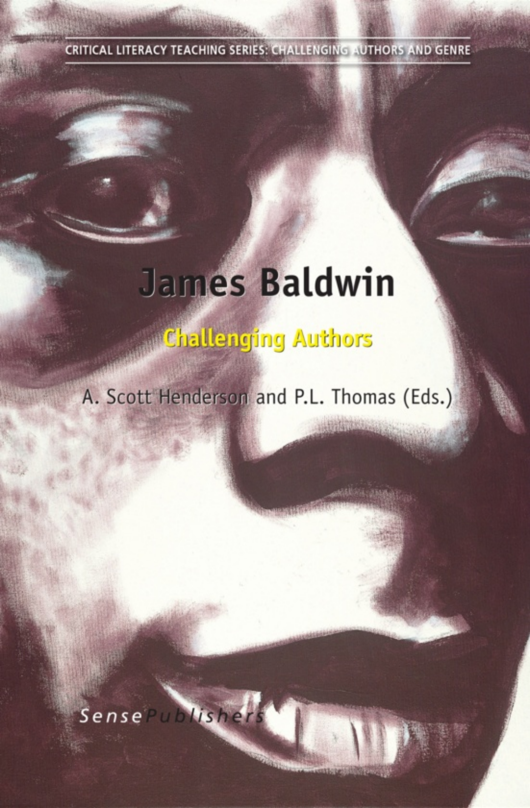

CRITICAL LITERACY TEACHING SERIES: CHALLENGING AUTHORS AND GENRE

James Baldwin

Challenging Authors

A. Scott Henderson and P.L. Thomas (Eds.)

SensePublishers

James Baldwin

Critical Literacy Teaching Series: Challenging Authors and Genre

Volume 5

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James Baldwin

Challenging Authors

Edited by

A. Scott Henderson and P. L. Thomas
Furman University, Greenville, USA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction: To Jimmy (and Jose), with Love
P. L. Thomas 1

1 Conversion Calls for Confrontation: Facing the Old to Become New in the Work of James Baldwin
McKinley E. Melton 9

2 Why Theater, Mr. Baldwin?: *The Amen Corner* and *Blues for Mister Charlie*
Susan Watson Turner 29

3 Baldwin in South Africa
Hugo M. Canham 41

4 From James' *Portrait* to Baldwin's *Room*: Dismantling the Frames of American Manhood
Dwan Henderson Simmons 55

5 Another Country: James Baldwin at "Home" (and) Abroad
Sion Dayson 77

6 Feeling in Radical Consciousness: James Baldwin's Anger as a Critique of Capitalism
Jeffrey Santa Ana 91

7 James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and the Jeremiad Tradition
James Tackach 107

8 James Baldwin: Artist as Activist and the Baldwin/Kennedy Secret Summit of 1963
Charles Reese 121

9 Uplift Versus Upheaval: The Pedagogical Visions of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin
A. Scott Henderson 137

10 The Agitating Power of Nonviolent Cool in "Going to Meet the Man"
Beazley Kanost 149

11 James Baldwin vs. William Buckley, Jr. for the Soul of America: The 1965 Cambridge Union Debate
Seneca Vaught 165

12 James Baldwin's Gospel of Postcategorical Love: Transgressing and Transcending Boundaries
Pekka Kilpeläinen 181

13 "Fame Is the Spur and—Ouch!": James Baldwin's Meditations on Fame in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*
Jacqueline Jones Compaore 197

14 "Digging through the Ruins": *Just Above My Head* and the Memory of James Arthur Baldwin
Ernest L. Gibson, III 207

Author Biographies 221

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Critical Literacy Teaching Series: Challenging Authors and Genres is a series that explores various genres, texts, and authors that pose specific challenges to readers. Previous volumes have included analyses of comic books, graphic novels, science fiction, speculative fiction, young adult literature, and Rachel Carson. James Baldwin seems perfectly suited to this series because his voice and work are indeed challenging; nevertheless, he has remained nearly invisible in the canon of assigned and studied works.

As an edited volume, this examination of Baldwin is indebted to many. The co-editors, A. Scott Henderson and P. L. Thomas, provide their acknowledgements below.

A. Scott Henderson

I would like to thank the contributors for sharing their scholarship on a fascinating and inspiring individual who was (to use a cliché) far ahead of his time. Thanks are also due to the librarians at Furman University who assisted me in obtaining various source materials. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Paul Thomas for having identified the need for a book on James Baldwin, and then coordinating the entire project from beginning to end. Baldwin would be pleased with the result.

P. L. Thomas

I want to thank Scott Henderson for joining me in this project—for his diligence, patience, and friendship. The authors contributing to this volume have made this work possible, and I have reaped innumerable benefits from their work. I want to offer my special gratitude to Chris Thinnes for helping us secure the artwork by Roy Thinnes that graces the cover.

And to James Baldwin, his words, his voice, his passion—I remain a dedicated student hoping to do his work justice.

Finally, the continued support of Sense Publishers, publisher Peter de Liefde, and the entire editorial staff is greatly appreciated.

P. L. THOMAS

INTRODUCTION

To Jimmy (and Jose), with Love

No rhetorical sleight of words should mask that Trayvon Martin was a son. He had parents. No rhetorical sleight of words should allow us to ignore that any child is everyone's child.[1]

Trayvon Martin was killed February 26, 2012, in part because he was reduced to a stereotype, and after his death, Trayvon was again reduced—often by well-meaning people—to an icon, the hoodie. In his death, as well, Trayvon has been spoken *about*, spoken *for*—and I am compelled to argue that he has also been rendered voiceless. But, as Arundhati Roy (2004) has explained, "We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" (n.p.).

In this introduction to a volume on the work of James Baldwin, I, like Roy, am compelled to speak *beyond* Trayvon about "the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard"—about those *Others*: African American males.

At mid-twentieth century, as the U.S. was fighting against its racist heritage, African American males demanded to be heard—Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and many others took the stage as artists, public intellectuals, and civic leaders. Wright's *Black Boy* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* represent in fictional narrative a powerful and disturbing image of the African American male; for Ellison, the guiding metaphor of that narrative is *invisibility*. The killing of Trayvon and the subsequent trial may suggest that African American males no longer suffer from invisibility but from how they are seen, how they are silenced, and how they are unheard: Trayvon seen (and reduced) as black male, thus *necessarily* a thug, a threat, and then Trayvon, the hoodie, the icon of the disposable African American male.

The fact of being seen and reduced as African American males too often results in violent deaths and prison. And the intersection of race, class, and gender with education has paralleled the rise of mass incarceration (Thomas, 2013) over the past thirty-plus years. While Wright's and Ellison's novels continue to capture the African American male experience—including the entrenched conditions that contributed to Trayvon's killing—Ellison's and Baldwin's concerns about the failure of education to see clearly and holistically—and humanely—the plight of African American males continue to send an ominous and powerful message today (see Chapter 9 for a fuller discussion).

In 1963, Ellison (2003) spoke to teachers:

A. Scott Henderson & P. L. Thomas (eds.), James Baldwin: Challenging Authors, 1–7.

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> At this point it might be useful for us to ask ourselves a few questions: what is this act, what is this scene in which the action is taking place, what is this agency and what is its purpose? The act is to discuss "these children," the difficult thirty percent. We know this very well; it has been hammered out again and again. But the matter of *scene* seems to get us into trouble. (p. 546)

Ellison recognized the stigma placed on African American students, a deficit view of both an entire race and their potential intelligence (marginalized because of non-standard language skills). But Ellison rejected this deficit perspective: "Thus we must recognize that the children in question are not so much 'culturally deprived' as products of a different cultural complex" (p. 549). Ultimately, Ellison demanded that the human dignity of all children be honored.

Baldwin (1998) addressed teachers in that same year, 1963:

> Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced, not by Khrushchev, but from within. (p. 678)

Then, Baldwin unmasked the cruel tension between the promise of universal public education and the inequity found in the lives of African American children. Education, for Baldwin, must be revolutionary, an act of social justice. In Baldwin's words, I hear a refrain: *No rhetorical sleight of words should mask that Trayvon Martin was a son. He had parents. No rhetorical sleight of words should allow us to ignore that any child is everyone's child.*

However, if the killing of Trayvon does not haunt us, if the killing of Trayvon slips beneath the next tragedy-of-the-moment—as the Sandy Hook school shooting (December 14, 2012) has beneath the George Zimmerman trial—then society and schools will continue to be mechanisms that shackle "the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." And I suppose that is ultimately the cruel paradox, rendering Trayvon a ghost in this American house he was never allowed to enter, invisible again as Ellison's unnamed narrator.

TO JIMMY (AND JOSE), WITH LOVE

When teacher and blogger Jose Vilson[2] posts a blog, I read carefully and don't multitask. Why? I am a privileged, white male who has lived his entire life in the South where racism clings to the region like the stench of a house razed by fire.

And as a result, I walk freely among racism because I am white. So when Vilson (2013) posted "An Open Letter From The Trenches [To Education Activists, Friends, and Haters]," I listened, and I *recognized*:

> Anger isn't a title we parade around like doctorates, followers, and co-signers; it's the feeling before, during, and after we approach things with love and earnest….

> However, for anyone to say that racial insults are "no big deal" speaks volumes to the sorts of work *people of color* and anyone who considers themselves under the umbrella have to do in order to make things right. As colleague Kenzo Shibata once said, "You can't build a movement by making allies feel unwelcome and telling them to get over it." I'd take it one step further and say that we can't build coalition if we continue to think we have to build a movement under *one or two* people's terms. I refuse to believe that we can't coalesce around building a better education system for all children, regardless of background.
>
> How can you say you care about children of color, but ostracize *adults* of color with the same breath?…
>
> Adults, on the other hand, don't get excuses. The privilege is in the hopes and dreams we have for our students, not in the ways we act towards our fellow man or woman. The privilege, to convert the anger over how our kids are treated in the system into a passion for student learning, remains at the forefront. (n.p.)

I have learned to read and listen to Jose as I do with *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow and writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, as I do with Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Ralph Ellison, and now more than ever, James Baldwin, who is the focus of this volume.

I have learned daily—I continue to learn today—that America the Beautiful has failed an entire race of people, specifically African American males. I have learned daily, I continue to learn today that in my half-century-plus life, the most hateful people I have encountered have been white men—yet, daily brown and black faces smile at me (even or especially when we are strangers) and speak with kindness and joy when we approach each other on the street, in restaurants, and where we all work and live. I have learned daily, I continue to learn today that in my half-century-plus life, the most beautiful humans—and the greatest reason to live on this planet—are children of every possible shade. They laugh and sing and dance and run with the beauty of life that has nothing at all to do with race or the supreme and inexcusable failures of the adults in whose care they reside.

America the Beautiful created a minority class out of a race of people who are as rich, vibrant, and beautiful as anybody else. America the Beautiful has also created a criminal class out of African American men, building a new Jim Crow system (Alexander, 2012) with mass incarceration masked as a war on drugs. America the Beautiful created a dropout class and future criminal class out of African American young men, building school-to-prison pipelines and schools-as-prisons as zero-tolerance schools imprisoning urban communities (Nolan, 2011).

These are not angry and hyperbolic claims about the soot-stained American past; these are claims about the roots that continue to thrive and bear bitter fruit. Baldwin (1998), in "A Report from Occupied Territory" (originally published in *The Nation*, July 11, 1966), confronted an "arrogant autonomy, which is guaranteed the police, not only in New York, *by the most powerful forces in*

American life" (p. 737) and the corrosive deficit view of race it is built upon: "'Bad niggers,' in America, as elsewhere, have always been watched and have usually been killed":

> Here is the boy, Daniel Hamm, speaking—speaking of his country, which has sworn to bring peace and freedom to so many millions. "They don't want us here. They don't want us—period! All they want us to do is work on these penny-ante jobs for them—and that's *it.* And beat our heads in whenever they feel like it. They don't want us on the street 'cause the World's Fair is coming. And they figure that all black people are hoodlums anyway, or bums, with no character of our own. So they put us off the streets, so their friends from Europe, Paris or Vietnam—wherever they come from—can come and see this supposed-to-be great city."
>
> There is a very bitter prescience in what this boy—this "bad nigger"—is saying, and he was not born knowing it. *We taught it to him in seventeen years* [emphasis added]. He is draft age now, and if he were not in jail, would very probably be on his way to Southeast Asia. Many of his contemporaries are there, and the American Government and the American press are extremely proud of them…. (pp. 737-738)

These realities of racism from 1966 linger today—the scar of racism cloaked, as Baldwin recognized, with claims of justice:

> This is why those pious calls to "respect the law," always to be heard from prominent citizens each time the ghetto explodes, are so obscene. The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer. To respect the law, in the context in which the American Negro finds himself, is simply to surrender his self-respect. (p. 734)

And thus, Baldwin's conclusion about the Harlem Six rings true still:

> One is in the impossible position of being unable to believe a word one's countrymen say. "I can't believe what you say," the song goes, 'because I see what you do'—and one is also under the necessity of escaping the jungle of one's situation into any other jungle whatever. It is the bitterest possible comment on our situation now that the suspicion is alive in so many breasts that America has at last found a way of dealing with the Negro problem. *"They don't want us—period!"* The meek shall inherit the earth, it is said. This presents a very bleak image to those who live in occupied territory. The meek Southeast Asians, those who remain, shall have their free elections, and the meek American Negroes—those who survive—shall enter the Great Society. (p. 738)

Today, racism is thinly masked, and many refuse to see it.

In 1853, Frederick Douglass recognized what would 100 years later be portrayed as invisibility by Ralph Ellison:

> Fellow-citizens, we have had, and still have, great wrongs of which to complain. A heavy and cruel hand has been laid upon us.
>
> As a people, we feel ourselves to be not only deeply injured, but grossly misunderstood. Our white fellow-countrymen do not know us. They are strangers to our character, ignorant of our capacity, oblivious of our history and progress, and are misinformed as to the principles and ideas that control and guide us as a people. The great mass of American citizens estimate us as being a characterless and purposeless people; and hence we hold up our heads, if at all, against the withering influence of a nation's scorn and contempt. (qtd. in Alexander, 2012, p. 140)

Douglass's charges are echoed in Baldwin's (1998) "No Name in the Street," which points a finger at the entrenched American problem with race:

> The truth is that the country does not know what to do with its black population now that the blacks are no longer a source of wealth, are no longer to be bought and sold and bred, like cattle; and they especially do not know what to do with young black men, who pose as devastating a threat to the economy as they do to the morals of young white cheerleaders. It is not at all accidental that the jails and the army and the needle claim so many, but there are still too many prancing around for the public comfort. Americans, of course, will deny, with horror, that they are dreaming of anything like "the final solution"—those Americans, that is, who are likely to be asked: what goes on in the vast, private hinterland of the American heart can only be guessed at, by observing the way the country goes these days. (pp. 432-433)

America doesn't know what to do, but it is startlingly clear that we should know what *not* to do: Don't suspend and expel young black men without just cause, don't incarcerate young black men without just cause, don't lure and then send young black men to war, and without a doubt, don't allow anyone to demonize anyone else with racial slurs.

Maybe, in the end, racism remains a cancer on America the Beautiful because we will not face it or unmask it—and because we have become so cynical that the solution seems trite: As Jose stated, as King repeated, and as James ("Jimmy") Baldwin demanded, the solution is love. Love everyone, but be vigilant about loving the least among us—children, the impoverished, the imprisoned, the hungry, the sick, the elderly—and do so color-blind.

As stated above, I offer these words because I walk freely among racism and because I, like Vilson (2013), refuse to believe "that we can't coalesce around building a better education system for all children, regardless of background" (n.p.). Or, as Baldwin (1998) himself said: "'I can't believe what you say,' the song goes, 'because I see what you do'" (p. 738)—and we all must hear what everyone else says—especially the words they choose—never offering excuses for the racism of policy, the racism of action, or the racism of language.

JAMES BALDWIN: CHALLENGING AUTHORS

In 2004, poet Adrienne Rich (2009) wrote about a postage stamp bearing the face of American ex-patriot writer James Baldwin: "the stamp commemorates Baldwin's birthday, August 2: he would have been eighty that year" (p. 49). This volume appears in 2014, the year that Baldwin would have turned ninety.

Rich's essay reads as the journey of one writer's experience embracing the other, but Rich also highlights what this volume seeks to address as well—the lack of attention that Baldwin receives in the twenty-first century U.S. Why, Rich asks, does a country still laboring under the same issues of race continue to ignore a powerful voice, as Americans certainly did when Baldwin spoke of racism?

Quoting from "Lockridge: 'The American Myth,'" Rich (2009) includes the following:

> The gulf between our dream and the realities that we live with is something that we do not understand and do not wish to admit. It is almost as though we were asking that others look at what we want and turn their eyes, as we do, away from what we are. I am not, as I hope is clear, speaking of civil liberties, social equality, etc., where indeed strenuous battle is yet carried on; I am speaking instead of a particular shallowness of mind, an intellectual and spiritual laxness….This rigid refusal to look at ourselves may well destroy us; particularly now since if we cannot understand ourselves we will not be able to understand anything. (p. 52; Baldwin, 1998, p. 593)

Baldwin's challenge here should haunt us because it remains the challenge before us—"[t]his rigid refusal to look at ourselves."

The following chapters—based on both scholarly and experiential perspectives—make significant contributions to the astonishingly slim amount of research and discussion that exists on one of the twentieth century's most important public intellectuals. They provide key insights into Baldwin's literary skills, his political views, and the impact his life and work had on historic, as well as ongoing, policy debates. They reveal a complicated, often tormented, and always provocative individual who confronted racism, imperialism, and homophobia as a black, gay pacifist. It should therefore come as little surprise that his work maintains its relevance as American society continues to grapple with racial, social, and political challenges.

NOTES

[1] Portions of this chapter are adapted from two blog posts: "The Deliberately Silenced, or the Preferably Unheard" (2013, July 25), http://radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/the-deliberately-silenced-or-the-preferably-unheard/ and To Jimmy (and Jose), with Love: I Walk Freely among Racism (2013, April 9), http://radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/2013/04/09/to-jimmy-and-jose-with-love-i-walk-freely-among-racism/

[2] Vilson offers about himself at his blog, The Jose Vilson (http://thejosevilson.com/): "José Luis Vilson is a math educator for a middle school in the Inwood / Washington Heights neighborhood of New York, NY. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science from Syracuse

University and a master's degree in mathematics education from the City College of New York. He's also a committed writer, activist, web designer, and father. He co-authored the book Teaching 2030: What We Must Do For Our Students and Public Schools … Now and In The Future with Dr. Barnett Berry and 11 other accomplished teachers. He currently serves as the president emeritus of the Latino Alumni Network of Syracuse University, as a board member on the Board of Directors for the Center for Teaching Quality, and has been a part of the Acentos Foundation, LATinos In Social Media (LATISM), the Capicu Poetry Group, BlogCritics, and the AfroSpear."

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MCKINLEY E. MELTON

1. CONVERSION CALLS FOR CONFRONTATION

Facing the Old to Become New in the Work of James Baldwin

James Baldwin, emerging from the fertile cultural ground of the black church, regularly infuses his work with the rhetoric and the stylistic remnants of his experiences as the stepson of a preacher, who later ascended into the pulpit himself. Throughout his fiction, drama, and essays, Baldwin's attraction to the church as a literary resource, replete with performance elements of spectacle, ritual, and poetry, is apparent. Yet, his formal separation from the church at the age of seventeen, after spending three years as a preacher in the Pentecostal Holiness tradition, also positioned him as an outsider. It is this nuanced perspective that he often applies in his critique of the ideologies that emerge from the very same institutions that so profoundly influenced him as a writer. Baldwin routinely questioned the doctrine of the fundamentalist Christian tradition in which he was raised, and often directly challenged those beliefs that he considered to be most damaging. In so doing, his approach to supposedly sacrosanct beliefs was to hold the "truths" of Christianity up to a critical light, complicating and often re-writing the narratives that had so extensively shaped his childhood.

One such tale that became a dominant thematic presence in his work is the narrative of conversion. The traditional narrative—of a sinner who discovers the redemptive power of God's love and turns from his wicked ways to go forth and bear witness to others that they might do the same—is rooted directly in a number of biblical tales, the most famous of which is arguably that of Saul's conversion to Paul on the road to Damascus. This narrative has been further popularized through commonly sung hymns such as "Go Tell It on the Mountain," which offers this verse: "When I was a sinner / I prayed both night and day. / I asked the Lord to help me / and He showed me the way." Tellingly, Baldwin titles his debut novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* when it is published in 1953. Honoring the song, and the themes of salvation and renewal that it evokes, the novel likewise incorporates multiple narratives of "sinners" who seek cleansing and redemption above all else. While this discussion is chiefly concerned with the novel, it also examines how Baldwin's fourth work of non-fiction, *No Name in the Street*, published nearly twenty years later in 1972, continues his exploration of this theme.

These texts—two different genres separated by a span of twenty years—are connected primarily through the driving force of Baldwin's voice and vision, culled from elements of his own biography. Each of these texts is profoundly shaped by Baldwin's experience, including the "conversions" that brought him into the fold of the Christian church and those that facilitated his exit. *Go Tell It on the*

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Mountain [hereafter *Mountain*] is largely a work of autobiographical fiction, focusing on the story of young John Grimes, who functions as a fictionalized version of Baldwin's younger self. The novel, orchestrated around the events of John's fourteenth birthday, explores the lives of various members of the Grimes family through flashbacks, highlighting the extent to which the conditions of John's existence are shaped by a family history that he knows very little about. Elements of the conversion narrative are addressed and re-worked throughout the character arc of each family member, as nearly each man and woman ostensibly "falls" through sin and temptation only to rise through some form of redemption. Even as the novel culminates in John's own conversion experience, Baldwin's most emphatic critiques concern the family patriarch, Gabriel Grimes.

No Name in the Street [hereafter *No Name*] offers more direct personal testimony, as Baldwin reflects on the events of his life from his adolescence in 1930s Harlem through adulthood. The essays largely exposit his views on such national issues as McCarthyism and the apex and crumbling of the modern Civil Rights Movement, drawing parallels to international concerns such as the war in Algeria. The ruminations on public affairs are all framed against a backdrop of personal interactions with friends and family. The text, moreover, is organized into two autobiographical essays, "Take Me to the Water" and "To Be Baptized." Framing his essays through allusions to baptism, a fundamental Christian symbol of being born anew, Baldwin's essays offer several complements to the reconstruction of the conversion narrative that he begins in his earliest novel.

Primarily, Baldwin revisits the traditional conversion narrative by challenging how "the converted" must learn to reconcile with their past, rather than simply turning away from it. As such, Baldwin critiques the traditional biblical narrative of the redeemed sinner, which is rooted in the convert Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, found in II Corinthians, 5:17: "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he* is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Baldwin argues that a literal interpretation of this passage allows one to cast the sins of their past into the sea of forgetfulness, rather than actually facing them and seeking atonement alongside the promise to never repeat them. His exploration of the ways that we, both as individuals and as a collective society, attempt to disavow the past without ever working toward resolution extends beyond the parameters of religious thought. Pointing out the results of ignoring instead of resolving the past, Baldwin shows that "old things" are never passed away, but continue to haunt the present.

In the character of Gabriel Grimes, Baldwin presents a man who is fundamentally flawed, yet believes himself to have been made anew through a conversion experience that has taken him from sinner to saint. By revisiting Gabriel's life, both pre- and post- "conversion," Baldwin highlights the many ways that Gabriel has failed at conversion—failures that prevent him from becoming anything other than reincarnated versions of his old self. Moreover, as a symbol of power, Gabriel is shown to have a corrupting influence on those who follow him. Often, rather than challenge his authority, characters allow the image of his "righteousness" to become their goal. Similarly, Baldwin's essays reflect on a post-

Civil Rights Movement society that believes itself to have been cleansed of its hateful ideology and oppressive practices, being made anew in the image of the spirit of democracy and equality that it honors as its creator. By confronting the history of the nation, even as he explores his own, Baldwin's works collectively challenge superficial conversions, of the individual and of society, advocating instead for wholesale change—a more honest "conversion" of ideologies and practices—through which true transformation might be realized.

PRIMED BY THE PAST: GABRIEL GRIMES AND THE FOUNDATION OF HISTORICAL ILLUSION

When the novel opens, Gabriel Grimes quickly emerges as the primary antagonist. An authoritarian figure, Gabriel's oppressive rule is supposedly grounded in his religious faith and the teachings of the church. He embraces his role as a minister to the fullest, often shielding himself from criticism and challenge by claiming that anyone who opposes him *ipso facto* opposes the will of the Lord. This mindset, with constant reminders that he is the divinely ordained head of his family, allows him to maintain unchallenged power within the household, thoroughly cowing wife Elizabeth and stepson John. This is directly in keeping with Baldwin's own reflections on his stepfather, David. In speaking of his stepfather, Baldwin is unequivocal in his sentiments:

> He was righteous in the pulpit and a monster in the house. Maybe he saved all kinds of souls, but he lost all his children, every single one of them. And it wasn't so much a matter of punishment with him: he was trying to kill us. I've hated a few people, but actually I've hated only one person, and that was my father. (Auchincloss & Lynch, 1989, p. 78)

Similarly, the fictional Gabriel establishes himself as the religious arbiter, the standard of righteous behavior, imposing impossible restrictions by which he expects his family to abide.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that Gabriel is empowered by his mastery of religious rhetoric, as well as the ability to compartmentalize the events of his past and deny their consequences in the present. Baldwin clarifies this by tracing Gabriel's narrative, and his own psychological response to it, and also by positioning John's lack of power as a direct result of his ignorance of the past. This again parallels Baldwin's biography. Indeed, his essays in *No Name*—as do several others throughout his career—begin with an exploration of his relationship with his stepfather. In "Take Me to the Water," he begins with the confession, "I was so terrified of the man we called my father," and acknowledges that "I have written both too much and too little about this man, whom I did not understand till he was past understanding" (Baldwin, 1998, pp. 353-354). The parallel drawn here is quite clear, as Baldwin frames his tremendous fear of his stepfather within his inability to understand him, even going so far as to suggest that it is the driving force in his literary career. The only way to gain this understanding—and, consequently, to be free from the fear that comes in its absence—is to uncover the past.

The significance of the past, or more specifically, of one's knowledge of the past, is established very early within the novel through the character of John. John is introduced as an extremely confused young man, lacking direction and understanding of the circumstances of his life. He is driven, largely, by the relationship with the man he believes to be his father, and is consumed with the desire to understand why Gabriel doesn't love him as John believes a father should. Structurally, Baldwin locates his readers in the midst of John's confusion, allowing us to similarly wonder and question, until Gabriel's backstory unfolds in Part Two of the novel. Baldwin's narrative approach, as Dolan Hubbard (1994) articulates, allows for "the point of view" to be "skillfully controlled and manipulated to convey the impact of history—personal and collective—on an individual, whether or not that individual is aware of the history" (p. 96). Ultimately, beyond the relationship between John and Gabriel, or even James and David Baldwin, the use of a non-linear narrative structure highlights the vitality of knowledge of the past for understanding the conditions of the present.

Within this opening section, titled "The Seventh Day," Baldwin provides several key passages that reveal the importance of a past that lies beyond John's understanding. He deliberately takes readers into John's consciousness to demonstrate how crippled he is by what he doesn't know. One of these most powerful moments occurs when John is cleaning the family home. After sweeping the front room, John redirects his efforts "to the living-room to excavate, as it were, from the dust that threatened to bury them, his family's goods and gear … he attacked the mirror with the cloth, watching his face appear as out of a cloud" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 27). Once the mirror is cleaned, John turns his attention to the photographs on the mantelpiece, described as "the true antiques of the family" that are arranged "against the mirror, like a procession" (Baldwin, 1953/1985, p. 28). Here, Baldwin allows the mirror to function as a powerful metaphor. John must first scrub the mirror clean in order to appreciate his own reflection—to look upon himself as he struggles to figure out his own identity. The "cloud" out of which his reflection appears is the history of his family, one that "threatened to bury them," including John.

John's ability to appreciate his own reflection comes as a result of his labors, not only by removing the dust, but also in the thoughtfully intensive process of uncovering the truths that lie within the procession of family photographs. The link here becomes evident when John pauses upon the photograph of the "shadowy woman … whose name he knew had been Deborah," Gabriel's first wife (Baldwin, 1985, p. 29). John understands that "it was she who had known his father in a life where John was not," and that her knowledge of this past might provide the answers to settle John's confusion (Baldwin, p. 29). As John looks upon the photograph, Baldwin emphasizes Deborah's importance, writing, "she knew what John would never know—the purity of his father's eyes when John was not reflected in their depths," as John believes "she could have told him—had he but been able from his hiding-place to ask! —how to make his father love him" (p. 30).

Deborah possesses knowledge that might have brought John peace, and we subsequently see the impact of that silenced past. The past is privileged as a site of knowledge, yet the answers that John so desperately needs are buried beyond his reach.

When Gabriel's past begins to unfold, Baldwin allows his readers to better understand what John cannot: How Gabriel came to be who he is, and how he came to embody so destructive a force in his family's life. Aptly, Baldwin narrates Gabriel's life starting in his childhood when he lived in a cabin with his older sister Florence and their mother, Rachel, who establishes a clear distinction between her children from the moment Gabriel is born. Baldwin explains that "Gabriel was the apple of his mother's eye … There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's—to which, since Gabriel was a manchild, all else must be sacrificed" (1985, p. 72). Although Rachel Grimes is portrayed as being deeply committed to her religious beliefs, Gabriel is privileged within the family structure long before he himself claims any divine sanctioning of his authority.

Moreover, by rooting Gabriel's privilege in the principles of patriarchy—as he is elevated solely because he is the male child—Baldwin reveals that Gabriel's understanding of what it means to be head of his household is formed at a very early age. Once Gabriel undergoes his own "conversion"—that is, when he is called by God to be a minister to live a righteous life renouncing his formerly wicked ways—the sense of patriarchal privilege in which he has been immersed all of his life greatly increases. Baldwin shows how dangerous it is to combine a society that raises a man as a god with an institution that reinforces and duplicates that very same structure and proffers it as divinely ordained. By including Gabriel's earliest childhood moments within the narrative, Baldwin provides readers a glimpse into who Gabriel has always been—knowledge that would greatly benefit John—while simultaneously offering useful commentary on the ways that power is ascribed and re-affirmed within the larger society.

When Gabriel announces his calling into a life of righteousness and ministry (shortly after he turns twenty-one), his "conversion" is marked by a complete disavowal of all of the wickedness that had come before. As Gabriel interprets the scripture's directive that "all things are become new," his coming to religion directs him on a new pathway and thoroughly absolves him of his past sins. Baldwin (1985) explains the new convert's mindset as such:

> Like a birth indeed, all that had come before this moment was wrapped in darkness, lay at the bottom of the sea of forgetfulness, and was not now counted against him, but was related only to that blind, and doomed, and stinking corruption he had been before he was redeemed. (p. 92)

Moreover, as he casts aside the sinful ways of his past, Gabriel conceives his life among the redeemed as being one that is fully associated with an elevated status. Baldwin is unequivocal in this: "yes, he wanted power—he wanted to know himself to be the Lord's anointed … He wanted to be master, to speak with that authority which could only come from God" (p. 94). These lines reveal that there was at least one element of his past that he very much brought with him: The exalted position into which his mother had always placed him.

Shortly after “finding religion,” Gabriel marries his first wife, Deborah, an older woman and a childhood friend of Florence, who had been viciously raped by a group of white men some years prior. The damage done to Deborah—a representation of her double-victimization in a society that saw her weakened as both black and female—leaves her as an unsuitable choice for a wife in her community. Consequently, by courting her, Gabriel sees himself as a savior—a redemptive figure who is capable of bringing salvation to the sinners who surround him: “It came to him that, as the Lord had given him Deborah, to help him to stand, so the Lord had sent him to her, to raise her up, to release her from that dishonor which was hers in the eyes of men” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 109). For her part, Deborah also recognizes Gabriel as a changed man following his conversion, and steps into her role as his holy help mate. “She never called him Gabriel or ‘Gabe,’ but from the time that he began to preach she called him Reverend, knowing that the Gabriel whom she had known as a child was no more, was a new man in Christ Jesus” (Baldwin, p. 99). Thus, Gabriel fully embraces the idea of rebirth as part of the Christian narrative of conversion, while his wife serves as a willing accomplice in the rejection of his past.

While married to Deborah, Gabriel embarks on a nine-day affair with a young woman named Esther, who worked as a serving-girl in the same white household where he was employed. Though he initially approaches his relationship with Esther with the same savior mentality that drew him to Deborah, Esther quickly recognizes and addresses the fact that his interest in her is not limited to his desire to save her soul. “‘That weren’t no reverend looking at me them mornings in the yard,’ she had said. ‘You looked at me just like a man, like a man what hadn’t never heard of the Holy Ghost’” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 123). The stolen glances and sexually charged conversations ultimately result in a brief affair. As Gabriel recalls his infidelity, it is framed in the rhetoric of a relapse, which he would quickly move past: “So he had fallen: for the first time since his conversion, for the last time in his life … Fallen indeed: time was no more, and sin, death, Hell, the judgment were blotted out” (Baldwin, p. 126). Moreover, Gabriel envisions this yielding to the flesh in terms that render it the complete opposite of his holy commitments, thinking: “there was only Esther, who contained in her narrow body all mystery and all passion, and who answered all his need” (Baldwin, p. 126). Gabriel cannot imagine that both the spiritual and the sexual impulses could exist within him simultaneously. He subsequently ends their affair, vowing to prevent the “carnal man” awoken by Esther from ever taking the reigns again.

The affair, brief though it is, produces a child, Royal. Gabriel, in his inability to cope with the aftermath of a “sin” that he has already denounced as a “fall” and no longer a part of him, refuses to claim the child that serves as a constant and living reminder of an act that he has already relegated to the past. He cannot confront the shame of his past, and therefore rejects everything that represents it, including his child. In addition to the disavowal of Esther, his son Royal, and the sin of his infidelity, Gabriel attempts to literally outrun his past, going out “into the field” in an effort to absolve himself through preaching far and wide. Baldwin (1985) writes:

> So he fled from these people, and from these silent witnesses, to tarry and preach elsewhere—to do, as it were, in secret, his first works over, seeking again the holy fire that had so transformed him once. But he was to find, as the prophets had found, that the whole earth became a prison for him who fled before the Lord. There was peace nowhere, and healing nowhere, and forgetfulness nowhere. (p. 136)

Unable to run from his sin, Gabriel instead projects it onto others, and begins to separate himself from the wickedness that surrounds him: "he saw, in this wandering, how far his people had wandered from God" (Baldwin, p. 136). Gabriel makes it his mission to use his elevated status to preach redemption to the wayward. He distresses that these sinners "had all turned aside, and gone out in to the wilderness, to fall down before idols of gold and silver, and wood and stone, false gods that could not heal them" (Baldwin, p. 136). Ironically, Gabriel responds to this by establishing himself as the unassailable representation of righteousness, working in many ways to make a "false god" of himself.

This desire to serve as a savior influences Gabriel's preaching career and continues to influence his personal life, even after the death of first wife Deborah. Shortly after reuniting with his sister in New York, Florence introduces him to her friend and co-worker, Elizabeth, and her son, John. In gazing upon Elizabeth and her nameless child—following the death by suicide of the child's father, Richard—Gabriel finds a new cause. Gabriel's clearest memories of Elizabeth recall how "one night after he had preached," the young unwed mother "had walked this long aisle to the altar, to repent before God her sin" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 149). After pursuing the much younger woman, he proposes marriage, confessing to her that he believes they would be fulfilling the mandate of the Lord. Continuing the image of himself as the rescuer of fallen women, his proposal is thoroughly framed within the language of redemption. He suggests to Elizabeth: "maybe I can keep you from making … some of my mistakes, bless the Lord…maybe I can help keep your foot from stumbling … again … girl … for as long as we's in the world" (Baldwin, p. 187). Only after he speaks of the redemptive nature of their marriage does he promise to "love" and "honor" her, and then finally to "love your son, your little boy … just like he was my own" (Baldwin, p. 188). Elizabeth, miles from home, having lost the man she loved, and bearing the responsibility for a fatherless child, sees Gabriel's proposal as "a sign that He is mighty to save" (Baldwin, p. 188). Relieved, she accepts his proposal and agrees to be his wife. In doing so, much like Deborah before her, Elizabeth encourages Gabriel's growing conception of himself as a righteous man. Even more significantly, because she believes that her new husband will be a man of his word, Elizabeth allows John to believe that Gabriel is his father. The suppression of this knowledge proves extremely damaging to John, as he is never afforded the opportunity to understand or appreciate his past.

Despite Gabriel's professed "forgiveness" of Elizabeth, the "sin" of conceiving John out of wedlock follows her and John throughout the remainder of their lives.

On the day of John's fourteenth birthday, Elizabeth thought, "as she had thought so often, that it might have been better, after all, to have done what she had first determined in her heart to do—to have given her son away to strangers, who might have loved him more than Gabriel had ever loved him" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 175). Gabriel's failure to truly love John is seemingly rooted in his inability to forgive Elizabeth for the sins of her flesh. Yet, his consistent rejection of John is also clearly connected to Gabriel's quest to reject and deny his own past.

From the moment of his baptism into the Christian faith, Gabriel has believed that the only hope of redemption from the sins of the past is a rejection of all remnants of that past. Gabriel's history, therefore, exists as shadow and shame, with the evidence of his wickedness being quite literally buried as a consequence of the deaths of Esther, Royal, and Deborah. John, however, is a living reminder of Elizabeth's past, and of a sin for which he has no legitimate right to condemn her. The fact that Elizabeth proudly embraces her son and bears responsibility for him is further evidence that she possesses a strength—the ability to pursue redemption without an amnesiac approach to her past—that Gabriel lacks. Elizabeth makes consistent sacrifices for her son, and John lives and thrives as a result. His very existence serves as a constant reminder of Gabriel's failings and the lives that were destroyed by his own inability to acknowledge his weakness.

John exists as a testament that one need not disavow their past—or the responsibility for that past, as Gabriel did with Esther and Royal—in order to be redeemed for their "sins." When he first proposes to Elizabeth, Gabriel praises God "because He done give me back something I thought was lost" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 188). In thinking of what he has lost, Gabriel not only refers to the last "fallen" women in his life—Deborah and Esther—but also to his now deceased son, Royal, who died a violent death after being stabbed in a barroom brawl. Gabriel is constantly pained that, despite his attempts to "save" the various women in his life, the person that he was most responsible for, his son, perished without ever having even been publicly acknowledged by his father. As the marriage progresses and Elizabeth gives birth to three children—including another son named Roy—Gabriel finds that what he has lost cannot be replaced. Rather than direct his anger toward himself for forsaking his past, or questioning the religious narrative that led him to believe that the rejection of his past, wholesale, was the right thing to do, Gabriel turns his smoldering rage toward his stepson. This anger is then framed within the rhetoric of righteousness, which blames John and Elizabeth for their "sinfulness" while allowing Gabriel to distance himself from his own. Gabriel retreats into his identity as a holy man not to assuage his guilt, but to deny any cause for it.

Despite Gabriel's role as the novel's antagonist, Baldwin's nuanced representation of the character—primarily within his struggles to deal with his past—places him in a tragic position as well. Gabriel is crafted as a relatively unsympathetic character, but he is no less pitiable because Baldwin makes him a symbol of oppressive power. Dolan Hubbard (1994) refers to Gabriel as a "hypocrite" who is "trapped in his personal history of deceit and denial, which he does not acknowledge" (p. 103). This sentiment resonates with Baldwin's (1998)

1963 essay, “My Dungeon Shook,” in which he advises his nephew to “accept [white people] with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it” (p. 294). Gabriel, in the zealous denial of his history, fails to understand it. This makes his entrapment no less painful than the white people of whom Baldwin writes, who must be loved in spite of themselves.

The double bind of history in which both Gabriel and John are trapped is also a powerful subject of Baldwin’s essays in *No Name*. Baldwin freely acknowledges that history functions as an oft-used tool of the powerful to construct and maintain the reality that they desire, stating bluntly that “the key to a tale is to be found in who tells it” (1998, p. 380). He further explains:

> History, which is now indivisible from oneself, has been full of errors and excesses; but this is not the same thing as seeing that, for millions of people, this history—oneself—has been nothing but an intolerable yoke, a stinking prison, a shrieking grave. It is not so easy to see that, for millions of people, life itself depends on the speediest possible demolition of this history, even if this means the leveling, or the destruction of its heirs. (p. 381)

The painful truth, Baldwin suggests, is that a dishonest historical record binds those on both sides of the power struggle to the identities that were created therein. While this does not absolve the powerful, such as Gabriel (who functions continually as a symbol of corrupt power), this truth is at the heart of Baldwin’s analysis. Wholesale ideological conversion and ultimate liberation are utterly dependent on the ability of all of us, as individuals and a collective society, to assess our history, to repudiate the actions of the past where appropriate, and to craft a more honest representation of who we’ve been in order to discover more truthful representations of who we are.

