20th century African American essayist, novelist, and playwright
Lived in Harlem ghettos as a child and eventually became advocate for civil rights
This excerpt is derived from a speech given on October 16, 1963 to NYC teachers and was later printed in an edition of the *Saturday Review* under the title “A Talk to Teachers”
“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” (Baldwin, 1963).

Education allows an individual to question the society he or she is learning in and about.

However, much of society seeks to suppress this questioning as someone who consistently questions and disobeys is seen as dangerous to national order.

However, Baldwin states that society’s only hope for change is through those individuals who question.
African American History

- Black child is disconnected from American ideals such as “liberty and justice for all”
- Under the American flag his or her ancestors were sold into slavery
- “It is impossible for any Negro child to discover anything about his actual history” (Baldwin, 1963) → lack of celebrated African American figures in education leads to a disconnect from individual and group identity
Separation Between Black and White

- Church, government, politicians all aim to please white people
- Black child sees this separation but does not understand why
- School is where he ultimately realizes these differences
- Reaction is rage and hatred towards white people who have slammed the “doors of opportunity” (Baldwin, 1963) on his ambition
- Baldwin ideally desires that the child grows to use this rage for positive social change
Lack of the American Dream

America has perpetuated segregation to keep “the Negro in his place” (Baldwin, 1963).

Fear of diminishing white power prevents the black man or woman from gaining a respected place of power in America.

No social mobility for African Americans: Baldwin states that even after slaves were freed, they were still at the bottom of the labor market and have remained there.
Implications for Education

- Addresses the teachers as educated peoples who have the ability to create social change through power in classroom
- America has created myth of own history to forget and hide from past → induces ignorance and falsity in American identity
- Baldwin desires teachers to teach truth and not the sugar-coated version of American history
Suggestions for Future Educational Practices

- Include prominent figures in black history in curriculum to give the black child a sense of history and identity.
- Show black child the “criminal conspiracy” (Baldwin, 1963) that white people have devised to keep him in his “place”.
- Make peace with this conspiracy and use education as a weapon against the ignorance of others in order to incite change in American society.
Feel a sense of ownership of actions and realize that he is his own self → he does not have to listen and blindly obey administrative policies

Continuously question to discover what is best for self and society

Teachers must foster these qualities so that a formerly oppressed black child can gain confidence as an educated individual and commence positive societal change
References