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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Published/Created Date</strong></td>
<td>1944 Sep 2</td>
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<td>James Baldwin early manuscripts and papers</td>
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<td><strong>Rights</strong></td>
<td>Permission from the James Baldwin Estate is required to publish James Baldwin materials in any format. To learn more, contact the Curator, Yale Collection of American Literature.</td>
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Sept 2, 944

Dear Mom,

This letter is being begun
under conditions. I am at work
and surrounded by the model
Americans of our time. Every
one here is in some degree
“successful” - which is to say
they have held down
the same job (successfully)
for the last fifty years.
They are all very proud
of it. I am, course, no
profit. (Have I ever been
any thing else?)

This letter is being
written on galley paper. I
am in a galley box in the
composing room of the
Morning Telegraph, America's
authority on Motion Pictures,
Theatre and Turf - their
somewhat complicated method
of keeping their keys...
somewhat complicated method of saying that they are a racing sheet. The front page is liberally sprinkled with ability and heartwarming comment on the days of the stars - Bette Davis is fascinating with Robert Taylor in something and Vivien has just had an abortion. The other twenty-three pages are devoted to the activities of various horses. A close study of the paper reveals that horses are vastly more honest and interesting - and generally pay off more.

There is a V-maid being baked before this which you probably have by now. I hope you got all the envelopes at the same time. I wrote as small as I could but I could...
I have more or
less deliberately written you in as
completely adult a manner as I was
able. I have tried, in your letters, and
in my life, to consistently avoid the
senseless and inarticulate (sometimes all
too articulate) depression of youth.
Passed the gamut for running. I have a vast respect, admiration, and love for you. I still feel a great deal of sentimentality. There is in you a positive, hopeful, deathless force which strikes close to something equally positive but more hidden and anonymous in myself. It may simply be a similarity in the faith and hope temperament (assuming there is such a thing), but I have known other Irishmen and other Negroes and they were not like you. Nor like me either, for that matter.

I have been in and out of the village now for three years—from seventeen to twenty. I think the time is fast approaching when I must get out for good. There is death here. Everywhere people are sick or dying or dead.

I have, after all, found very little here to nourish me. After a point, the witty conversation, are pointless, the earnest ones are dull.
The political ones hysterical, unconscious, and naïve. The parties are wasteful, the love affairs futile and acrid, and one's friends turn out to be, after all, not quite the stuff of which heroes are made. I am only incidentally interested in personalities—hardly at all any more in those personalities advertised as bizarre and which are actually upon close investigation only affected, shall we say, or deprived. I am indifferent to schools of art—I do not really think, for instance, that James Joyce said anything worth saying after he wrote "Portrait of the Artist." I am dubious about T.S. Eliot, seeing nothing (or at least very little) in most of the haughtily and opinionated surrealists. I am quite certain indeed that inventing, analysing, or chopping up English language is not necessarily art. I have been made aware that this may spring from one's own
limitations — being what I am I have mulled over that possibility as far greater length than I should have! I have many limitations all of which, undoubtedly and inevitably affect my points of view but I think that Art is positive and that it is directly responsible to Life. My definition of life is not so broad now perhaps as it will be later. Still, I can see no virtue in Art divorced from Life or Art which distorts or negates it.

I read somewhere — I believe in Paul Moore, On Being Human — that the chief reason for the vogue that bizarre schools of Art have achieved is, the schools of Art which proclaim themselves as "new", "startling", "daring" and imply that they are the only hope or that (I might note the type of pretentious hedonistic artist who generally creates such...
art - the artist who sacrifices whatever follows crimes or damages to himself and others in the name of art - the reason, I was saying, they enjoy such a vogue is the tremendous illusion of irresponsibility that such art maintains. Here the artist creates with no thought but his own pleasure, his own ingenuity, the complicated beauty or distortion of whatever art form he chooses to work in. I have seen such work and known such men and I have not been able, in the final analysis, to accept their work as art. It is argued that I demand too much of art - that I expect art to play the role of philosophy. I don't think I am but I do think the artist's philosophy comes through his work and the depth, sincerity, and vision of the artist is of profound
importance to life. Art.

Life, after all, moves with a certain simplicity (no matter what complexities have been formed around it.) There are laws in universe, as inexorable and as simple as "an eye for an eye." They are profoundly simple laws - so simple few people have ever recognized them, much less understood them. Man has made his own chaos. There is no point in glorifying it.