CONFRONTATIONS ON THE THRESHING FLOOR

In the novel’s concluding section, aptly titled “The Threshing Floor,” the preceding narratives come together to lead the primary characters to the evening worship service at the Temple of the Fire Baptized. Under the watchful eye of his family, John “finds religion” in the midst of his church community. John’s chaotic, and at times violent, experience serves as the lynchpin to the final chapter of the novel, but this moment is not solely John’s. Rather, just as the story of John’s life is intertwined with that of his family, so too is this a defining moment for each of the novel’s primary characters. This is particularly so for Gabriel, whose presence has defined John’s existence and self-conception since he was six months old. On the evening of his fourteenth birthday, however, in full view of all of the “saints” at the Temple, it is John’s very public presence that proves the catalyst for how Gabriel is understood and how he understands himself.

The past “catches up with” Gabriel in a series of confrontational moments at the novel’s conclusion. More than thirty years in the making, the confrontation between Gabriel and his sister, Florence, powerfully frames John's religious "awakening" on the Threshing Floor. Florence is a unique figure within the novel because she is the only character who has known Gabriel for his entire life. Consequently, she stands as the one true obstacle to his authoritarian rule. Florence's knowledge of his past deeds empowers her to consistently reject her brother's claims that he is without sin, thereby deconstructing his image as a holy man. Just as John is limited by his lack of knowledge of the past, Florence uses all of the information at her disposal to challenge Gabriel's oppressive power, refusing to bow down to him as she had been forced to do in their youth.

The most significant source of Florence's power, which she taps into on the evening of John's birthday, is her knowledge of Gabriel's affair with Esther and the resulting conception, birth, and abandonment of Royal. When Deborah figures out the truth about his affair and his illegitimate child, she first drafts a letter to Florence, thereby granting Gabriel's resentful sister the knowledge that she needs in order to render him powerless over her. Florence, discussing the letter with her then-husband Frank, declares that Gabriel "ain't got no right to be a preacher. He ain't no better'n nobody else" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 89). Moreover, Florence suggests to Frank that she knows precisely what her sister-in-law should do:

> she ought to let him know she know about his wickedness. Get up in front of the congregation and tell them too … It'll do her some good. It'll make him treat her better. There ain't but one way to get along with him, you got to scare him half to death. That's all. He ain't got no right to go around running his mouth about how holy he is if he done a trick like that. (Baldwin, p. 89)

Florence recognizes that the one way to disempower Gabriel is for his wife to speak, loudly, about his true nature in front of the only audience whose condemnation would frighten him: his congregation. What's key in Florence's response is that she understands fully how devastating it would be to Gabriel to have his supposed moral superiority over his flock challenged and dismissed. For Gabriel, the greatest punishment he could face is to be no longer elevated above his community, but integrated into the collectivity of sinners by the pronouncement that he "ain't no better'n nobody else." Ultimately, however, Florence does not respond to Deborah's letter, and instead carries it around for thirty years, not revealing her own knowledge of the entire sordid affair until the day of John's fourteenth birthday.

Florence finally confronts Gabriel with this knowledge, reminding him that his past is not as dead and buried as he might wish. From the moment she produces the letter and Gabriel "recognized Deborah's uncertain, trembling hand," his demeanor shifts, having recognized the truth that he thought had died with Deborah had instead "lived in her silence, then, all of those years." He becomes both ashamed and fearful in the knowledge that "this letter, her witness, spoke, breaking her long silence, now that she was beyond his reach forever" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 212). Gabriel's initial response is to remain firmly planted in his own conviction that he is serving under the protection of God, warning his sister: "You be careful … how you talk to the Lord's anointed. 'Cause my life ain't in that letter—you don't know my life," and telling her that he "ain't never seen nothing but evil overtake the enemies of the Lord. You think you going to use that letter to hurt me—but the Lord ain't going to let it come to pass. You going to be cut down" (Baldwin, pp. 213, p. 215). Gabriel refuses to waver from the position that he has so painstakingly crafted for himself. Even when faced with the uncovering of his history, he holds tightly to the idea that he has been cleansed from all remnants of his past wrongdoings.

For her part, Florence is undeterred by Gabriel's protest. She responds that she is not afraid of any of the false protection that Gabriel lays claim to, recognizing that they must both answer to the same judgment:

> I ain't long for this world, but I got this letter, and I'm sure going to give it to Elizabeth before I go, and if she don't want it, I'm going to find *some* way—some way, I don't know how—to rise up and tell it, tell *everybody*, about the blood the Lord's anointed is got on his hands … When I go, brother, you better tremble, 'cause I ain't going to go in silence. (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 214-215)

Florence once again invokes the power of public judgment, pointing out that Gabriel's image in the eyes and minds of his family and congregation will be forever tainted should they know the truth. Moreover, Florence reminds her brother that he is also undeserving of the approval of the Almighty. Challenging the authenticity of his conversion, she argues with him:

> you ain't changed … You still promising the Lord you going to do better—and you think whatever you done already, whatever you doing right at that *minute*, don't count. Of all the men I *ever* knew, you's the man who ought to be hoping the Bible's all a lie—'cause if that trumpet ever sounds, you going to spend eternity talking. (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 214-215)

Florence's confrontation with Gabriel is truly rooted in their shared past. Yet, the pronouncements and proclamations that she makes offer a direct challenge to the position he occupies in the present, by suggesting his destruction through public condemnation. Moreover, by invoking eternity and the after-life, she suggests an ultimate link between his past and his future, threatening the legacy with which Gabriel is so thoroughly concerned.

Florence remains a remarkable character, not only because she is offering to publicly voice the truth in a way that Deborah was unable to do, but also because she is willing to directly and openly confront Gabriel's monopoly on the truth, which he gained through his rejection of the past. That Gabriel is being humbled by the truth is a powerful statement that Baldwin is making here, especially considering Gabriel's connection to the pulpit, which might otherwise be a symbol of speaking truth to power. In speaking that truth, Florence challenges Gabriel while attempting to protect young John. In what is perhaps her most powerful admonition, she directly acknowledges the misdirected hatred that Gabriel has been displaying toward his stepson since his infancy:

> "I going to tell you something, Gabriel," she said. "I know you thinking at the bottom of your heart that if you just make *her*, her and her bastard boy, pay enough for her sin, *your* son won't have to pay for yours. But I ain't going to let you do that. You done made enough folks pay for sin, it's time you started paying … [talking about it now will] make Elizabeth to know," she said, "that she ain't the only sinner … in your holy house. And little Johnny, there—he'll know he ain't the only bastard." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 214)

Florence recognizes that Gabriel has no right to lay claim to a holiness that rejects his human imperfections, and she invokes the past as a means of curtailing the continued devastation that he levies against his family. Moreover, by recognizing Gabriel's equality with the community from which he wishes to distance himself, Florence challenges the aspect of his crafted identity that he values the most, as his ability to exist as an anointed man privileges him to judge and condemn the sinful and wicked.

Gabriel's sense of being among the anointed few is similarly threatened by the religious experience of John, which is located at the center of this chapter. At different points in the novel, within their respective "prayers," Florence, Gabriel, and Elizabeth are each made aware of John's moment of conversion. Indeed, the recognition of John's presence on the threshing floor pulls each of the primary characters' focus back to the present moment, as they are each engrossed in flashback narratives when they first witness John's ecstatic experience. The moment at which Gabriel realizes that his stepson has "caught the spirit," however, is the most significant because it is when John feels most liberated from Gabriel's oppressive presence:

> John and his father stared at each other, struck dumb and still and with something come to life between them—while the Holy Ghost spoke. Gabriel had never seen such a look on John's face before; Satan, at that moment, stared out of John's eyes while the Spirit spoke; and yet John's staring eyes tonight reminded Gabriel of other eyes: of his mother's eyes when she beat him, of Florence's eyes when she mocked him, of Deborah's eyes when she prayed for him, of Esther's eyes and Royal's eyes, and Elizabeth's eyes tonight before Roy cursed him, and of Roy's eyes when Roy said: "You black bastard." And John did not drop his eyes, but seemed to want to stare forever into the bottom of Gabriel's soul. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 150)

Gabriel is figuratively confronted with his past through John's piercing gaze, but he is also reminded of the conviction of those who have come before. This powerfully recalls John's earlier wish that he might know "the purity of his father's eyes when John was not reflected in their depths" (Baldwin, p. 30). In this moment, however, it is Gabriel who sees himself reflected in the depths of his stepson's eyes, and the unwavering collective judgment held within those eyes proves almost too much for him to bear.

Moreover, John's experience provides him with a direct means of confronting Gabriel's power over him. John's own thoughts anticipate this, just prior to slipping out of the state of full consciousness. Looking toward his own conversion moment, after “the hand of God would reach down and raise him up,” John believes that:

> he would no longer be the son of his father, but the son of his Heavenly Father, the King. Then he need no longer fear his father, for he could take, as it were, their quarrel over his father’s head to Heaven—to the father who loved him, who would come down in the flesh to die for him. Then he and his father would be equals, in the sight, and the sound, and the love of God. Then his father could not beat him any more, or despise him any more, or mock him any more—he, John, the Lord’s anointed. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 145)

As Gabriel feigns support for his stepson—despite the tremendous disappointment that Elizabeth’s bastard son should find religion before his own flesh and blood, Roy—John searches for a new language with which to speak to Gabriel. Baldwin writes of the young man’s continued quest for voice: “John struggled to speak the authoritative, the living word that would conquer the great division between his father and himself…It came to him that he must testify: his tongue only could bear witness to the wonders he had seen” (p. 207). Then, the words of one of Gabriel’s old sermons came to him and “as his father did not speak, he repeated his father’s text” (Baldwin, p. 207*)*. As he repeats his stepfather’s text—literally taking ownership of Gabriel’s words—John feels his growing liberation.

Although John feels his most empowered in this moment, having taken control of the very same rhetoric that Gabriel had previously used to declare him unworthy, there is a tragic irony to John’s repetition of his father’s text. For much of the novel, living as he does within the shadow of Gabriel’s condemnation, John often imagines that his freedom will grant him the ability to reject his father and everything that he represents. Indeed, at a much earlier point in the novel, Baldwin (1985) writes of John: “he had made his decision. He would not be like his father, or his father’s fathers. He would have another life” (p. 19). This decision stands in direct contradiction to the role that his congregation always imagined John would assume, as is made clear from the opening line of the novel: “Everyone had always said that John would be a preacher when he grew up, just like his father” (Baldwin, p. 11). In his “coming through” into religion on the threshing floor, John begins to fulfill the communal prophecy. While this terrifies Gabriel, threatening a loss of his position as the family’s sole “anointed” man, Baldwin makes it clear to his readers that this is a much more terrifying prospect for John.

The novel’s conclusion closely mirrors Baldwin’s reflection at the conclusion of *No Name*, as he ponders what must take place in order for one generation to make a full conversion and turn from the wickedness of the generation that preceded it. As Baldwin (1998) reflects on the “flower children” encountered during his time in San Francisco, he critiques their naïve innocence, describing their “long hair, their beads, their robes, their fancied resistance” and “their uniforms and their jargon” (p. 467). Yet, even as he describes the immaturity of their approach to loving away hate, and admits that he knew “them to be idealistic, fragmented, and impotent,” he considers it significant that they made the decision to repudiate the collective past of their predecessors (p. 467). Baldwin writes: “an historical wheel had come full circle. The descendants of the cowboys, who had slaughtered the Indians, the issue of those adventurers who had enslaved the blacks, wished to lay down their swords and shields" (p. 468). Despite the naiveté of their idealism, the flower children made an uncommonly difficult choice to "reject their father's fathers." In so doing, they represent the potentiality to Baldwin's claim that "when the heir of a great house repudiates the house, the house cannot continue" (p. 469). In describing these flower children, Baldwin offers a brief glimpse into what might be possible if we truly confront the past and condemn it.

John's ultimate inability to turn his back on his father, and the power that Gabriel represents, is certainly understandable, as the conversion moment provides an opportunity for John to finally share in the power that he has long felt denied. Yet, in many ways, this aligns him with the flower children, who could never truly gain the respect of the Blacks with whom they wished to collaborate, because Blacks "had to be aware that this troubled white person might suddenly decide not to be in trouble and go home" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 470). Sadly, in making this decision to "go home," they validate the oppressions they once attempted to rebel against. This is similar to the decision that John Grimes makes at the end of the novel. Baldwin fairly acknowledges in *No Name* that, "a person does not lightly elect to oppose his society," yet when the decision has been made to no longer resist it, "it is terrible to watch people cling to their captivity and insist on their own destruction" (p. 474). The only way of avoiding this destruction, then, is to break free from the bonds of an unacknowledged history. This is not fully possible for John Grimes, largely because Gabriel's confrontation with Florence and the revelations of his past continue to be hidden from the young man by the novel's end. Even in the midst of a seeming moment of empowerment, the emancipatory effect is limited by a still un-reconciled past.

Throughout the novel, John has been crippled by his ignorance of his past. While the threshing floor is witnessed by the congregants of the Temple of the Fire Baptized and perceived as a resolution of sorts, Baldwin crafts a fuller vision for his readers. John has been injured by his inability to access his past, and healing cannot happen as long as he remains divorced from it. At the novel's conclusion, John remains unaware of Gabriel's trespasses, and reads his triumph on the threshing floor as the result of having gained parity with his stepfather, rather than questioning Gabriel's right to occupy the exalted position at all. Moreover, John has been most damaged by the withholding of his paternity, and the novel concludes with the lies and misinformation about his own origins still intact. As such, the novel offers no lasting resolution to the problems that have plagued the protagonist throughout. This novel is clearly about Baldwin's origins, through the fictionalization of his and his family's past; it is a novel about beginnings, not resolutions. This is made clear within the novel's ultimate lines, as John and Baldwin simultaneously announce their introduction to the world: "I'm ready … I'm coming. I'm on my way" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 221).

FACING THE PAST AND CRAFTING THE FUTURE

While Baldwin's first novel concludes without full resolution for its characters, *No Name in the Street* establishes the possibility for a different future that is based on the reconciliation of the past with the present. Similar to his employment of flashback to structure his novel, Baldwin roots this discussion in a consideration of memory, drawing parallels between the way one remembers their past, the way one is remembered, and the impact that this has on their present and potential identities. Baldwin takes his title from *The Holy Bible*, alluding to the story of Job, a man who loses all that he has, only to regain it tenfold as a reward for his continued faith. Baldwin's title comes specifically from a conversation between Job and his council of friends, who have gathered with him in the midst of his trials. Speaking of the calamity that might befall the wicked man, Bildad the Shuhite suggests: "his remembrance shall perish from the earth and he shall have no name in the street" (Job 18:17). This threat to the wicked, to have their own existence wiped away and be completely unknown by those who remember them not, thereby frames Baldwin's meditations and guides his efforts to reflect thoughtfully on his existence.

Paying homage as he does to biblical narrative, Baldwin still moves beyond it, offering another revision in the process. As he looks back on his life, and the events that contextualize his existence, Baldwin suggests that simply being remembered is insufficient, advocating instead for an honest and often unfiltered remembrance through which one might craft an accurate representation of their identity. In many ways, Baldwin accomplishes this simply by combining the themes and issues that he does. The parallels drawn between his personal experiences and the national concerns foregrounded within the Civil Rights Movement and the deaths of leaders such as Malcolm X and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. suggest the pervasiveness of questions of social equality on individual and societal levels. By moving fluidly between discussions of the "national convulsion called McCarthyism" and "school convulsion" in Little Rock, he suggests a clear historical continuity, once again centering his concern with the past as a means of understanding the present (1998, p. 370, p. 389). Moreover, Baldwin does not shy away from juxtaposing American power struggles with such international conflicts as the Algerian War, his own experiences abroad, and the protracted legal battles of his friend Tony Maynard, who had been imprisoned in Hamburg, Germany.

The global scope established here allows him to model behavior that his fictional Gabriel Grimes consistently rejects. By examining the history of America alongside his own, even as he argues that "all of the Western nations have been caught in a lie" and that "their history has no moral justification and that the West has no moral authority," Baldwin (1998) avoids a dichotomy between himself and the society of which he is a part (p. 404). Rather than position himself, or his country, as the sole reformed individual in the midst of a collection of sinners, Baldwin invokes the biblical admonition that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). As such, the only possible redress for our collective shortcomings is a collective re-evaluation of our identities and the historical narratives that have constructed them.

Despite the broad focus, Baldwin's essays function most powerfully in the tradition of introspective confession. Even when confronted by Florence and John in the novel's final passages, Gabriel is never able to look inward and confront his own demons. Metaphorically, Baldwin makes the argument that this failure is mirrored in a societal inability to do likewise. By acknowledging the necessity of self-confrontation, Baldwin points to a tremendous lack in the traditional conversion narrative, which never suggests that one must face their demons in order to change. This absence is clear with the prototypical convert, the apostle Paul. As King Saul, he built a life on violence and persecution before being blinded by a heavenly light on that road to Damascus. The moment that transforms him into the Lord's willing servant, Paul, and makes him "a new creature" requires divine intervention, as do the plethora of miraculous events that often surround Biblical conversion narratives. Even the oft-recounted tale of "Amazing Grace," of the sinner who "was lost" and now "is found," takes a passive approach to salvation. In *No Name*, Baldwin suggests that direct, and often difficult, actions provide the only true pathway to change. To be sure, society cannot continue to wait idly on the intervention of a higher power.

At the heart of this challenge, Baldwin argues, is a confrontation with the past, but also the confrontation with the present self. Rather than looking for the great white light to shine down from above, Baldwin advocates for shining one's own light inward for a brutal and honest assessment of who they are. The difficulty in doing so for America, Baldwin (1998) explains, is "an emotional poverty so bottomless, and a terror of human life, of human touch, so deep, that virtually no American appears able to achieve any viable, organic connection between his public stance and his private life" (p. 385). This fear of the private self, which Baldwin argues is at the root of the creation of historicized power relations (even "the Negro problem"), has maintained a crippling effect on American society, just as it cripples the fictional Gabriel. Baldwin explores this complicated state of being in the following passage:

> In the private chambers of the soul, the guilty party is identified, and the accusing finger, there, is not legend, but consequence, not fantasy, but the truth. People pay for what they do, and still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead. (p. 386)

Rather than claim to be at peace as a result of his introspection and time spent communing with his private self, Baldwin clarifies that his process of looking inward is continuing, and that it often lacks a clear and simple resolution, in much the same way that his novel is unresolved. Indeed, this is perhaps the strongest way in which he redefines the traditional conversion narrative. Conversion is not a moment on the road, or a miracle on the mountaintop; it is a continuing process, which is the difficult truth that he expresses throughout *No Name*.

Baldwin addresses a number of political leaders and movements, ranging from the Black Panthers to the Flower Children. Yet, nowhere is his admiration more potent than in his discussions of Malcolm X—himself a famous convert from Christianity to the Nation of Islam. In his discussion of knowing, and losing, Malcolm, what is most apparent is that Baldwin respects him primarily because of his tremendous ability to look inward. This is particularly notable because the American public had crafted an image of Malcolm that was rooted in aggression and external agitation. More significantly, Malcolm was not content to simply examine himself, but he suggested that others would benefit from doing the same.

Baldwin (1998) writes of meeting Malcolm at a time "when many of us believed or made ourselves believe that the American state still contained within itself the power of self-confrontation, the power to change itself in the direction of honor and knowledge and freedom," suggesting that this was vital for the state to be able, "as Malcolm put it, 'to atone'" (pp. 408-409). Here, Baldwin spells out with intense clarity precisely what made Malcolm such a threatening figure, though it had nothing to do with the radical violence with which his image was regularly imbued. By invoking the language of "atonement," Malcolm suggested that America needed to do more than simply wash its hands of the past, but had to instead work toward actively making amends. This reparative and restorative process, as Baldwin likewise advances, was necessary for true change, which could only begin with the fundamental act of self-confrontation.

Baldwin highlights the extent to which self-confrontation proved even more intimidating than fending off external threats, again using his own experience as a model. Baldwin (1998) writes of debating Malcolm, acknowledging that Malcolm's true skill was not in the attack, but in "those loopholes he so often left dangling," which were actually "hangman's knots," prepared to trap his opponents in the lies and illogic of their own position (p. 411). Even as Baldwin goes on to paint the portrait of "the strangling interlocutor," the imagery of the hangman's knot is best understood as denying the vitality of those ideas that could not survive the thoughtful interrogation to which Malcolm subjected them. Moreover, Baldwin suggests that Malcolm's debating prowess was rooted in the fact that "the others were discussing the past or the future, or a country which may once have existed, or one which may yet be brought into existence—Malcolm was speaking of the bitter and unanswerable present" (p. 411). As such, Baldwin furthers his argument that the investment in a mythic past leaves one utterly unprepared to confront the insistent demands of the present.

Finally, while reflecting on Malcolm's legacy, Baldwin identifies a number of characteristics for which he thoroughly admired the fallen leader. One that made Malcolm particularly powerful, in direct contradistinction to the earlier consideration of Baldwin's stepfather and the fictionalized Gabriel, is that "Malcolm considered himself to be the spiritual property of the people who produced him. He did not consider himself to be their savior, he was far too modest for that" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 411). Malcolm's humility is critically important here, but so too is the attribution of his existence to the people who needed him badly enough to create him. This flies in the face of a traditional conversion narrative in which people await salvation from an interceding force. Malcolm came from within the community of people who needed him most. Baldwin, ultimately, refers to Malcolm as "a genuine revolutionary" who "in himself, indeed … was a kind of revolution, both in the sense of a return to a former principle, and in the sense of an upheaval" (p. 412). This upheaval, then, this all-encompassing change which might yield salvation, must be produced by the community that needs it most.

Baldwin concludes *No Name* with multiple images of the future, both on an individual and a collective level. In the epilogue, "Who Has Believed Our Report?," Baldwin offers the metaphor of a newborn baby. He writes that "the old world is dying, and a new one, kicking in the belly of its mother, time, announces that it is ready to be born" (1998, p. 475). Juxtaposing endings and new beginnings, just as he does with *Mountain*, Baldwin suggests that the next step is still yet to be realized—in other words, there's no easy resolution in sight. As such, he presents the embodiment of his earlier claim that the "foundations of a new society" contain "the shape of the American future and the only potential of a truly valid American identity," even as he reminds his readers that "identities are forged" through "a long drawn-out and somewhat bewildering and awkward process" (p. 470). Ultimately, it is in *No Name*'s conclusion, much like the novel before it, that Baldwin presents selective allegiance to the traditional conversion narrative that he has so actively re-structured. Just as with any proselyte before him, Baldwin understands all too well that his revelations are not to die with him. His works, then, demonstrate his commitment to spreading the good word of his own hard-earned lessons, with the fervent hope that those who bear witness to his testimony might go forth and do likewise.

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SUSAN WATSON TURNER

2. WHY THEATER, MR. BALDWIN?

The Amen Corner *and* Blues for Mister Charlie

The personal relationship each author has with another author can be tangible or intangible since great authors make themselves known to us through their work. Great authors travel with us, go to bed with us, and enter other very personal aspects of our lives. Such is the case with James Baldwin and me. Before I ever actually set eyes on him, his book *Another Country* was my constant companion for almost a month. Admittedly I was a slow reader, yet I remember savoring this particular book like a favorite ice cream cone—and then finishing reluctantly, since finishing meant an end to the amazing sensation I was experiencing. When I did turn the last page of that book (on a bus ride in Cleveland Ohio on a brutally cold day) I distinctly recall wanting more. I was saddened that the last page had been turned—but also delighted to begin what I hoped would be a lifetime connection to Baldwin's work and fervent life. I devoured his fiction, studied his dramatic work, and painstakingly analyzed his essays. This unknowingly prepared me to meet him at Ohio University, the site of my undergraduate study in theater.

Causally walking across campus one day, I noticed a standing-room-only crowd overflowing from the theater. I asked what was going on or who was speaking, and in a hushed tone someone said, "Oh, James Baldwin is lecturing for the English Department." An uncontrollable, unbelievable emotional rush came over me. How could James Baldwin be on campus without my knowing about it? What's more, he was right there in the building where I spent almost all of my academic energy. I was shocked and really didn't believe what had been related to me. I entered the theater to see for myself—and actually made enough of a disturbance in the back that Baldwin momentarily stopped speaking and made eye contact with me.

When he restarted and the audience disdainfully dismissed my late and abrupt entrance, I noticed that I was in a sea of non-Black students and faculty. This event took place in 1977-1978 when there was no shortage of black students on state funded campuses due to a plethora of financial aid. In addition, there was also a fully funded Black Studies building and program (for which I worked as a peer counselor).

I listened to the remaining few minutes of the lecture and made my way toward Baldwin. He beckoned me to a front and center position. He shook my hand, leaned over and said to me. "Where are all the Black students?" Embarrassingly, I answered meekly "We … I … didn't even know you were here!" He was quickly whisked away by faculty sponsors and administrators who'd overheard our

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exchange. I stood dumbfounded as the theater emptied. Despite my embarrassment, I'd actually met James Baldwin.

The teachable moment here is also the inspiration for this article. Throughout my theater studies, I have never been required to read Baldwin, even though his two major plays are often and regularly staged. This is probably one reason that the English Department at Ohio University hosted Baldwin's visit without any participation from the Theater Department.

"BLACK PEOPLE IGNORED THE THEATER BECAUSE THEATER HAD ALWAYS IGNORED THEM" (BALDWIN, 1969)

Baldwin completed and commercially produced two plays. There were additional plays written that never reached the stage beyond a workshop level. The first fully produced and reviewed play by Baldwin was *The Amen Corner*, which was written in 1954, but not published until more than a decade later (after it had been produced on Broadway and completed an international tour). His second play was *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which was published in 1964 as a tribute to Baldwin's friend and civil rights activist, Medgar Evers.

The notes on *Blues* by Baldwin provide a closer look at his choice to embark into the American theater. Even though the literary establishment would distance itself from Baldwin because of his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin (1964) noted the following:

> [Elia] Kazan asked me at the end of 1958 if I would be interested in working in the Theater …. I did not react with great enthusiasm because I did not then, and don't now, have much respect for what goes on in the American Theater. (p. xiii)

Though the notes state that Kazan encouraged Baldwin toward the stage, the author's relationship with Lorraine Hansberry was likely an additional contributing factor. It began with her stand against the Actors' Studio on Baldwin's behalf. In the introduction to Hansberry's autobiography, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, Baldwin (1969) recalled: "The first time I ever saw Lorraine was at the Actors Studio, in the winter of '57-58. She was there as an observer of the Workshop Production of *Giovanni's Room*. She sat way up in the bleachers, taking on some of the biggest names in the American theater because she had liked the play and they in the main, hadn't" (p. xii).

Baldwin (1969) may have been enticed into the theater not only by Hansberry's success, but also by her relationship to the audience:

> Lorraine and I found ourselves in the backstage alley, where she was immediately mobbed. I produced a pen and Lorraine handed me her handbag and began signing autographs …. I stood there and watched. I watched the people, who loved Lorraine for what she had brought to them: and watched Lorraine, who loved the people for what they brought to her. It was not for her a matter of being admired. (p. xii)

Baldwin, however, wasn't naïve. To wit, Hansberry responded to his phone call one day by saying that it was only the second time her phone had rung that day. Clearly, Baldwin and Hansberry understood what it meant to be the 'flavor' of the month—and what that feels like when you are no longer the 'flavor.' They were under no illusion that the racial landscape had been altered so drastically that they were permanently installed.

In 1926, W.E.B. Du Bois attempted to define a place for the Black theater artist—which was echoed by Douglas Turner Ward in 1966 ("American Theater: For White's Only"), and yet again by August Wilson in his ground breaking speech before the Theater Communication Group in 1996 entitled "The Ground on Which I Stand." They all seem to center on the same theme: The theater is *no place to be somebody* if you happen to be a Black artist. Baldwin (1968) captures it in his own words:

> At the crucial hour, he can hardly look to his artistic peers for help, for they do not know enough about him to be able to correct him. To continue to grow, to remain in touch with himself, he needs the support of that community from which, however, all the pressures of American life incessantly conspire to remove him. (p. xiii)

Although some changes have taken place, most Black theater artists who have been embraced into the mainstream are themselves mainstream. They do not particularly identify with any genre or form, and certainly do not conform to the ideals of Du Bois, Ward, or Wilson. For instance, Regina Taylor speaks of her work as being 'from her lens.' Taylor enjoys production support from the mainstream theaters vs. any production activity from culturally specific institutions; her last new play was produced under the auspices of Signature Theater in New York. Admittedly, that was Baldwin's desire for us—to see his world through his lens; in fact, it was his only choice: From his peak playwriting period (1958-1964) it would be almost a decade before Black theatrical institutions would strongly emerge and be situated within the professional theater. When he began writing for theater, there were a few community-based theaters that produced Black plays. The Karamu Theater in Cleveland was one of them; there weren't any in the commercial/professional arena.

Despite all the changes, the autonomy of the Black theater artist is constantly at risk. The American theater still remains an unfriendly arena for the Black dramatic text; yet Baldwin's two plays continue to enjoy consistent international production/performance. The City College Theater Department Chair and artistic director of the Harlem Repertory Theater, Professor Eugene Nesbitt, opened his season with the controversial production of *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which was followed by *The Amen Corner* the next season. *The Amen Corner* was produced by the National Theater of London in 2013, where Michael Billington's (2013) review from *The Guardian* began, "I don't think *The Amen Corner* is a great play, but I get the feeling it is one that its author, James Baldwin, was compelled to write back in 1955."

By the time Baldwin's earliest written play reached a commercial audience, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. Baldwin was deeply involved in marches and meetings on behalf of the movement. The Black theater was exploding with the Civil Rights Movement, and Lorraine Hansberry had just become the first Black female playwright to have a play produced on Broadway (*A Raisin In the Sun*). She was also the first and youngest Black playwright to receive the New York Critics Circle award. The play opened in 1959 at the Barrymore Theater and ran for 538 performances. The director for *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lloyd Richards, would later direct the international touring production of *The Amen Corner*. Baldwin and Hansberry continued their relationship, not only as friends, but also as colleagues in the civil rights struggle. Hansberry continued to defend and encourage Baldwin's playwriting efforts. As he himself would remark about his introduction into theater life, "I had never in my life seen so many black people in the theater and the reason for that was that never before, in the history of American theater, had so much truth of black people's lives been seen on stage" (1969, p. xii).

Soon after the production of *A Raisin in the Sun*, a small group of Black theaters emerged. The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations began providing funding for Black theater institutions, particularly as a result of the Black Arts Movement, headed by Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka. Furthermore, Douglas Turner Ward would receive a three-year grant from the Ford Foundation in 1967 to fund The Negro Ensemble Company located at that time in Greenwich Village's St. Marks Theater. These initial attempts to establish an autonomous voice for the Black writer within the professional theater would come after Baldwin's theatrical efforts. He had had to remain content with mainstream liberal collectives like the Dramatist Guild and the Actors Studio Theater.

Baldwin might have also been drawn to the theater because of his unabashed and unapologetic dive into the fight for Black civil rights. His voice was heard at meetings and marches. The FBI dossier on him became thick and controversial. Not only was he a civil rights activist, but rumors of his sexual orientation also began surfacing. James Campbell, author of *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: James Baldwin and the FBI*, writes about the difficulty and lawsuits that took place for almost a decade following Baldwin's death in an effort to secure his FBI files. Baldwin referred to this period with coolness as "trying to write between assassinations" (Campbell, 2008).

Blues for Mister Charlie was definitely a vehicle to express Baldwin's outrage toward what had happened to Emmett Till and his friend Medgar Evers (*Blues* was subtitled *A Civil Rights Drama*). Baldwin (1964) would later observe:

> I once took a short trip with Medgar Evers to the back-woods of Mississippi. He was investigating the murder of a Negro man by a white storekeeper … and we had been followed for many miles out of Jackson Mississippi, not by a lunatic with a gun, but by state troopers. I will never forget that night, as I will never forget Medgar … When he died, something entered into me which I cannot describe, but it was then that I resolved that nothing under heaven would prevent me from getting this play done. (p. xv)

On the other hand, Baldwin wrote *Amen Corner* in 1954 while he was in self-exile in France. The theme of the play was the place of religion in one's life—particularly a Black man's life. And Baldwin (1968) linked this theme to the theater itself: "I was armed, I knew, in attempting to write the play, by the fact that I was born in the church. I knew that out of the ritual of the church, historically speaking, comes the act of theater, the communion which is the theater" (p. xvi).

There would be an almost ten year delay before *The Amen Corner* was produced on Broadway. The interim development saw a production at Howard University in 1955 directed by Owen Dodson and a smaller subsequent production in Los Angeles. The play was finally produced on Broadway in April 1965 and ran a short 84 performances before closing in June of that same year.

Upon closing, the play was booked solid for a European tour beginning July 1965. It traveled from New York to Amsterdam, Germany, Vienna, Israel, France, Zurich, Budapest, and the Edinburgh Festival in August. Certainly, this play did not receive the overwhelming response that Hansberry's play had received—yet the climate for an Ibsenequse portrayal of how African Americans were feeling and dealing was received enthusiastically on the international stage. European audiences understood realism and the social role of the theater better than Americans. They were actually disappointed that Baldwin's play did not present a *more* confrontational text that reflected the tumultuous times of 1960s America. Nevertheless, Baldwin offered a harshly realistic portrayal of Harlem, poverty, and disillusionment. For him, the theater became a way around the political scrutiny, the social judgments, and the literary strictures he faced—and a way to voice his views on a range of contentious subjects.

The followings sections will provide script analyses and production histories of *The Amen Corner* and *Blues for Mister Charlie* as a way to better understand their contributions to the American theater.

THE AMEN CORNER: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The Amen Corner is about the fiery Sister Margaret, leader of a devoted church in Harlem, who has dedicated years of her life to serving the Lord. But when her son unexpectedly reunites her with her estranged husband, a jazz musician, she risks losing her standing in the church and the son whom she has tried to keep devout. The play focuses on earthly imperfections and the conflicts that rise between faith and family. It is ironic that Baldwin was overseas when he wrote a play so intrinsically steeped in the issues of Harlem.

The play was directed by Owen Dodson at Howard University in 1955, but Baldwin felt the student cast was too young to truly reach his performance objective. While *The Amen Corner* was maturing through small productions, Baldwin was an observer of the New Dramatists Committee process. Sol Stein (2004) has written about their work during this period in his book *Native Sons*, recapping his relationship with Baldwin and the theater, noting that Baldwin was able watch every stage of the production of Archibald MacLeish's *J.B. and I* and every rehearsal of Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (p. 18).

Stein and Baldwin wrote a story about Baldwin’s experiences in France entitled *Dark Runner.* With the encouragement of William Fitelson, the managing director of the Theater Guild, they decided to turn the story into a play. They eventually had a lunch meeting with Fitelson to discuss what he (Fitelson) thought of the finished product. According to Stein (2004), Fitelson “was prepared to go forward with the television play we’d written, with one proviso. The central character, that young black we’d named Billy Ade, had to be changed to white” (p. 24). But it made no sense to Baldwin or Stein to change the central character to a white man. The project was thus abandoned. This was Baldwin’s rude awakening to the parameters and protocols of the American theater.

Baldwin developed *The Amen Corner* script as a member of the New Dramatists, which is a playwright collective. The play ran for far fewer performances than anticipated. The original Broadway production was directed by Frank Silvera and featured Cynthia Belgrave, Gertrude Jeanette, and Juanita Moore. It was produced by Mrs. Nat Cole. The European tour fell under the direction of Lloyd Richards, who was fresh off the Broadway success of Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. Later in his career, he would direct a series of plays by August Wilson and head the Yale drama program from 1979 until 1991. The successful artistic synthesis of the Richards/Baldwin team was evident to critics:

> *The Amen Corner’s* emotional momentum, and its enabling of the audience to actually partake in the over the top, impassioned Black Pentecostal rituals …. provides a much closer insight into the religion’s allure … Richards’ production emphasizes this point in its scenic design. In terms of the church portion of the set, the congregation is seated facing away from the audience … While this was certainly a directorial choice, Richards’ vision for *The Amen Corner*, can in some ways be seen as Baldwin’s own. (Cienfurgos, 2013, p. 4)

Europeans, who had much less exposure to Black playwrights, saw a part of American culture that was new to them:

> European audiences fully expected to see a play that dealt directly with race relations and civil rights …. *The Amen Corner* does not explicitly handle the issue of race relations; an analysis of the text reveals that it uses the racialized version of Christianity unique to Harlem as an avenue for discussing the black community’s struggles with family, poverty and faith in the United States. (Cienfurgos, 2013, p. 5)

The fact that the play dealt with family struggles and religion instead of racial politics disappointed European audiences. Nonetheless, the play continues to be staged overseas. Charles Spencer (2013), a reviewer for *The Telegraph*, had this to say about a recent production of the play at the National Theater in London:

> This is a drama that takes religious faith, and doubt, seriously as it sets divine love against human passion and anguish. It is a work and a production full of humour but it is also deeply moving as it shows how faith can cause pain as

> well as joy, and the way those who praise God most passionately can be every bit as cruel and devious as those they denounce as sinners. (p. B1)

BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

A short summary of *Blues for Mister Charlie* begins with the dedication to the memory of Medgar Evers and his widow and his children. It is also dedicated to the memory of the dead children of Birmingham. The play takes place in a small Southern town; a white man murders a black man (Richard Henry), and then throws his body in the weeds. Lyle Britten, a storeowner, is tried for the murder, and his trial gives way to a reflection upon American racism. The play is also loosely based on the Emmett Till murder. Baldwin was washed in disillusionment during this period. Though *Blues* was Baldwin's second fully reviewed and produced play, it was the first to hit the Broadway stage. *Blues* opened on April 14, 1964 at the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA Playhouse). In 2005 this theater was renamed the August Wilson Theater and stands in 2013 as a tribute to the body of work created by Wilson. The Broadway run was a successful one, culminating into a five-month run and 148 performances. The production was directed by Burgess Meredith and featured Rosetta LeNoire, Al Freeman, Jr., Billie Allen, and Diana Sands who had appeared as Beneatha in *Raisin in the Sun*. Diana Sands was nominated for a Tony Award for her supporting role in *Blues* but did not win. Clearly, *Blues* was the recipient of the recognition that Baldwin was enjoying now as writer and civil rights activist.

The original reviews on this play denoted that the play was being reviewed as a work that had a larger objective beyond the stage. As Baldwin had stated in the introduction to *The Amen Corner*, "*I did not want to enter the theater on the theater's terms, but on mine.*" Certainly he did just that. Howard Taubman's (1964) review of *Blues* opens with this observation: "James Baldwin has written a play with fires of fury in its belly, tears of anguish in its eyes and a roar of protest in its throat. *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which stormed into the ANTA Theater last night, is not a tidy play. Its structure is loose, and it makes valid points as if they were clichés. But it throbs with fierce energy and passion. It is like a thunderous battle cry."

In *Blues*, Baldwin delves into the interior of white Southern life juxtaposed with that of Black Southern life. The details of his stage directions allow the reader to envision the ultimate production values needed for the performance:

> The aisle also functions as the division between WHITETOWN and BLACKTOWN. The action among the blacks takes place on one side of the stage, the action among the whites on the opposite side of the stage …. (Baldwin, 1964, p. 1)

The setting is described as Plaguetown, USA. Christianity and race are denoted as "the plague." Unlike *The Amen Corner*, which dealt with the interior workings of a Black family, the challenge for Baldwin in *Blues* is to truthfully draw the personalities found in Whitetown (something that Baldwin knew less well).

