my parents introduced me to poetry and literature at a young age. I fell in love with reading in the fourth grade. It was the first time I read Dr. Maya Angelou’s poem *Still I Rise*. Her words sparked a fire in me – to read more and think more – I was so intrigued. I desired to read from more black writers. I soon discovered your short stories and took a liking to *This Morning, This Evening, So Soon*. As a child, I did not quite understand your words, but I knew they were powerful. One line still resonates with me today: “It is astonishing the lengths to which a person, or a people, will go in order to avoid a truthful mirror.” Those words still carry weight today.

I am writing you this letter to share what is happening in today’s time. While I am sure what my generation is experiencing is nothing in comparison to the obstacles yours had to overcome, we are still living in a time where people are motivated by racism, sexism, and hate. From the killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Sandra Bland, and others, to the violent destruction of government property at the Capitol by people “protesting” the 2020 election results, it is frustrating to witness so many social injustices. As I reflect on the letter you wrote to your nephew about his father (your brother) and the cruelty he faced, I am moved by your decision to tell your nephew to accept those that are motivated by racism with love. You go on to say, “They are . . . still trapped in a history in which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.” This level of acceptance is commendable especially when you know that it will not be reciprocated. In combining these words with your message about people avoiding a truthful a mirror, I now understand my role in the anti-racist movement of today.

This movement allows me to feel the feelings I suppressed in the past. For years, I would not speak on my personal experiences with racism and sexism. Out of fear that my words would be used against me, I chose to internalize the microaggressions, racist comments, and hateful treatment. In turn, I developed a censorship in my personality which hindered my growth as a person and as a black woman. In a way, I can relate to your story of how racism tore down your brother. Nevertheless, I begin to find myself again amid the anti-racist movement. Seeing people come together and act against systemic racism, oppression, and bias

motivated me speak up. This is a time to remind each other that we as a people are not inferior and we are more than capable of success and making impactful choices.

In a time where there are endless efforts by people to spread hate, one does not have time to be doubtful. Darkness cannot overcome darkness, for only light can bring a breakthrough. To make real changes in our society we must maintain hope and use that hope as endurance to push for change. Just as Dr. King, Malcolm X, and Angela Davis spoke for change, we must do so. Just as Dr. Angelou, Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni, and yourself wrote for change, we must do the same. Just as the leaders of your generation have impacted mine, we will impact future generations to come. Black people today and in the future will recognize that they are the essence of excellence. Doors will open and barriers will continue to break down. This year I witnessed the inauguration of the first black female Vice President of the United States. This sheds light on the amazing opportunities that black people work hard to deserve.

As a future lawyer in this world, it is my mission to support the needs of my community. It is important that black lawyers like me create a space where we not only use the law to fight the social injustices, but we also hold others accountable to do the same. It is equally important that we have legislators helping make changes in the law that provide equal opportunities for minorities. To fight against racism and oppression, the legal system needs to be equipped with people that share the mindset of fairness and respect. I intend to see that through.

I know you will never read my letter, yet it brought me such excitement to write. Still, in my heart your words chime, and I promise you, this movement will withstand the fire this time.

An admirable reader,

Ataesheeana Storr