
Life Path and Works Of Dudley Randall

Dudley Randall was born in 1914 in Washington, D.C. blessed with parents who focused on education. Mr. Randall received his bachelor's degree, in English at Wayne State University in 1949, and his master's degree, in Library Science, at the University of Michigan in 1951. He began writing poetry at the age of four. A continuation of his writing was successful on African American literary figures. In 1965 he wrote the Ballad of Birmingham a very tragic, and emotional poem.

In the early years of the Negro rebellion, it was common in this geographical area, to find Negroes floating in rivers. The KKK burning crosses, and the FBI's infiltration of groups, as the Black Panthers. Detroit the Poet's hometown had riots that were deadly. The assassination of John F. Kennedy, tragic as it was, is still remembered today, but not those little young people. The Viet NAM war could not cloud the killing of Negro leaders in America. The killing of Dr. King, and the writing of the poem reflex feelings of great disappointment. Mr. Randall saw the collapse of the stock market as a boy, share croppers who had nothing to share, and schools bombed to limit education of other Negro children.

It was the children of the sixties who grew their hair into Afros. Dress in a style that identified their attitudes as fed up with this society. It was these children whom no longer would agree to colored and white bathrooms, or eat standing up in the back doors of restaurants. In the poem Booker T. and W.E.B. the writer says "for what can property avail if dignity and justice fail. Mr. Randall writes "If the white man took the name Negro and you took the name Caucasian, he'd still kick your ass, as long as you let him." The death of the children in that church doing the freedom march on the streets of Birmingham was very tragic and should be a national holiday. Also it should be a reminder to all parents, which the struggle for existence continues to this very day.

The Ballad of Birmingham shows sixty-five years of conscious compassion for the plight of African Americans. The Ballad begins with a little young person addressing her mother as "Mother Dear," and concludes with the mother asking "where are you?" The love the mother felt shows in every word of the poem, while the march was such a horrible event.

The child's desire was to march on the streets of Birmingham rather than play. Her mother answered "no baby, no, you may not go," obviously because of the brutal treatment Negroes received for demanding their rights. The little girl insisted on being part of the march, and no harm would come to her, but mother dears' love and faith in God sent her to church. From the beginning of sit ins, early 1960's, someone, man, woman, boy or girl was always hurt by police

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while demonstrating.

The Irony of the Ballad is while the child wanted to march, the bomb was already set. The mother wanted her singing in the choir, but the evil minds of the racist system wanted her dead. It was not politically correct for Negroes to make and take what they wanted. Ethnic barriers in place since the penning of the constitution, were so solid, racial change was beyond perception.

Imagery in this poem reflects the non change able minds of white bigots. Mr. Randall used imagery that describes the universal location of African Americas living and suffering in the ghetto. "May I go downtown, dogs or fierce, her eyes grew wet, she clawed through bits of glass and birch, the shoes my baby wore."

The rhyme of the Ballad carries the mood of the poet from the word "play" on the second line to the last line, where the mother says where are you? The innocence of her little girl gone, the maturity of the mother increased without choice. A little girl wanting "to make our country free" and a mother wanting to protect her child depicts the theme of the poem.

Mr. Randall's Ballad should have raised the conscious level of all African Americans, it did not. Doing the 1960's and into the 70's every day, somewhere in this Country the media redefine the image of Negroes. As self help groups were formed, the leaders were targeted. All those who spoke out were either jailed, or force into leaving the country, or killed.

The mother of the child in the Ballad of Birmingham, had every right to think her child would be safe, in a "sacred place, singing in the choir." How could she have known the child would meet her death in church. As we compare the period of the sixties to the nineties it is obvious the plight of African Americans has deteriorated. Our children today are shooting each other with the white man's guns, selling drugs they can't either grow nor manufacture.

The mother"combed and brushed her night-dark hair, and bathed rose petal sweet, and drawn white gloves on her small brown hands, and white shoes on her feet. The little girl was happy and smiled, not knowing the end was near. This Ballad of Birmingham is an example of the parent child relationships that no longer exist in most families. Children are more intelligent today than ever before, but are more obedient to peer pressure than parents. Children steal cars which allow them to escape the neighborhoods they live in and commit drive by shootings. Some parents are still finding their children dead in the streets. As a race African Americans must rediscover their own heritage, culture and way of life.

Just as the mother in the Ballad of Birmingham found the church was not the safest place for her child, we must establish parameters, mentally and physical to eliminate the sophisticated societal ideals of the white man from our culture. Mr. Randall suggested a change of mind, not

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names, and change our life not clothes were needed. African Americans need to learn it is not where you live but how you live where you are. Attending a white private school does not change the history of a minority race, neither does it close down any prisons. Driving a luxury car with no place to park of your own is just as bad as buying a house you cannot afford furniture for.

The struggle of all African Americans will always exist because of acquiescence as a race. Mothers will continue to look for their children to come home and they will not. Poets will continue to write Ballad of Birmingham because African Americans will continue to allow division to be the strongest influence in the culture. How many more mothers will have to run through the streets, looking for their children, before it is realized, there is a better way to live. Stop killing each other because of white ideology.

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