Blues is based on the case of Emmett Till, who was murdered in 1955. The murderer was released and it would be decades until justice in that case was realized. The play is dedicated as well to Baldwin's friend and civil rights activist Medgar Evers. These emotional ties to justice and injustice motivated Baldwin to write the play. He was able accurately to characterize the Blacktown people, yet the Whitetown characters presented a theatrical challenge:

> I began to see that my fear of the form masked a much deeper fear. That fear was that I would never be able to draw a valid portrait of the murderer. In life, obviously, such people baffle and terrify me and, with one part of my mind at least, I hate them and would be willing to kill them. Yet, with another part of my mind, I am aware that no man is a villain in his own eyes. (1964, p. xiv)

He worked hard to find that truth. Lyle Britten, the white storeowner accused of murdering the son of Meridian Henry (a local minister), is portrayed by the more sympathetic part of Baldwin's brain. Scenes between the white people include the stereotypical discussions among the women. But they become intimate and truthful when Lyle and his wife Jo discuss the expansion of their store and when she chastises him for his late working hours through a second person discussion that includes their unspeaking infant. Here, Baldwin (1964) endears us to the humanity of the murderer, Lyle Britton:

> Lyle: You mighty sassy tonight. (Hands her the child.) Ain't that right, old pisser? Don't you reckon your Mama's getting kind of sassy? And what do you reckon I should do about it?
>
> (Jo is changing the child's diapers.)
>
> Jo: You tell your Daddy he can start sleeping in his own bed nights instead of coming grunting in here in the wee small hours of the morning.
>
> Lyle: And you tell your Mama if she was getting her sleep like she should be, so she can be alert every instant to your needs, little fellow, she wouldn't know what time I come—grunting in.
>
> Jo: I got to be alert to your needs, too. I think. (pp. 7-8)

The scene continues as the two discuss Lyle's life plans and his economic development for his family and business. Race arises only in terms of what and how to capitalize on the patronage of "niggers" and how they will chose fashions that might attract the white women to their store. The discussion clearly classifies Lyle and his family as distant from the more exclusive Decatur Street vendors.

Philip Roth wrote a review of the play in an article entitled *Channel X: Two Plays on the Race Conflict*. Roth mentions Lyle in his opening critique as the only character mentioned in Baldwin's introduction to *Blues*. Baldwin discusses his feelings about critics in a dialogue with Nikki Giovanni:

> Giovanni: … I personally, hate critics—I'm not sure that anyone—
>
> Baldwin: Actually, I love critics, but they're very rare. A real critic is very rare … I will be able to accept critical judgments when I understand that they understand Ray Charles.
>
> Giovanni: It'll never happen.
>
> Baldwin: When that day comes, then okay. That's a new ball game and we'll play it as we see it. (Lewis, 1973, p. 17)

Clearly, Roth does not even know Ray Charles is blind, since his review of *Blues* is puzzling to say the least. He opens by stating that Baldwin's introduction discusses Lyle Britten. However, there is no mention of Lyle's character in the introduction, unless Baldwin's discussion of Emmett Till is supposed to suggest that the murderer in the play will be its central focus. Later, Roth (1964) discusses Richard's surrendering of his gun in exchange for his father's now truthful confession of the circumstances of the death of Richard's mother:

> Surrendering the gun at this point, then, is either psychological perversity on Richard's part … or sentimentality on the part of the writer, who may so want a scene of loving and forgiveness between a father and a son on the stage that he will have one even if it means destroying the most authentic facts about his own characters. (p. 39)

Certainly the theater is no stranger to the discovery of stories beneath the story, and Roth (with a little research) could have discovered Baldwin's own tumultuous father/son relationship. He goes so far as to rewrite Baldwin's scene supposing/imposing dialogue and "untangling" the drama. He further accuses Baldwin of "propagandizing." He believes that Baldwin's pronouncements stand in the way of the play (Roth, 1964, p. 41).

Baldwin makes the play's focus crystal clear in the introduction (with the description of how Whitetown is separated from Blacktown). There was no cloaking by Baldwin about the point of the play—he even speaks to the difficulty of writing the white characters truthfully and with empathy. Roth (1964) further concludes that the play is really about "… the small mindedness of the male sex. It is about the narcissistic, pompous and finally ridiculous demands made by the male ego when confronted by moral catastrophe" (p. 41).

Ironically, when Clifford Odets promoted unionization in his play *Waiting for Lefty*, the prostitution of the stage was heralded for political gain and posturing. Roth is typical of literary critics whose views of Baldwin's work were skewed.

Taubman (1964), another critic, concludes his review of the play with these off-handed accolades for Baldwin:

> The Actors Studio Theater, which has been stumbling in darkness all season, finally has arrived at something worth doing. Although Mr. Baldwin has not yet mastered all the problems and challenges of the theater, *Blues for Mister*

> *Charlie* brings eloquence and conviction to one of the momentous themes of our era.

Eugene Nesbitt, a theater professor at City College and Artistic Director for New Haarlem Arts Theater, has staged the play himself, largely because of Baldwin's popularity as a novelist, not as a playwright. According to Nesbitt, the play had not been professionally produced (under a Actor's Equity Association contract) since the original production in 1964. He also included these remarks during an interview with the author:

> *Professor Susan Watson Turner*: You opened your theater, The New Haarlem Arts Theater with Baldwin. Why did you put Baldwin onstage?
>
> *Professor Eugene Nesbitt*: Baldwin's primary writing is not as a playwright, but as a novelist and essayist; as such, he was one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. However, Baldwin did write two important plays, *The Amen Corner* and *Blues for Mister Charlie*, both of which have been neglected by the American theater. Because of this neglect, I chose to inaugurate the opening of the New Haarlem Arts Theater (NHAT) with Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Although a flawed play, it is a masterpiece in theme and construction. Racism is at the center of the play, but more importantly, the impact of racism on the psyche of blacks and whites in America. Contextualizing the drama in the situation of a real life story—the brutal murder of Emmett Till—places before an audience in 2011 a past event that now can be considered in a contemporary moment from a historical perspective. Since such murders continue to be a part of our society (think Treyvon Martin), the events explored in *Blues for Mister Charlie* are all the more prescient. The power of the play and Baldwin's writing is that he presents situations and complex characters that are compelling, and that we can identify and understand.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps if Lorraine Hansberry had lived, she could have protected Baldwin from those who ignored the universal humanity projected by his plays. Thus, Baldwin might have been able to tout the title of playwright along with that of novelist. Perhaps if Fitelson had been bold enough to produce the television play that Stein and Baldwin penned, Hollywood may have captured Mr. Baldwin. Perhaps if Baldwin had joined the Black Arts Movement, his technique would not have been consistently dismissed by critics as flawed. Perhaps if the Black Theater movement had been stronger, Baldwin's plays would have been considered mainstream prior to the works of Wilson, Taylor, and others.

Nevertheless, Baldwin did provide us with two poignant and provocative plays that address human frailties and sensibilities. He left the American theater shaken and stirred from his voice—through his lens and on his terms. His plays hosted some of the most prominent talent during the period. Pedagogically, his plays should find their way into the American theatrical canon and be studied regularly in general theater history and analysis courses. They capture an important part of American secular and theater history.

POSTSCRIPT

The Amen Corner returned to Broadway in 1983, featuring Rhetta Hughes, Roger Robinson, Leslie Dockery, Helena-Joyce Wright and Jeffrey V. Thompson. The design team included union designers who were fixtures of the Black theater world—the set designer Felix Cochren and the lighting designer Shirley Prendergast. All the culturally specific American theaters that address Du Bois's edict have included one or both of Baldwin's plays in their production histories.

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HUGO M. CANHAM

3. BALDWIN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Like Zora Neale Hurston's long season of obscurity (Gates, 1990), James Baldwin is largely ignored with the exception of recognition among small progressive circles who see him as a leading voice against injustice in the United States of America. However, notwithstanding my relatively late exposure to Baldwin in the later part of my 20's, I came to the realization that his voice was of paramount importance to South Africa. In the single year that I read all his books and essays, I was struck by his references to South Africa. What was most striking however, was the affective response that his work elicited in me. The moments where I felt that I had firsthand insight into the experiences of his characters and indeed his own experiences were both gratifying and unsettling. As someone that has spent most of his adult life in a democracy, I was alarmed and emotionally shaken by the current continuities of racist atrocities including the everyday racisms (Essed, 2001) that Baldwin had so aptly described decades ago.

This chapter seeks to make sense of this confluence of emotions by first claiming Baldwin as a spiritual South African that was profoundly influenced by events in South Africa and the United States of America. I apply Anderson's (2009) notion of atmospheric affect to theoretically illustrate how Baldwin was tied to apartheid South Africa. Second, through the narratives of black South Africans, I show how the white supremacies in the American situation and the South African context were sibling evils. Last, I reflect on how some of my own experiences in a democratic South Africa suggest that black life retains the stain of being out of place as it does in post-Civil Rights America.

SOUTHERN LOCATIONS OF VIOLENCE

While James Baldwin was a deeply patriotic American, he was also a citizen of the world. He was born and buried in the United States of America, and he lived in France and other parts of Europe. Even as he did not live in Africa, the African continent remained a central preoccupation of his non-fiction writing throughout most of his life. Baldwin saw marked similarities between American slavery, its rampant racism and the racist and degrading conditions under which black South African miners worked to support white supremacy. His intimate knowledge of American racism borne of deep experience made him an outstanding and prolific chronicler of the ills of his society. However, this did not limit his engagement with the rest of the world. To the contrary, it could be argued that the depths of the rage to which he was driven by his own country expanded the boundaries of his experience and imagination to foreign locations. Blint (2011) describes Baldwin's

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concern with the rest of the world thus: “The content of Baldwin’s transnationalism is founded in his ethical resolve to pursue the human condition beyond all the concrete abstractions—race, religion, sexuality, and country, etc.—that we inherit” (para.10). While the United States remained at the center of his writing, there is a substantial amount of his work that engages with European themes and Parisian life, most notably “Giovanni’s Room”. However, throughout his writing career, as a place of origin for African American’s, Africa loomed large in his consciousness. Ntongela Masilela (2009) makes a similar observation when he noted that the “Africaness of Baldwin, in the sense of the aura of Africa deeply permeating his consciousness, stretches from his early essays which he wrote on his arrival in Paris in 1948 to a short series of essays on South Africa which appeared in late 1986 in The New Statesman” (p. 5).

In a 1968 interview with “Esquire” magazine he noted that “the black people in this country are tied to subjugated people everywhere in the world” (Baldwin, 1968, p. 10). His encounter with Africans in Paris and their exchange of ideas at the seminal Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists in 1956 appears to have expanded his sense of Africa as more than just a metaphoric home. Indeed, his essay “Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown” marks this as an important encounter. Embedded in this meeting between African and *Negro* is a sense of recognition of relatedness and alienation through a yawning chasm. “They face each other, the Negro and the African, over a gulf of three hundred years – an alienation too vast to be conquered in an evening’s good-will, too heavy and too double-edged ever to be trapped in speech” (Baldwin, 1964, pp. 103-104).

Blint (2011, para.13) notes that Baldwin wanted to make sense of “the psychic distance yawning between Africa and African America as a consequence of an episode of rupture without peer in modern history”. Even as Baldwin understood the great difference in the situation of the African American and that of the African, he was able to identify with the human suffering of black South African’s under the system of apartheid. Thus, a year before his own death, in a letter to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Baldwin (1986) stated that he and Tutu lived in a common hell although they had not met in person. The unspeakable common hell that he was referring to was the unrelenting situation of white supremacy in their respective countries. In all his references to South Africa, Baldwin was careful to frame his comments as one writing from a place of not knowing the South African situation. However, even as he does this, the accuracy of the affective connection is uncanny for one who had not set foot on these shores. In the letter to Tutu, Baldwin (1986, para.3) states that “[i]t will be considered offensive—unpatriotic—to compare the South African situation to the American situation, nor will I, in fact, make such a comparison because I do not know enough about your country (I may not know enough about my own).” This is an instance of the provisionality of Baldwin’s writing style. Nkosi (1999) remarks on Baldwin’s style of constant qualifications, deferments, and provisional utterances meant to complicate his world.

In the same letter, Baldwin (1986) goes on to compare Tutu to Martin Luther King Jr and by extension, African Americans to their South African counterparts:

> You are, incontestably, one of the products of this [civilizing] mission, and so was the late Martin Luther King Jr. … Yet we do not owe our presence to the Civilized. We are here in spite of the Civilized. And nowhere is this clearer than in South Africa now, and in the reaction of the Civilized to this slaughter. We are not white, we are black, and we exist therefore, in this system, this hierarchy, on another, quite literally unspeakable, level. (para. 9)

Perhaps his most strident statement against South Africa was made in his conversation with Mead when he said, “One day South Africa will blow up. It is as certain as death” (Baldwin & Mead, 1972, p. 175). Similarly Baldwin had long issued a warning to American’s when he stated that white supremacy was untenable in the United States. This warning was issued in the title of his book, “The Fire Next Time.” Therefore, just as South Africa was sure to blow up, so America was to burn in the fire of black rage. Baldwin (1961) understood white supremacy as pervasive and not easily containable within pockets of society or corners of the world:

> I know another Negro, a man very dear to me, who says, with conviction and with truth, *The spirit of the South is the spirit of America*. He was born in the North and did his military training in the South. He did not, as far as I can gather, find the South *worse*; he found it, if anything, all too familiar. In the second place, though, even if Birmingham is worse, no doubt Johannesburg, South Africa, beats it by several miles, and Buchenwald was one of the worst things that ever happened in the entire history of the world. The world has never lacked for horrifying examples; but I do not believe that these examples are meant to be used as justification for our own crimes. This perpetual justification empties the heart of all human feeling. The emptier our hearts become, the greater will be our crimes. Thirdly, the South is not merely an embarrassingly backward region, but a part of this country, and what happens there concerns every one of us. (p. 66)

South Africa occupies the southernmost tip of Africa. It shares the dubious distinction of being southern with the American South. The southern extremity is also the location of racist extremity. In the US, *The Messenger* (March 1920) declared: “Fellow Negroes of the South, leave there. Go North, East, and West—anywhere—to get out of that hell hole” (Gates & Burton, 2011, p.258). Similarly, Horace R. Cayton (1944) noted that by leaving the South, the African American could “shake off many of the fears and insecurities which attend everyday life in the South. If he happens to talk back to the white man, he will not be lynched” (Gates & Burton, p. 395). Frederick Douglas, however, argued that Southern African Americans should not migrate but rather remain behind to fight Southern racism. While overt racism was cast as a Southern problem, Baldwin pointed out that the spirit of the South is the spirit of America. Through his and others experiences, he was able to show how white supremacy and everyday racisms operated across the country. In South Africa, perhaps one of the most poignant accounts of the sheer violence of the apartheid system was by Biko (2004). He told of a system that would soon kill him too when he died at the hands of the police system at the young age of 31. In the American South, black bodies were a commodity on the cotton fields and were hung off the branches of trees. In South Africa, the black body languished in the depths of the goldmine and was burned at barbecues.

BLACK BODIES IN AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERIC SPACE

Following Anderson's (2009) invocation of the concept of atmospheric affect, I posit that Baldwin's America and apartheid South Africa shared an atmospheric affect of racist violence against the black body. Anderson (2009) notes that bodies generate atmospheres. Where these bodies have common experience, they are enveloped by a similar affective atmosphere (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). For example, playing particular music at the beginning of a marathon serves to create shared affect among marathon runners. Shouse (2005) defines affect as abstract, unformed and unstructured potential. Massumi (2002) states that affect is prior to consciousness and it is inscribed within the grammar of the body. Conceptually, atmosphere allows us to move beyond Ngai's (2005) fixed distinction between emotion and affect. Atmospheric affect is subjective and objective, singular and collective.

Baldwin's description of the racist experience is not personal and biographical in the classical sense. He makes both deeply personal and overarching claims for the black experience in America and beyond. However, even in moments of describing the rage of being told by two restaurants that he cannot be served as he is a negro (in *Notes of a Native Son*, 1949) the experience ceases to be his alone and belongs to a race of South African's who knew the consequences of transgressing segregated restrooms, shops, and of entering restaurants classified as white spaces. Affect can belong to more than a single body and is therefore both transpersonal and prepersonal (Anderson, 2009; Massumi, 2002; Shouse, 2005). For Deleuze & Guattari (1994) "Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them" (p. 164). In making the argument for collective affect, Anderson (2009) notes that there has been an upsurge in work that has focused on forms of somnambulistic imitation as a way of understanding how atmospheres become contagious (see Thrift [2008] on mimetic rays or Brennan [2004] on transmission). Ralf Ellison's (1995) scene of the funeral procession of Tod Clifton in *Invisible Man* prefigures and recalls mass funerals of black South African's such as Steve Biko, the funerals of those killed in the Sharpville massacre, and the American funerals of Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X among others. The common affect of these racist killings of black life is marked by a mix of stoicism, simmering anger, defeat signified by downturned heads, and deep mourning reflected in glassy red eyes. Considering violence in the world, Fanon (1963) centers the Sharpville massacre to show how violence can be atmospheric:

> Every meeting held, every act of repression committed, reverberates in the international arena. The murders of Sharpeville shook public opinion for months. In the newspapers, over the wavelengths, and in private

> conversations Sharpeville has become a symbol. It was through Sharpeville that men and women first became acquainted with the problem of apartheid in South Africa. (p. 59)

In an essay published by *Esquire*, Baldwin (1968) again made the direct connection between African American suffering and the subjugation of South African blacks. He clearly pointed out the differential value attached to black lives compared to other groups:

> The black people in this country are tied to subjugated people everywhere in the world. … [T]his country, which began as a revolutionary nation has now spent god knows how many billions of dollars and how many thousands of lives fighting revolution everywhere else. […] But to other black people, all the other people who are suffering under the same system that we are suffering from, that system is led by the last of the Western nations. It is perfectly conceivable, or would be if there were not so many black people here, that the Americans decide to *liberate* South Africa. Isn't it? That is to say to keep the horrors of communism away, all the freedom fighters in South Africa would turn South Africa into another Vietnam. (p. 10)

Elsewhere he states that none of the bellicosity exhibited in other parts of the world is forthcoming in the case of South Africa (Baldwin, 1986).

Here I posit that Baldwin's work became a key site of connection between the African American and South African experiences. We thus see how a teenage Lewis Nkosi in South Africa in the 1950's was deeply affected by Baldwin's work. Recalling Nkosi in a 2010 obituary, Jürgen Schadeberg, described Nkosi as "larking about for a week with a James Baldwin paperback in his pocket" (Herbstein, 2010, para. 3). Herbstein notes that Nkosi and Nat Nakasa among others "exposed the injustices of apartheid, often in the language of American writers and films" (para. 3). Thus, the affective community created by the work of African American writers in the 1950's was extended to South Africa in the writing tone adopted by African writers such as Nkosi. This shows how collective affects extend beyond their original source.

As illustrated earlier, Baldwin was also deeply affected by the South African experience. He states: "One's got to face the fact that we police the globe - we, the Americans, police the globe for a very good reason. We, like the South African black miners, know exactly what they're protecting when you talk about the free world" (Baldwin, 1968, p. 14). The atmospheric similarity between the black South African and African American experience meant that these two worlds became intimately connected. Baldwin's exemplars of extreme violence therefore became the American South (although he showed how the South was in fact not much different from the rest of America) and South Africa.

For Anderson (2009), "the atmosphere has long been associated with the uncertain, disordered, shifting and contingent—that which never quite achieves the stability of form" (p. 78). While belonging to the affective community and constantly transforming, atmospheres evade distinct boundaries and are indeterminate (Anderson, 2009; Dufrenne, 1973). This is much like Baldwin's writing which Nkosi (1999) describes as resistant to static states, provisional and becoming. Nkosi notes that Baldwin's writing style forged a discourse on race that was "deliberately unstable, highly provisional, endlessly deferred, designed to obstruct any easy or uncomplicated play of identities: a syntax so fluid and mutable that it all but drove black radicals crazy" (p. 104). However, even as Baldwin's writing evaded essences, there is a real sense that it belonged to a particular affective community of the downtrodden. This is why it was able to reach across the waters of the Atlantic and resonate with black South African's. Affect is not simply transferable from one context to another in ways that reify affective life. Lived experience in various contexts enables atmospheres to be reworked and taken up by others with whom they resonate (Anderson, 2009). Even though there are points of radiation and envelopment, the location of atmospheres is vague and ambiguous and is more easily accessible through tone (Böhme, 2006). The atmospheric cross currents of racial oppression suggest that while Baldwin had not ever physically been in South Africa, affectively, he may as well have been a resident.

The notion of affective atmosphere allows us to understand how one is immediately aware of a certain set of experiences and reality when one comes into the space of a group from which the affect emanates. We can see an example of this in Baldwin and Nkosi's initial meeting. Thus, on meeting Baldwin for the first time soon after Nkosi's arrival to the United States, Nkosi (1999) remarked that Baldwin "first noticed the grin, as if he could not believe you were real, that you had actually managed to escape the apartheid regime …" (p. 110). Nkosi also recalls that Baldwin asked a lot of questions about South Africa on the occasion of the dinner of their first meeting. Nkosi and Baldwin met a few times in New York and London. Nkosi notes that Baldwin was generally generous with his assistance and time when he called upon him to help with various courses such as the Free Ngugi Committee during Ngugi wa Thiong'o's detention in Kenya.

APARTHEID NARRATIVES

Apartheid was a period characterized by formalized white supremacy complete with legalized segregation, dispossession of black land and property through forced removals, barred access to meaningful employment and a host of everyday racisms (Biko, 2004). In this section of the chapter, I look at a few narratives[1] of adults reflecting on their experiences during the period of apartheid. This inward turn towards South Africa is meant to illustrate the similarities between the white supremacist racism of the United States and that of the apartheid system of South Africa.

The extract reproduced below is an excerpt of a narrative by an African woman reflecting on her childhood interactions with white children. Even in the face of outright abuses metered out to her brothers and their friends, there was an element of pleasure at interacting with the young white male abusers. It is this accepted sense of inferiority that Biko (2004) sought to dispel with his avocations of Black Consciousness:

> … my brothers and their friends were once pushed into the boots of the farm owners' cars, driven by the latter's sons at excessive speed – deliberately hitting the rocks – for miles in the heat. This was to teach these young boys that they had to heed the orders of the *kleinbase* (little masters). My brothers and their friends were expected to run when invited by the young men inside the "masters'' homes. However, they had to take turns entering the house, since a big group of young black men gathered in a small space would leave a smell. It did not bother them to stand in the heat, waiting for their turn to enter, as they would at least have something special to report later. (Narrative 3, para. 3)

Speaking of American racism, Baldwin (1968) may as well have been responding to the preceding extract:

> We are a nation within a nation, a captive nation within a nation. Yes, and you do flaunt it. You talk to us as though we were not there. The real pain, the real danger is that white people have always treated Negroes this way. You've always treated Sambo this way. We always were Sambo for you, you know we had no feelings, we had no ears, no eyes. (p. 9)

The woman quoted earlier continues her story by recalling how she was not allowed to play with the white little girl because she was too dark skinned. Her friends with lighter skin tones could play with the white girl within particular parameters: "My privileged friends however had a duty to ensure that *Sussie* did not eat our funny food cooked in the *storesh* (workers quarters) lest it made her ill" (Narrative 3, para. 4).

Becoming ill as a result of eating food cooked in the workers quarters or *storesh* creates a value neutral physiological response while hiding the prejudicial belief that *Sussie* is better than the people that don't get sick from consuming the same food. It also conceals the fact that the *storesh* is probably an unhygienic place in which to prepare food. Those who are black eat inferior food in inferior conditions.

The extract below points to the impotent rage of a black man when he could not deal with being forcedly removed from his house to make room for a white settlement during apartheid South Africa. It appears that his helpless rage led to his suicide. "On the day that the families were to move out of Vasco, I was torn from my sleep by the loud wailing of one of our neighbours, Mrs Claassen. I later learnt that she had just returned from an early-morning visit to her sister to discuss the final arrangements for her family's move later that day. On entering her dwelling she was confronted by the lifeless body of her husband, James, dangling from a beam" (Narrative 4, para. 11).

The violence to which Baldwin (1970) and Biko (2004) refer became the reality of the township that this narrator (N4) was forcibly moved to:

> And indeed, on our first Saturday in Bishop Lavis, we learnt that a man had been brutally killed two streets away from ours. News of similar incidents was to reach us virtually every Saturday morning thereafter. Gangs of unemployed young men preyed on wage earners in Bishop Lavis on Friday

> nights, because on Fridays they received their weekly wages. These labourers were easy prey for gangsters, as there was no lighting in any of the streets in the township and people reached their homes quite late because of the poor public transportation system. (Narrative 4, para. 16)

The same narrator (N4) quotes Biko to make sense of his anger: “Deep inside [the black person’s] anger mounts at the accumulating insult [of apartheid], but he vents it in the wrong direction—on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people” (Biko, 1978/1988, p. 42).

Baldwin and Mead (1972) reflect on the destructive potential of poverty and rage: “I do know that we are surrounded by poverty and rage, and I know how explosive a formula that is” (p. 172). For Baldwin and Mead, black people are not driven by a death instinct. They believe that all black people want to live: “The black man, or boy, begins to lash out. He begins to fight and he really has to prepare himself to die, because you cannot accept going through the world covered with white people’s spit” (pp. 104-105).

The example of the apartheid narratives used here clearly point to the convergence of the African American experience and that of apartheid South Africa. Through atmospheric affect, Baldwin appears to have reflected upon and written about most aspects of the oppression of black people. Masilela (2009) is of the view that in his later years, Baldwin was participating in an established lineage of the recognition of the political significance of South Africa for the black world and African Americans. For Masilela,

> [the] interconnections between South Africa and Black America are deep rooted and of long duration: stretching from the profound effects in South Africa of the emergence of Afro-American independent churches in the late nineteenth century through the effects of Marcus Garvey’s movement on the awakening of political consciousness in the South Africa of the 1930’s. (p. 5)

Baldwin’s (1986) critique of apartheid South Africa can be seen as an affective solidarity with the black people of South Africa.

EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTIONS ON POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Bringing this circle to a close, I move from transatlantic Southern racisms centered on Baldwin’s connection to South Africa, to affective atmosphere, apartheid era accounts of racism, and close with my own experiential reflections of post-apartheid South Africa. Here I borrow from Berlant’s (2008) account of exploring another way of politically tracking affective intensities without determining their status as dramatic or, even, as events. In looking into the everyday of my lived experiences in a post-apartheid South Africa, together with Berlant, I recognize that

> most of social life happens in such modes of lower case drama, as we follow out pulsations of habituated patterning that make possible getting through the

> day (the relationships, the job, the life) while the brain chatters on, assessing things in focused and unfocused ways. (p. 6)

When we experience certain feelings, these feelings make us stop to think, thus making us think about feelings historically (Berlant). The recognition of these affects makes us pause our everyday life activities: “Stopping to think puts on minor breaks, making alternative agency and affectivity imaginable but not yet achieved within the shared world of the present that is in intensified suspension” (Berlant, p. 6). I take up these considerations in my reflections of my own interrupted moments in ordinary present day South Africa which falls outside of the apartheid epoch and indeed outside the period which Baldwin wrote of this country. This section presents a series of three reflections about my own experiences.

Reflection 1

Removing his phone from his face for an instant, he searches me out and says, “Lieza wants to know the font size and type. It is 72 and I used Calibri,” I respond while tottering from a ladder, conducting the finishing touches to the preparations for the exhibition. He returns the phone to his ear, “It is Calibri,” he tells her. The word is emphasized. Only, he is not just telling Lieza the font type, but correcting my pronunciation. It stings. I shrug my shoulders and catch my manager’s eye. We smile our exasperation for we have encountered this before. I have an ally in the moment but the sting is deep. The corrector of my pronunciation is about 20 years old. He is a student assistant for a project that I am project managing. I was an English major and have previously taught and supervised postgraduate research at this institution. This history is rendered meaningless in this moment. I am a boy in a need of tutoring by the all-knowing white male. In the moment, my skin color has foreclosed maturation and knowledge. The producer of knowledge is white. I am the recipient. I become the boy and he the man. Our positions inverted. The gardener and the master. I cannot own *his* language. There is no high drama in this incident. It is a moment in Kathleen Stewart’s (2010) politics of the ordinary to be found in everyday life and its ordinary affect.

Baldwin (1949) recognized the location of the black person outside of history. Commenting on an isolated community in the backwaters of Switzerland in the 1940’s, he notes

> These people cannot be, from the point of view of power, strangers anywhere in the world; they have made the modern world, in effect, even if they do not know it. The most literate among them is related, in a way that I am not, to Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo … Go back a few centuries and they are in their full glory—but I am in Africa, watching the conquerors arrive. (p. 140)

A few months after the scene outlined above, I am at the launch of a drama event, and I overhear two young black women in conversation. The first speaker says something about the beautiful façade. She pronounces the word façade with a *k* rather than an *s*. Her companion laughs and mixing isiXhosa and English corrects her, “It is façade sana, not fakade.” The tone and laughter is contagious and both women have a hearty laugh and high five before separating. My friend and I have been looking on, and we laugh too. I am struck by the difference in the way I and the lady that had pronounced the word façade incorrectly responded to correction. I am cognizant of the fact that the two women in this story are in a relationship that is not mediated by race and that they may be friends. Crucially though, in the correction, there is no attempt to assert power over the other.

In a similar incident, returning to the apartheid archive narratives addressed earlier, a narrative recalling a childhood experience during the period of apartheid suggests how, when left unchecked, supposedly innocent interactions can be internalized with adverse effects. Through the next extract we see that through her interaction with whiteness, the enemy was later internalized such that she experienced her mother as an embarrassment to her. She recounts her mother’s fondness of using Afrikaans words:

> The one word (amongst many) that never leaves my mind whenever I think of those years is *aandete,* which means dinner in Afrikaans. Due to her limited knowledge of the language and the fact this was not one of the languages she regularly spoke, she pronounced the word as ‘andete’. A young white Afrikaans-speaking boy from a neighbouring farm was most entertained when he heard her using this word. Later, however, he ‘corrected’ her pronunciation. This episode caused me endless embarrassment at the time. (Narrative 3, para. 2)

Reflection 2

A second recollection takes me back a few years ago to a post–graduate class that I taught.

A particular script appears to have been developed in post–graduate classes. In the final years of psychology studies, classes are decidedly white with black students making up a minority. Yes, in Africa. The script that students have come to expect is that white students will excel with top grades. Black students will manage to pass. This script is so entrenched that all that participate in the drama expect no variations. Students and teachers of all hues know what to expect. Having gone through the system myself, I know what is expected. Since my student days however, I have done some critical reflection on classroom politics. The grades of the first two assignments of this particular post–graduate class show no difference in grades between black and white students. While there are some poorly performing blacks, there are also poorly performing whites but the top performing students are two black women.

One of the white average performers catches up with me as I walk back to my office after class. I know her well and I recall teaching her at an undergraduate class two years before. I also wrote her a positive reference to support her application for postgraduate study. She is unhappy. In fact, she is silently seething. I see this in her bearing and her flushed cheeks. “I am not happy with my grades. I have looked at your feedback and compared my work to some of my peers and I am not sure what you want". Something rises up within me and I am a little breathless. The pores of my private places constrict and perspiration flushes my armpits. We enter my office and I compose myself as I sit down. She remains standing over me. I explain my assessment of her work. I then refer her to the top performing student that happens to be a black female, to assist her understanding of how to answer the assignments with the level of critical competence required.

I am not sure if she takes my advice. She sits sullenly in my classes. Her final examination grades are not much of an improvement from her earlier assignments. I know that this confirms an accurate assessment of her work. But I too have been inducted in the script of white competence. I want to be fair to this student and I don't want my grading to be influenced by any lurking sense of vengeance and latent rage from my own experiences as a student. In my examiners report to the external examiner, I ask the white male external examiner to pay close attention to this student's script as well as the two top performing students who happen to be black females. The external examiner confirms my grading. The student has now completed her studies and is presumably a psychologist. I have encountered her in public spaces on two occasions after graduation. She does not see me. She looks through me. I do not look at her.

Reflection 3

The third recollection is of an incident which occurred as I was driving home in bumper to bumper traffic about three years ago.

The cars are moving very slowly in a stop go manner. At that pace it is not easy to bump another car unless you are not paying attention. My car suddenly jerks forward and my head hits against the head rest. Fortunately, I do not sustain any injuries. I look back and realize that the car behind me has bumped into mine. Shaken, I pull over and disembark. The car behind me follows suit.

The driver is a young white woman. We do not speak as we both examine my bumper. Except for a hint of paint discolouration at the point of impact there is no damage. "Oh, there is no damage", she says. Her voice conveys no emotion. She looks at her own bumper and without another word she climbs into her car. I feel relieved but cowed at the same time. I return to my own car and the slow moving traffic but then suddenly a feeling of deep indignation takes over me.

The young woman had wronged me but had failed to acknowledge this. The only words she had uttered had succeeded in downplaying or erasing her complicity. She had not owned up to bumping into my car and potentially injuring me. The construction of the aggressor as the black male cowed me into silence. I dared not raise my voice or accuse her of being reckless or negligent. Moreover, although I did not consciously contemplate it then, a black man demonstrating any anger at a young white woman in a public space, would have opened himself up for judgment and abuse from the other motorists on the road. So, I seethed and simmered alone. I was angry at myself for being a walkover and at her for being the white madam who can do no wrong. I saw clearly how the meta-structures of power came to define the character of this remote incident on the highway. Here, history was coloring the present in a very particular way.

I have spent a significant amount of time attempting to make sense of my disabling rage. I have tried to link this incident to others that have made me feel like a little boy. Fortunately, many black men come before me. Strong men like Biko and Baldwin, who when they were brought down low, would sit at their desks, reflect deeply and document their pain. I have learned that it is necessary to link seemingly innocuous once off events, to a complex lineage of past events and histories. I concur with Vera and Feagin (2004), who state that perpetrators of racism and other isms often act now, "but not just now, for they and their reference groups carry congealed actions of the past into the present—often with an eye into the future" (p. 67). So, while I was humiliated in a moment in time, I understand that black men were abused in the past and that these abuses carry on in morphed forms. They are no longer limited to the garden boy but have insinuated themselves into the modern day post-apartheid workplace. Finally, these once off events are also directed at the future. I, as the black man and those watching my humiliation, must know our place in future.

For those of us that experience these moments of abusive infantalisation, if we dissociate from our history, we will keep chasing our tails and over analyse what our role in our abuse is. We need to consider the peculiar historical relationships that are conceptualised as racist so as to understand why a particular event happens. Following Berlant (2008), we stop to think about feelings historically. Baldwin (1949) summarizes the quandary facing the black person:

> One is absolutely forced to make perpetual qualifications and one's own reactions are always cancelling each other out. It is this, really which has driven so many people mad, both white and black. One is always in the position of having to decide between amputation and gangrene. (p. 94)

CLAIMING BALDWIN

Throughout earlier generations, in recognition of their common bondage, leading South African scholars such Tiyo Soga, Selema Thema, Elijah Makiwane, and SEK Mqhayi have been influenced by their American counterparts such as WEB Du Bois and Booker T Washington (Masilela, 2011). In the second half of the last century however, Baldwin has been of seminal importance to the unfolding South African narrative. Through the application of the concept of atmospheric affect, this chapter has shown how important South Africa was for Baldwin and conversely, the value of Baldwin to South Africa. This makes it possible to speak of James Baldwin in South Africa even though he had never physically been to the country. A Southern axis of racism and white supremacist oppression was highlighted as a space for mutual recognition between South Africans and their African American counterparts. The works of Anderson (2009) and Deleuze and Guattari (1994) among other affect theorists were applied to give an affective lens to the generative relations between Baldwin and South Africa. In order to track the stain of white supremacy, Baldwin's writings were used to make sense of apartheid era narratives as well as post-apartheid reflections. Berlant's (2008) conceptualization of the moment of stopping to think historically was productive for interpreting the racist incident in context. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates that while Baldwin can be claimed by all the downtrodden people of the world, South Africa remained an important lens through which to view the world as the ultimate exemplar of the extremes to which whiteness can consolidate itself. In his view, white supremacy is unsustainable and when it goes unchecked its end can only be a violent explosion through "The Fire Next Time." After his death in 1987, a series of explosions have rocked the United States of America and post-apartheid South Africa. These explosions, marked by the 9/11 calamity, the killing of Trayvon Martin, the Marikana massacre and the violence overtaking the United States and South Africa, suggest that the foundations of whiteness have been bolstered by capital and have yet to be uprooted. If Baldwin was alive today, he would still find remarkable parallels between black life in Harlem and the streets of Johannesburg, South Africa.

NOTES

[1] These narratives were collected through the Apartheid Archive Project of which the writer is a member. To preserve the anonymity of contributors, narratives are named in the order in which they were collected (e.g. Narrative 1).

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DWAN HENDERSON SIMMONS

4. FROM JAMES' *PORTRAIT* TO BALDWIN'S *ROOM*

Dismantling the Frames of American Manhood

> We are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it. (Baldwin, 1985)

This essay proposes James Baldwin's work as a lens for unifying racialized and often separated, American literary traditions; doing so further explodes the damningly normalized constructions of race, gender, and sexual power that have historically undermined inclusive American identity formation. There is, perhaps, no more seminal pairing for this exercise than Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). In *Portrait*, James (1881) writes a female consciousness awakened to the limitations of gender performance and seems intent on exposing the tenuousness of a manly identity that necessitates her subordination. Through the titular suggestion of gender's physical boundaries, as well as the exposure of masculine forces that maintain those boundaries for "the lady," the readers of the novel come to question, as does its author, "what it is open in their destiny to *be*" (James, p. xxvi). In Isabel, James jumbles the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine, ultimately writing a text in which hybridized gender identity could be imagined, but not realized. What he seems to hope for is, much like Baldwin's epigraph suggests, a world in which Isabel Archer's and Ralph Touchett's differences make them no less womanly or manly, where they might simply exist as entities valued for what they are rather than inhibited by what they are not. As Baldwin indicates, this potential for gender re-conception is actually *within* each of us, a hybrid space—one that is not masculine or feminine, as society necessitates, but one that is unnamed and "androgynous"—"inconvenient" even—because it is not normalized. It is in this type of space that both James and Baldwin could have felt whole. But, James insinuates in *Portrait* that such a reconstruction of gender is dangerous, particularly for a male, for masculine anxiety creates circumstances under which male aberrations from the norm are disparaged, or even destroyed. Because of it, while James desperately wished to invalidate the social taxonomies that hampered both his lady and him, he found himself trapped by them, imprisoned in a hell that prevented self-actualization.

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While Baldwin found kinship in James and his model of gender critique, his own experiences necessitated that he trouble manhood further, for as a Black man and a homosexual, whiteness compounded with feminization loomed as subordinating presences. His blackness was a visible marker that historically placed him outside the confines of American masculine precepts. His homosexuality, an unseen marker, further displaced him. Suggesting that a person need not be raced or gendered, but conceived as something apart from racial *and* gender binaries and their connotations, Baldwin radically complicates James' fictionalized masculine uncertainty in his own novel, *Giovanni's Room*, effecting a reading of American manhood that calls into question the historically gendered, raced, and sexualized confines of citizenship and place in American society.

In *Giovanni's Room*, instead of within the mind of a woman relegated to marginalized spaces, Baldwin's text takes place primarily in the consciousness of the male skirting the edges of marginalization and fighting with all of his might not to cross a socially imposed line. According to Baldwin biographer, James Campbell (1991), Giovanni is Baldwin's Isabel Archer. And, clearly, Giovanni, whose room alternately serves as safe-haven and prison, is confined to spatial boundaries similar to those in which Gilbert Osmond and the other males in the *Portrait* confine Isabel to differing degrees. Here, however, there are not four pieces of a frame, but the four walls of a room. In that respect, Campbell's point is well taken. Baldwin's novel is far more complex than Campbell's reading suggests, though. Yes, Giovanni is subordinated, and yes, one can easily link his plight to Isabel's. He wishes to be free, to choose his existence, and to throw off the labels that plague him; more importantly, he wishes the man he loves to do the same. But, just as the focus of James' novel seems to be the artists of Isabel's portrait and their anxious masculinity, the focus of *Giovanni's Room* is much more the masculine dilemma that necessitates Giovanni's subordination. Rather than in separate characters seeking to inhabit proposed masculine ideals, however, Baldwin situates the discomforting, dominant, and vigilantly heterosexual male consciousness, as well as the constructs that undermine its primacy, in one white male figure—David, an American male in Europe gifted with the space and opportunity to imagine identity outside of socio-historical boundaries and privilege. His individual consciousness, not the embattled psyche of the subordinated feminine self, becomes a battlefield where representative masculinity and its challenges, physically manifested in Giovanni, wage war. As a result, Baldwin writes, as Dwight McBride (2005) argues, "a novel [not] about gay sexuality as much as it is a novel about the social and discursive forces that make gay sexuality a 'problem'" (p. 48). The result is a text that takes the psychological realism of Henry James to a new level of interiority, revealing the war over performed manhood as an intensely internal and racialized one both projected onto and emanating from the social psyche.

The novel is remarkably raced, but it is notably absent of characters early scholars would deem raced. Of his reasons for writing the novel in this way, Baldwin (1956) says:

> Giovanni came out of something I had to face. I certainly could not possibly have—not at that point in my life—handled the other great weight, the "Negro Problem." The sexual-moral light was a hard thing to deal with. I could not handle both propositions in the same book. There was no room for it. I might do it differently today, but then, to have a black presence in the book at that moment, and in Paris, would have been quite beyond my powers. (p. 239)

But if, as Baldwin often contended, sexuality and race are "entwined" in America, "the sexual-moral light" is inextricably linked to "the Negro Problem." Baldwin's exploration of the "sexual-moral light" necessarily revolves around whiteness, for it is against the construction of a dominant, white male social and sexual identity that the "negative" space of the homosexual male and the black male exist (Roediger, 1991, p. 3). Just as James articulates the ambiguities of maleness before introducing us to a female consciousness that will be subjugated by them in *Portrait*, Baldwin unveils what exactly a white man believes he should be—the portrait of man—in *Giovanni's Room* before introducing us to the victims of his pathological mythology, including his own psyche. In short, Baldwin unmasks performed, white American manhood as both socialization and choice, damningly obstructing realization of inclusive self-identity.

THE FACE OF A CONQUEROR

Baldwin begins his text in the tradition of Poe's "William Wilson: A Tale" (1839) or Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912); he introduces us to a fractured figure flashing back to his sins and offering limited repentance. David stares out of his window in the South of France drinking to forget, studying his

> reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. [His] reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, [his] blond hair gleams. [His] face is like a face you have seen many times. [His] ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 3)

Just as James positions all other models of manhood against the historical Anglo-Saxon representative, Lord Warburton, in *Portrait*, so too does Baldwin begin by tapping into the historical elements of whiteness and manhood in introducing us to David. The dimming light shrouds his appearance, clouding what we soon learn is his distinctly Nordic exterior. Much like James' opening, Baldwin's is a revelation of shadows, symbolism, and incongruence that shape the domain in which David will battle himself. His "tall" stature suggests that he is physically imposing; in fact, Baldwin likens it to an "arrow." This arrow resonates of masculine penetration and dominance, much like the elongating shadows of male characters in feminized garden lawn space that open James' novel. It is also a weapon of war—arguably as physically brutal a representation of primacy as Lord Warburton's "crumpled pair of dog-skin gloves" (James, 2002, p. 6). Quickly, Baldwin builds on this link, locating David, with his "gleam[ing]" blond hair and markedly familiar face, to the brutal history of the Anglo-Saxon male, evoking the patriarchy and violence of colonization with the image of "death-laden plains."

Yet, Baldwin also uses the arrow imagery to blur the lines between oppressor and oppressed. Although the "arrow" alludes to the violence of colonization, the weapon is a shared one linking the Native's and Anglo-Saxon's pasts. The image recalls the violence of conquest on "death-laden plains"—violence that leaves the Native displaced or destroyed, the soon-to-be American male questioning his future, and neither sure of his identity. Baldwin intimates as much, for when faced with a boundary to their conquest, "an ocean," David's forefathers could no longer claim the sanctity of Europe or notions of European primacy; the plains they had crossed and the destruction in their wake pointed not to their civilization (not to Europe), but to their savagery (to the reality of colonization). Baldwin undermines the outward purity of white masculinity, "darke[ning]" it with its "past" and questioning its historical price. At the same time, the created parallel between European and Native American is our first inclination of the symbiosis that will dominate the text, foreshadowing the doom of both dominant and marginalized that later becomes the novel's focus. Interestingly enough, much like Lord Warburton's "white hat," which is "too large" for him, the weight of this "past" seems too heavy for David (James, 2002, p. 5). Baldwin opens by questioning the purity of David's raced, masculine identity and articulating the dichotomous relationship between 'center' and 'other'. Although David's crime is unknown, Baldwin's opening implies that at the root of it is the weight of his whiteness and the battle for dominance historically embedded in it.

Baldwin's continued revelation of David further blurs preconceived boundaries. As if abiding by James' dictum in his "Preface" to *Portrait*,[1] Baldwin unfurls David to readers incrementally, moving from exteriority to interiority by degrees. Awareness of his whiteness echoes in most of David's thoughts, but his complicity in perpetuating its darkness and the inevitability of his current state does as well. For instance, David notes that on his journey away from the South of France,

> the train will be the same, the people, struggling for comfort, and even dignity on the straight-backed, wooden, third-class seats will be the same, and I will be the same. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 4)

In David's reverie, the projected train journey is both literal and metaphorical. Traveling away from the countryside will be lengthy, literally uncomfortable, and closely quartered in the third-class cabin. The "seats" are "straight-backed, wooden"—their rigidity suggesting the impossibility of "comfort" or "dignity" while in them. Yet, the "same[ness]" of those relegated to seats in the "third-class" environment takes on a larger degree of symbolism, for it foreshadows David's psychic battle. As the novel unfolds, David refuses the potential "comfort" that Giovanni offers because he sees only its "[in]dignity"—the male-male love that, in his mind, makes him a "third class citizen." David's commonality with those who will be on the train—the shared struggle of humanity—is deceiving, for Baldwin does not write, "and the people [and I], struggling for comfort." He writes, "[they] will be the same, and I will be the same," suggesting an intrinsic separation between David and those around him. Baldwin seems to ask whether David, with the face of a conqueror, truly *can* be a part of the community, *or* if there is some aspect of his being that will keep him removed from it despite his similarities to all who are a part of it.

To this point in the novel, the focus is racial identity; David's personal crisis with his sexual identity emerges later in the text. Baldwin begins with whiteness as root of David's struggles, laying the groundwork for examining an alternately othered, sexual existence. In this sense, he both adopts and inverts James' paradigm at the beginning of *Portrait*. Baldwin uses the illusory sense of community within the scene to take us deeper into David's mind just as James uses the gender distortion of men communing at tea in the garden to reveal their varied typologies. As David considers the journey more fully, he divulges a deeper fear—the enigmatic thing that casts a shadow over him, that which he believes separates him from all around him. Baldwin (1956) writes,

> We will ride through the same changing countryside northward, leaving behind the olive trees and the sea and all of the glory of the stormy southern sky, into the mist and rain of Paris. Someone will offer to share a sandwich with me, someone will offer me a sip of wine, someone will ask me for a match … At each stop, recruits in their baggy brown uniforms and colored hats will open the compartment door to ask *Complet?* We will all nod Yes, like conspirators, smiling faintly at each other as they continue through the train. Two or three of them will end up before our compartment door, shouting at each other in their heavy, ribald voices, smoking their dreadful army cigarettes. There will be a girl sitting opposite me who will wonder why I have not been flirting with her … It will all be the same, only I will be stiller. (p. 4)

On this ride, David will be the beneficiary of kindness, of community. He will have something that he can, perhaps, offer in return. He, like those around him in the train cabin, will be the object of some scrutiny, under a microscope in a sense. When the army recruits travel through the train, there will be the air of "conspiracy"—that feeling of "sameness" heightened in the face of a regulatory force. David will be riding away from the "glory of the stormy southern sky," returning to the "mist and rain of Paris"—a site of hoped-for-resistance that, by novel's end, is one of submission to convention. In Baldwin's descriptions of the weather, there is diminishing potency—the difference between sublimity and the commonplace, the infinite possibility for a "storm" of resistance and feebleness implied by the veiled "mist."

In similar contrast are the army recruits, with their "heavy, ribald voices," who bombard David senses—sight, sound, and smell—and impose themselves on an environment characterized by its forced quietude. These men are incongruent with the scene; their dominance and forcefulness expected, but invasive in the closed quarters. Tellingly, their presence strikes to the heart of David's internal disquietude. Their camaraderie, uniformity, and martialism are hyper-masculine in the face of David's inaction with the "girl sitting opposite [him]" and his "stillness." The contrast reinforces the very lack of potency to which the fading storm imagery alludes. Read against the virility of the soldiers, David is effectually marginal, and this small community of riders is resonant of a larger community seeking to inhabit defined roles—"conspir[ing]" together to appear to be what forces of convention expect to be. Like Warburton, Mr. Touchett, and Ralph, they occupy the same space, but are subject to the "mill of convention" (James, 2002, p. 551). When David thinks, "they will be the same, only I will be stiller," there is a realization of his complicity and falsity in perpetuating the silent forces of social normalcy. His inaction only emasculates him further.

"WE CAN'T INVENT OUR MOORING POSTS"

Four pages into chapter one, Baldwin shifts gears in his painstakingly precise revelation of David, and in doing so, he reminds the reader again of the opening's import. The young man thinks, "And the countryside is still tonight, this countryside reflected through my image in the pane" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 4). Baldwin employs David's reflection, with its long, penetrating shape, as the lens through which the reader views a French countryside known for its rolling hills, beauty, and fertility. Is that landscape still, or is it merely so because of David's "still[ness]"? Baldwin again toys with David as physical representation of Anglo-European dominance, for this ripe landscape is mediated through David, just as his perception of masculinity will be mediated through the shadow of his whiteness. As the last light of day fades, the image of the land will grow dimmer, and only David's impression will remain.

The internal war that this façade both fuels and masks shows Baldwin's firm revision of Jamesian tropes. Baldwin merges his revelation of David's homosexuality with discussion of his lone heterosexual relationship in the text—that with Hella. He juxtaposes that which is expected of a man, that which is deemed unmanly, and the potential for freedom from these expectations. David recalls,

> it was too late by that time. I was already with Giovanni. I had asked her to marry me before she went away to Spain; and she laughed and I laughed but that, somehow, all the same, made it more serious for me, and I persisted … I told her that I had loved her once, and I made myself believe it. But I wonder if I had. I was thinking, no doubt, of our nights in bed, of the peculiar innocence and confidence, which will never come again, which had made those night so delightful, so unrelated to past, present, or anything to come, so unrelated, finally to my life since it was not necessary for me to take any but the most mechanical responsibility for them. And these nights were being acted out under a foreign sky, with no one to watch, no penalties attached—it was this last fact which was our undoing, for nothing is more unbearable, once one has it, than freedom. I suppose this was why I asked her to marry me; to give myself something to be moored to … People can't unhappily invent their mooring posts, their lovers & their friends … The great difficulty is to say yes to life. (Baldwin, 1956, pp. 4-5)

David "laughs" in the discomfort and oddity of the moment. Their laughter triggers something in him, though—some place in him that sees the amusement as an affront to his manhood—or, at least, a sense of manhood troubled by the fact that he "was already with Giovanni." This makes him "more serious about it," largely because the truth of the matter is that "it was too late"; his proposal is merely a means of playing the role that he believes he should play. When he later wonders whether his love for Hella had been a delusion, whether he had only robotically, "mechanical[ly]," engaged in what was expected of him, it is clear that he has neither connected fully with Hella, nor with himself. Conversely, subtly, Baldwin reveals that, under this same sky, David has also had the "freedom" to be himself, to be "with Giovanni … with no one to watch, no penalties attached." Unfortunately, "nothing is more unbearable, once one has it than freedom," for David cannot bear what it exposes in him. Because it is pulling him toward an identity space that is *other*, it is a dangerous freedom. His proposal to Hella, then, is rendered reactive, a need to "moor" himself amidst strong currents pulling him toward what he has been socialized not to accept.

What ensues is a seminal realization—"people can't invent their mooring posts, their lovers, & their friends." This retrospective and melancholic insight suggests to David that, despite his resistance, he is *meant* to be with a "boy." He appears profoundly aware of the heterosexual trap in which he lives, yet he cannot accept the escape. Its source is external, but he has allowed it to fester within him, eating away at his soul and condemning him. David understands far too late and still resists the need to "say yes to life"—his life, his needs, his identity, that which is given to him, not that which he believes he should have—because this means that he must take the freedom to invent his own conception of manhood.

Baldwin (1956) ends this segment of the opening chapter with an awakening in David—not one that suggests future triumph or a sense of completion, but a sense of resignation and even despair. Moving closer to admitting that his identity is one built upon untruths, David thinks,

> Now, from this night, from this coming morning, no matter how many beds I find myself in between now and my final bed, I shall never be able to have any more of those boyish, zestful affairs—which are, really, when one thinks of it, a kind of higher, or anyway, more pretentious masturbation. People are too varied to be treated so lightly. I am to various to be trusted. If this were not so I would not be alone in this house tonight. Hella would not be on the high seas. And Giovanni would not be about to perish, sometime between this night and this morning, on the guillotine. (p. 5)

While he laments the innocence lost in his experiences, in the unraveling of his deceits and conceits, what stands out in this passage is his understanding that like himself, others are "varied" both internally and externally—far "too varied" to disregard their depths. Furthermore, his inability to reconcile himself to the facet of his identity that he deems substandard makes him a danger to others. If he cannot be true to himself, then he can in no way be true to anyone else. His lies lead his partners to a hell of their own—Hella alone to the "high seas" and Giovanni to the "the guillotine."

"BUT HE IS A BOY … AND I AM A *MAN*"

Effectively, after making us aware of David's toxicity and the psychic mire in which he treads, Baldwin literally draws a line signaling the end of the previous segment. He next takes us further backward into David's psychology—to his first homosexual experience. David says, "I repent now—for all the good it does—one particular lie among the many lies I've told, lived, and believed … that I had never slept with a boy before." He finds "something fantastic in the spectacle … of having run so far, so hard … only to find [himself] brought up short once more before the bulldog in [his] own backyard" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 6). Echoing his author in "Nobody Knows My Name" (Baldwin, 1992), as well as Henry James, David leaves the States so that he may escape that which others him. But he cannot run from it, for the construct that makes his encounter with another male a problem is in his psyche, and without attending to what it has done to him, he cannot shake it—no matter his locale. Although David begins with an apology, he understands that his lies have had dire consequences, and he will have no absolution.

Foremost in this encounter is the self-loathing and raced, gendered hysteria that Baldwin exposes. David tells the reader of Joey, once his "best friend … [and] later … proof of some horrifying taint in [him]" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 6). A derivative of the French verb teindre, the word "taint" can be read in both a moral and racial sense. That this young man is, for David, evidence of his own corrupted manhood becomes clear as the brief narrative unfolds. At the same time, the course of the story shows us that Joey stains, or un-whitens him.

Their experience begins innocently enough. They are horsing around on a summer day in Coney Island. It is hot; the "heat coming up from the pavements and banging from the walls of houses with enough force to kill a man." The stifling heat reflects the hellish, reprehensible thing David sees in himself—that "something … [he] had not felt before, which mysteriously, and yet aimlessly, included" Joey and "kill[s] [his] man[hood]." Having showered and fallen asleep, he awakens to find Joey "examining the pillow with great, ferocious care." When he asks what is the matter, Joey believes that a bedbug has bit him, to which David replies, "You slob. You got bedbugs?" The bedbug theory is disproved, but it introduces a scene that David finds profoundly dirty. For the first time, David is fully conscious of himself and of someone else. The feeling of being with Joey is "like holding … some rare, exhausted, nearly doomed bird which [he] had miraculously happened to find"; it is life giving and wondrous (Baldwin, 1956, pp. 7-8). Here, Baldwin seems to allude to Ralph Touchett's wish for Isabel Archer to "soar above the heads of men" as he cannot (James, 2002, p. 329). It is a potentially exalting moment—one that could enable transcendence of ordinary strictures and bonds. Frightening though it may have been, the moment is ingrained in David's psyche, for it is a pure "act of love." Through it, there is resonance of

David's admonition that we cannot "invent our mooring posts." Feeling completion that he has never felt, all that he has to do is "say yes to life."

But the bird is "exhausted, doomed." In *Portrait*, Gilbert Osmond, though externally effeminate is internally masculine "convention itself"—a "missile" ready to down soaring thoughts of freedom or departures from gender normalcy; against him, neither Ralph Touchett, nor Isabel, have any defense. In *Giovanni's Room*, David cannot defend against the conventional forces within him. As he begins to regret his act with Joey, the perceived dirtiness of it overtakes him. The "lifetime" that was seemingly endless in his moment of elation proved to be "short … bounded by night … ended in the morning" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 8). When he looks at Joey in the light of day, he sees the raced and gendered existence that he has inherited weighing in on him, constricting him. His stages of recognition mirror the stages through which Baldwin reveals the character's identity to us. First, he is the conqueror, for he wakes to see Joey, "still sleeping, curled like a baby on his side … his mouth half open, his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow." While the day before, he had been proud of his larger size, he was now

> suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because [Joey] looked so innocent lying there, with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising … seemed monstrous. (p. 9)

Not yet fully cognizant of homosexuality as concern, David simply is aware that there is something "monstrous" about his seeming usurpation of innocence. David objectifies Joey, but he fears what he has done to him. Baldwin suggests briefly that the external representative of white maleness both recognizes and regrets his dominance of the weaker other.

Then, suddenly, as if he has had an epiphany, the alternality of his sexual act is borne in on him: "*But Joey is a boy.*" The vision of the scene before him changes in the instant of that recognition, just as the soldiers' presence on the train drive home his difference. David sees Joey anew,

> suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and promise and the mystery of that body made [him] suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which [he] would be tortured till madness came, in which [he] would lose [his] manhood. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 9)

Gone is the "innocence" of his first associations. Joey, though smaller, is like him—a boy, bodily the same, and therefore, in his psyche, sexually off-limits. Just as there is power in him, there is "power" in Joey, a "mystery" wrapped in the sinews and muscles of the male body. Joey's body becomes signifier for him. It is the darkness, the abyss, the physical manifestation of Foucault's (1990) "obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover," where lines blur and fear ensues, where the mind in need of order or classification loses its hold, or where, in this instance, David believes the man loses his identity—his singular white American "manhood" (p. 105). While the shadows ironically signify white masculine construction itself in all of its “heterosexism,” they simultaneously correspond to its opposite—what David perceives is the perversion in his buried homosexuality (Sedgwick, 2000, p. 711, n.1). Reminiscent of a joking Ralph Touchett, David seems to feels very seriously that he is “too perverted a representative of the nature of man” to be a man (James, 2002, p. 88). This darkness, then, represents *simultaneously* the weights of the “center” and the “other.” The boundaries of perceived gender and sexual absolutes are less distinct, and Baldwin locates David in the intersecting space, giving him a means to reclassify himself. In that space lies Baldwin’s hoped-for realization of the self, but David rejects it—several times, in fact.

Baldwin’s incorporation of this dark space—this “taint”— heavily impacts the remainder of the novel. Its import signals sexual and racial implications conjunctively. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2000) contends that “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (p. 711). Simply put, there is a symbiotic relationship between patriarchal dominance and male homosexuality; creation of an inter-masculine hierarchy is dependent upon the existence of something deemed less masculine or un-masculine. In terms of sexuality, then, demonizing homosexuality may be necessary to construct and maintain superior male heterosexuality, and this is precisely what happens within David’s consciousness.

However, just as masculine hierarchy is a dependent creation, so, too, is racial hierarchy. Toni Morrison (1992) argues that “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (p. 52). Whiteness as center of historical American self is defined analogously—by negation. Much like a reading of Eliot’s “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1914) or Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), it is often impossible to define what whiteness is, but it is always possible to indicate what it is not. When read together, then, Sedgwick’s and Morrison’s statements demonstrate the like delineations of sexual and raced otherness in opposition to maleness and whiteness. While Henry James could, sexuality masked, benefit from all of the privileges of whiteness, what is clear is that it is the same parasitic raced and gendered ideological center working to sustain itself that crafts both the alternatively-oriented and alternately-raced individual as the outsider.

Compounding the abysmal revelation of the homosexual act is David’s recollection that “Joey’s body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen till then” (Baldwin, 1956, p. 8). Although there is no mention of Joey being anything other than white, David reads him (and Baldwin positions him) as the darker other. Similar to Eric in Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1962), this sexual act with the other not only spoils David’s manhood, but *taints* his whiteness. Reinforcing Joey and this act as an infection, David begins to consider the reactions of the outside world—Joey’s mother seeing the sheets, his own father’s reaction, that of his own mother who had died long ago. The prescriptive identity that they represent bullying him, David thinks,

> A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened *in* me. (p. 8)

David's perception that he is descending into darkness, that he will reside in it, is one common in queer theory. As David Bergman (1991) argues, "the homosexual suffers a categorical, perhaps even ontological, otherness since he is made to feel his 'unlikeness' to the heterosexual acts and persons who gave him being…He is distanced without definition … [His is a] negativity of self." Yet, Bergman also notes that homosexuality is traditionally understood by the homosexual first in terms of "legend"—not only that which affirms who he is when he lacks a model for his "self," but also that which is geared to deter homosexual identity—in this case, "the half –heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words" (p. 30). David feels the pressure of normative, heterosexual, white, male constructions intrinsically, and he has learned them not only socially, but also familially. The "shame and terror" that he feels come not entirely because of the act itself, but because of the associations of that act in a larger social psyche. In Baldwin's oeuvre, because white, male identity is "built upon homophobic foundations," David cannot be a man if he has "[been] with a boy" (Bergman, p. 30). In his mind, his actions are, therefore, symptoms of a cancerous, cannibalistic entity that has been awakened and will consume him. Like Ralph or Mr. Touchett, in James' explorations, his perceived illness *invalidates* him. He believes that something is happening "*in* him" that changes him fundamentally. Because of it, he is much more aware of what he must *not* do if he wishes to be perceived as a man.

His decision to "pick up with a rougher, older crowd" and be "very nasty to Joey" antedates his similar treatment of Giovanni. In response to actions believed "un-manly," he aligns himself with those who are closer to "manhood" and adopts behaviors that are "rougher." He recalls that the "sadder [his treatment] made Joey, the nastier [he] became" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 10). In order to maintain accepted notions of manhood, he projects all of his bitterness, rage, and self-abhorrence onto Joey. He becomes the aggressor, punishing Joey for bringing to light the flaw that he sees in himself; in treating Joey so menacingly, David runs him away, metaphorically excising the part of him that is aberrant. Foreshadowing Giovanni's far more violent end, Baldwin establishes that David will do all that he must to destroy that which he believes makes him an invalid man. In hindsight, sadly, David realizes that he "began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began, that summer, the flight which has brought [him] to [the] darkening window" with which chapter one begins (p. 10). His recollections of what he calls "the incident with Joey" serve to identify a pattern—one of potential and constructed selves battling for life in his consciousness (p. 15).

The self-exploration that David undertakes is his means of searching for “the crucial, the definitive moment, the moment which changed all others” (Baldwin, 1956, p. 15). In it, he finds himself “pressing, in great pain, through a maze of false signals and abruptly locking doors.” By degrees, Baldwin journeys even further into the recesses of David’s mind. The door fastens on “the incident” for a moment, and trying to “find the germ of the dilemma which resolved itself, that summer into flight,” David searches the “reflection [he] is watching in the window as the night comes down outside,” questioning whether the answer is “locked” within it somehow. If not there, “it is trapped in the room with [him], always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to [him] than those foreign hills outside,” for though it is a part of him, he cannot locate it or recognize it (p. 10).

Perhaps fearing the latter, he searches more deeply. He queries the familiar, thinking back to the family of his youth and wondering if the disconnect was there. David’s youth is rootless. His father is a man who has drowned his pain in drinking and women. His sole wish is that “David…grow up to be a man. And when [he] say[s] man…[he] doesn’t mean a Sunday school teacher” (Baldwin, 1956, p. 15). Although he is a far different character than James’ Mr. Touchett, his words are reminiscent of Mr. Touchett’s admonition that Ralph Touchett should want to “do more than look at” Isabel; they are also resonant of Mr. Touchett’s questions about the “tone” of manhood that his son has adopted. Where Mr. Touchett’s ideology reflects the fact that a man pursues the girl he likes, David’s father’s suggests that a man is one who follows his whims and sews his oats at all costs. David learns what it means to be a man from one whose “manhood and self-respect, too” are notably absent (pp. 14-15). What becomes painfully clear is that David drinks in notions of manhood from a tainted fountain—one reliant on caprice and privilege.

Moreover, his Mother’s death has left him emotionally and psychologically scarred. Baldwin (1956) adopts James’ trope of the ‘absent’ mother figure and increases the trauma of it—heightening its impact as he does with all else. David’s mother is not only dead, but also a haunting presence in his subconscious. In his dream of his mother’s rotting body, there is a Freudian articulation of David’s fear of the female sexual self and an association of it, too, with the dark. Of his Mother, he says:

> I scarcely remember her at all, yet she figured in my nightmares, blind with worms, her hair as dry as metal and brittle as a twig, straining to press me against her body; that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive. (pp. 10-11)

Psychological realism in its truest sense, Baldwin inserts a frightening reading of the Oedipal complex. While the dream points to a fear of death and detachment from his mother, it also points to an early desire for and fear of being dreadfully enveloped in her love. In his dreams, therefore, she becomes symbolic and nightmarish. More importantly, she becomes sexualized. Envisioning her “straining to press [him] against her body” as her body “open[s]” and consuming him, the body and womb that gave him life are conflated, for he associates each with "putrescence." Because of it, his revulsion at being drowned in the abyss by his love for Joey and horror at his possible homosexuality can be read as a by-product of the womb, a *hysteria* of some sort embedded in his unconscious and externally reinforced. In his mind, homosexuality is fundamentally tied to female sexuality; this is not surprising, for his cry, "I'm a man," is a reaction to his fear of being feminized. Though he "[claws] and [cries]," he cannot seem to escape this fear.

David's flight from the States, then, is his attempt to repair the disease within him. To stay with Freud for a moment, the trigger for recalling David's "latent" memory with Joey is the experience with Giovanni and his eminent death by guillotine. In Freud's model, at the same time that David's "repression" (or "suppression" in this case) of the memory would lead to the recurrence of his homosexuality, the realization of the memory would allow him to deal with his hysteria and displace its effects on his unconscious. But, homosexuality is not a disease. For, David, it is also not a choice. It simply is, and Baldwin suggests that David must learn to say *yes* to who he is.

READING THE SPACE OF "GIOVANNI'S ROOM"

The actual space of Giovanni's Room (the room, itself) allows Baldwin to explicate the identity fragmentation that he evidences in the first chapter in a far more pronounced way. Additionally, his manipulation of James' model in *Portrait* becomes far more clear. In one portion of his psyche, David houses his subordinate self—the one who can be with Joey or Giovanni, defying gender norms. Akin to James' Ralph or even externally to Osmond, this portion of himself, should he allow it to see the light, would be the embodiment of a new gender safe-space. Yet, in another segment of his mind, there is a perceived dominant masculine force that not only casts his subordinate self as feminized and dark, but also calls for its extinction. Like the French countryside in the opening scene, the room is filtered through that dominant vision. In David's mind, his own personal hell, which like Osmond's mind for Isabel Archer, is his "habitation," Giovanni's room becomes, like Osmond's home, "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" (James, 2002, p. 239)

It is convention, then—"the old, the consecrated, the transmitted"—that makes Giovanni's dingy, little room the symbol of all that David believes shameful, distasteful, and taboo in himself (James, 2002, p. 411). While this is the one space in which he is afforded the opportunity to understand and be honest with himself without fear of societal repercussions, he refuses to accept it. Like his mother's womb and the phantom abyss in his mind, this space for David is the tiny area down the "short, dark corridor" where "in the gloom," he thinks: "If I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 64). In this moment, he is very like Isabel—a fact that shows just how carefully Baldwin is interweaving the multiple psyches individually cast in James' text. Where Isabel Archer associates physical, sexual submission with a blinding, all-consuming light, David likens his alternate sexuality to a cavernous pit that threatens to swallow him whole. In so doing, he negates both literally and symbolically, the only portion of himself that renders him complete.

Although he is initially happy with Giovanni, David expectedly begins to look upon Giovanni and himself with increasing shame. On his first evening with Giovanni, David thinks,

> The beast which Giovanni has awakened in me would never go to sleep again; but one day I would not be with Giovanni anymore. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues into what dark places? With this fearful intimation there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 84)

Evoking themes of James' *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903) or Crane's *The Monster* (1898), David again likens his homosexuality to aberrance, to a kind of hysterical deviance in which one becomes like "the others" and travels willy-nilly seeking the companionship of "boys." The fact that David does not think of "following [men]" is telling. He does not mention Joey, but his associations in the opening chapter govern his mind in this moment as well. He would recall his experience with Joey and hear the words "But Joey is a boy." As in that first instance, homosexuality is predatory, seemingly requiring 'inferior' prey. But, more importantly to David, 'real men' would not be what he has become. "Men never can be housewives," he later suggests to Giovanni (p. 88). In short, 'real men' are *never* effeminized, and because he is bound by the constraints of white, male, heterosexual mythology, he accepts that this way of life would effeminize him interminably—bastardizing the very idea of manhood.

The final conversation between David and Giovanni only serves to reiterate David's foolish allegiance to a brand of manhood that cannot embrace him; it also allows him to voice his silent fear. Baldwin allows the two characters to verbalize the interior skirmishes that have dominated David's consciousness for the bulk of the text. Giovanni, in this one instance, emerges fully as the physical manifestation of David's perceived aberrant self. What becomes painfully obvious in their dialogue is that Giovanni understands David and his dilemma far better than David does, for his experiences and, perhaps, nationality removed from American duality give him a degree of insight that David cannot have. Giovanni is a human being as he conceives it—not as others do—and, in refusing to bow to David's flawed categorizations, Giovanni becomes the catalyst to David's exposure. "I have never known anyone like you before," Giovanni says,

> I was never like this before you came. Listen. In Italy I had a woman and she was very good to me. She loved me, she loved *me*, and she took care of me and she was always there when I came in from work … and there was never any trouble between us, never. I was young then and did not know the things I learned later or the terrible things you have taught me. I thought all women

> were like that. I thought all men were like me—I thought I was like all other men. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 138)

What Giovanni learns from David, sadly, is his difference, his dirtiness in the "far-off, dirty world." He had been with a woman, lost a child, become angry at God, and left his village to come to Paris, but never, before David, had he so intensely felt the "lonel[iness]" of difference (p. 138). When Giovanni tells David that in him, he has "found a lover who is neither man nor woman, nothing that [he] can touch," he speaks truths that David refuses to admit (p. 139). He is a manifestation of what Baldwin's epigraph demands. However, because David cannot distance himself from gender absolutes, he is playing the man, not wishing to play the woman, and embodying skewed notions of each that deter him from truly knowing himself as he is—or being known by others. He is in a nether region of gender and sexual identity, but he continues his farcical play.

Soon, David announces that he is leaving Giovanni to return to his "fiancée, Hella." As a result, Giovanni exposes David's untruths fully and painfully, for he replies:

> You are not leaving me for her. You are leaving me for some other reason. You lie so much, you have come to believe all your own lies. But I, I have senses. You are not leaving me for a *woman*. If you were really in love with this little girl, you would not have had to be so cruel to me. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 140).

Giovanni *reads* deceit that David has yet to recognize with the same depth of perception that allows the marginalized Ralph Touchett to fathom truths about Isabel, Osmond, and others in the text. Giovanni has thought himself free from the boundaries that confound David, but just like Ralph, he is affected by them. In this scene, he is battered, bruised, and defeated by David's masculine performance. And, as David continues to perform, avowing his love for Hella. Giovanni's reply cuts to the heart of Baldwin's exposé:

> You do not love anyone! You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will! You love your purity, you love your mirror—you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you as though you had some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* down there between your legs! You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch* it—man *or* woman. You want to be *clean*. … You want to leave Giovanni because he makes you stink. You want to despise Giovanni because he is not afraid of the stink of love. You want to *kill* him in the name of all your lying little moralities. And you—you are *immoral*. You are, by far, the most immoral man I have met in all my life. (p. 141)

With each word reverberating truth, the suggestions of the "purity" and "cleanness" of whiteness conjoined with the perceived masculine ideal resound. Giovanni recognizes David's wish to be heterosexual at all costs; he must be "clean" rather than "taint[ed]" as he was with Joey, for part and parcel to the male portrait that he seeks to inhabit is the purity and dominance of white masculinity, itself. That Baldwin has Giovanni move from softer metals to the hardest and most precious of stones as he describes David's 'family jewels' is no accident. This obvious, external symbol of his sex is indicative of his internal quandary. In David's mind, manhood cannot be malleable like gold or silver; it cannot be semi-precious like the ruby; it must be solid and impervious like the hardest of diamonds. It must have no occlusions. He believes that his sexual organ is determinant of his identity, but as the vehicle through which he has been aberrant, it is also a tool for deviance.

Giovanni insists that personhood comes with its impurities, and they are only deemed so because of our imbibed notions of what is and is not "pure." Giovanni makes David "stink," and this is precisely why David believes he must escape the four walls of this room. He will not relinquish his feigned supremacy for anyone, and his "lying little moralities" are his shield. His image of manhood is a conceit, a fable, and though to Giovanni, David is valid despite their male-male love, David's consciousness of the trap in which he lives and his performance anxiety will not allow him to explode it. Because his self-image is based on lies, because he lives and treats others deceptively, David is "the most immoral *man*" Giovanni has ever encountered. Although he does not believe himself "acquainted with the mythology of [David's] country," Giovanni has deconstructed the white, American, masculine mythology insightfully, laying it bare for David and the reader to see (p. 142).

But, Baldwin (1956) allows the confrontation between masculine selves to be far more biting, and far more overtly revelatory than James, perhaps, ever dared. In this moment, David, again, transfers all of his self-loathing onto 'the other.' He has silently condemned both Giovanni and his homosexual self, attempting to sequester them so that the deviance within him may be contained. But, he feels smothered; "I want to get out of this room, I want to get away from you," he cries. Giovanni clearly grasps the cause of David's merciless cruelty, his need to hurt the one who embodies all that he finds repulsive in himself. But, he knows fully well that David does not. As if he is the voice of reason amidst a sea of voices in David's head, Giovanni continues to press him until David finally explains that which most troubles him. With "eyes … so bottomlessly bitter it was almost benevolent," he asks David, "You want to get away from me … At last you are beginning to be honest. And do you know *why* you want to get away from me?" (p. 141). The benevolence of this moment lies in Giovanni forcing David to speak his masculine panic aloud, digging deeper into that "frozen" space inside himself. David begins:

> I cannot have a life with you … What kind of life can we have in this room?—this filthy little room. What kind of life can two men have together, anyway? All this love you talk about—isn't it just that you want to be made to feel strong? You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money, and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little *girl*. That's what you want. That's what you mean and that's *all* you mean when you say you

> love me. You say I want to kill *you.* What do you think you've been doing to me?"
>
> "I am not trying to make you a little girl. If I wanted a little girl, I would be *with* a little girl."
>
> "Why aren't you? Isn't it just that you're afraid? And you take *me* because you haven't got the guts to go after a woman, which is what you *really* want?"
>
> …"You are the one who keeps talking about *what* I want. But I have only been talking about *who* I want."
>
> "But I'm a man … a man! What do you think can *happen* between us?"
>
> "You know very well … what can happen between us. It is for that reason you are leaving me." (p. 142)

Giovanni voices that which Baldwin frequently discussed—the American need for labels, for categorization. For David, one of them must be the "big laborer and bring home the money," and the other must be the "little girl." Like Osmond's stifling vision of what his wife should be in *Portrait*, David's dualism is his means of sense-making. David's brokenness, iciness, and distance are reminiscent of Osmond's calculated ruse. In David's mind is "convention itself"— a "what" that determines concepts of masculinity and femininity; he must fit into one at all costs lest he be shoved forcibly into the other. More importantly, he not only likens his sexuality to femininity but also to girlhood—deepening his self-loathing and feelings of aberrance with the projection of pedophilia onto Giovanni. With increasing urgency, culminating in Giovanni's heartbreaking denunciation of David's contrived obtuseness, their dialogue reveals more about the pathology of the masculine model eating away at David's psyche than perhaps any other in the text. Echoing Baldwin's contention in "The Crusade of Indignation" (1986b), that "a very crucial difficulty encountered in interracial communication [comes] in attempting to discover not *what*, but *who* the Negro is," what Giovanni attempts to drive home to David's consciousness is that, to him, David is not a what, but a who—simply a person who is loved beyond the boundaries of all labels (p. 611). Again, David refuses to accept the safeness of this space, for his inherited paradigms inhibit him from doing so.

The hopelessness that Baldwin, like James before him, evidences in his novel is heartbreaking. The final segment of *Giovanni's Room*, like that of *Portrait*, shows the potential hybrid gender identifier being written out of existence; like Ralph Touchett's death from terminal illness and Isabel's return to Osmond, Giovanni's imprisonment and death remove the external threat to perceived masculine ideality. As a physical symbol of David's invalidity, Giovanni is subject to David's cruelties, and his end is a violent reminder of the conquest suggested in David's initial introduction. Playing on the idea of the predator, colonizer, destroyer, historical Anglo-Saxon, Baldwin ends Giovanni's life by guillotine. His head is severed from his body—a brutal, ritual sacrifice and metaphorical castration of the "aberrant" half of David's self. As Richard Dyer (1997) argues in *White,* slaying difference grants full ownership of whiteness and masculinity identities—together a valuable commodity that must be protected at all costs. The physical manifestation of the subordinate consciousness within David is purged in blood so that the dominant may reign supreme. Quickly, any remnant of Jamesian subtlety is gone.

Unfortunately, this does not make David whole, and therein lies the dilemma of dominance and subordination. Unlike James' Osmond, Goodwood, and Warburton, David is psychically torn asunder by the schism within him. What David learns is what Baldwin notes in several interviews: that there is no escape for him. "Giovanni's Room" is always already there. His war over his self-identity is projected into that space with four walls, but the true battle is internal. The room becomes a symbolic repository of his truth—a truth that will relegate him to outsider in the gender, sexual, *and* racial status quo—and that, he cannot stomach. So, he lies to escape it—both to himself and to all around him.

MY BODY, MY PRISON

To end the text, Baldwin (1956) recaptures the confessional mode of his first chapter. David's recognition of his lies serves as the foundation for his revelations as the book ends. While the text begins with sunset, a window, and Giovanni's impending execution, it ends with sunrise, a mirror, and the moment of Giovanni's execution. Just as in battle, sunrise brings death rather than beginnings. There is a twinning in this final moment—much like that between Isabel and Ralph Touchett. The light illuminates David's body in the mirror before him just as he imagines Giovanni being pushed through a "door" into the darkness. The "door" through which Giovanni must be taken to the guillotine, David thinks, is "the gateway he has sought so long out of this dirty world, this dirty body." But, his vague pronouns make the reader question whether the "dirty body" is his or Giovanni's (Baldwin, p. 168).

More ambiguous in this reference is the fact that Baldwin replaces the framed window in his opening with a mirror within a room. David says,

> the body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body … It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation. (Baldwin, 1956, p. 168)

Hearkening back to the opening chapter, David realizes that the thing that damages him is not "trapped in the room with [him]" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 10). It is even more insidious; it is "trapped" *within* him, in his body "dull and white and dry," in his image, and in his mind "trapped in time." He wishes to excise it and has attempted to do so through his damnation of Giovanni. A portrait becomes a reflection housed within four walls. Baldwin merges James' vehicle for examining gender confinement with his own, but replaces a still image with one that does not have to remain stationary. In mediating not the countryside, but David's self through this reflected image with the potential to alter itself, Baldwin reveals self-damnation both as a choice and the price for refusing to resist normative identity constructions across gender and race.

As he concludes the novel, Baldwin draws on his pulpitic roots, incorporating I *Corinthians* 13:11: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 168). The words are appropriate, for the word "child" is gender neutral, and the innocence that it connotes is long gone from David's consciousness; in its place is only the abyss that he has imbibed and self-perpetuated. David "long[s] to make this prophecy come true…to crack that mirror and be free. [He] look[s] at [his] sex, [his] troubling sex, and wonder[s] how it can be redeemed, how [he] can save it from the knife." Just as in his final conversation with Giovanni, the focus is on the physical symbol of his manhood. Ironically, with his conception of the male self, he can no more break free of the image imprinted in his mind than he can save Giovanni from the guillotine. Like Ralph for Isabel, Giovanni existed as David's "apostle of freedom." He offered David the means, the location, and the path to realize himself. Thus, the rending of Giovanni's head from his body tells us that "the knife" wins. David's desire to "become a man"—"to break free" from the "dirty body" that daily betrays his sensibilities is rooted in an insensate ideological system. A victim of a sort of societal, Freudian castration complex, he is too bound by imposed mores to be free.

Once Giovanni is "thrown" into the darkness, David steps into the light, leaving the countryside for Paris, taking the journey that he foreshadows at the novel's beginning. Yet, as he attempts to cast aside torn pieces of a letter announcing Giovanni's impending execution, a hoped-for release from all that Giovanni represents, Baldwin writes, "The morning weighs on [his] shoulders with the dreadful weight of hope" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 169). As the wind blows the pieces of the notice "back on [him]," his "hope" is "dreadful," for it has come at the cost of Giovanni's head, and that price is high. As did James before him, Baldwin leaves his character "en l'air," literally, with the wind—its very existence and directions forces beyond his control. Baldwin insinuates that all that Giovanni represented will *always* be with David, *always* be *in* him no matter how far he runs. And readers are left to wonder what will become of this man struggling to shake the yoke of the masculine ideal—a *man* who could be gay, who could be happy, who could be whole should he simply recognize the futility of his internalized notions of masculinity. If he can understand that he cannot inhabit a finite set of arbitrarily constructed traits that define the masculine and the feminine, then he has an opportunity to transcend his bonds. In doing so, he would possibly not only lead a self-actualized and fulfilled existence, but also become a transformative power—living proof of an "imagined" existence. He would inhabit, in the words of Toni Morrison (1998),

> a new space … formed by the inwardness of the outside, the interiority of the "othered," the personal that is always embedded in the public. In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third … world "already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed." (p. 12)

But, that space seems almost utopian in light of this novel, for Baldwin, like James before him, was painfully aware of how difficult it is "to make freedom real" (Baldwin, 1962, p. 672).

NOTES

[1] James "Preface" to Portrait almost serves as an apologia, as if he has to explain his impetus to write about "a class difficult, in the individual case, to make a centre [sic] of interest"—"the Isabel Archers, and even smaller female fry, [who] insist on mattering" (p. xxix; xxvi). He explains his reasoning for "plac[ing] the center of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness."

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SION DAYSON

5. ANOTHER COUNTRY

James Baldwin at 'Home' (and) Abroad[1]

> "You can take the child out of the country," my elders were fond of saying, "but you can't take the country out of the child." They were speaking of their own antecedents, I supposed; it didn't, anyway, seem possible that they could be warning me; I took myself out of the country and went to Paris. It was there that I discovered that the old folks knew what they were talking about: *I found myself, willy-nilly, alchemized into an American the moment I touched French soil.*—James Baldwin (Baldwin, 1998, p. 187, emphasis added)

Depending on who's speaking and for what purpose, James Baldwin can be classified as one of the twentieth century's best essayists and fiction writers, a fiery black spokesman with an agenda, or the celebrated Negro author of his generation. But by my lights, he was simply a great American writer.

That's how Baldwin would have it, too. Though his work most often deals with the searing issues of race, he himself wanted to be thought of not as a black writer, but an American one. This distinction speaks not only to the limitations of being boxed in as an artist (and a human being), but also to the conception of identity—his own, and the nation's. Race, after all, is very much an issue for all Americans, not the concern of just one group in the country.

This identification as an American arises from Baldwin's many years as an expatriate. We see in his work and hear in his comments over the years that he began to define and understand both himself and America only when he left America.

The idea for *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, for example, his first novel which was influenced heavily by his experience growing up in Harlem and the black church, had been with him for eight years. But he was unable to write any sort of satisfactory draft. During a feverish three months of work in a small Swiss village, however, he finished it. In a strange, white Alpine setting that couldn't have been farther from the streets of Harlem, he was able to see his home with shocking clarity. "Once you find yourself in another civilization," he notes, "you're forced to examine your own" (Thorsen, 1989).

I was only a little girl when Baldwin died, so I speak not as someone who has any intimate knowledge of the period in which he lived and wrote. Instead I serve as proof that he continues to touch younger writers, too, despite our new concerns, the fact that the racial and social landscape looks far different than the one he confronted.

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Yet so little feels dated about Baldwin's work. To read his writing now is to be as roundly astonished—by his insight, his almost prophetic observations—as when he first penned the words. That's because he could take a precise event and transform it into a broader meditation. In the title essay of 1955's *Notes of a Native Son*, for example, Baldwin turns the day of his father's funeral into a deeper reflection on the nature of rage and hatred, an examination of the human psyche in the face of systematic injustice. And even when delving into the most difficult of subjects, Baldwin's work pulses with a soaring love for humanity. Indeed, he's incensed by injustice because it is contrary to humanity.

From *The Fire Next Time* (Baldwin, 1962):

> Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace … in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. (p. 128)

Baldwin's attentions, however outraged, were a form of love, his own daring quest to describe what was "really happening here," to unravel the "myth of America" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 142).

What's fascinating—and this brings me to the main impetus behind this essay—is that Baldwin was so often not here, not in America. The United States—her people and her struggles—were his main preoccupations, but he wrote about them most often from a remove abroad.

BALDWIN'S LIFE AND WORK ABROAD

James Baldwin lived in Paris from 1948-1957. Even when he returned to the States for the civil rights movement in the sixties, he continued what he'd later term his "transatlantic commutes"—and what scholar Magdalena J. Zaborowska (2009) termed his "Turkish Decade," Istanbul being the site of his most productive writing during that period. And in the end, he found himself back in France, in a small village called St-Paul-de-Vence this time, for his final years. Little of his adult life, then, was actually spent in the America of which he wrote. His self-imposed exile, however, helped him become an American writer. The distance from his birthplace allowed him space to start deconstructing our myths, come to the terms with the fact that he was American. Baldwin's evolution as a writer is intimately tied to his years living abroad.

"The best thing I ever did in my life was leave America and go to Paris," Baldwin said (Thorsen, 1989). Critics would agree, as his most lauded works date from his first sojourn in the City of Light. After Europe pushed him to finish the much-praised *Go Tell It on the Mountain*—the largely autobiographical and most disciplined of all his novels—he tackled his second one from abroad, too. *Giovanni's Room* is one of my all-time favorite books, and apparently, also his favorite, too. That novel brought me to my knees when I first read it and it had nothing to do with the fact that it was set in Paris, but everything to do with its portrayal of the suffocating effects of self-hatred, repressed desire, and the denial of love. It's the haunting tale of a homosexual relationship and its heartbreaking trajectory, written with a restrained lyricism that makes me weep.

But rereading it now, over a decade later, it becomes powerful to me in new ways. I see the notion of home as much an imagined landscape as a real place for the characters that populate the story. I see Baldwin exploring the curious loneliness and escapism of the expatriate, the expat as perhaps the most extreme example of someone trying to run away from himself—literally—and failing.

While Baldwin found a certain salvation in his exile, he also warned in the introduction of his collection *Nobody Knows My Name* that "havens are high priced. The price exacted of the haven-dweller is that he contrive to delude himself into believing that he has found a haven" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 136).

Early in the novel *Giovanni's Room* (Baldwin, 1956), David, the protagonist, remarks:

> There is something fantastic in the spectacle I now present to myself of having run so far, so hard, across the ocean even, only to find myself brought up short once more before the bulldog in my own backyard. (p. 6)

The young American falls in love with Giovanni in Paris, but encounters the same struggle he knew he had back home—he cannot accept that he loves men. This self-repression has dire consequences for both Giovanni and himself, ending literally in Giovanni's death.

Giovanni's Room was a bold step. Not only was homosexuality still considered a crime at the time—in the US where he was from, in France where he wrote it, and in the UK where it was first published – but Baldwin willfully wrote outside of the box his publishers were trying to put him in: that of "the next big Negro writer."

After *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, he was expected to continue writing about "black themes." But as a gay man, and a writer abroad, he had additional concerns close to his heart. He did not follow up his Harlem book with another "Negro novel." In *Giovanni's Room*, all of the characters are white.

And for this, I admire him, too. For his stand that the artist is not beholden to only one subject matter. And that the black writer does not always have to write about the black experience. "I have not written about being a Negro at such length because I expect that to be my only subject," he said in the autobiographical notes that open *Notes of a Native Son,* "but only because it was the gate I had to unlock before I could hope to write about anything else" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 8).

Many critics argue that Baldwin's strongest writing is found in his nonfiction. He himself wanted most to be thought of as a fiction writer and to make more headway with his plays. No matter what genre he was writing in, though, it was all deeply personal. For Baldwin, he knows exactly from whence he writes:

> One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 8)

I contend—and Baldwin has said it himself in many ways—that Paris gave him the space to see more clearly his experience, to find his material, illuminate his obsessions, and to transcend what others would attempt to saddle him with in terms of subject matter. Living in another country gave him the remove to look at America, his homeland and himself in a way he might not have been capable of accessing otherwise.

In a speech he gave at UC Berkeley in 1979, Baldwin put it this way:

> At a certain time in my life when I was not in this country, but in France, where I could not speak to anybody because I spoke no French … I dropped into a silence in which I heard for the first time—really heard—and began to be able to try to deal with the beat of the language of the people who had produced me. I might have been able to do that here, but in the event, I was not able to do that here. I did it far away. (Burch & Sorrenti, 2008)

In his seminal essay "The Discovery of What it Means to be an American," Baldwin discusses the writing of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, in that aforementioned Swiss village. Without the familiar crutches of home, he reaches something profound:

> I, like many a writer before me upon the discovery that his props have all been knocked out from under him, suffered a species of breakdown and was carried off to the mountains of Switzerland. There, in that absolutely alabaster landscape, armed with two Bessie Smith records and a typewriter, I began to re-create the life that I had first known as a child and from which I had spent so many years in flight.
>
> It was Bessie Smith, through her tone and her cadence, who helped me to dig back to the way I myself must have spoken when I was a pickaninny, and to remember the things I had heard and seen and felt. I had buried them very deep. *I had never listened to Bessie Smith in America (in the same way that, for years, I would not touch watermelon), but in Europe she helped to reconcile me to being a "nigger."*
>
> *I do not think that I could have made this reconciliation here. Once I was able to accept my role—as distinguished, I must say, from my "place"—in the extraordinary drama which is America, I was released from the illusion that I hated America.* (Baldwin, 1998, p. 138, emphasis added)

BALDWIN'S BIOGRAPHY

By way of historical context, Baldwin was born in Harlem in 1924, the oldest of nine children. He never knew his real father and instead grew up with his strict, religious step-father, David, a Baptist minister, and his mother, a maid. The family lived in dire poverty, barely able to keep all mouths fed. Baldwin's sharp intellect and thirst for literature served as his escape. He is said to have read every single book in his neighborhood library, so he started visiting the Midtown Manhattan library, encountering the white world outside Harlem. Countee Cullen, the famed poet of the Harlem Renaissance, was a literary club advisor at his junior high school and Baldwin later entered the prestigious De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx, where he worked on the school journal.

He spent three years as a youth minister, following in his step-father's footsteps, though he couldn't stand his stepfather, whom he regarded as cruel and bitter. He ended up losing the taste for ministry, questioning the church's role, but a Biblical cadence remained in much of his work.

After graduating, he picked up odd jobs, none of which stuck. He began writing what would later be *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, enough to get him a grant in 1945. But in 1946 his best friend committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge, an event that shook him to the core. This incident becomes crucial in a later novel he will write, *Another Country*.

Baldwin was asked many times over the years why he left the United States. He gives different versions of the same essential answer: he felt forced to flee. Here's one account he gave in a *Paris Review* interview from 1984:

> I had to get out of New York … Reading had taken me away for long periods at a time, yet I still had to deal with the streets and the authorities and the cold. I knew what it meant to be white and I knew what it meant to be a nigger, and I knew what was going to happen to me. My luck was running out. I was going to go to jail, I was going to kill somebody, or be killed … It wasn't so much a matter of choosing France—it was a matter of getting out of America. I didn't know what was going to happen to me in France but I knew what was going to happen to me in New York. If I stayed there, I would have gone under, like my friend on the George Washington Bridge. (Elgrably, 1984, answer to first interview question)

France wasn't such a random choice, though. At that time, there was a whole community of black writers living in Paris, including Chester Himes and Richard Wright, by then the most famous black author after the publication of *Native Son*. Wright said in a 1953 *Ebony* interview, "Every Negro in America carries through his life the burden of race consciousness like a corpse on his back. I shed that corpse when I stepped off the train in Paris" (Campbell, 1991, p. 52).

When Baldwin was twenty, he had knocked on Wright's door in Brooklyn and the older writer took him under his wing. So now there they were, Wright and Baldwin, meeting again, in Paris this time, both having fled in an effort to slough off racism's "corpse."

Baldwin was only twenty-four when he landed in Paris. He had a few solid pieces of literary criticism under his belt, but nothing resembling a career. His first big literary essay from Paris, "Everybody's Protest Novel," criticized *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and also, interestingly, *Native Son*, which created a rift between Wright and him. During this period, Baldwin "saw the writer's place as being not on the platform but at the desk," as one biographer, James Campbell (1991), put it (p. 70). All literature may be protest, but not all protest is literature.

The arc I find particularly interesting in Baldwin's journey is that he left America to save himself—to him it literally was a question of life or death. But in landing in this new country, he came to identify strongly as an American and would later feel a responsibility to return to deal with what was happening in the civil rights movement. And in many ways he took to the platform, started writing in protest. He comes full circle.

BALDWIN'S DISCOVERY OF HIS AMERICAN IDENTITY

> I proved, to my astonishment, to be as American as any Texas G.I. And I found my experience was shared by every American writer I knew in Paris. Like me, they had been divorced from their origins, and it turned out to make very little difference that the origins of white Americans were European and mine were African—they were no more at home in Europe than I was. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 137)

This distance, and unease even, sharpens one of a writer's most important tools: that of careful observation and reflection. All of the essays from *Notes of a Native Son*—that title, you notice, echoing purposefully Wright's novel—were written during Baldwin's time in France. It is still considered among his best work. What struck me while reading some of the essays was his use of the word "we." I had to back up and reread some of the sentences as at first it sounded as if he was talking from the position of a white man at times.

Take this line, for example, from the essay "Many Thousands Gone": "Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 20).

Whose identity is he talking about? He doesn't sound like he's located himself as "the Negro" in this passage.

I found the answer to this "we" question in a book of correspondence between Baldwin and his friend and editor, Sol Stein. Baldwin writes of the crucial importance of those essays to define himself in relation to society this way:

> I was trying to decipher my own situation, to spring my trap, and it seemed to me the only way I could address it was not take the tone of the victim. As long as I saw myself as a victim, complaining about my wretched state as a black man in a white man's country, it was hopeless. Everybody knows who the victim is as long as he's howling. So I shifted the point of view to 'we.' Who is the 'we'? I'm talking about we, the American people. (Baldwin & Stein, 2004, p. 9)

I don't think this sort of clear-headed embodiment of the collective "we" would have been possible if Baldwin were still the angry young man on the Harlem streets, in the midst of a rage that he said threatened to consume him like it did his friend who jumped from the George Washington Bridge.

Of course, Baldwin is still the master of speaking from "I." In his famous essay "Stranger in the Village," he talks about his time in Switzerland, where villagers would merrily call him "Neger" the German word for black, having no idea, isolated as they were, how that sound resonated in Baldwin's mind.

Here Baldwin is not speaking as a collective we, but as himself, and working to put the reader in his shoes. As his friend Sol Stein explains,

> It is Baldwin's … insight as a writer into the visions that people have of others and otherness, that enable readers who are not black to momentarily experience what a black man feels, and invites the black reader to grasp the origin of the white man's desperate clinging to … prejudice … (Baldwin & Stein, 2004, p. 11)

From "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin (1998) writes:

> There is a dreadful abyss between the streets of this village and the streets of the city in which I was born, between the children who shout *Neger!* today and those who shouted *Nigger!* yesterday—the abyss is experience, the American experience. The syllable hurled behind me today expresses, above all, wonder: I am a stranger here. But I am not a stranger in America and the same syllable riding on the American air expresses the war my presence has occasioned in the American soul. (p. 123)

In this essay, we see his famous stylistic technique again, the concrete particular raised to the poetic musing. He takes us from Swiss neighbors touching his hair and face, thinking his black color will rub off, to the conflation of the village to all of Western civilization, "the West onto which I have been so strangely grafted" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 121). He uses it as an opportunity to explore the unique history of the American Negro, and that as opposed to blacks in Europe:

> Europe's black possessions remained—and do remain—in Europe's colonies, at which remove they represented no threat whatever to European identity. If they posed a problem at all for the European conscience, it was a problem which remained comfortingly abstract: in effect the black man, as a man, did not exist for Europe. But in America, even as a slave, he was an inescapable part of the general social fabric and no American could escape having an attitude toward him. (p. 125)

He ends the essay with powerful insistence:

> The time has come to realize that the interracial drama acted out on the American continent has not only created a new black man, it has created a new white man, too. No road whatever will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village where white men still have the luxury of looking on me as a stranger. I am not, really, a stranger any longer for any American alive. One of the things that distinguishes Americans from other people is that no other people has ever been so deeply involved in the lives of black men, and vice versa … This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again. (p. 129)

This experience of being a stranger, a true stranger in Switzerland, illuminated a way for him to articulate the racial situation back home. Because no matter how loathed and despised he felt in the States, there was an intimate engagement of the races due to our unique history.

I can't help thinking being a "stranger" also comes from living in France where the word for "foreigner" and "stranger" are one and the same: *étranger*. The near decade of living as a foreigner, as a "strange" person, couldn't help but have him reflect on what he did know, the place where he was known.

BALDWIN'S RETURN 'HOME' DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

What's Baldwin to do with all the insights gained abroad? With the reassessment? The time had come to act. It's the late fifties and the civil rights movement is heating up in the United States. People are standing up for their freedom. Being killed. Baldwin's distance allows him room to create these powerful conceptual frameworks for explaining contemporary race issues. But once understood, the distance also brings with it danger—the danger of not facing up to responsibility and taking on a role as active participant. Of missing the most important moment in his country's struggle. He describes the dawning of this new understanding this way:

> One day it begins to be borne in on the writer and with great force, that he is living in Europe as an American … This crucial day may be the day on which an Algerian taxi driver tells him how it feels to be an Algerian in Paris … Or it may be the day on which someone asks him to explain Little Rock—and, corny as the words may sound, more honorable—to *go* to Little Rock than sit in Europe, on an American passport trying to explain it. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 141)

And so Baldwin returns to America. He starts reporting from the South, turns his attention to the unfolding drama in his country. "Once you realize that you can do something, it would be difficult to live with yourself if you didn't do it," he says in a *Paris Review* interview. "I didn't think of myself as a public speaker, or as a spokesman, but I knew I could get a story past the editor's desk." (Elgrably, J., 1984, answer to 27th interview question).

In his essay "A Fly in Buttermilk" where he speaks with some of the "integrated" students in Charlotte, North Carolina, he says:

> … it was ironical to reflect that if I had not lived in France for so long I would never have found it necessary—or possible—to visit the American South. The South had always frightened me. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 187)

He writes about the civil rights movement—for outlets such as *Partisan Review, Harper's,* even popular magazines like *Mademoiselle*—in his typical, personal style. Other people could cover the sit-ins, the marches, the big events. Baldwin picks quiet, quotidian moments that vibrate with intensity to focus on: a look from a black man on an Atlanta bus, his eyes telling Baldwin (1998) "that what I was feeling he had been feeling, at much higher pressure, all his life" (p. 204); observing one of the black students in an all-white school doing his homework, "pride and silence … his weapons" (p. 193) as insults and violence threatened him daily; or the white principal charged with protecting that student sitting uncomfortably in an interview as he struggles to both defend and deny injustice simultaneously. Segregation is the only way of life he's known—but how do you face a child and justify such acts?

Baldwin's second collection of essays, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*, was published to wide acclaim; it's his first book since being back in the United States. He becomes more than a writer now; he does become a spokesman. He gives speeches at rallies, makes numerous radio and television appearances. The number of interviews he does in the early sixties nearly outpaces the number of pages he writes. He's invited to meetings with Robert Kennedy. He's on the cover of *Time* magazine.

"Down at the Cross" is published in *The New Yorker* and makes quite a mark. That essay, along with an open letter he writes to his nephew, is republished as *The Fire Next Time,* which becomes a national bestseller. It is considered one of his masterpieces. The urgency and anger is more palpable than in any of his other work thus far. Like the title, the essay is beautiful, incendiary. "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?" he asks (Baldwin, 1962, p. 127).

Yes, ultimately, he does; the way to solve the racial strife in the country, a country that is like a burning house, is through love and accepting that no one is free until everyone is free.

But first, Baldwin makes you feel the indignities suffered by blacks, in a controlled, seething prose. In this passage, he's describing what he terms a turning point in the Negro's relation to America during the Second World War. Notice, too, what he has to say about home here:

> You must put yourself in the skin of a man who is a candidate for death in [his country's] defense, and who is called a "nigger" by his comrades-in-arms and his officers; who is almost always given the hardest, ugliest, most menial work to do; who knows that the white G.I. has informed the Europeans that he is subhuman … who watches German prisoners of war being treated by Americans with more human dignity than he has ever received at their hands. *And who, at the same time, as a human being, is far freer in a strange land than he has ever been at home. Home! The very word begins to have a despairing and diabolical ring* (emphasis added). You must consider what happens to this citizen, after all he has endured, when he returns—home: search, in his shoes, for a job, for a place to live; ride, in his skin, on segregated buses; see, with his eyes, the signs saying "White" and "Colored" and especially the signs that say "White Ladies" and "Colored Women"; look into the eyes of his wife; look into the eyes of his son; listen, with his ears, to political speeches, North and South; imagine yourself being told to "wait." And all this is happening in the richest and freest country in the world, and in the middle of the twentieth century. The subtle and deadly change of heart that might occur in you would be involved with the realization that a

> civilization is not destroyed by wicked people; it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless. (Baldwin, 1962, p. 76)

These are commandments, imperatives he's issuing: search, see, ride, look. It's a sermon, Baldwin a preacher again, the reader his congregation. One of the main episodes he describes in the book, in fact, recounts his days as a young Pentecostal minister. The other is an eerie meeting with Elijah Mohammed and the Nation of Islam.

Baldwin's writing is no longer just describing, analyzing; his is writing meant to mobilize:

> At the center of this dreadful storm, this vast confusion, stand the black people of this nation, who must now share the fate of a nation that has never accepted them, to which they were brought in chains. Well, if this is so, one has no choice but to do all in one's power to change that fate, and at no matter what risk—eviction, imprisonment, torture, death…I know that what I am asking is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand—and no one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history in particular, for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible. (Baldwin, 1962, p. 140)

In *The Fire Next Time,* Baldwin is at his authoritative height, the emotion issuing an unflinching demand to face things for what they are. It reads as a cross between literary art, philosophical inquiry, and active manifesto.

His fiction, however, begins to suffer. *Another Country* is the novel he remarks he was destined not to survive. It is uneven in sections, clunky even, a word I would never apply to his previous work.

Take this bit of dialogue after the protagonist's friend has been hurt and they discuss going to the hospital:

> "No, man. Listen. If I go with you, it's going to be a whole lot of who shot John because I'm black and you're white. You dig? I'm telling it to you like it is."
>
> Vivaldo said, "I really don't want to hear all that shit, Rufus…Are you mad at me …?"
>
> "Shit no baby, why should I be mad with you?" But he knew what was bothering Vivaldo. He leaned down and whispered, "Don't you worry, baby, everything's cool. I know you're my friend." (Baldwin, 1962, p. 27)

This exchange rings a bit stilted and inauthentic to my ears. These characters have known each other for years and their color is already obvious. Why in dialogue would it be necessary to say "I'm black and you're white" or "you're my friend?" other than to make a point? The writing is becoming too obvious, almost as if Baldwin's lost the touch for nuance. His characters risk serving as simply stand-ins for the heated racial politics that now consume him.

I like Baldwin both as Baudelaire and as a blues singer. I'm awed by his restrained lyricism and incendiary indictment. Each has its own resonance. But as Stein says, "Baldwin the ex-preacher taught best when he preached least" (Baldwin & Stein, 2004, p. 14). His biographer Campbell thinks he was "too angry" to write during this period. His voice is completely different. Campbell (1991) writes:

> Nineteen sixty-three was the year his voice broke; and it affected every element of his literary style—his rhythm, his syntax, his vocabulary, the way in which he made discriminations and reached judgments. It was the year Baldwin shifted away from the lyrical cadence that had been his signature tune. (p. 181)

I believe anger can be channeled effectively—righteously, well—and Baldwin proves this time and time again. It is one of the things I most admire him for. But he himself agrees that the demands put on him to serve as a spokesman during this time divorced him from his true calling as a writer and I have no doubt that these pressures changed his writing.

In an early essay from 1951, Baldwin had said:

> Leaving aside the considerable question of what relationship precisely the artist bears to the revolutionary, the reality of man as a social being is not his only reality and that artist is strangled who is forced to deal with human beings solely in social terms; and who has … the necessity thrust on him of being the representative of some thirteen million people. It is a false responsibility *(since writers are not congressmen)* and impossible, by its nature, of fulfillment. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 25, emphasis added)

By the sixties, Baldwin *is* speaking as a representative. The mission is important to him, he feels it necessary to play an active role in the movement. But this new role saps much of his will and energy to write. Though he had planned to stay in the United States when he returned, he finds the only time he can really write is when he leaves the US again.

BALDWIN, THE "TRANSATLANTIC COMMUTER"

James Baldwin begins making more and more frequent trips across the ocean, often finding solace in Turkey now, a country that has no history of the slave trade and no colonies like the French. This country, free of those attachments and associations, makes him feel as if he can breathe again. Most of the work he completes in the sixties is on these trips to Istanbul, an escape from the heated situation back "home."

He writes to his agent that he is reconciling himself to being a "transatlantic commuter" and laments the fact that "I am a stranger everywhere" (Campbell, 1991, p. 152).

In a letter to his friend Sol Stein on one of his sojourns abroad, he writes:

> It will be nice to see the homestead again. It would be even nicer if I could feel that I'd ever feel at home there. I'll tell you this, though, if you don't feel

> at home at home, you never really feel at home. Nowhere. I try to keep remembering something Peter Viereck told me, simply that you don't live where you're happy or, for that matter, unhappy: you do your best to live where you can work. (Baldwin & Stein, 2004, p. 87).

Ultimately, he uses his celebrity for good, but it takes him from what he deep-down wants to be: a writer. An American writer. "I consider that I have many responsibilities, but none greater than this: to last, as Hemingway says, and get my work done. I want to be an honest man and a good writer," he said in his autobiographical notes in 1955 (Baldwin, 1998, p. 9).

In 1970 he says,

> Because of what I had become in the minds of the people, I ceased to belong to me. Once you are in the public limelight … you have to realize you've been paid for … to save myself I finally had to leave [America] for good. (Baldwin, & Stein, 2004, p. 13)

Baldwin will continue his transatlantic commute for nearly two decades more, spending his final years in the South of France. "He liked the French because they left him alone" (Campbell, 1991, p. 254). And as he had discovered, being left alone was a requirement for writing.

Baldwin does more work, much more work, including the novels *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* and *Just Above my Head* to name a couple. They have their glorious moments as all Baldwin work does, but nothing quite reaches the heights of his earlier work. I don't mean to gloss over the rest of his career, but the major works that came from his first expatriation and are still considered his landmark contributions have already been written.

There is then this paradox to grapple with: by living abroad and gaining insight into his homeland, Baldwin produced his most luminous writing. But he never shook the feeling of displacement thereafter and in some ways, felt he never had a true home again. What happens to you, your work, when you feel you belong nowhere, when the initial breakthrough is over?

I think Baldwin offered one possible answer early on in his career, in *Giovanni's Room*, his favorite book and mine. "Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition," he said (Baldwin, 1956, p. 92). Irrevocable. Not something you can escape or change. If this creates unease—the fact that home becomes not a fixed place or somewhere to set down roots, but rather a concept, a condition—that tension can be mined for our art. If it's true that we write from our own experience, that the currency of fiction comes from conflict, this constant reckoning can animate our work. To have something we carry inside us, everywhere, yet are always searching for at the same time.

Or maybe the answer really does lie in *Another Country*, Baldwin's sprawling novel that spans two continents and complicated relationships. In it, he describes the characters Yves and Eric, a Franco-American couple this way: "Each was, for the other, the dwelling place that each had despaired of finding" (Baldwin, 1962, p. 143).

This is one of Baldwin's obsessions, too—as it probably is for many of us—love. Home is found in connection. Love infuses his work.

Because James Baldwin, no matter where he made his life, located his art in the ability to speak truthfully about the human condition, in all its glory—profound, painful, noble, absurd. Sorrow and joy, both. His gift: the local made universal, his reality written so it reverberates in the bones.

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JEFFREY SANTA ANA

6. FEELING IN RADICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

James Baldwin's Anger as a Critique of Capitalism

> I also realized that to try to be a writer (which involves, after all, disturbing the peace) was political, whether one liked it or not; because if one is doing anything at all, one is trying to change the consciousness of other people. You're trying also to change your own consciousness. You have to use your consciousness, you have to trust it to the extent—enough to begin to talk; and you talk with the intention of beginning a ferment, beginning a disturbance in someone else's mind so that he sees the situation … The point is to get your work done, and your work is to change the world. (Baldwin, 1973/1974, p. 40)

In a riveting conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde published in the December 1984 issue of *Essence* magazine, Lorde challenges Baldwin to recognize and rectify the problem of violence against black women. Both writers are enmeshed in a struggle to understand the root cause of racism and sexism. Baldwin responds affirmatively to Lorde's challenge, but their rejoinders express an anxiety about a system they seem unable to name. Baldwin tells Lorde, "All right, I accept—the challenge is there in any case. It never occurred to me that it would be otherwise. That's absolutely true. I simply want to locate where the danger is … We are behind the gates of a kingdom which is determined to destroy us" (Baldwin & Lorde, 1984, p. 130). Lorde replies:

> There is a larger structure, a society with which we are in total and absolute war. We live in the mouth of a dragon, and we must be able to use each other's forces to fight it together because we need each other. I am saying that in our joint battle we have also developed some very real weapons, and when we turn them against each other they are even more bloody, because we know each other in a particular way. When we turn those weapons against each other, the bloodshed is terrible. Even worse, we are doing this in a structure where we are already embattled. (Baldwin & Lorde, pp. 130, 133)

That Baldwin and Lorde are discussing the problems of violence against black women and black male disempowerment is undeniable. But where specifically is the location of "the danger" that Baldwin mentions? What exactly is the "kingdom" he speaks of? Why does the "larger society" that Lorde points out seem so ambiguous? What is striking about Baldwin and Lorde's conversation is not just their intense passion in taking sides in the so-called gender wars, but the fact that

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the system of oppression to which they allude remains unspecified, as though it were an anxiety paradoxically unmentionable and indefinable but nonetheless universal.

Both Lorde and Baldwin were two of the most revolutionary U.S. writers of their time. They championed the collaborative struggles of activists to overturn systems of racial segregation and gender oppression, and the spirit of such collaboration is obvious in the final moment of their conversation when Baldwin asks Lorde to understand how it feels to be a black man and Lorde replies that Baldwin in turn should know how it feels to be a woman. "All right, okay …," agrees Baldwin, to which Lorde responds, "—let's start with that and deal" (Baldwin & Lorde, 1984, p. 133). Despite the fact that the dangerous system remains indefinable in Lorde and Baldwin's conversation, we can nevertheless learn a great deal from their moment of reconciliation: the struggle to understand and recognize the seemingly invisible system that causes oppression is much like Lorde and Baldwin's argument, because they each must know *how it feels* for the other to be oppressed. And for both of them to realize each other's oppression and to agree on its root cause is to comprehend the system under which they and their communities are oppressed. This is the system, I argue, of *modern capitalist society* in America.

The indignation and exasperation that throb so resoundingly throughout Lorde and Baldwin's heated exchange bring to the surface of their conversation a radical consciousness through which to evaluate the structural violence of capitalist exploitation. The exchange of anger between them, emanating from their struggle to make one another feel and understand the oppression they've each experienced, expresses an unconscious anxiety about capitalism. The "kingdom" for Baldwin and the "society" for Lorde that are the modern capitalist system seem indefinable because this system's omnipresence and dominion are so completely *rationalized* that we render it invisible. But this system is clearly *felt* and palpable as Baldwin's and Lorde's anxiety to name the specific "location" and "structure" of the danger and the injustice that fuel the rage of the oppressed, the disenfranchised, the marginalized.

We especially come to understand the political relevance of Lorde and Baldwin's argument when we take into account their antagonism to capitalism's profit system. In so doing, we may realize how social oppression in the United States today is influenced, structured, and mediated by the emotions in capitalist globalization. By investigating the economic *and* the emotional terms of oppression in the work of racialized minority writers like Lorde and Baldwin, we can bring into sharper focus their criticism of the way people's lives in America are shaped and determined by the profit motive of capitalist ideology. Moreover, it is through the emotions of radical consciousness, and from anger in particular, that Lorde and Baldwin articulate their critique of inequality and oppression in modern capitalist society. This is the political-economic dimension of human feeling in their argument: to express anxieties about objectification, exploitation, and the fragmentation of human social life in the modern capitalist system.

This chapter demonstrates the critical and radical meanings of human feeling in some of James Baldwin's writings and published conversations, specifically his anger about the objectification of human subjectivity and alienation in U.S. society as consequences of the capitalist system. Anger is both critical and radical in Baldwin's denunciation of capitalist exploitation. His anger locates and describes the violence of objectification in the capitalist system. I contend that Baldwin expresses historical materialist concerns in his writings to explain social processes by which human feeling becomes objectified in the capitalist system. Especially in his novel *Another Country* (1962), Baldwin critiques processes of objectification that alienate human beings in twentieth-century America. These are processes, moreover, that dehumanize the poor, the socially marginalized, racialized minorities, and women. In particular, Baldwin's anger in *Another Country* critiques processes of objectification that negatively affect interracial relations and love between blacks and whites. His anger about the social oppressions that structure and deny interracial relations articulates anxiety about social processes that objectify, interpellate, and alienate people in modern capitalist society.

EMOTION AS A SOCIAL CRITIQUE

In his writings, Baldwin's anger characterizes what I call the radical consciousness of racialized minority subjects. This approximates the educational and social concept of "critical consciousness" that is grounded in Marxian critical theory, as conceptualized by Paolo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[1] According to Freire, critical consciousness focuses on the way oppressed subjects come to understand social contradictions that are created by exploitative economic and political systems. It is the cognitive awakening of oppressed subjects that affirms their becoming aware of totality by questioning the nature of their own historical and social situation. By developing an in-depth understanding of their own objectification and dehumanization in processes of abstract and exploited labor, for instance, oppressed subjects can transcend alienation in capitalism and "be owners of their own labor" (Freire, p. 164). Implicitly in Freire's terms, Baldwin expresses a radical perspective to represent objectification and critique exploitation in the capitalist system.

Focusing on Baldwin's writing, I refer to Marxist critical theories to argue that emotions express criticism of social division and fragmentation in modern capitalist society. Baldwin posits a dialectical relationship between human feeling and social fragmentation from which the contradiction of radical consciousness emerges for the racialized minority subject.[2] In *Another Country*, he expresses this radical consciousness through his tropes of *using anger* and *using pain*. According to Baldwin, to use anger and pain constructively is to imagine empathically what another's oppression feels like, and thus transcend the logic of exploitation in capitalism's profit motive. Through this transcendence, we may realize the dialectical potential of anger as a negative emotion to express a radical consciousness that condemns injustice and envisions social transformation.[3]

James Baldwin is both a revolutionary and canonical figure in twentieth-century U.S. literature and African American culture. Before he died of cancer in 1987 at the age of 63, Baldwin produced an immense volume of fiction, stories, essays, and autobiography that garnered international acclaim and respect. His writing continues to inspire incisive thinking among activists and scholars about the social conditions of oppression and injustice.

In his work, Baldwin maintains a forceful politics through a complex understanding of how the emotions can register social critique. In particular, the politics of anger that Baldwin articulates brings into focus the profit motive of capitalism as an underlying cause of oppression. Indeed the ability to channel and transform anger into a constructive politics to critique society and effect social change is a recurring theme throughout his work. Consider, for example, the political role of Baldwin's anger in a famous published conversation he had with Margaret Meade entitled *A Rap on Race* (Baldwin & Meade, 1971). Among many intense moments in this conversation in which Baldwin's anger impassions his critique of inequality and disenfranchisement, the most forceful is his denunciation of capitalism as a system that causes racial strife and segregation. In their conversation, Baldwin and Meade talk about social domination in the consumer society of "mass production" (pp. 158-159). Arguing that the rage of the poor and the disenfranchised articulates their unmet human needs in capitalism, Baldwin emphasizes the political role of anger to express (and make visible) the ideological structure of exploitative capitalist profit relations. Yet the anger and frustration of the oppressed within a system that dehumanizes the poor and profits from racialized class division has, Baldwin further asserts, the contradictory potential to effect social change and overturn the present order (Baldwin & Meade, pp. 160-162). In the conversation, Baldwin ingeniously suggests a concept of the emotions as a radical social critique, which draws our attention to the "larger structure" of capitalism that eludes notice as a causal mechanism of racialized exclusion, discrimination, and social division. "That is the fault of the system," Baldwin contends:

> One has been avoiding the word capitalism and one has been avoiding talking about matters on that level. But there is a very serious flaw in the profit system which is implicit in the phrase itself. And, in some way or another, one can even say at this moment, sitting in this room, that the Western economy is doomed. Certainly part of the crisis of the Western economy is due to the fact in a way every dime I earn, the system which earns it for me—I don't mean the fact that I write books, but the way the system works, the base—is standing on the back of some black miner in South Africa, and he is going to stand up presently. Now, if we don't anticipate that, we will be in terrible trouble. Because he is not going to be bending under this weight ten years from now. And if we don't understand that and let him stand up, the whole thing is going to be a shambles. (Baldwin & Meade, pp. 163-164)

To be sure, Baldwin's passionate statement is a forewarning about how an immense black underclass will channel its anger and frustration to destroy the racially oppressive order historically imbricated in the profit system. But what's also remarkable in Baldwin's statement is that he traces *himself* to the violent operative of racially exploitative capitalism evident in the way "every dime" he earns as profit in "the system which earns it for [him]" means, in turn, the dehumanizing exploitation of black laborers in South Africa. By way of his anger here, Baldwin addresses his own involvement in a capitalist system that profits from the abstract labor of black South African miners. To register, as Baldwin does, one's complicity in profiting from the racialized abstraction of black labor in South Africa is to reveal the *transnational reach* of capitalism's exploitative profit motive—a grip whose intricate hold on the entirety of society is easy for us to take as given and simply not see, and thus by extension, feel hopeless to avoid, much less disengage ourselves from. Yet one could also plausibly argue that Baldwin's point is to include some notion of unity or collectivity to contradict the collapse of Western capitalism—to counteract the fact that "the whole thing is going to be a shambles." For this reason it is important to assess the critical capacity of anger and empathy in Baldwin's radical political vision. His anger criticizes the capitalist system that restricts human subjectivity to the sensation and affect of the profit motive.

In Baldwin's statement, the anxiety that pervades the future of Western capitalism's demise is expressed by the emotional contradictions of anger and empathy. These are emotions that throw into relief the direct link between the "Western economy" and its racialized exploitation of black labor, a link producing the further contradiction of the racialized critical subject (of Baldwin, we might say) who empathically envisions the revolutionary change that arises from a worldwide movement of collective resistance. By conceptualizing anger and empathy as emotional contradictions, then, Baldwin depicts the emergence of a radical consciousness with universal dimensions.

In an "open letter" to Angela Davis published in *The New York Review of Books*, Baldwin (1971) rails against commodity capitalism. In Marxist idiom, he denounces the capitalist processes of commodification and consumerism that deprive America's black underclass of their humanity:

> We know that man *is not a thing* and is not to be placed at the mercy of things … We know that we, the blacks, and not only we, the blacks, have been, and are, the victims of a system whose only fuel is greed, whose only god is profit. We know that the fruits of this system have been ignorance, despair, and death, and we know that the system is doomed because the world can no longer afford it—if, indeed, it ever could have. (Baldwin, p. 16)

Instead of creating conditions for equality and the affirmation of human life, the capitalist profit motive generates, according to Baldwin, a destructive social order that thrives on the negative affects of "ignorance, despair, and death" (p. 16). In response, furthermore, to the revolutionary fervor of black Marxist intellectuals in the 1960s like Angela Davis who struggled to transform U.S. racist society and its destructive capitalist system, Baldwin describes the rise of radical black consciousness, whose emergence is the historical condition of black people's experiences with the pain of suffering from dehumanizing social oppressions:

> The enormous revolution in black consciousness which has occurred in your generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. Some of us, white and black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. (p. 16)

It is important to note that Baldwin frames his argument about black radical consciousness in *economic* terms. As he implies in his letter, the collective resistance of the anti-racist movement has emerged as a contradiction of the immense human injury and death by the "greed" of the profit system. And yet, the potential of radical consciousness to transform society is premised on the ability of people to use the pain of their suffering to express and encourage positive affects of love, compassion, and empathy.

COMMODIFICATION AND THE REPRESSED HISTORY OF SLAVERY

In Baldwin's (1993) *Another Country*, the mediation of pain registers the psychological costs of social division and oppression. In this story about interracial love and bisexual desire in 1950s New York, the oft-repeated phrase "*All you got to do is pay your dues*" (p. 277) is like a refrain from the Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday songs that Baldwin quotes throughout the novel. The painful feelings of misery, frustration, and despair evoked in Baldwin's assertion that "the price has already been paid" for revolutionary consciousness and transformation is a telling reminder of human objectification under capitalism, which functions as a metaphor for the exploitative process of profit extraction.

In his novel, Baldwin (1993) depicts as one of his central themes the capitalist objectification of human life, in particular the money the whole world makes "on black flesh" (p. 7). What resonates so powerfully throughout the story is a compelling sense of anger, a palpable outrage against a system of exploitation under which everybody lives.[4] In the pre-Civil Rights era of New York, the novel's black and white, heterosexual and homosexual artists struggle to love one another in an urban milieu replete with bigotry specific to the capitalist system. Rage against the profit system, as Baldwin implies, underscores the dehumanizing effects of objectification, which are evident in the novel's black and white protagonists who struggle to live in a system thriving on the social divisions and hierarchies of class society. For Baldwin, negative affects like anger and outrage indicate how people who are oppressed by racism, misogyny, homophobia, and poverty can use the pain of their suffering to communicate empathically with others and counter social injustice with the positive affects of communicative interaction. The mediation of pain in this socially transformative manner thus disengages anger from the route of destructive bitterness and resentment.

Another Country opens with an indictment of the predicament of the black male under the forces of commodity capitalism. Rufus Scott, the novel's black male protagonist, wanders New York's streets homeless, unemployed, and volatile with vengeful fury about his indigence. The city is cruelly unresponsive to his suffering; it functions like a monstrous cyborg, operating on and solely concerned with the ceaseless mechanical dealings of profit extraction. The people in the city are an alienated mass in the capitalist processes of commodification and consumption:

> At corners, under the lights, near drugstores, small knots of white, bright, chattering people showed teeth to each other, pawed each other, whistled for taxis, were whirled away in them, vanished through the doors of drugstores or into the blackness of side streets … A sign advertised the chewing gum which would help one to relax and keep smiling. A hotel's enormous neon name challenged the starless sky … The great buildings, unlit, blunt like the phallus or sharp like the spear, guarded the city which never slept. (Baldwin, 1993, p. 4)

Around Rufus, New York teems with the business of consumerism and capital accumulation. People live in the city through relations that seem entirely dehumanizing. New York's denizens, the novel's opening scene tells us, exist as isolated abstractions; they are anesthetized to the inhumanity of their surroundings, baring "teeth to each other" and "paw[ing]" one another predatorily like animals to perpetuate the unending cycle of struggle. Lost amid the capitalist business of living and working in New York (which is what maintains the system of financial exchange and profit extraction), Rufus endures the pain of abstracted social relations and his alienation. Beneath the city's "murderous weight," he walks as "one of the fallen … one of those who had been crushed on the day, which was every day, these towers fell. Entirely alone, and dying of it, he was part of an unprecedented multitude" (Baldwin, p. 4). As a "multitude" of nameless, faceless parts in the capitalist machine, the city's animal-like dwellers maintain the cycle of objectification and commodification. Rufus is an invisible man within this urban multitude, a human consequence of mass alienation by the profit system. Before killing himself by jumping off the George Washington Bridge, he spends his final days in a white-privileged city that's utterly indifferent to him, save for when his presence serves as a reminder of the necessary condition of black abjection and impoverishment on which New York's class structure thrives.

The first chapter of *Another Country* portrays Rufus's destruction by the profit system as the contemporary effect of America's repressed history of slavery. The rage he feels about the injustice of his condition warps into self-destructive bitterness, blinding him to the humanity of others and that of himself. He destroys his lover, Leona, a white woman from the South whom he had met one year earlier in a Harlem jazz club. Abusing Leona so relentlessly that she ends up institutionalized from physical and mental trauma, Rufus makes her the target of the anger that he has internalized and distorted into bitterness and vengeance.[5] The couple's attempt to love one another thus becomes a casualty of *ressentiment* manifested as Rufus's profound self-loathing borne from his privation by the legacy of white racist society.[6] It is, moreover, one of Baldwin's central concerns in his novel to depict racism as a social norm, a norm consequent to historical forces in slavery that deforms an interracial couple's love into hatred as the essential condition of their abjection.

Racism in the novel thus has its most devastating impact on interracial relations as the mandate of bitterness and hatred imposed by a white and patriarchal class-stratified society. This is true for Rufus and Leona insofar as their presence as lovers in New York's streets becomes, in the eyes of this discriminatory society, the target both for expressing the constraints of miscegenation and for enforcing racist codes of social hierarchy. Consider the hostility that Rufus receives and to which he bitterly responds from passersby when he walks with Leona through the streets of Greenwich Village: "They encountered the big world when they went out into the Sunday streets. It stared unsympathetically out at them from the eyes of passing people; and Rufus realized that he had not thought at all about this world and its power to hate and destroy" (Baldwin, 1993, p. 27). In public, the couple immediately becomes a target of racist attitudes about black men in the company of white women:

> Villagers, both bound and free, looked them over as though where they stood were an auction block or a stud farm … Then he raised his eyes and met the eyes of an Italian adolescent. The boy was splashed by the sun falling through the trees. The boy looked at him with hatred; his glance flicked over Leona as though she were a whore; he dropped his eyes slowly and swaggered on—having registered his protest, his backside seemed to snarl, having made his point. (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 29-30)

What Baldwin depicts in this discomforting scene is the racialized interpellation of Rufus and Leona. If interpellation is, as Louis Althusser (1977, p. 173) contends, the effect of ideology "transforming" individuals into subjects, then ideology "acts" or "functions" on the street as the public's gaze to enforce racial segregation and to label non-normative and queer the love that Rufus and Leona have for each other. By interpellating their interracial love as non-normative and queer, the public's gaze renders deviant Rufus and Leona in terms that register the historical deployment of race for exploitation and profit. Rufus feels the shame-casting eyes of the public as the historical condition of having descended from slavery. In public with a white woman, he experiences the legacy of slavery's sexual objectification of the black male, "as though where they stood were an auction block or a stud farm," and feels likened to an animal in the basest of sexually exploitative terms for black men. The Italian adolescent glances hatefully at Leona as if she were a "whore," with the connotation of Rufus as her pimp. Further, by way of the passerby's interpellative vision, Rufus and Leona are indexed as the opposite of freedom; they become the site and spectacle of bondage, a means through which to implement freedom in white patriarchal society by sexually degrading interracial couples and restricting them to their abjection. The dehumanization of black male and white female couples through the act of racialized interpellation is a social and historical demand of the capitalist profit motive.

Interpellation acts on Rufus to make him feel dehumanized as the shamed subject of abjection. The shame he's made to feel about his relations with Leona provokes rage within him that gets distorted into the bitter desire to inflict harm and seek revenge. Destructive bitterness about "the world and its power to hate and destroy" (Baldwin, 1993, p. 27) overwhelms Rufus, causing him to lash out at the nearest targets of his vengeful wrath—at himself, his friends, and his lover. Although he tries, he cannot love Leona on equal terms as another human being; because of racist opprobrium and the blinding fury that it causes within him, he cannot relate to her on equal terms. Instead, acting out of unforgiving resentment for his disparaged status in dominant white society, he succumbs to racism's hatred, and abuses Leona as an object he considers more dehumanized and lowly than he. She becomes for him a "whore" beneath his contempt. This is the tragic outcome of objectifying social processes like interpellation for Rufus: To internalize the hatred and shame of racism as self-reproach, a history of destruction that he inherits and experiences as insufferable pain, and that he vengefully pays back in terms that assure the destruction of the woman he loves and, ultimately, of himself.

CHANNELING ANGER THROUGH THE BLUES

Another Country is an especially searing indictment of capitalism's exploitative processes of objectification and commodification, against which the novel's protagonists struggle to find personal meaning and fulfillment in their work as artists, as well as in their relations with each other as lovers and friends. The artists in *Another Country* experience the socially constraining forces of commodity capitalism—forces that compel them to exploit themselves and each other as though they were "whores." To suffer exploitation and to inflict it, in the novel, is to feel the cost of having to pay for dignity and personal worth lost in a system that extracts profit from exploitation based on gender, race, class, and sexuality. For example, the novel's other interracial couple, Vivaldo Moore and Ida Scott, encounter the same oppressions that destroy Rufus and Leona. Vivaldo is a working-class Italian American struggling to write his first novel, and Ida is an aspiring blues singer, as well as Rufus's sister. They fall in love, initially because of their despair over Rufus's suicide. Yet Ida can love Vivaldo only at the cost of making him understand the suffering she experiences, which is the legacy of black oppression and dehumanization by white patriarchal society. One of the most remarkable achievements of Baldwin's novel is, then, to portray the radical politics of a black woman's struggle to return the love of a white man and affirm her self-worth.

Ida's love for Vivaldo is a progressive radical act because it signifies not only her resistance to racial segregation and anti-miscegenation, but also her consciousness of how black women have been historically abused and objectified sexually in America. White supremacist capitalist patriarchy has refused black women their self-worth by denying their humanity through sexual exploitation and degradation (Lorde, 1984, pp. 127-133). That Ida can love Vivaldo, however, in spite of her anger about being sexually objectified and stigmatized as a black woman, demonstrates her ability to use the pain of her suffering to avoid the tragic fate of her brother and defend her personal worth. In a scene that parallels the interpellation of Rufus and Leona in Greenwich Village, Ida walks with Vivaldo as his lover in New York's streets, and like her brother, she experiences the same interpellative contempt from hostile public glances:

> She was very, very dark, she was beautiful; and [Vivaldo] was proud to be with her, artlessly proud, in the shining, over, male way; but the eyes they passed accused him, enviously, of a sniggering, back-alley conquest. White men looked at her, then looked at him. They looked at her as though she were no better than a whore. And then the eyes of the men sought his, inviting a wet complicity.
>
> The women, too. They saw Ida first and might have been happy to admire her if she had been walking alone. But she was with Vivaldo, which gave her the status of a thief … Ida strode past, seeming not to see them. She conveyed with this stride and her bright, noncommittal face how far she felt them to be beneath her. She had the great advantage of being extraordinary—however she might bear this distinction or however others might wish to deny it; whereas, her smile suggested, these people, the citizens of the world's most bewildered city, were so common that they were all but invisible … So their passage raised small clouds of male and female hostility which blew into their faces like dust. And Ida accepted this spiteful tribute with a spiteful pride. (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 144-145)

Ida withstands the public's hostility by her ability to channel her anger in a way that preserves her dignity. Her "spiteful pride" indicates that she does not internalize the shame-casting disdain of other women who look at her as a "thief." She does not succumb to the anger and resentment that are distorted into bitterness—internalized rage that caused Rufus to destroy Leona and commit suicide. But how exactly does Ida channel *constructively* the anger that is specific to her abject status as a black woman? By what means is she able to endure so much contempt by the public? Through what medium is she able to use the pain of her suffering to affirm personal worth and return the love of a white man?

Here, it must be noted, is the relevance of Ida's aspiration to be a blues singer. She sings the blues as a way to manage her pain and channel her anger. It's telling, for instance, that she holds hands with Vivaldo on the street and returns hateful glances with her "spiteful pride" while humming an old church song. She tells Vivaldo that she awakened in the morning with the song in her mind. Charmed by Ida's humming, Vivaldo asks her to sing the lyrics:

> She sang, in her low, slightly rough voice, whispering the words to him:
>
> *I woke up this morning with my mind*
>
> *Stayed on Jesus*

> *I woke up this morning with my mind*
>
> *Stayed on Jesus*
>
> "That's a great way to wake up," he said.
>
> And she continued:
>
> > *I stayed all day with my mind*
> >
> > *Stayed on Jesus.*
> >
> > *Hallelu, Hallelu*
> >
> > *Hallelujah!*
>
> "That's a great song," he said. "That's tremendous. You've got a wonderful voice, you know that?"
>
> "I just woke up with it—and it made me feel, I don't know—different than I've felt for months. It was just as though a burden had been taken off me." (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 145-146)

Ida sings the blues not only as a means by which to defend her worth against the objectification and degradation of black women, but also as a way to use her anger and mediate her pain. By saying that her singing makes her feel "as though a burden had been taken off me," Ida invites comparison with enslaved Africans in America who sang while working on plantations to protest their abjection and to articulate powerful emotions that registered their humanity against their subjugation under slavery. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglas (1987) recorded how slaves "would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness …. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound—and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone" (p. 262). An expression of sentiment that protests her oppression under white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the song that Ida sings when she's with Vivaldo signifies the historical contexts of enslaved Africans in America who protested their bondage and misery by singing spirituals, work songs, and field hollers with overtly religious lyrics. A primary role of singing the blues in the novel is, then, to portray the historical act of black people's mediation with the pain of their suffering. Through the blues lyrics that appear throughout his novel's pages, Baldwin shows us how to mediate the pain of oppression so as to acquire and express positive affects of compassion, empathy, and love.

THE GLOBAL DIMENSION OF BALDWIN'S EMOTIONAL METAPHORS

Near the conclusion of his novel, Baldwin (1993) asserts his most important point about using anger and pain to develop compassion and "become better" (p. 391). In a moving scene between Vivaldo and his friend Eric, the novel's bisexual protagonist through whom all the characters become connected by the power of redemptive love, Baldwin illustrates the mediation of pain as a way to break through barriers that inhibit empathic recognition of another's humanity. Vivaldo has spent the evening with Eric, seeking consolation from him while in despair over an affair Ida is having with a white producer who falsely promises to advance her singing career. The two men have made love, and in the morning they reflect upon the pain they and their friends have suffered. "'You haven't got to be—admirable—in order to feel pain,'" Eric tells Vivaldo (Baldwin, p. 391). "No," Vivaldo responds:

> "But I think that perhaps you can begin to become admirable if, when you're hurt, you don't try to pay back." He looked at Eric and put one hand on the back of Eric's neck. "Do you know what I mean? Perhaps if you can accept the pain that almost kills you, you can use it, you can become better." (Baldwin, p. 391)

To use pain in order to "become better," Vivaldo suggests, is a necessary first step to structure one's consciousness with the awareness of suffering borne from past and present oppressive forces. By empathizing with the suffering of Ida and Rufus, Vivaldo shows that he understands "the repressed history of African Americans in a country that has lacked the courage to deal honestly and openly with the truth of its collective past" (Feldman, 2000, p. 99). Mediating pain to become a better person is an act that conditions one's self-awareness in a dialectical relationship between oppressive social forces and critical consciousness. But critical consciousness, as Baldwin also suggests, may be further understood as radical consciousness that can merge with the collective vision and action necessary for a more just and humane world.

The analysis presented in this chapter shows that Baldwin advocated revolutionary social transformation in his writings that depict intense emotions in radical consciousness. In an interview with *The Black Scholar*, Baldwin (1973) offered the following prophetic vision: "I think the revolution begins first of all in the most private chamber of somebody's heart, in your consciousness. I think that what is happening now is that a new vision of the world which has always been there … is beginning to be born" (p. 42). Baldwin is clearly concerned, as is Audre Lorde,[7] with theorizations of anger and indignation that are useful for understanding formations of radical consciousness. Through their anger *and* empathy Lorde and Baldwin both conceptualize and express the revolutionary spirit and character of feeling in radical consciousness. Their accounts of emotions in social protest and societal transformation are especially meaningful today if understood in the context of our current era's transnational movements against corporate globalization, a worldwide network of solidarity among people whose emancipatory politics have affective expression. For example, Baldwin's emotional metaphors of using anger and using pain to express and structure critical consciousness have much in common with radical concepts, such as those of Antonio Negri, that refer to collective transnational resistance in today's anti-corporate globalization movements. Negri (2002) claims:

> Another thing which strikes me as absolutely fundamental: people understood. They understood from that point on that subjectivity produces, and that all activities become places of production once there is no longer a "place of production." When there is this sort of consciousness, always bigger, always deeper, those who take part in pacifist movements blend with workers' movements, tangible as well as intangible, which in turn unite with women's movements and youth from social centers. Really, as long as that consciousness spreads and deepens in as powerful a manner as we're seeing today, certain watchwords begin to have weight, such as "desertion." (pp. 142-143)

The subjectivity of "people understood" implies the global dimension of critical consciousness in a transnational movement, such as the World Social Forum, that champions counter-hegemonic globalization. By "desertion," Negri means the people's *refusing* the ruling bloc's power alliance in the global corporate organization of production, which for Baldwin implicitly would mean the power of an oppressed people's collective consciousness to *overturn* social divisions and to actualize the emancipation of the oppressed by recognizing the radical implications of anger and empathy. It is therefore the case (at least for Baldwin) that the consciousness of racially oppressed people emerges from the dialectic of feeling objectified and dehumanized in capitalism *and* of articulating the emotions of political awareness. In his work, James Baldwin emphasized the emotions through which oppressed people may realize and express critical consciousness. Feeling in *radical* consciousness is, then, one of capitalism's most potentially effective contradictions.

NOTES

[1] See also Paolo Freire (1974), *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

[2] Lisa Lowe's (1996) definition of "contradiction" informs my thinking about emotions in critical consciousness as contradictions of human objectification in the capitalist system. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe writes: "In using the term 'contradiction' to conceive of both group and individual identities, I mean to take up the sense in which contradiction describes the condition within which a system produces, in the course of providing for its effective hegemony, the conflicts that will bring about its own expiration and undoing" (pp. 56-57).

[3] By "dialectical," I refer to the Marxist concept of negating exploitative social forces in capitalism in order to effect emancipatory historical change and liberate "the possibilities immanent within the 'given state of affairs'" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 315).

[4] The novel's portrayal of interracial erotic relations generated controversy and scorn for Baldwin. William A. Cohen (1991) notes that when *Another Country* was published in 1962 nearly every major critic in New York's literary scene reviled it (p. 1). The novel has provoked contempt by those who accuse Baldwin of misrepresenting black male sexuality; see Terry Rowden (1993) and Charles

P. Toombs (2000). Susan Feldman (2000) offers a perceptive argument against these accusations. See also Ernesto Javier Martinez (2009).

[5] Baldwin has written powerfully on the distortion of anger into bitterness and vengeance. See James Baldwin (1983), *Notes of a Native Son*.

[6] See Rey Chow (2002) for her analysis of negative emotions, such as envy, contempt, and self-loathing, that structure the "ressentiment" of postcolonial and racialized minority subjects. In using his rage against white racist society to destroy Leona and himself, Rufus externalizes his bitterness in a manner that is consistent with the destructive consequences of ressentiment.

[7] See Audre Lorde's (1984) essay "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism."

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JAMES TACKACH

7. JAMES BALDWIN'S *THE FIRE NEXT TIME* AND THE JEREMIAD TRADITION

James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* fits many genres—personal memoir, religious journey, an analysis of the racial landscape of the United States early in a tumultuous decade, a critique of the Nation of Islam and black nationalism. Baldwin's extended essay that originally appeared as an article in *The New Yorker* late in 1962, and in book form early in 1963, also takes the form of a jeremiad, an admonitory sermon to Baldwin's American countrymen for the putative sins they had committed. The jeremiad, originally a type of sermon that took its name from the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah, presents a warning to the unrighteous and the wavering that God's justifiable vengeance will be coming as payment due for individual and communal sins. The jeremiad traveled to America with the English Pilgrims and Puritans who settled in Massachusetts during the seventeenth century; it became a staple of their pulpit.

Secularized and adapted to a wide range of social and moral issues, the jeremiad has endured, over almost four centuries, to become an important component of American religious and political rhetoric; it survived the decline of Puritan hegemony in New England, was adapted by American patriots to the cause of American independence from Great Britain, found new energy during the abolitionist era and Civil War, and remains alive—and not merely in evangelical Christian churches—almost four centuries after it sailed to America with English religious dissenters. *The Fire Next Time* is a mid-twentieth-century jeremiad, a condemnation of American racism that connects Baldwin to the Puritan vision of America—a special place inhabited by a special people who were given a special mission in the world and would be held responsible by God for failing to achieve that mission.

THE JEREMIAD AND THE PURITAN VISION OF AMERICA

The British Pilgrims who sailed from Holland aboard the *Mayflower* and established Plymouth Plantation in 1620, and especially the British Puritans who crossed the Atlantic Ocean aboard the *Arbella* and established Massachusetts Bay Colony a decade later, saw themselves as God's newly chosen people. The majority of them did not come to America for gold, furs, land, or anything else of material value that this so-called New World might offer. Unlike their British predecessors who landed in Virginia in 1607 and established Jamestown, most of these New England migrants crossed the Atlantic mainly for religious purposes—to set up a new society, both ecclesiastical and civil, far from the Anglican and

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Catholic religious ideology and practices that still prevailed in post-Reformation England. They were indeed pilgrims embarking for a holy land in America where they could live and worship without interference from British civil and religious authorities. Their mission to this New World was unique and exceptional, they believed, an errand in the American wilderness guided by their God, who had established with them a special covenant, similar to the one that he had formed with the ancient Israelites: If these new Israelites obeyed God and carried out his work on Earth, he would bestow upon them special blessings that no other earthly communities enjoyed. The Israelites of old had become too worldly and, thus, had failed to uphold this covenant, but it was renewed by God with these seventeenth-century Pilgrims and Puritans. As the Puritan historian Perry Miller (1967) has stated, the leaders of Massachusetts Bay Colony "conceived of their society as in covenant with God like Israel of old, which supplied meanings and directions not alone for theological speculation but for the civil polity as well" (p. 415). Pilgrim and Puritan literature—sermons, histories like William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, journals and letters—is filled with references to Moses and the Israelites journeying toward and arriving in the promised land of Canaan. The New Englanders saw themselves as the new Israelites and America as their promised land, their new Jerusalem. As the historian Nathaniel Philbrick (2006) has noted in *Mayflower*, the Pilgrims emigrated to America "with the conviction that God wanted them to go." It was their "patriotic and spiritual duty to plant a godly English plantation in the New World" (p. 6).

Two Puritan sermons of 1630 eloquently articulated the vision of the Massachusetts immigrants. Before the *Arbella* departed from Southampton, England, for America, Reverend John Cotton, the pre-eminent Puritan clergyman living in England, delivered to the ship's passengers a sermon titled *God's Promise to His Plantations*. For his sermon's biblical text, Cotton appropriately chose a passage from II Samuel: "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more" (II Samuel 7:10). Although Cotton would not be crossing the Atlantic on the *Arbella*—he would come to Massachusetts Bay Colony a few years later—he blessed the journey, comparing the departing Puritans to the ancient Israelites, led by Moses, escaping the pharaoh in ancient Egypt and journeying to the land of Canaan. Cotton (1630) also offered the travelers God's pledge for a special place of their own: "It is a land of promise, where they have provision for soul as well as for body" (p. 77).

A short time after Cotton delivered his sermon, the leader of the Puritans aboard the Arbella, John Winthrop, a layman, offered a sermon that remains one the most influential American speeches, *A Model of Christian Charity*. In this sermon, Winthrop suggested that this Puritan outpost in New England would be no ordinary earthly community; it would become, as Winthrop's title suggested, a model community based on the ethic of Christian charity. According to Winthrop (1630), the Massachusetts Bay Puritans must "be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection" (p. 83). These bonds of love that would hold the community together must become like "a bond or ligament" that holds the human body intact

(Winthrop, p. 86). "We must love brotherly without dissimulation; we most love one another with a pure heart fervently," exhorted Winthrop:

> We must bear one another's burthens. We must look not only to our own things, but also on the things of our brethren. … We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. (pp. 90-91)

According to Winthrop, this commitment to love and charity would set the Puritan community apart from all others on the face of the Earth:

> For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. (p. 91)

This exceptional community in America, a gift that was part of God's covenant with these New England settlers, would have special responsibilities. The New Englanders believed, as Luke's Gospel suggests, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required …" (Luke 12:48). About ten years after Winthrop delivered *A Model of Christian Charity*, Peter Bulkeley (c. 1639-40), a Puritan minister who migrated from Great Britain to Massachusetts in 1635, echoing Winthrop, reiterated, in a sermon titled *The Gospel-Covenant*, that this Puritan covenant with God encumbered certain responsibilities:

> And for ourselves here, the people of New England, we should in a special manner labor to shine in holiness above other people; we have that plenty and abundance of ordinances and means of grace, as few people enjoy the like. We are as a city set upon an hill, in the open view of all the earth; the eyes of the world are upon us because we profess ourselves to be a people in covenant with God, and therefore not only the Lord our God, with whom we have made covenant, but heaven and earth, angels and men, that are witnesses of our profession, will cry shame upon us, if we walk contrary to the covenant which we have professed and promised to walk in. If we open the mouths of men against our profession by reason of the scandal of our lives, we (of all men) shall have the greater sin. (p. 120)

As Miller (1967) stated, "New England was founded as a Puritan commonwealth and was intended to be a holy and unique corner of the world …" (p. 491). The settlers of this holy commonwealth must be a holy people and do God's work on Earth. To fail in this task would bring about God's displeasure and wrath and the world's criticism.

The jeremiad, which, according to Sacvan Bercovitch (1978), "originated in the European pulpit" (p. xi), found fertile soil in seventeenth-century New England. In its original form, the sermon warned of the dangers of backsliding, disobeying God. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah had warned the people of Israel that their failure to keep God’s covenant would lead to their destruction. The Puritan jeremiad offered a similar message; and as these new Israelites saw themselves as a special people chosen by God to create a new Jerusalem in America, God’s punishments for their sins would be particularly devastating. If this model of Christian charity in New England failed in its earthly mission, these sermons warned, God would exact penalties both on Earth and in the afterlife.

In *The American Jeremiad*, however, Bercovitch (1978) has suggested a distinction between the New World jeremiad and its European ancestor. The Puritans “revised the message of the jeremiad. Not that they minimized the threat of divine retribution; on the contrary, they asserted it with a ferocity unparalleled in the European pulpit. But they qualified it in a way that turned threat into celebration. In their case, they believed that God’s punishments were *corrective*, not destructive” (Bercovitch, p. 8). Hence, according to Bercovitch, the essence of the New England jeremiad was “its unshakable optimism” (p. 7), an articulation of the belief that God would punish correctively *and* offer forgiveness for sincere repentance so that his newly chosen people could continue on their holy errand in the American wilderness. Even the harshest of Puritan jeremiads, Jonathan Edwards’ (1741) *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, for example, delivered more than a century after the *Arbella* had landed, ended with the hope that sinners could yet “fly out of Sodom” and avoid God’s wrath and eternal damnation (p. 65).

But the Puritan jeremiad was not solely a religious text. According to Bercovitch (1978), it developed, in the hands of New England Puritans, into “a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal” (p. xi); it was a “*political sermon*, as the New England Puritans sometimes called this genre,” that served as both a spiritual and practical guide to survival in the American wilderness. The Puritan jeremiad wedded theology to politics “and politics to the progress of the kingdom of God” (xiv). A staple of election day festivities in Massachusetts Bay Colony was a sermon that often took the form of a jeremiad. In a 1670 election-day sermon titled *A Brief Recognition of New England’s Errand into the Wilderness*, for example, Samuel Danforth (1670) used this political occasion to warn his listeners, “We have … in a great measure forgotten our errand into the wilderness” (p. 65). A half-century after Winthrop spoke of his city upon a hill, Danforth issued a call for a renewal of the original Puritan commitment. The jeremiad form, in the hands of clergymen or laymen, could be used to address both religious and social issues, and it was still available as a rhetorical strategy for Baldwin to use in the mid-twentieth century.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE JEREMIAD

The jeremiad form, Bercovitch (1978) has pointed out, “persisted through the eighteenth century, and helped sustain a national dream through two hundred years of turbulence and change” (p. xi). It was effectively adapted to the cause of the American colonies in their quest for independence from England by American patriots, who asserted that just as the Pilgrims and Puritans had severed their ties with England by coming to America, so must the thirteen American colonies become independent from their mother country. In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine (1776) stated, "Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America, is a strong proof, that the authority of the one, over the other, was never the design of Heaven"; the discovery of America, according to Paine, occurred "as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years" (p. 25). As Bercovitch has pointed out, the Americans under British rule were frequently compared to the ancient Israelites under the pharaoh in Revolutionary War rhetoric (p. 121). The United States' founding document, the Declaration of Independence (1776), channeled the jeremiad as it listed the many sins ("a history of repeated injuries and usurpations") committed by King George III against the colonies. In *Common Sense*, Paine (1776) alluded to the idea of America as a special place, a model community that the entire world was looking up to for inspiration, when he asserted, "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind" (p. 5).

Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1982), David Howard-Pitney (1990), and Willie J. Harrell, Jr. (2006) have studied how antebellum African Americans, more than a century before Baldwin was writing, adapted the jeremiad to critique white Americans for not delivering rights and liberty to their fellow citizens of color. According to Harrell, in the hands of African Americans, the jeremiad was transformed "from a religious to a sociopolitical critique of public advocacy while inspiring moral uplift and elevation in its black audience" (p. 151). Although Moses claims that the African American jeremiad was "mainly a pre-Civil War phenomenon" (p. 31), Howard-Pitney argues that the form has been used not only by African American abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, but also by twentieth-century African American civil rights activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson. (Howard-Pitney begins his study of the African American jeremiad with an analysis of King's "I Have a Dream.") In the hands of both black and white abolitionists, the jeremiad form became a standard tool to critique Americans for their tolerance of slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852), the daughter, sister, and wife of clergymen who was also influenced by African American abolitionist writers such as Douglass, ended *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with a sermon on the evils of slavery. The last paragraph of her tremendously influential novel could have been delivered by a Puritan minister:

> A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, is this Union to be saved,—but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law, by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law, by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God! (Stowe, p. 388)

Before and during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, too, frequently alluded to the ideas articulated in the original Puritan jeremiads. Although Lincoln, realizing the political and economic difficulties of uprooting slavery in the United States, never fully embraced the abolitionist cause prior to the Civil War, he came to see slavery as a stain on the American republic, a national sin. Like the New England Puritans, Lincoln came to view the United States as a special place, “man’s last, best hope on earth” (Basler, 1953, V, p. 537). Writing to his friend Joshua F. Speed in 1855, Lincoln, commenting on the rise of the No-Nothing party, articulated the idea that the United States was a special nation because of its commitment to the equality of all citizens; therefore, slavery was especially sinful because the United States had to be held to a higher standard of conduct than that of other nations:

> As a nation, we began by declaring that “*all men are created equal.*” We now practically read it “all men are created equal, *except negroes.*” When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read “all men are created equal, except negroes, *and foreigners, and catholics*.” When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocricy [sic]. (Basler, 1953, II, p. 323)

In Lincoln’s view, because Americans were historically committed to equality (at least in theory), their nation must be held accountable for its failure to achieve it in a way that Russia would not.

Two recent books on Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address connect that great speech with the Puritan jeremiad (Tackach, 2002, pp. 125-40; White, 2002, pp. 151-56). In that address, Lincoln identified “American Slavery” as “one of those offences, which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came” (Basler, 1953, VIII, p. 333). Lincoln’s God had kept a tally of “every drop of blood drawn by the [slaveholder’s] lash,” and he now required that each drop “shall be paid by another with the sword” on the battlefield (Basler, p. 333). Lincoln’s God was the Puritan God exacting on the whole nation, both North and South, retribution for the sin of slavery, in the form of a long and bloody civil war. Despite this severe critique of his nation, however, Lincoln, true to the American jeremiad form, ended his address on an optimistic note:

> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations. (Basler, p. 333)

Lincoln had come to see his nation in Puritan terms. If the nation’s covenant was not specifically with God, it certainly was, in Lincoln’s view, with the American Founders, who, when they drafted the Declaration of Independence, had publicly committed the United States, in 1776, to the equality of all men. At Gettysburg in 1863, Lincoln had stated that “our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (Basler, 1953, VII, p. 23). In his Second Inaugural, delivered sixteen months after the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln suggested that his nation, by permitting slavery to exist for more than four score years, had sinned by failing to bestow that equality on all of its citizens. Civil rights activists like Du Bois, King, and Baldwin would make the same argument during the twentieth century. Slavery might have been abolished, but racial inequality had not, and these civil rights proponents called the United States to account for that failing.

Over the course of four hundred years, the American jeremiad has been employed to serve various other social and political causes. For example, much American environmental writing takes the form of the jeremiad—warning of nature's retribution for the nation's sins against the planet. John Opie and Norbert Elliot (1996) have offered ten or more American texts as examples of environmental jeremiads, ranging from Danforth's *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand in the Wilderness*, to William Bartram's *Travels* (1791), to Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836), to twentieth-century texts such as John Muir's *Yosemite* (1912), Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), and Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance* (1992). Certainly, both the award-winning film version and bestselling book version of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) conform to the rhetorical mold of the traditional Puritan jeremiad. The book, like the Puritan jeremiads of the seventeenth century, opens with a biblical text—the passage from Genesis about God creating the Earth—and then chastises mankind for damaging God's creation but ends on the optimistic note that Americans can solve the problem of global warning as they solved other problems in their history. In the film version, Gore is frequently pictured standing at a podium, dressed in black, guiding his audience through a PowerPoint presentation. Electronic gadgetry aside, Gore could be Samuel Danforth addressing his congregation from a pulpit in a seventeenth-century Puritan meeting house.

JAMES BALDWIN AND THE JEREMIAD TRADITION

"I was born in the church," Baldwin (1968) wrote in the notes for his play *The Amen Corner* (p. xvi). Baldwin was born to Emma Berdis Jones, an unmarried woman living in Harlem who later married David Baldwin, who was born in Louisiana during the 1860s and had come to Harlem during the Great Migration to escape his native region's insufferable racial oppression and find a better life. Baldwin biographers paint David Baldwin as a stern man and a strict father. He was a self-ordained minister who preached fiery sermons on Saturday nights in Harlem's storefront churches. In his essay "Notes of a Native Son," James Baldwin (1955) asserted that his stepfather "could be chilling in the pulpit" (p. 87). One of David Baldwin's favorite passages from scripture came from the Old Testament Book of Joshua: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (p. 112). Indeed, as many Baldwin biographers have pointed out, James learned to serve the Lord at a very young age, and he absorbed the sermon form from constant exposure to it at home, via his father's lectures on the many dangers and sinful temptations that lurked in the streets of Harlem, and in church, via the weekly sermons. Writing about his religious upbringing in Harlem, Baldwin, in a 1948 essay titled "The Harlem Ghetto," claimed that the Harlem churches were "going full blast every night" and that the message repeated over and over from the pulpit was that "the bad will be punished and the good rewarded, for God is not sleeping, the judgment is not far off" (pp. 65-66). This fire-and-brimstone message appealed to young James. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin (1963) stated that the church became his "gimmick" (p. 24) to escape the hazards of the Harlem streets:

> Just before and during the Second World War, many of my friends fled into the service …. Others fled to other states and cities—that is, to other ghettos. Some went on wine or whiskey or the needle, and are still on it. And others, like me, fled into the church. (p. 20)

At age fourteen James Baldwin underwent a religious conversion in Mother Rosa Horn's Mount Cavalry of the Pentecostal Faith Church on Lennox Avenue in Harlem, an experience that he detailed in *The Fire Next Time* (and which became the key event in his first novel, *Go Tell It on a Mountain*, published in 1953). Shortly after his conversion, Baldwin became a "Young Minister," and he, like his stepfather, began preaching in Harlem churches. According to Baldwin biographer David Leeming (1994), Baldwin "quickly demonstrated a gift for preaching and before long was something of a sensation in several Harlem churches" (p. 25). Describing his preaching career in *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin (1963) wrote, "I remained in the pulpit for more than three years. My youth quickly made me a much bigger drawing card than my father" (p. 32). Baldwin continued in *The Fire Next Time* to describe vividly the excitement that he experienced during his time in the church while preaching:

> The church was very exciting. … There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord. There is still, for me, no pathos quite like the pathos of those multi-colored, worn, somehow triumphant faces, speaking from the depths of a visible, tangible, continuing despair of the goodness of the Lord. I have never seen anything to equal the fire and excitement that sometimes, without warning, fill a church, causing the church, as Leadbelly and so many others have testified, to "rock." Nothing that has happened to me since equals the power and the glory that I sometimes felt when, in the middle of a sermon, I knew that I was somehow, by some miracle, really carrying, as they said, "the Word"—when the church and I were one. Their pain and their joy were mine, and mine were theirs—they surrendered their pain and joy to me, I surrendered mine to them—and their cries of "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" and "Yes, Lord!" and "Praise His name!" and "Preach it, brother!" sustained and whipped on my solos until we all became equal, wringing wet, singing and dancing, in anguish and rejoicing, at the foot of the altar. (pp. 33-34)

Baldwin's church sermons have not survived. He likely worked from notes rather than from a crafted written text. But we can assume that many of his Harlem sermons took the form of the jeremiad, for, as Baldwin (1963) put it in *The Fire Next Time* in one long, spectacular sentence, Harlem was enveloped in sin:

> For the wages of sin were everywhere, in every wine-stained and urine-splashed hallway, in every clanging ambulance bell, in every scar on the faces of the pimps and their whores, in every helpless, newborn baby being brought into this danger, in every knife and pistol fight on the Avenue, and in every disastrous bulletin: a cousin, mother of six, suddenly gone mad, the children parcelled [sic] out here and there; an indestructible aunt rewarded for years of hard labor by a slow, agonizing death in a terrible small room; someone's bright son blown into eternity by his own hand; another turned robber and carried off to jail. (p. 20)

The mean and dangerous streets of Harlem offered young minister Baldwin plenty of material around which to craft his sermons.

But Baldwin left the pulpit after three years, just when he seemed destined to become a great African American preacher, a forerunner to Reverend King, perhaps. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin (1963) attributed "the slow crumbling of my faith" (p. 34) to his engagement with novels by the Russian author Fydor Dostoevski during high school. Baldwin began to doubt the messages in the religious pamphlets that he distributed to his high school classmates. He befriended Jewish students despite his stepfather's strict rule that he associate only with other Christians. Worse, he began to sense hypocrisy within the church: "the minister eventually acquires houses and Cadillacs while the faithful continue to scrub floors and drop their dimes and quarters into the plate" (p. 39). Baldwin began to feel as if he were "committing a crime" when he advised children in Sunday school "to reconcile themselves to their misery on earth in order to gain the crown of eternal life. Were only Negroes to gain this crown? Was Heaven, then, merely another ghetto?" (p. 39). Ultimately, Baldwin came to believe that the church "was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair. The transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended, and salvation stopped at the church door" (pp. 39-40). Baldwin concluded that "whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being … must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church" (p. 47). As Leeming (1994) put it, Baldwin "had to leave the church to save his soul" (p. 31).

Despite Baldwin's religious disaffiliation, the Christian church and its tenets remained deeply embedded in his character. Baldwin biographer James Campbell (1991) asserted that "although he [Baldwin] left the church, the church never left him" (p. 4). Religious themes, motifs, and rhetoric were at the heart of his best literary efforts, as many Baldwin critics and biographers have noted. "The prophesy of wrath and the quest for salvation shaped his imagination, just as the rhetoric and cadence of the King James Bible and the rhetoric of the pulpit were at the heart of his literary style," claimed Campbell (p. 4). Campbell further averred that the "oratorical delivery also lies behind his style of writing," and that his "personal theology" came from the Bible (pp. 10-11). Similarly, the book critic Jonathan Yardley (1985), reviewing Baldwin's collection of essays *The Price of the Ticket* in *The Washington Post Book World*, stated that despite his forsaking of the church at a young age and the religious skepticism that ensued, Baldwin's "upbringing in a pious household and his training as a boy revivalist left marks that no amount of apostasy could erase. His prose has the rhythm, the rolling and irresistible cadences, of hellfire and brimstone; his expository method is that of homily, a mixture of logic and passion that is rational and emotive" (p. 3). Gregory Mowe and Scott W. Nobles (1972) called Baldwin "a transplanted fundamentalist preacher" who became "a raging prophet of the apocalypse" (p. 147). Perhaps somewhat condescendingly, the southern writer Robert Penn Warren (1965), in his book *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, referred to Baldwin as the "Boy Preacher" who, when he left the church, "smuggled out the Gift of Tongues" (p. 280).

Throughout his literary career, Baldwin wrote religious texts. He used his own childhood experiences within the church to create the plot and characters of *Go Tell It on a Mountain*. That novel's title and its section headings—"The Seventh Day," "The Prayers of the Saints," "The Threshing Floor"—are evidence of Baldwin's debt to his Christian upbringing. "Sonny Blues," one of Baldwin's best short stories and certainly his most anthologized story, is built upon two Bible stories—the Cain and Abel story from Genesis and the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke's Gospel (Tackach, 2007). And in *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin became a preacher again, chastening his audience for their collective sins.

BALDWIN'S CIVIL RIGHTS JEREMIAD

Mowe and Nobles (1972) have identified four major themes in Baldwin's essays and speeches: First, the so-called "Negro problem" is actually white America's problem—its refusal to "acknowledge the humanity of the black." Second, present solutions to America's racial problems are doomed to failure. Third, the country "will be called to account for her sins." Fourth, the "promise of redemption" is attainable "if Americans will honestly reassess their past and reinterpret their reality and the reality of the black man" (pp. 144-45). The traditional Puritan jeremiad advances similar themes: the community has sinned; it must seek forgiveness or suffer God's punishment; and redemption is possible if the community mends its ways. Harold K. Bush, Jr. (2006) has noted that "much of his [Baldwin's] greatest writing takes the form of a jeremiad, railing against society's injustices" (p. 184). That is certainly the case with *The Fire Next Time*, which Campbell (1991) has called "a visionary sermon" (p. 161).

The book version of *The Fire Next Time* contains two parts: "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation" (originally published separately in the journal *Progressive*) and "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" (which originally appeared in *The New Yorker*). The letter is addressed to Baldwin's nephew and namesake James on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln's 1863 New Year's Day decree that was designed to put American slavery on the road to extinction and thereby recommit the nation to the principles of equality articulated in the Declaration of Independence. But Baldwin's letter to his nephew would not sound a note of centennial celebration; he would, instead, identify a national sin—a "crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it" (1963, p. 5). Directly addressing his nephew, Baldwin asserted that these "innocent and well-meaning people, your countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in London more than a hundred years ago" (p. 6). According to Baldwin, his country set his young nephew "down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish," and he was set down there because he is black "and *for no other reason*" (p. 7). The younger James was expected to "make peace with mediocrity" rather than "aspire to excellence" (p. 7). The white people who have committed these sins against young James were, according to Baldwin, "still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it." In sum, they believed "that black men are inferior to white men" (pp. 8-9). Before concluding his letter, however, Baldwin offered his young nephew some hope: "I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto," but "You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention" (p. 9). Young James was born in America, and "great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become" (p. 10).

"Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" opens with Baldwin's personal narrative—his boyhood on the Harlem streets, his attraction to and later departure from the church, and his high school years. He identifies the many sins that his countrymen, and his neighbors in Harlem, had committed. Pimps and prostitutes work the avenues; young men stick needles in their arms; crime is rampant, and the police make little effort to maintain the peace—"the police would whip you and take you in as long as they could get away with it" (1963, p. 21). The nation has failed this community and its people: "Negroes in this country … are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means they are superior to blacks" (p. 25). The church was Baldwin's temporary escape from this sinful domain. When that failed, he looked elsewhere.

Readers of Baldwin's books and biographies of Baldwin know that his pen probably saved him from the sins that enveloped so many of his contemporaries. Those first essays written during the late 1940s enabled him to secure a grant to work on *Go Tell It on a Mountain*. He would escape Harlem by moving to Paris and living the expatriate existence and then return to the United States after those first shocks—*Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Little Rock crisis—signaled the start of a significant American civil rights movement. But Baldwin chose not to detail this part of his life in *The Fire Next Time*. Halfway through "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind," Baldwin described a recent meeting that he had in Chicago with Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam movement, the next important stop on the religious journey that Baldwin had begun in Harlem's churches.

Perhaps by visiting Elijah Muhammad, Baldwin (1963) was searching for some alternative vision for America, some way to end what he later called in *The Fire Next Time* our "racial nightmare" (p. 105). Elijah Muhammad offered him one:

"God is black. All black men belong to Islam; they have been chosen. And Islam shall rule the world" (p. 57). Elijah Muhammad reported to Baldwin that Allah has permitted the white man to rule in America for a limited time—"the total destruction of the white man is being delayed," until Elijah Muhammad is able to "return 'the so-called Negro' to Islam, to separate the chosen of Allah from this doomed nation" (p. 66). That is Elijah Muhammad's mission in America. This message, of course, sounds vaguely Puritanical—God's chosen people will be given a kingdom on Earth where they will rule until Judgment Day. Although Baldwin "really wished to be able to love and honor him [Elijah] as a witness, an ally, and a father" (p. 78), and while he respected how Elijah had been able "to heal and redeem drunkards and junkies, to convert people who have come out of prison and to keep them out, to make men chaste and women virtuous"—things that the Christian church had failed to do (pp. 50-51)—Baldwin rejected Elijah's vision. First, Baldwin asserted that the American Negro "must be willing to accept his past"—that he "has been formed by this nation, for better or worse, and does not belong to any other—not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam" (p. 81). Second, Baldwin admitted that the "glorification of one race and the consequent debasement of another—or others—always has been and always will be a recipe for murder." To attempt "to treat any group of people with special disfavor because of their race or the color of their skin" was to become like the Nazis, or so Baldwin opined. As he categorically stated, we "must oppose any attempt that Negroes may make to do to others what has been done to them," for "*Whoever debases others is debasing himself*" (pp. 82-83).

Baldwin rejected Elijah Muhammad's and the Nation of Islam's vision of America for a traditional Puritan vision of America as a special place on Earth, a vision reinterpreted by the American Founders who drafted the Declaration of Independence and again later by Lincoln and others who saw America's exceptionalism in its stated commitment to equality. Despite his severe critique, his chronicle of America's racial sins, Baldwin (1963), in the concluding pages of *The Fire Next Time*, was still able to see America as special among nations: "America, of all Western nations, has been best placed to prove the uselessness and the obsolescence of the concept of color" (p. 93). Echoing Winthrop's call for a commitment to love as the bond that holds a community together, Baldwin asserted that "we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identify, our maturity, as men and women. To create one nation has proved to be a hideously difficult task; there is certainly no need now to create two, one black and one white" (p. 97). That nation, according to Baldwin, must recommit itself to the equality of all of its citizens. Like Lincoln, Baldwin knew that the nation had suffered greatly for its racial sins, "but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are," can never become strong and resilient (p. 98). Baldwin here seemed to suggest that punishment and suffering, as so many Puritan sermons proclaimed, are corrective and can be redemptive.

As he worked toward his essay's moving conclusion, Baldwin (1963) urged whites and blacks to love each other and work together to solve their problems:

> If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve the history of the world. (p. 105)

Here, Baldwin, like Lincoln at Gettysburg, was endorsing a new birth of freedom for his country. (Lincoln and Baldwin had actually individually appeared on the covers of consecutive issues of *Time* magazine in May 1963.) A century after Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg, Baldwin was calling on the nation to make a new commitment to equality.

The traditional Puritan jeremiad began with a biblical text, a passage from the scriptures. Baldwin (1963) concluded *The Fire Next Time* with the lyrics from the Negro Spiritual "I Got a Home in Dat Rock": "*God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time*" (p. 106). According to Bush (2006), "Baldwin ends his essay by rising again to the level of benediction in finally endorsing with passion the hope upon which America was ostensibly founded." But "Baldwin implies" that if we fail, "we must face the certainty of a judgment of God not unlike the cataclysms of the book of Genesis—this time, as the book's title reminds us, not by water but by fire," a warning that "place[s] the book's argument firmly in the biblical tradition of the jeremiad" (Bush, pp. 183-84).

Baldwin's words were tragically prophetic. America's racial nightmare did not end in 1963 or shortly thereafter. Urban race riots erupted in Watts, California, during the summer of 1965 and in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit two summers later. The fire that Baldwin had warned of did come to these American cities. But he concluded *The Fire Next Time* with an optimistic vision of what America could and must become—a model community committed to the ethics of Christian charity, as first suggested by Winthrop in 1630, a nation dedicated to the equality of all citizens, as asserted by the Declaration of Independence and then tested and redefined by a great civil war. This vision of America was, for Baldwin, still fragilely intact and still achievable one hundred years after emancipation, despite America's long history of racial sins.

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CHARLES REESE

8. JAMES BALDWIN

Artist as Activist and the Baldwin/Kennedy Secret Summit of 1963

> Let us say that we all live through more than we can say or see. A life, in retrospect, can seem like the torrent of water opening or closing over one's head and, in retrospect, is blurred, swift, kaleidoscopic like that. One does not wish to remember—one is perhaps not able to remember—the holding of one's breath under water, the miracle of rising up far enough to breathe, and then, the going under again; or the tremendous difference between the light beneath the water and the light when one comes up to the sky.—James Baldwin (Baldwin & Kenan, 2010, p. 109)

ACT I: ARTIST-ACTIVISTS

Quinn Eli (1997), in his book, *Many Strong and Beautiful Voices*: *Quotations from Africans throughout the Diaspora*, describes creativity and the qualities of an artist in the following way:

> Creativity isn't a quality possessed only by artists. Rather, it's the most essential ingredient in a meaningful and fulfilling life. The qualities that make an artist—passion, vision, an unerring sense of style, a determination to breathe life into a world grown old and stale—are not limited to those who wield a paintbrush, a pen, or a camera. Anyone can possess an artist's imagination. We're challenged to approach everything about our lives with a creative spark. (pp. 35-36)

Thus, according to Eli, everyone is an artist—or, at the very least, everybody possesses a creative spark, and that creative spark sometimes shows up in the form of activism.

The year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the civil rights journey in the United States. The most catalytic events in the struggle for civil rights, also known as the Civil Rights Movement, occurred in 1963: The 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and publication of James Baldwin's prophetic book, *The Fire Next Time* (January 1963); Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (April 1963); the brutal murder of NAACP civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi (June 1963); Malcolm X's Unity Rally in Harlem, New York (June 1963); the historic march on Washington, DC (August 1963); the devastating death of four young girls (Addie Mae Collins, Denise

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McNair, Carol Robertson, and Cynthia Diane Morris Wesley) as a result of the bombing at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (September 1963); and the shocking assassination of President John Kennedy in Dallas, Texas (November 1963). In many respects, this was really the year of the *burning soul* of America—a call to use all forms of political action, including art, history, education, and culture, to advance the struggle for human and civil rights in the United States and around the world.

American writer and artist-activist James Baldwin played a significant role in literature, politics, art, culture, and activism in 1963. He was the author of dozens of highly praised works, including non-fiction books, essays, plays, and novels. He was passion; he was fire. He was black and homosexual at a moment in history when it could be harmful to be either. He was an expatriate who left New York to live in France in the 1940s, returning to the United States to serve as an artist-activist for the Civil Rights Movement. He utilized his celebrity status as an American writer, the power of his pen, and his unapologetic, challenging voice as a tool for social change.

ACT II: HOWARD SIMON AND JAMES BALDWIN: A SOUL ON FIRE

In the fall of 1981, Howard B. Simon enrolled at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. At the same time, Baldwin was spending time on the campus of the Atlanta University Center, also known as the AUC. The AUC is the largest consortium of historically black colleges and universities in the United States. In addition to the all-male Morehouse, there is the all-female Spelman College, Clark College (co-ed), Atlanta University (now Clark-Atlanta University), Morris Brown College (co-ed), and the International Theological Center.

Like James Baldwin, Simon as a young child was also encouraged to preach the gospel (as Baldwin would say in his book, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*). And their journeys would lead both men to the same city at a time when the Atlanta child murders were receiving national and international attention. These murders reminded some of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham; however, this time more than two-dozen black boys had been killed between 1979 and 1981 in the progressive city of Atlanta. (Wayne Williams, a young black man, was eventually tried for those murders.) Baldwin was hired by *Playboy* magazine to write a story on the murders (he would later describe his task as “bearing witness”). Baldwin’s story eventuated in the publication of his reportage book, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Page, 1985). Although Baldwin and Simon did not cross paths during that time, Simon’s love for Baldwin’s work grew immensely during his days as an undergraduate at Morehouse, as did his passion for writing and the goal of becoming a writer.

After graduating from Morehouse College and reading more of Baldwin’s eclectic works (including *Go Tell On Tell On The Mountain*, *Giovanni’s Room*, *The Fire Next Time*, *Nobody Knows My Name, and Tell Me How Long The Train’s Been Gone)*, Simon (along with his Morehouse College classmate, Charles Reese) went in search of Baldwin at his home in the southern part of France in the summer of 1985. Much to their chagrin, Baldwin was not in Europe; he was in the United States while the two adventurers travelled abroad. Two years later, on December 1, 1987, Baldwin would die of stomach cancer at his home in St. Paul de Vence, France. Simon (by then living in New York) would attend his funeral service at the Cathedral of St. John Divine.

In the late 1990s, Simon—by then a graduate of New York University's dramatic writing program—was inspired by David Leeming's (1994) book, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, particularly the chapter entitled "Activist." In that chapter, Leeming (Baldwin's biographer and former secretary from 1963 until 1968) describes the meeting with Robert Kennedy in 1963. Simon decided to use that meeting as the basis for his historical fictional play, *James Baldwin: A Soul on Fire*.

The meeting itself took place on May 24, 1963 in New York City (three months before the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom). Baldwin and several civil rights activists were invited to attend the unpublicized meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy to discuss race relations. Other participants included Burke Marshall, David Baldwin, Thais Aubrey, Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Lorraine Hansberry, Kenneth Clark, Rip Torn, Eddie Fales, Edwin Berry, Clarence Jones, Henry Morgenthau III, and Jerome Smith (Leeming, 1994, p. 223).

In his foreword to Simon's play, Leeming notes:

> Baldwin was in many ways a burning soul. When in the meeting, Kennedy suggested that blacks, like his fellow Irishman, could pull themselves up by their bootstraps and that in 40 years or so one might even be president, Baldwin reminded him that blacks had been here long before the Irish, and that an Irishman was now a president whereas blacks were still required to supplicate and beg you for justice. (Simon & Reese, 2011, p. 8)

On April 9, 2000, Simon's two-character play based on the meeting opened on Off-Broadway at the New Federal Theater, with Charles Reese (Simon's classmate who had travelled to Europe with him looking for Baldwin) portraying Baldwin and Tony-Award nominee Forrest McClendon in the role of Ethereal. David DeWitt (2000) of the *New York Times* reviewed the play, stating:

> Howard Simon's short play is funny, thrilling, and wise, buoyed by the passionate performance of Charles Reese in the title role. One minute he is singing and leading the audience into hand clapping unity; the next he is speaking with urgent force on the desperate crisis of civil rights. Mr. Reese even resembles Baldwin, with large eyes that suggest a singular vision of the human experience. Forrest McClendon, who serves the play well in a range of performance styles as a choral confidant and a force of nature called Ethereal. With humor, style, and raw emotions, it embraces its chosen territory with enthusiasm. All stage biographies should be served so well.

Sadly, Simon didn't live to see the accolades for his Off-Broadway debut. He died on the day that DeWitt's review was published at the age of 37 with a dozen completed plays, several screenplays and short stories, a poetry collection, essays, and an Emmy Award nomination for his film, *Just Passin' Through*.

Simon's play explores Baldwin's thoughts and feelings as an artist-activist while he prepares for the meeting with Kennedy, which took place in the latter's New York City apartment on 24 Central Park South. In addition to Baldwin, several of the other individuals who had been invited to the meeting were accomplished artists in their own right. For example, Lorraine Hansberry was a celebrated playwright whose semi-autobiographical play on black life, race, and property ownership in America, *A Raisin in the Sun*, had had a very successful run on Broadway in 1959.

Another important participant at the meeting—and one who would figure prominently in Simon's play—was Jerome Smith. As Leeming (1994) notes, "Smith was a 25-year-old scarred veteran of the Mother's Day freedom ride who had been badly beaten during an attempt to desegregate interstate buses and bus terminals across the South" (p. 223). He represented the emerging role that younger African Americans were taking in the struggle for freedom, democracy, and equality. The lingering effect of Smith's beating probably accounted for his slowness of speech and possibly one of the reasons Kennedy was apparently unable to get the gist of what he was trying to convey. In addition, Kennedy was unfamiliar with the details of segregation from an African American perspective and not ready to receive or understand Smith's vehemence when he told Kennedy that he "would not fight for the United States of America" (Leeming, p. 223). Kennedy became upset, assuming that Smith was unpatriotic. It was Lorraine Hansberry who defended Smith by telling Kennedy, "You have a great many accomplished people in this room, Mr. Attorney General, but the only man you should be listening to is that man over there. That is the voice" (Baldwin & Kenan, 2010, p. 111). Lena Horne chimed in later, saying, "If you are so proud of your record, Mr. Attorney General, you go up to Harlem into those churches and barber shops and pool halls and you tell the people. We ain't going to do it, because we don't want to get shot" (Baldwin & Kenan, p. 112).

Like Lorraine Hansberry, Lena Horne (along with Baldwin and Harry Belafonte) had accomplished a great deal as an artist-activist in her work as a performer at the Café Society and in Hollywood movies, and in assisting Eleanor Roosevelt in her drive for anti-lynching laws (Corliss, 2010). In short, it was Horne and Hansberry, the only women in the meeting, who bravely defended Smith. Ultimately, Robert Kennedy and his brother, President John Kennedy, were moved by the integrity and passion of Smith and others like him.

In Simon's play, the roles of the main participants at the meeting (except for Baldwin) are portrayed through a spirit-like figure called Ethereal, who embodies these characters through voice and movement in a series of telephone calls as Baldwin tries to figure out what he will wear "to meet the man" (Kennedy), which actually alludes to one of Baldwin's most noteworthy stories. Ethereal serves as a spiritual guide who opens up a window to the *burning souls* of the attendees. For example, here is a re-imagined interaction between Baldwin, Hansberry, and Smith:

ETHEREAL (Jerome Smith)

Hello, may I speak with Mr. James Baldwin.

JAMES

Speaking … who's calling?

ETHEREAL (Jerome Smith)

My name is Jerome Smith, and Miss Hansberry gave me your number and told me to contact you.

JAMES

Could you hold on for a moment, my other line is ringing.

ETHEREAL (Jerome Smith)

Sure …

JAMES

Lorraine, who is this Jerome?

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Oh, I nearly forgot. He is a young man who along with other people tried to integrate bus terminals and stations across the south. He was severely beaten by sheriffs in Mississippi. His presence and story are what we need today.

(ETHEREAL dials another phone)

JAMES

I have to get the other line. It's probably Peter.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Talk with Jerome … You'll find his story interesting … Got to run. Speak with you later.

> JAMES
>
> Hello …
>
> ETHEREAL (Jerome Smith)
>
> Yes, Mister Baldwin … I don't want to take up much of your time. I just thought since you were speaking with the Attorney General, a very important man in this country, that you would tell him that Black men like me are tired of second-class citizenship. My grandfather fought in World War I and my dad fought in World War II, and they both served their country well only to return to racism, discrimination, and segregation. We're mad and we're no longer going to defend a country that doesn't defend all of her citizens. America is living a lie.
>
> JAMES
>
> I think you need to join our meeting today and tell the Attorney General yourself, but know that you now will represent.
>
> ETHEREAL (Jerome Smith)
>
> And that I will … I will represent those who have faced segregation with fire hoses turned on them, dogs biting them, policemen beating them with clubs, and men and women lynched on lonely roads as their spirits cross the middle passage heading for freedom land … Yes, I will represent.
>
> JAMES
>
> Come to the meeting with Miss Hansberry. She shall be your guide. Goodbye. (Simon & Reese, 2011, pp. 46-50)

One of the most important and critical factors in the meeting for Baldwin and the others was their attempt to shift the Attorney General's perspective on civil rights. They wanted Kennedy and the administration (Burke Marshall was a key official who was also there) to understand that civil rights were a *moral* issue and not just a *political* issue. During the meeting Baldwin requested a *moral* commitment from the Kennedy administration by posing a question to the Attorney General: *Could he get his brother, President John Kennedy, to escort a Black child to a segregated school in the South?* This was a shrewd tactic that was vintage Baldwin. As almost all the meeting's participants were surely aware, Baldwin had published *The Fire Next Time* at the beginning of 1963. This seminal book consisted of two very powerful, sometimes vitriolic essays: *My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation* and *Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind*. Additionally, Baldwin had appeared on the cover of *Time* Magazine a few weeks before the meeting. It seems unlikely that the Kennedys were really ready to listen to the bitterly honest Baldwin, who would often say what most blacks (and whites) were afraid to say themselves. For example, in *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin (1963) makes a powerful pronouncement:

> And here we are, at the center of the arc, trapped in the gaudiest, most valuable, and most improbable water wheel the world has ever seen. Everything now, we must assume is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks who, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in a song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time! (pp. 105-106)

Simon was able to incorporate and capture Baldwin's urgency in his play simply by utilizing the historical information from Leeming's biography, infusing Baldwin's perspective and fueling it through the spirit-like figure, Ethereal. Simon emphasized the moral imperative expressed by the meeting's participants through a key scene with Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Harry Belafonte, and Lena Horne:

> JAMES
>
> Hello, Lorraine …
>
> ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)
>
> No, it's Harry …
>
> JAMES
>
> Oh shit, I'm getting all mixed up.
>
> ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)
>
> Don't you worry because we're all in this mess together. We'll get you through it.
>
> JAMES
>
> Thank you!

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

We must let the Attorney General know that we are searching for the moral healing of America …

JAMES

Let me run that by Lorraine … Lorraine?

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Yeah, was that another boyfriend?

JAMES

Baby, no … it's Harry Belafonte …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Oh how nice, Mr. Belafonte …

JAMES

Harry, call him Harry …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

(Sings) *I'm just wild about Harry and Harry's wild about me.*

JAMES

He's in a solemn mood. He's talking about the moral healing of America …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Well, I have nothing against that, but the time to act is now because brothers and sisters are getting tired and pretty soon it will be *By Any Means Necessary*.

JAMES

Lorraine, I'm trying to get through all that girl, but the man is gorgeous.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Who?

JAMES

Harry, umm, umm, he’s a fine Black man. And you know I saw “Carmen Jones” six times just to see his chest!

(ETHEREAL dials the phone)

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

Oh Lord.

JAMES

There is another call. If it’s that boy …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

You won’t do a thing but listen. Don’t forget we got business this morning, Negro …

JAMES

Hello Peter, don’t call here no mo’ …

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

Who’s Peter? It’s Lena Horne.

JAMES

Lena, chile, I was just listening to you this morning because my man done walked off and left me and it seems as if it is storming all around me.

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

Well darling, you better raise up an umbrella and get ready for our meeting with the Attorney General. I’m just checking in … making sure everything is all right because I’m Lena and special that way. Anything I can do for you?

JAMES

Nothing I can think of …

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

This meeting should take place uptown, but I'm glad it's downtown because I ain't going up there talking about civil rights. Let Mr. Attorney General take the government's policies on civil rights to Harlem. I don't want to get shot.

JAMES

Yes Lena there is one thing only you can help me with …

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

Yes?

JAMES

What color are you wearing?

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

Black, it's a serious color.

JAMES

I'll see you this afternoon.

ETHEREAL (Lena Horne)

Love.

JAMES

Hello … Harry?

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

Yes, Jimmy you seem to be a busy man.

JAMES

I was running your idea of moral healing to Lorraine, and she says it's good, but we must stress action. What actions must we take to represent this moral healing?

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

How about a march?

JAMES

It must be something that all Americans can see, recognize and join in. We need Dr. King's help …

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

He's very sorry that he can't make the meeting, but …

JAMES

But he's nervous around me?

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

Don't be ridiculous. Dr. King is in high profile and he just has to carefully schedule his meetings and appearances. He still is a minister of a church.

JAMES

Oh, I understand. I understand more than you know. He must carefully take meetings.

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

He has asked Dr. Kenneth Clark to represent him.

JAMES

Dr. Clark, great, we may now have a fighting chance.

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

Counsel from the wise is most wise.

JAMES

I must tell Lorraine … hold please, Lorraine, the man is sending goose pimples all over my back.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

I know what action we can take …

JAMES

Harry says a march.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

No, we need something more powerful than a march for moral healing …

JAMES

I need Harry …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

We need to ask the Attorney General to ask the President to escort a Black child in Mississippi to an integrated school …

(ETHEREAL dials another phone)

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

Listen, it's getting late and if we're to be prompt, we better get moving.

JAMES

Well, I think we should ask the Attorney General to get the President to escort a Mississippi Black child to school while the nation looks on.

ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)

What good will that do?

> JAMES
>
> It represents a deep moral commitment. A point would be made with the President's presence. If any dares spit on that child, they would also spit on the President and the nation.
>
> ETHEREAL (Harry Belafonte)
>
> Point well taken. It's a go as far as I'm concerned. I have to go. See you later today. (Simon & Reese, 2011, pp. 35-44)

Unfortunately, Robert Kennedy viewed the request for his brother to escort a Black child to a segregated school in the South as a "meaningless moral gesture" (Leeming, 1994, p. 223). Ultimately, the so-called meaningless moral gesture by Baldwin and his fellow activists did indeed play a role in changing the Kennedy administration's perspective on civil rights from a political one to a political *and* moral one. Less than one month later on June 11, 1963, President Kennedy addressed the nation on national television and radio to announce his support for the most comprehensive civil rights policy ever offered by a president.

Baldwin reflected on the 1963 meeting with Kennedy in an essay that did not get published until 2010 in a collected volume of his works. Baldwin recalled:

> The meeting ended with Lorraine standing up. She said, in response to Jerome's statement concerning the perpetual demolition faced every day by black men, who pay a price literally unspeakable for attempting to protect their women, their children, their homes, or their lives, "That is all true, but I am not worried about black men—who have done splendidly it seems to me, all things considered." Then, she paused and looked at Bobby Kennedy, who, perhaps for the first time, looked at her. "But I am very worried," she said, "about the state of the civilization, which produced that photograph of the white cop standing on that Negro woman's neck in Birmingham." Then, she smiled. And I am glad that she was not smiling at me. She extended her hand. "Goodbye, Mr. Attorney General," she said, and turned and walked out of the room. We followed her. Perhaps I can dare say that we were all, in our various ways, devastated, but I will have to leave it at that. (Baldwin & Kenan, 2010, pp. 112-113)

Baldwin and Dr. Kenneth Clark left to do an interview later that day with Henry Morgenthau III. (Several excerpts from this interview with Baldwin and Clark can be found in the "Citizen King" [2004] episode of the PBS series*, The American Experience*.) However, in Simon's play, the immediate aftermath of the meeting is depicted in a scene with Baldwin and Hansberry, who express their hopefulness about what had just happened, though not without a sense of urgency and even foreshadowing:

JAMES

Hello …

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

I rejoiced when I heard them say let us go to the house of the Lord … But our house is burning down brother. What shall we do?

JAMES

Sister Lorraine, Behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

That history will remember these times with words and photos of white men standing on the necks of black women.

JAMES

For by fire, and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: And the slain of the Lord shall be many.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry)

I hope Mr. Attorney General realizes that real resistance is coming. Maybe the meeting will lead to some type of action. We were not a group of good Negroes begging the white power structure to be nice to Negroes. We are Black citizens saying that this is an emergency for our country, as Americans.

JAMES

God sent Noah the rainbow sign … no more water, the fire next time.

ETHEREAL (Lorraine Hansberry) & JAMES

(Singing) *My Lord he calls me, he calls me by the thunder … the trumpet sounds within my soul – I ain't got long to stay here …*

JAMES

Stay strong sister. (Simon & Reese, 2011, pp. 58-59)

The Baldwin/Kennedy meeting of 1963 would be the last time James Baldwin would see his artist and activist friend Lorraine Hansberry. Twenty months later on January 12, 1965, Hansberry died of cancer at the age of 34 in New York. It was Hansberry's beauty and power that Baldwin remembered so fondly in a 1979 essay:

> I must, now for various reasons—some of which, I hope, will presently become apparent—do something which I have very deliberately never done before: Sketch the famous Bobby Kennedy meeting. I have talked about it or around it, and a day is coming when I will be compelled to deliver my entire testimony. But, for the moment, I want to merely suggest something of Lorraine Hansberry's beauty and power on that day; and what the incomprehension that day's encounter was to cause the nation and, presently, and until this hour, the world. (Baldwin & Kenan, 2010, p. 109)

ACT III: LIVING WITH THE LEGACY

Presently, and until this hour (as Baldwin would say), fifty years have come and gone since the Baldwin/Kennedy meeting. President Kennedy didn't escort a Black child in the South to a segregated school as Baldwin and his artist-activists had hoped; instead, the president proposed a comprehensive civil rights policy. But the president would soon be dead, killed by an assassin's bullet on November 22, 1963. Lyndon B. Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy, eventually signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Robert Kennedy (who become a senator and ran for president) was shot on June 6, 1968 in Los Angeles, California, just two months after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee).

James Baldwin was "a man who loved the simple joys of life—eating, singing, loving. But above all he was a prophet, a man possessed by a driving and demanding need to remind his people—black and white—of how they had lost sight of the right path" (Simon & Reese, 2011, p. 9). Baldwin continued writing and also taught at various colleges and universities in his later years. He lived to see a few results from his actions, notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Perhaps the most significant (though indirect) result of the Civil Rights Movement was the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008. And in that, Robert Kennedy ended up being pretty accurate in his rhetorical estimate of how long it would take for a black man to become president (Simon & Reese, p. 9).

The year 2014 marks the 90th anniversary of James Baldwin's birth, an appropriate moment to re-assess the significance of his 1963 meeting with Robert Kennedy. We are all artists, as Eli (1997) so elegantly states. Thus, we must celebrate the lessons of the past by commemorating them through every artistic medium, just as Simon did with his gifts. As Baldwin's friend and fellow artist-activist Nikki Giovanni once said, "Histories are important because they point the directions of traditions" (Eli, p. 202).

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A. SCOTT HENDERSON

9. UPLIFT VERSUS UPHEAVAL

The Pedagogical Visions of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin

In 1967, Harold Cruse (2002), an African-American author and social commentator, issued this challenge to the readers of his newly published book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*: "In advanced societies it is not the race politicians or the 'rights' leaders who create the new ideas and the new images of life and man. That role belongs to artists and the intellectuals of each generation" (p. 57). In making his case, Cruse argued that "negro intellectuals" were in "crisis" because they either could not, or would not, condemn the failure of white America to acknowledge (let alone praise) the contributions of African American culture to mainstream society. Though an opponent of segregation and discrimination, Cruse insisted that integration—a goal uncritically championed by middle-class blacks and liberal whites—could itself prove inimical to the flourishing, perhaps even the survival, of African American culture and identity *if it failed to confront other problems*.

The issues that Cruse raised were not abstract or theoretical, but ones that possessed immediate relevancy as the Civil Rights Movement shifted from a legal/political orientation to a more radical/cultural orientation in the late 1960s (Marable, 2007). Even prior to this transition, dramatic developments such as the United States Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) were compelling African American intellectuals to address contemporary social and racial problems with greater urgency. In a coincidence of timing, two of the most influential black intellectuals of the era, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, made important public statements about education in the fall of 1963. Now, approximately fifty years later, their remarks not only shed light on significant historical topics, but they also pose questions that are still salient as educators and policymakers wrestle with determining the objectives of public education.

This chapter—after an overview of legal developments in the 1950s and 1960s—analyzes and compares the texts of the two statements noted above. This comparison is useful because it reveals certain limits (that is, historical and cultural constraints) to Ellison's thinking, while at the same time highlighting the degree to which Baldwin was willing to go beyond received notions of education in calling for schooling that could have far reaching implications. As such, Ellison advocated a pedagogy of uplift, while Baldwin supported one of upheaval.

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BROWN AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown* struck a legal, if not wholly effectual, blow against the system of segregated public schooling that existed throughout the country. On the eve of the decision, legally sanctioned school segregation existed in the entire South (the eleven states that constituted the former Confederacy); the six Border states (Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, and West Virginia); the District of Columbia; and parts of several other states. This meant that approximately 40 percent of the nation's students attended segregated schools by law. De facto segregation, often a function of residential segregation, existed in every other region of the country, though some districts were integrated, most of which were in the Northeast (Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield, 1978).

Local officials, particularly in the South, did very little to implement the Court's 1954 decision—and a great deal to ignore or thwart it. In 1956, ninety-nine United States senators and representatives signed the so-called "Southern Manifesto," which condemned *Brown* and pledged the signatories to use all legal means to reverse it (Patterson, 1997, p. 398). Southern school districts also initiated freedom-of-choice plans. In theory these plans allowed students, including African Americans, to choose the schools they wished to attend (Ogletree, 2004); in practice they provided a strategy to avoid desegregation—local schools officials permitted very few African American students to attend schools where whites constituted the majority. As Clotfelter (2004) has noted, only 0.2 percent of the South's black students were attending schools with whites by the 1959-1960 school year. Worse still, in Virginia a policy of "massive resistance" was spearheaded by United States Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., which led to a closure of the Prince Edward County (Virginia) schools from 1958 until 1964 in an effort to prevent integration (Gates, 1964).

Further impeding desegregation, federal courts narrowly interpreted the reach of *Brown II* (1955), a follow-up to *Brown* that charged federal district courts with the task of monitoring desegregation with "all deliberate speed" (Brown II, 1955, p. 294). Despite this mandate, the United States District Court for the Eastern Division of South Carolina ruled in *Briggs v. Elliot* that the Supreme Court had "not decided [in *Brown*] that the states must mix persons of different races in the schools," but that it had simply outlawed attempts by states to prohibit students from attending public schools on the basis of their race, a significant distinction (Briggs, 1955, p. 777). Opponents of integration used this decision as the legal justification for freedom of choice plans. It would not be until *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) that the United States Supreme Court ruled that school districts could no longer hide behind ineffectual freedom of choice plans; without mincing words, the Court ordered segregated districts to devise policies that would promptly create "a system without a white school and a Negro school, but just schools" (Green, 1968, pp. 441-442).

This was the legal and political landscape that Ellison and Baldwin confronted as they formulated their views on education in the early 1960s. As discussed below, neither addressed school desegregation or integration; in fact, they did not even mention *Brown* in their remarks. While this might seem curious, historical context provides some clues about the substance of Ellison and Baldwin's remarks. First, both of them spoke to northern audiences whose attention (at least in 1963) was focused on the racial dramas unfolding in the South, not on the less overt forms of racism in the North. Second, there were some, if not many, integrated schools in the North—in fact, Baldwin had attended one of them. These first two reasons likely supported a third reason: The two authors were seemingly more eager to address what was going on *inside* the classroom—and especially inside the heads of students—than in the events taking place *outside* the classroom. To put it differently, both men were keenly interested in the psychological dynamics affecting African American children.

RALPH ELLISON: "WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE LIKE"

Ralph Waldo Ellison was one of the giants of twentieth-century American literature, known primarily for his 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*. Born in Oklahoma City in 1914, Ellison had a sometimes precarious childhood marked by the uneasy tension between the region's multiethnic character and the bigotry that lay beneath (and often above) the surface of race relations. He attended the segregated Douglass Elementary and High School, where his academic record was mediocre, though he read extensively, thanks in large part to the books that were available in the "colored" branch of the public library. One of the greatest influences on him was Zelia Breaux, a teacher at Douglass who was also the music superintendent for the city's black schools; because of her, the future novelist would briefly consider a musical career. With funding from a scholarship, Ellison attended Tuskegee Institute from 1933 until 1936. (Tuskegee had become a leading institution of higher education for African Americans because of the inspiring story of its founder, Booker T. Washington, and its emphasis on preparing blacks for vocationally oriented careers.) Ellison eventually left Tuskegee without earning a degree, and his ambivalent memories of the time he spent there would figure prominently in his later writings (Rampersad, 2007; Thomas, 2008).

Ellison moved to New York City in 1936, where he developed his skills as a writer and became involved in the Communist Party. After service in the Merchant Marine at the end of World War II, he spent several years working on *Invisible Man*, which was published to great acclaim (it won the National Book Award for fiction in 1953). A deeply penetrating and unapologetically autobiographical novel, *Invisible Man* explores the unnamed protagonist's quest for his identity against the backdrop of southern and northern racism. Literary critics then and now consider it to be among the most insightful novels ever written about American race relations. Because of the praise that *Invisible Man* received, Ellison's literary star rose immediately, and he spent the rest of the 1950s and early 1960s lecturing, teaching, living abroad, and working on a second novel (Rampersad, 2007).

In September of 1963, Ellison participated in a seminar that was held under the auspices of the United States Panel on Educational Research and Development (created as an advisory body to the United States Commissioner of Education, the

Panel would issue its first report, *Innovation and Experiment in Education*, in 1964). The seminar, entitled “Education for Culturally Different Children,” was jointly funded by the United States Office of Education, the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development, and the National Institute of Mental Health. Seminar sessions were conducted by the Bank Street College of Education, which was a respected voice in the national dialogue about underachieving students—Bank Street College would play an influential role in the creation of Head Start a few years later. The seminar was held at Endicott House, a conference center operated by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Dedham, Massachusetts. Seminar participants included professional educators, sociologists, social psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, judges, lawyers, and federal policymakers (Bank Street College, 2004).

Ellison’s seminar presentation, “What These Children are Like,” was the only one printed in the seminar’s proceedings. A probable reason that his remarks were highlighted was his eloquent refusal to accept prevailing assumptions; or, as the introduction to the proceedings noted, “Mr. Ellison’s remarks were a healthy antidote to the stereotyping and oversimplification so often implied in the term ‘cultural deprivation’” (Bank Street College, 1964, p. 6).

At the beginning of his remarks, Ellison noted, “There is no such thing as a culturally deprived kid” (Ellison, 1995, p. 547). This assertion questioned one of the emerging explanations for why some students—perhaps as many as one-third of public school enrollments—failed to succeed academically. This explanation had been fully developed by Frank Riessman (1963), a sociologist at Bard College, in his book *The Culturally Deprived Child*. Riessman admitted that the phrase “culturally deprived” was imprecise and could be used interchangeably with “educationally deprived,” “deprived,” “underprivileged,” “disadvantaged,” “lower-class,” and “lower socio-economic group” (p. 1). In specific educational terms, the phrase referred to “those aspects of *middle-class* [emphasis added] culture—such as education, books, formal language—from which these [culturally deprived] groups have not benefitted” (Riessman, p. 3).

Perhaps even more significant to sociologists were the “traditions,” “values,” and “mores” that were associated with cultural deprivation (Riessman, p. 6). According to Riessman, these attitudes were characterized by an inability to value education “for its own sake” or as a “means for the development of self-expression” (p. 15). This view reinforced nascent “culture of poverty” arguments that would attempt to link cycles of poverty (and poor academic performance) with the values that the poor themselves espoused (Lewis, 1966). Not surprising (given this perspective), Riessman’s conclusions had the patina of biological determinism: “They [culturally deprived children] need to have the abstract constantly and intimately pinned to the immediate, the sensory, the topical … [and] then the deprived individual may, *to some degree* [emphasis added], begin to understand abstract formulations per se” (Riessman, p. 69). Although Riessman acknowledged that the first step in educating culturally deprived children was for teachers to understand their “psychology”—and though he was a tepid but sincere advocate for what would later become known as multicultural curricula—his larger thesis was condescending at best and a blame-the-victim rationale at worst.

Ellison (1995) viewed things differently. "The children in question," he argued, "were not so much culturally deprived as products of a different cultural complex" (p. 549). He made this particular point by referring to the survival of blacks in American society, noting that "any people which has not been destroyed after three hundred years of our history, and which is still here among us, is a people possessing great human potentialities and strengths which its members have derived from their background" (p. 551). Among these strengths were "group discipline," "patience," the capacity to "manipulate language," and "the ability to withstand ceaseless provocation without breaking down or losing sight of their ultimate objective" (Ellison, p. 549). Ellison also identified "aggressiveness" as an African American attribute, though he shied away from suggesting how that quality might be called upon to advance educational reform (p. 549).

Ellison not only rejected contemporary definitions of "cultural deprivation" (as they were applied to African Americans), but he also offered his own understanding of what that term meant: Any student who needed "extensive aid" to live in the "real world" before or after his/her schooling was culturally deprived (Ellison, 1995, p. 553). So, too, were students who were unable to live in a diverse environment, one in which they had to relate their own "cultural traditions and values" to the range of "cultural forces" that were found in the larger society (Ellison, p. 553). Ellison therefore asserted—in an explicit jab at Riessman—that many of the students at Bard College (where Ellison had also taught) could be deemed culturally deprived. To this extent, Ellison insisted that cultural deprivation transcended the narrow category of race—a white Bard student could be just as deprived as an African-American teenager.

The majority of Ellison's (1995) remarks focused on the dynamics between whites and blacks, especially in the classroom. He identified the best teachers as those who taught their students that they (the students) came from a place of "value," and that what they had learned from their past experiences did "count" in their struggle for success and happiness (p. 551). This was particularly important for black children who had been "harmed" and "maimed" by their confrontation with a "complex" world (Ellison, p. 551). Ellison lamented the fact that a seemingly large number of teachers "emasculated" students of "potentiality" instead of encouraging them (p. 551). This, in turn, had a troubling consequence: Without having confidence or pride in one's background or abilities, a person's "phony" self would "take command" (Ellison, p. 551). Ellison admitted that there was "a bit of phony built into every American" (social and geographic fluidity forced Americans to adapt to new surroundings/circumstances). He also argued that the denigration of "Negro" students and their abilities was not a "racial matter" (black as well as white teachers were guilty of underestimating the academic potential of students). Nonetheless, his analysis was aimed squarely at those *white* educators who doubted the intellectual capabilities of *African Americans* (pp. 550, 551).

However much Ellison's remarks may have been at odds with the views of other seminar participants, the crux of his educational philosophy was not especially novel. His belief that African Americans were every bit as intellectually capable as whites placed him within a decades-old debate over which type of education (vocational versus academic) was most appropriate for blacks (Meier, 1963). That he also believed African Americans had skills and dispositions constituting a rich heritage of adaptability and survival was certainly a rebuke—though a mild one—against scholars arguing that certain groups were culturally deprived and/or deficient in verbal skills, which would foreshadow later arguments over Black English (Baugh, 2002). Finally, his concerns with authenticity and phoniness tapped into conversations that were already occurring about identity formation in the post-World War II era—primarily the fears expressed by social critics over the role of conformity in capitalist economies that depended on mass consumption (Cheever, 2010). Ellison's main contribution was in bringing these themes together in a forum with other intellectuals and academics who were concerned with shaping educational policies. The message he left with them was unequivocal: African American students had minds that were just as good as anybody else's.

JAMES BALDWIN: "THE NEGRO CHILD—HIS SELF IMAGE"

James Baldwin (along with several siblings) was born and raised in Harlem by his mother and stepfather during the 1920s and 1930s. He attended P.S. 24 Elementary School, where he met a young WPA theater project worker, Orilla ("Bill") Miller, who encouraged his academic pursuits and helped him to broaden his intellectual horizons. Due to Miller's influence, Baldwin eventually enrolled in DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, a predominantly white (but integrated) school known for its academic rigor. After receiving his diploma in 1942, he spent the next twenty years living overseas, establishing a literary reputation, and becoming increasingly involved in social and political causes (Leeming, 1994; Porter, 1989).

On October 16, 1963, Baldwin gave a talk entitled "The Negro Child—His Self Image" to a group of New York City teachers (Baldwin, 1963). The tone and substance of his remarks were likely influenced by the activities in which he had been involved during the preceding months. He had participated in a lecture tour for the Congress of Racial Equality; spoken on television and in churches about the treatment of African Americans; met with Robert Kennedy and several other prominent civil rights activists; and worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama. These activities allowed Baldwin to see firsthand the smoldering anger of his fellow African Americans over white reluctance to address systemic prejudice and widening racial harassment (Leeming, 1994).

Baldwin used his talk to express his mounting concerns about American race relations. "Many generations of bad faith and cruelty" toward African Americans had created a "dangerous time" and a "revolutionary situation," he averred (Baldwin, 1998, p. 678). Society was "desperately menaced" by a "lack of vision" regarding an equitable solution to the discrimination and mistreatment of blacks.

This only exacerbated the “inarticulate and dangerous rage” that African Americans already felt, which was “all the more dangerous” because it was “never expressed” (Baldwin, pp. 678, 681, 684). Thus, there were “tremendous reservoirs of bitterness” that had “never been able to find an outlet,” but that might, as Baldwin warned, “find an outlet soon” (p. 683). Baldwin was clearly referring to the possibility of riots or other forms of mass or individual violence, though he refrained from explicitly saying so.

Logically enough, as Baldwin (1998) made clear, one might look to the public schools as a forum in which to defuse American race relations. This required Baldwin to address the specific issue of identity formation. All children and youth, he argued, had “to ask questions” in order to “achieve” their “identity” (pp. 678-679). Yet here was the great obstacle that confronted African American children: When they asked such questions about their cultural heritage, they were told (by whites) that blacks had “never contributed anything to civilization” and that their past was “nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured” (p. 679). Without much exaggeration, Baldwin maintained that the “value” of the “black man” was “proven by one thing only—his devotion to white people” (p. 679). This did nothing except undermine the confidence and self-worth of each successive generation of African Americans.

In emphasizing the low self-esteem that plagued African American children, Baldwin was on solid empirical ground. Since the early 1940s, Kenneth Clark (1955)—a clinical psychologist with a Ph.D. from Columbia University—had been conducting a series of experiments with black children (Kluger, 1976; Philogene, 2004). Using a set of dolls representing blacks and whites, he asked the children a series of questions to determine which doll they liked best, which one was the “nice doll,” and which one had a “nice color” (p. 23). Clark and others studying racial identity formation were greatly dismayed by the results: The majority of children who were interviewed consistently “indicated an unmistakable preference for the white doll and a rejection of the black doll” (p. 23). Clark concluded that the only way to combat the “self-hatred” resulting from these feelings of inferiority was to make “positive and fundamental changes in the way in which the larger society views and treats the Negro” (p. 51). Clark distilled his findings into a few principles that he felt educators should follow, which included the following injunction: “Classroom practices should not violate the child’s sense of his own worth and integrity …” (p. 94).

Baldwin was doubtless aware of Clark’s work. The two had met and spent time together in 1957, and Clark had been among the group that Baldwin had gathered to meet with Robert Kennedy in May of 1963 (Leeming, 1994, p. 138). Implicitly accepting Clark’s arguments, Baldwin identified additional factors that he thought eroded the self-esteem of African American children. A major influence outside the classroom was popular culture, an influence that would increasingly catch the attention of subsequent scholars (Cortes, 2000). In short, Baldwin (1998) believed that popular culture—as represented “on television and in comic books and in movies”—was “based on fantasies by very ill people” who constantly produced and disseminated distorted images of African Americans; it was up to teachers to make students aware that these images had “nothing to do with reality” (p. 685). He also contended that the press was “not as free as it says it is,” which was something else he thought teachers ought to explain to their students (p. 685). In these and other instances, he viewed teachers as crucial mediators between students and cultural constructions of race and racial identities.

More significant for Baldwin (1998) was what students were (and were not) being taught in school itself. He believed that it was “impossible for any Negro child to discover anything about his actual history” because whites had always depended on African Americans as a vital source of cheap labor (p. 681). In order to justify this exploitation of African Americans—that is, to justify the inhumanity of slavery and, afterward, the depredations of economic subordination—whites had disseminated *a fraudulent version of history* that portrayed African Americans as “animals” who had always “*deserved* to be treated like animals” [emphasis in original] (Baldwin, p. 681). Baldwin—anticipating calls for bottom-up history and multicultural curricula—suggested that educators needed to teach a very different version of the past in their classrooms, one that acknowledged that American history was “longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it …” (Baldwin, p. 683). Furthermore, Baldwin viewed curricular revision as an emancipatory act on behalf of all students:

> If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. (p. 683)

If the prospect of curricular innovation frayed the nerves of (white) policymakers, Baldwin’s (1998) concerns about the general state of education were even more disturbing to them, especially in light of his assertion that a “revolutionary situation” existed. For Baldwin, American schooling was part of what he called the “paradox of education” (p. 678). This paradox resulted from conflicting, mutually exclusive objectives. On one hand, the purpose of education was “to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself,” which meant that it was the responsibility of teachers to tell students that they “had the right and the necessity to examine everything” (Baldwin, pp. 686, 678). On the other hand, Baldwin also believed that education occurred within “a social framework” that was “designed to perpetuate the aims of society” (p. 678). “What societies really, ideally want,” he stressed, “is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society” (p. 679). Consequently, the so-called paradox of education arose from this push-pull of teaching students to accept *and* critique social and political norms.

Baldwin (1998) clearly supported the critical-questioning half of this paradox. However, he went beyond a simple existentialist philosophy of education that demands constant inquiry into putative truths; he adopted a social-reconstructivist view, urging that “the obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what cost” (p. 679). On the question of what needed to be changed, he did not mince words: The black or white teacher of African American children needed to "make them know" that the "dangers" and "agonies" that surrounded them were "criminal" (p. 685). Putting a fine point on it, he maintained that the adverse conditions that African Americans faced were the result of a "conspiracy" that black children *must* be taught to challenge (p. 685).

Baldwin's call for defiance prefigured and supported the tenets of what would become known as critical pedagogy. As Kincheloe (2004) has noted:

> Critical pedagogy is dedicated to resisting the harmful effect of dominant power. Advocates of critical pedagogy work to expose and contest oppressive forms of power as expressed in socio-economic class elitism, Eurocentric ways of viewing the world, patriarchal oppression, and imperialism around the world. (p. 34)

Indeed, critical pedagogues would come to conclusions that were similar to Baldwin's in their analyses of contemporary education: "Too often, mainstream education teaches students and teachers to accept the oppressive workings of power—in the name of a neutral curriculum, in an attempt to take politics out of education" (Kincheloe, p. 34). Within the tradition of critical pedagogy, Baldwin's views most closely anticipated the arguments of Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian educational philosopher who saw schooling as a political act that could dramatically redefine relationships between the oppressed and the oppressor. For Freire (and Baldwin), teachers and students were to be collaborators in overthrowing oppression, whether it be based on economic disparities, racial apartheid, or some other system of inequality.

UPLIFT VERSUS UPHEAVAL

As this analysis has revealed, Ellison and Baldwin's views were not entirely or even primarily antithetical. Rather, their perspectives illustrated a generational divide (despite their relative closeness in age) that would become even more pronounced as student activists (white and black) shifted the direction of social movements in the 1960s. Ellison primarily tackled the enduring problem of American pluralism—namely, how various groups negotiated the assimilationist imperatives of the dominant culture while attempting to maintain their own group identity. His basic demand was for whites to acknowledge the distinct cultural contributions of African Americans. Or, to put it another (albeit anachronistic) way, Ellison would have agreed that blacks were indeed "African Americans," a descriptor illustrating their racial heritage *and* their membership in the larger society. Where Ellison demonstrated the greatest prescience was in his insistence that African Americans were not monolithic—that they represented a wide array of aptitudes, each of which was to be judged on its own merits. His main point was that *all* blacks possessed cognitive abilities equal to those of any other group. In this regard, he would have been in agreement with those who, in recent years, have resisted the notion that poverty or other social factors create insurmountable intellectual deficits (Gorski, 2008).

While Ellison's remarks were aimed at those who discounted the intellectual potential of blacks, Baldwin's comments attacked racial arrangements directly, excoriating the sources of power that subordinated African Americans. Though both Ellison and Baldwin recognized the psychic harm that discrimination caused to African American children in and out of the classroom, it was Baldwin who identified the potential social costs that this harm could produce: The specter of unleashed rage. Moreover, Baldwin seemed to be adding fuel to the fire in telling teachers that it was their *duty* to instruct students to not only question the status quo, but also to resist it as a "criminal conspiracy." Thus, while Ellison advocated a pedagogy of uplift, Baldwin supported one of upheaval. Ellison's strategy would lead to *incremental* change; Baldwin's, if taken to its logical conclusion, could produce *revolutionary* change.

In their relatively brief remarks, Ellison and Baldwin each made important contributions to national debates over public schooling, particularly the education of African Americans. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, neither of them addressed the *Brown* decision or the resistance that it had generated. Their silence, however, did not indicate apathy or acquiescence toward segregation or disingenuous school officials. It most likely suggested a proximate locus of their concerns, which was the immediate classroom experience of African American students. In the case of Baldwin (1998), he had continued to voice his skepticism over the law's ability to effect meaningful social change, most notably in his book of essays, *The Fire Next Time*, in which he insisted: "Had it been a matter of love or justice, the 1954 decision would surely have occurred sooner; were it not for the realities of power in this difficult era, it might very well not have occurred yet" (p. 336; Miller, 2012).

Baldwin's views were clearly more attuned to the *zeitgeist* than Ellison's critiques. While Ellison's views were a recapitulation of certain longstanding pedagogical propositions, Baldwin's remarks were a political manifesto, not just a pedagogical one. He espoused an ideology that was already informing the Civil Rights Movement ("freedom schools" were emerging throughout the South), an ideology that—by the late 1960s—would play a major role in anti-war protests across America's college campuses (Anderson, 1996; McAdam, 1990). In sum, even as he warned against the possibility of a violent revolution, Baldwin's pedagogical recommendations were intended to make a non-violent revolution more, not less, likely.

Baldwin's views remain relevant today. Since the enactment of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, the nation's public school systems have focused primarily on standardized testing—and how teachers can improve the scores that students achieve on such tests. Moreover, during this same period conservative politicians and organizations throughout the country have attempted to implement school choice programs, which involve the use of tax revenues to provide low-income students with the option of attending public or private schools outside of their attendance zones. Although speculating about how historical actors would view contemporary issues is always problematic, it seems likely that Baldwin would agree with Ravitch (2010) and others who have asserted that these developments are undermining certain aspects of public education. At the very least, Baldwin would likely urge teachers *and* students to question the efficacy of both standardized testing and school choice programs. In doing so, he would be in agreement with the educational commentator Jonathan Kozol (2007), who has passionately argued that "education is never neutral" (p. 86).

Conversely, Baldwin would find himself at odds with Stanley Fish (2012), an English professor and former university administrator, who has forcefully maintained that teachers must remain dedicated solely to their subject matter, eschewing any and all advocacy that is not strictly related to disciplinary debates. For example, within Fish's framework, Baldwin (as a teacher) could discuss the linguistic integrity of Black English, but he would have to refrain from criticizing the way in which the dominant culture might stigmatize African Americans for speaking it. According to this line of reasoning, the only upheavals that teachers can legitimately foment are academic, not social/political ones, a contention that Baldwin would fiercely challenge, were he still alive.

In the end, both Ellison and Baldwin proved to be exceptions to the broad-brushed criticisms that Harold Cruse employed against African American intellectuals. Both Ellison and Baldwin were aware that white society ignored and/or maligned the contributions of black culture. They also realized that whites discounted the virtues (and latent rage) that inhered in black resilience. But while Ellison's pedagogical prescriptions were aimed at making African American youth better *students*, Baldwin's also sought to make them better *citizens*. In this respect, Baldwin was a greater exception to Cruse's censure than Ellison.

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BEAZLEY KANOST

10. THE AGITATING POWER OF NONVIOLENT COOL IN “GOING TO MEET THE MAN”

PROBLEMATICS OF AMERICAN COOL

In early and mid 20th-century America, behavior marked as cool received increasing attention that arose out of African-American jazz and blues cultures’ burgeoning popularity and influence. As Beat writers and mass culture with its focus on middle-class whites, appropriated, adapted, commodified and marketed their perceptions of the African-American urban hipster’s language and mannerisms, cool came to characterize youthful male rebellion against conformity to bourgeois norms. Marlon Brando as rebel biker in *The Wild One* (Kramer & Benedek, 1953), Jack Kerouac’s (1955) Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, and Allen Ginsberg’s (1956) hipster geniuses in “Howl” formed in the wake of Charlie Parker’s and Miles Davis’s figures as effortlessly brilliant masters of art and style.

In *The Birth of the Cool*, Lewis MacAdams (2001) describes coolness as, at root, defiance (p. 20): defiance of racist stereotypes (p. 24), defiance of fear, and for whites, defiance of white middle-class culture’s lack of style and passion (p. 20)—a defiance which Norman Mailer (1959) famously articulated in his essay “The White Negro” (originally published in Dissent, Fall, 1957). MacAdams cites scholars who trace cool American styles of behavior to the male slave’s demeanor while he was tortured and demeaned. Such explanations sometimes also focus on his having to witness the rape of a woman he loved (MacAdams, p. 20). This example points to a racialized America’s focus on black men’s sexual relations (Mercer, 1993; Tate, 2003), a focus that also permeates white appropriations of the hip and cool that, like Mailer’s, had no conscious racist intent—that in fact assumed they evinced an anti-racist stance.

Cultural critics have tended to problematize popular notions of the cool because they emerged out of appropriating African-American art and style without adequately crediting and paying the artists who originated them (Davis, 2003, 2012; Tate, 2003). Moreover, popular representations of African Americans as hip and cool tend to sexualize them (Mercer, 1993; Tate), as Mailer’s (1959) essay does so famously in describing the “Negro hipster,” ostensibly the object of admiration. Mailer’s conception of this hipster is one whom racism has confined in economic, intellectual and social marginal spaces and who has compensated for that confinement by developing “animal,” irrational qualities Mailer associates with jazz and orgasm, and by further ridding himself of inhibition with drugs (pp. 339-341). That popular culture has continued to represent African Americans as

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sexualized objects is evident in how many hip hop artists choose to present and market themselves, encouraged by profits that speak of a large white audience's desire for such representations (West, 2004, p. 181; Tate, 2003).

In *Black Cool: A Thousand Streams of Blackness*, Rebecca Walker (2012) argues for a new conception of "Black Cool" (p. xv) as a source of power unmarred by racist stereotypes and associated with west African modes that predate American cool and do not form around reactions against oppressive power. She presents President Obama as an exemplar of such cool (p. xiv), marked by "audacity" and "propelled by an unstoppable force," but also possessing a "reserve [that] is mesmerizing" (p. xv). Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson (1992) also ascribe west African antecedents to "a repertoire of black styles, including cool pose [that] has sprung from a unique fusion of African heritage with the legacy of a ruthless slave system" (p. 55) in the US. They note that the titles of fifteenth-century rulers from what is now Benin and Nigeria referred explicitly to their cool and cite sixteenth-century Yoruba beliefs and practices. These examples provide insight into an "idea of cool" which "bears a spiritual meaning: sense of control, symmetry, correct presentation of self, and sophistication," and "a part of character—ashe" (Majors & Billson, p. 57). They describe *ashe* as "a noble confidence and mystic coolness of character [… that] reveals an inner spirituality and peace that marks the strongest of men" (Majors & Billson, p. 58). But Majors and Billson also discuss contemporary African-American men's cool behavior as sometimes maladaptive, in that it prevents them from articulating the full range of their feelings to themselves or others (p. 43).

Thomas Frank (1997) maintains that from the early 1950s on, corporate marketers recognized and used the appeal of rebelling against conformity to sell products, thereby subverting any actual non-conformist impulse to rebel. Frank focuses on dominant culture during a period when advertising did not employ many representations of African Americans and so he doesn't treat the subject of cool as racialized. Poet David Meltzer (2001) similarly explores the commodification and popularization of Beat culture (pp. 392-396, 399-400) that he first encountered very differently as a "bebop true believer" (p. 398) in his youth. Nilgin Yusuf (2006), in analyzing a shirt sporting the image of Robert DeNiro's character in *Taxi Driver* (Phillips, Phillips, & Scorsese, 1976), asserts how the cool rebel—the outcast risk-taker—has become an image on a product whose purchase belies any authentic claim to outsider status. Jim MacGuigan (2009) notes how its cool has contributed to African American popular art's influential "cultural capital" around the world (p. 92), but without sufficiently altering the economic conditions for most urban African Americans whose culture produces that art (pp. 98-99). For MacGuigan, coolness has come to characterize "the almighty brand" (p. 199). He claims that "brands may be cool by definition, but 'cool' itself is almost impossible to define....To try to say exactly what it is, is uncool. The allure of brand, then, is a kind of psychological magic, hard to explain, yet effective" (p. 199). Susan Fraiman (2003) criticizes coolness—whether that of the jazz hipster or derivations of that image in Beat writings and films from *The Wild One* to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (Bender & Tarantino, 1994)—as adolescent male rebellion that defines itself through devaluing the female, especially the maternal (p. xii). She finds that cool is constructed in such a way that one cannot be both feminine and cool.

RETHINKING THE COOL

While apt, I find that the assessments outlined above fail to fully account for cool's significance in American culture. In James Baldwin's representations of two Civil Rights activists, one of the actual person Reverend Frederick Shuttlesworth in *No Name in the Street* (1972), and the other a fictional activist in the story "Going to Meet the Man" (1965), Baldwin describes cool behavior that emphasizes another, overlooked facet of its significance. While he does not use the word itself to describe it, their behavior is patently cool. Before focusing on those texts, I will define cool behavior and how we may recognize it through a common denominator not specific to any racialized or gendered identity or situation. I will also discuss work by Frantz Fanon (1952) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1955) that provides useful ways for thinking about how coolness appears to those who witness it.

Rhetorical Construction of Coolness

The Oxford English Dictionary (2011) demonstrates that cool was used as an adjective to describe human behavior in texts as early as Beowulf. I find that its metaphorical use requires recognition within a rhetorical situation: in most cases, witnesses describe an individual's behavior as cool precisely because it defies their expectations of how that person should act in the specific circumstances at hand. For example, one is "cool under fire" because we expect someone who is under fire to display fear and anxiety, and yet the cool person does not. Cool most often refers to how much affect or emotion one feels: one seems unmoved, shows no agitation when cool. But within the rhetorical context that constitutes behavior as cool, witnesses observe behavior rather than any actual feeling, and they measure it against their expectations. Cool's stillness can also characterize more than affect: to audaciously stand one's ground can be read as cool without considering the affect, if any, displayed. Witnesses may make assumptions about what a cool person feels or about what mindset or personal history enables that person to behave coolly, but access or clues to that person's consciousness are most often obscured precisely by the fixity and unmoving nature of his or her behavior. Cool's stillness thus agitates by disrupting the expectations and assumptions that shape witnesses' mindsets, and that in turn can provoke conjecture about why and how a person behaves thus so unexpectedly cool. A paradoxical reaction occurs in that stillness begets its opposite—agitation. Sometimes that agitation leads to further cool as the person agitated seeks ways to decrease that agitation.

Reading Self-mastery in the Cool

Thirteen years before Baldwin published “Going to Meet the Man,” psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1952) explored how people labeled black by a racialized, colonial world were psychologically affected by that designation, and how they could release themselves from those effects. Fanon drew on both psychoanalytic discourse and Hegel’s (1955) ideas about recognition to represent how black people tended to internalize racism when living where whites enjoyed more freedom and privilege at blacks’ expense. Such a black person, who “came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, [with a] soul desirous to be at the origin of the world,” finds that the idea of race constitutes him or her as “an object among other objects” (Fanon, p. 89), rather than an independent self-consciousness, or subject, who enjoys the freedom to act upon objects. Hegel asserts that to develop a sense of their own self-consciousness, individuals must recognize that another person also experiences self-consciousness (p. 229). Establishing this expectation that an Other is self-conscious like the self allows—through recognizing that sameness—for individuals to also recognize their own self-consciousness as independent and distinct from others. Hegel also explains how inequality develops: individuals who demonstrate a willingness to die in struggles with others, and those who are unwilling to risk their lives in such struggles, come to recognize themselves and each other as, respectively, master, or lord, and slave, or bondsman (p. 234). Fanon describes a series of reactions to being recognized and recognizing oneself as black and unable to fully escape that designation psychologically. Then, drawing on Hegel, he proposes that the way for people to fully free themselves of internalized racism is to demonstrate a willingness to die for the purpose of claiming their status as subjects. He quotes Hegel’s idea that “It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence” (as cited in Fanon, p. 192). Fanon describes the complex situation of a person, forced into a slave position, who navigates a series of recognitions in response to that position which ultimately lead to taking “This risk [that] implies that I go beyond life toward an ideal which is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth” (p. 193). Thus risking one’s life forces all others to recognize that this claim to having worth is true on a conceptual plane, where one clearly “pursues something other than life,” because one risks life (Fanon, p. 193). That risk demonstrates “[one is] fighting for the birth of a human world, in other words, a world of reciprocal recognitions” (Fanon, p. 193). To account for how notions of race shape human psyches, Fanon thus joins and extends a psychology of internalized racism and Hegel’s concept of how series of recognitions lead to particular kinds of “self-consciousness.”

In thinking about the kinds of work slaves have performed and their historical significance, Gerard Aching (2012) notes that little “critical attention has been paid to reading the slave’s work ontogenetically, as an internal struggle for the freedom of self-mastery” (p. 912). He calls for more scholarly focus on those who had transformed through series of recognitions that led them beyond enslavement not only in their legal and social relations with other people, but also in the relations between elements of their own psyches (Aching, p. 914). Aching stresses self-mastery and adapting productively in order to maintain self-mastery once one is free of overt oppression (p. 915). In a different yet related vein, Kevin Quashie (2012) examines a “quiet” evinced by African American art and literature that he sees as the product of intimacy and generative exploration of an individual’s “interior.” He contrasts this to more common ways of seeing African American culture as shaped by struggles against oppression. Discussing an image of athletes John Carlos and Peter Norman with fists raised in a Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics, he sees quiet in the generally overlooked “balance between their intentional political gesture and [a] sense of inwardness, a sublimity” and “intimacy” in how they seem “as vulnerable as they are aggressive, as pensive as they are solidly righteous” (Quashie, p. 3). While Quashie examines intimacy in Baldwin’s essays in *The Fire Next Time*, I am interested in how Baldwin’s description of Reverend Shuttlesworth links cool behavior to an interior quiet. Baldwin’s representation informs my thinking on witnesses’ conjectures about the self-consciousness, or mindset, that produces cool behavior as having formed through a series of recognitions. Baldwin also represents those processes as having shifted the individual self-consciousness to a vantage point that exceeds the limitations of societal designations like race, even as those labels initially may shape the recognition process.

RECOGNITION AND REVEREND SHUTTLESWORTH

In describing a visit to the South to write about the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin (1972) says, “The first time I saw Reverend Shuttlesworth...he came strolling across the parking lot of the motel where I was staying, his hat perched precariously between the back of his skull and the nape of his neck, alone” (p. 66). With his stroll and his hat at such an angle, Shuttlesworth’s figure evokes the hipster’s cool style. Moreover, Baldwin notes that the reverend evinces this self-possession in the face of danger: “Shuttlesworth was a marked man in Birmingham” (p. 66) due to his activism. This danger makes his cool behavior exceptional, which Baldwin emphasizes by juxtaposing it with the description of the stroll and hat. Then he says that “while we talked,” Shuttlesworth

> kept walking back and forth to the window. I finally realized that he was keeping an eye on his car—making sure that no one put a bomb in it, perhaps. As he said nothing about this, however, naturally I could not. (p. 66)

Here Baldwin not only increases our sense of Shuttlesworth’s danger and cool, but also emphasizes his own hesitance about getting him to discuss the circumstances, though he finally does express concern.

In representing Shuttlesworth’s response, Baldwin (1972) interprets the mindset—the subjectivity—that produces such cool:

> And he smiled—smiled as though I were a novice, with much to learn, which was true, and as though he would be glad to give me a few pointers, which,

> indeed, not much later on, he did—and told me he'd be all right and went downstairs and got into his car, switched on the motor and drove off into the soft Alabama night. There was no hint of defiance or bravado in his manner. Only, when I made my halting observation concerning his safety, a shade of sorrow crossed his face, deep, impatient, dark; then it was gone. It was the most impersonal anguish I had ever seen on a man's face. It was as though he were wrestling with the mighty fact that the danger in which he stood was as nothing compared to the spiritual horror which drove those who were trying to destroy him. They endangered him, but they doomed themselves. (pp. 66-67)

Baldwin reads in Shuttlesworth's face signs of a stable interior "space" that generates his cool: the "shade of sorrow" traverses without shaping it, and unlike "defiance or bravado," what it reacts against doesn't shape it. The description of his smile implies that, in recognizing Baldwin's ignorance, long learning has produced his perspective. Baldwin also reads what the other man has come to recognize. In that "sorrow"—although "deep, impatient, dark"—Baldwin sees "anguish" that is "impersonal" and so does not directly react to—is not itself directly shaped by—how white racism harms African Americans or specifically threatens his very life; instead, Shuttlesworth recognizes "the spiritual horror" of white racists' subjectivity—that which "[drives]" them. Baldwin sees a perspective well removed from self-recognition in simple response to a more powerful Other or racial designation. Moreover, Shuttlesworth "[wrestles]" with a contrast between his physical, interpersonal "danger" and the intra-personal "spiritual horror" driving white racists. Through this contrast he does not recognize any master/slave relationship between himself and whites, but rather the master/slave relation within white racist subjectivity. Through its dynamics, the "spiritual horror" is a master that "[drives]" another part of the psyche enslaved to it. Contrasted with the dangers of that psycho-spiritual terrain, Shuttlesworth recognizes the threat to his life "as nothing." He eschews the decision of Hegel's slave to accept subjugation in order to stay alive; instead, he asserts his worth in terms that produce Fanon's (1952) "reciprocal recognitions" (p. 193).

This figurative interior that Baldwin glimpses provides Shuttlesworth with a position of greater psycho-spiritual safety, knowledge, and power from which he recognizes the racist "interior." The representation also suggests that his cool derives from this position. Moreover, his ability to perceive in psycho-spiritual terms enables his recognition of racism's psycho-spiritual interior—an ability producing the impersonal cool authority with which he resists it. That the threat to his own life is "as nothing" implies that these abilities surpass the reach of material power, whether bodily or economic, and derive authority from ethical virtue and knowledge not typically linked to coolness.

READING “GOING TO MEET THE MAN” PSYCHOANALYTICALLY

In “Going to Meet the Man,” Baldwin (1965) conversely refuses to represent an African-American Civil Rights activist’s “interior,” instead rendering that of a white racist. Although the story makes no overt references to psychology, since its publication critics consistently note ways in which Freudian notions shape the repressed memories, gradually-recalled, that reveal how its protagonist’s racism formed. In the year after its publication, Beau Fly Jones (1966) finds that the story represents “Whites [as] 'innocent' in the Freudian sense that they know not what they do because they have subconsciously blinded themselves to the horrible deprivation they have caused the Negro” (p. 108). He adds that fears “that the individual Negro will challenge the power and masculinity of the white” play out in the tale (p. 109). More recently, Paul Griffith (2002) and Matt Brim (2006, p. 183) also demonstrate how the story lays out foundations for white racist masculinity as dependent on sexualized notions of black men. Brim asserts that those foundations include homoerotic dynamics “without being traditionally homosexual” (p. 185), which Tiffany Gilbert (2011) also argues (p. 242).

Steven Weisenberger (2002) stresses that reading lynching narratives within their historical context is more apt and accurate than the “transhistorical readings” psychoanalytic notions provide “of white terror’s origins and logics” (p. 3). However, “Going to Meet the Man” is fiction published at a historical moment when Freudian ideas and Fanon’s expansion of them were current, and it portrays an attack on Civil Rights activists in that moment, linking it to a much earlier lynching in multiple ways, one of which relies on psychoanalytic assumptions about how repression and fetishization work. Moreover, the story lays out a psychological foundation that aligns with the now-commonplace description of objectifying African American men as fetishizing. Because my interest lies in how cool behavior may exceed rather than reiterate such objectification, I offer a psychoanalytic reading of “Going to Meet the Man.”

Sigmund Freud’s (1927) notion of fetishism features a series of recognitions: small boys expect that their mothers, their chief objects of desire, have penises like them: they expect an anatomical sameness. When their expectation is not met, they assume the mother once did have a penis, and then was castrated. The boy further assumes that he might be castrated too, again expecting sameness and giving rise to fear of castration. Because the boy still wants to see the mother as like him, he represses the upsetting memory of her genitals (Freud, p. 953). Because the mother also remains his object of desire, he wants an intimacy that has become too threatening, so he replaces her missing penis with another object of desire. That object is a fetish, and having it evokes pleasure because it reminds the boy of his mother and the pleasure he desired from her, but it is also unconsciously linked to terror that has been repressed, because it reminds him of the mother’s lack of a penis and the fears that generated (Freud, p. 954).

Although Freud discussed fetishism in terms of the specific sexes of boys and mothers, Emily Apter (1993) points out that the term has come to signify different kinds of “displacing of a reference [which] occurs, paradoxically, as a result of so much fixing” (p. 3). To fetishize is to assign fixity to people or events to make them serve as objects. She cites William Pietz's definition, more general than Freud's, of the fetish as "always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all a 'historical' object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event" (cited in Apter, p. 3). Brim (2006) finds that Baldwin's story does not represent white virility as depending on "a sexual object burdened with a surplus meaning left over from the man's relationship with his mother or sister but rather in a psychic lack, a debilitating racial void" (p. 185). I offer a reading of fetishism in "Going to Meet the Man" that also does not strictly adhere to Freud's ideas although it relies on the kind of dynamics Freud describes.

As Brim (2006) notes, it is now commonplace to describe how dominant American culture represents African American bodies—especially male ones—as fetish objects (Tate, 2003). Kobena Mercer (1993) asserts that these representations imply a white male gaze that fetishizes African-American men (pp. 308-310, 316) to obscure white men's fears about their own masculinity's inadequacy (p. 312). In successive readings of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of African-American men, Mercer demonstrates how they depict them as sex objects in ways that fully support racist stereotypes but also satirize those stereotypes (p. 317)—and then again represent how a gay man (the white Mapplethorpe or African-American Mercer) at a certain time within a gay culture (pp. 320-321), looked at gay men as objects of desire. His reading thereby examines fetishization's rhetorical nature: its significance depends on who recognizes whom as fetish object, and in what particular context (Mercer, pp. 319, 322). This fluidity can provide means to destabilize unequal power relations that fetishizing produces and reproduces when it constitutes some people as objects and others, subjects. I find that "Going to Meet the Man" represents similarly rhetorical recognition of cool behavior and its power to destabilize fetishization.

BALDWIN'S RENDERING OF RACIST SEXUALITY

Set during the 1960s, when non-violent Civil Rights activists attracted widespread support but Southern police might still attack them without immediate legal censure, the story excavates repressed memories that represent the genesis of the racist psyche of a white policeman named Jesse. Jesse's witnessing the pronounced cool of a Civil Rights activist agitates him in ways that force repressed memories to emerge into consciousness. Through that emergence, we discern how Jesse came to fetishize black men, their bodies becoming eroticized objects that obscure an erotically-charged interaction with and fear of castration by his own father. Because Jesse cannot make black men an object of overt desire in the heteronormative small-town South of the 1960s, that fetish is in turn repressed and replaced by fetishizing women—most readily black women whom he can rape, unpunished, but also his white wife. The story presents these objects of desire in a metonymic succession, each of which obscures the object more closely related to a primary experience of erotic contact with his father, linked inextricably to fear of his castrating power and white masculinity, which Jesse has repressed.

"Going to Meet the Man" opens with Jesse's "not getting it up" in bed with his wife, a condition that "had [not] ever bothered him before" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 230). His white wife's insufficiency as object of desire immediately reminds Jesse how "he could not ask her to do just a little thing, just to help him out [...] the way he could ask a nigger girl to do it" (Baldwin, p. 229). Here we see not only how blackness in a woman would be more likely to excite him, for "The image of a black girl caused a distant excitement in him" (Baldwin, p. 229), but also that his wife won't perform the sex act that would "help him out." Whether fellatio or anal sex, the act is not limited to heterosexual coupling, which implies that the object of desire who might stimulate him—in addition to being black, need not be female. And for some as yet unexplained reason, Jesse does feel desire, regardless of his impotence: "excitement filled him like a toothache, but...refused to enter his flesh" (Baldwin, p. 229).

NONVIOLENT COOL'S POWER TO AGITATE

Jesse's thoughts as he lies awake turn to the Civil Rights activists he encountered earlier that day and come to focus on how he hopes never again to see "their sealed eyes struggle open" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 231). He conjures racist characterizations of them until recollection settles on encountering their leader. The police have "had trouble with him before," marking his activism as unswervingly fixed, even with repeated police opposition. The protestors had blocked a street, and the police think "the others would move if this nigger would move, him being the ring-leader, but he wouldn't move and he wouldn't let the others move" (Baldwin, p. 232). This fixity of body and purpose, and their refusal to stop singing when arrested and beaten, marks the activists as cool. Jesse focuses on coercing the leader to stop the singing, but the man remains unmovable except for involuntary physical responses to Jesse's torturing him with a cattle prod.

In significant contrast, Jesse not only "[shakes] worse than the boy had been shaking," but also is "glad no one could see him" and "[feels] very close to a very peculiar, particular joy" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 233) that clearly relates to the "distant excitement" (Baldwin, p. 229) aroused by erotic thoughts of black women—except the feelings resulting from torturing the activist make Jesse feel "very close" to, rather than "distant" from, their still-elusive source in his mind. This closeness suggests that the source is a repressed memory that relates more to a black man than woman, and to sadistically attacking him. Then the activist arrests Jesse's attention by hailing him with the label, "white man," at which Jesse "for some reason, [grabs] his privates" (Baldwin, p. 233), implying that a black man's recognizing him as "white man" forms part of the repressed memory.

The activist tells Jesse they've met before, when he was "[not] more than ten" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 234) and Jesse was a bill-collector. Similarly unmoving as a boy, the activist refused to converse with a "white man" who didn't call his grandmother "Mrs." (Baldwin, p. 235). The boy responded to Jesse's trivializing offer of chewing gum with, "I don't want nothing you got, white man" (Baldwin, p. 235), asserting a cool refusal to be moved by this manipulative attempt to make him the recipient of Jesse's largesse. Even as a child, the activist demonstrated multiple forms of stillness that mark him as cool: he remained silent in response to a question; when Jesse "watched the boy[,] the boy watched him[,] the expression on the boy's face" unchanging (Baldwin, p. 234). This sustained eye contact could perhaps evoke some form of recognition between them, except that in Jesse's mind, something intervenes: his perceptions suddenly assume a "nightmare" quality: "everything familiar, without undergoing any other change" was "subtly and hideously displaced," diverting him from articulating what or whom he recognized in the boy, even as, "white man" repeated itself in his mind (Baldwin, p. 234). That interpellation itself points toward the cause of his agitation, which repetition underscores.

COOL'S INTERPELLATING AUTHORITY

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser (2001) illustrates his concept of interpellation with the figure of a policeman hailing an individual—an act representing ideology's power (and the power of social systems it maintains) to call individuals into being and give them identity (p. 118). Baldwin shows us Jesse's consciousness resist recognizing the boy as a figure with the power to interpellate him—to call him into being within a network of historical power relationships that form Jesse—even as repetition of "white man" in his mind demonstrates that the boy has exercised that power; this is precisely what agitates Jesse. Here, Baldwin links observable forms of cool to the power and agency inhering in the boy's interpellation of Jesse as "white man," which in turn provokes Jesse to recognize the boy's power—a recognition that his psyche simultaneously stymies through incomprehension, while nevertheless agitated enough to "subtly and hideously [displace]" his perceptions of "everything familiar."

On recognizing the activist as that child, grown, Jesse responds with excitement that doesn't give pleasure: "he[...trembles] with what he [believes is] rage, sweat, both cold and hot, [racing] down his body" and "he [feels...] icy fear rise in him and raise him up" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 235). He cannot ascribe a cause to the emotional or physical agitation which he discovers "to his bewilderment, his horror" includes an erection "beneath his own fingers" (Baldwin, p. 235).

Unable to comprehend his responses, Jesse's psyche again diverts his attention, this time to thinking how Civil Rights activists "fight against God and go against the rules laid down in the Bible for everyone to read!" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 235). He invokes his world's ultimate source of order—what Althusser (2001) calls the Subject, from which concept individuals derive the ability to conceive of themselves as subjects endowed with self-consciousness and agency (p. 121). By invoking that Subject, Jesse tries to counter the activist's interpellation of him and so discount the authority—and status as subject—from which the activist dares to hail Jesse. The thought also diverts attention from his sexual arousal. In that sudden shift and the thoughts it juxtaposes, Baldwin links Jesse's position in societal systems of power inextricably to his psychological formation as white and male, and represents how consciousness and unconsciousness regulate it. And as a policeman, not only does Jesse ironically exemplify Althusser’s functionary of ideology’s power, but he also acts as agent for stasis at the interface between white racist law and Civil Rights agitation against it. Baldwin places a white racist’s invocation of the divine Subject’s authority in tension with an activist’s cool assertion of the power to hail Jesse into being, as if the activist had the constitutive authority of some more encompassing system of knowledge than that which Jesse would uphold or could detect.

In his cool, the activist doesn’t reveal that knowledge, but through his interpellation, Baldwin implies a sphere with greater perspective and authority, from which the activist polices Jesse. The story points to an epistemological position which lies beyond Jesse’s ken because he has been created as white in a racialized system. We can read the activist in Aching’s (2012) terms as one who has apparently negotiated a series of recognitions between himself and others, and between the terms of his own psyche, to achieve a self-mastery Jesse’s psyche cannot afford to see. Moreover, his nonviolence detaches his assertion of authority—of power to interpellate, to recognize himself as subject—from material sources. However, although the activist occupies a rhetorical position that we cannot misread as subjected, and although we may conjecture about the source of the authority from which he hails Jesse as “white man,” Baldwin provides no access to its precise nature because he gives no access to his thoughts. Readers cannot make the activist’s psyche into an object of analysis, but can only witness how his behavior’s cool authority undoes Jesse.

RACIALIZED FETISHISM

Through its structure, the story clearly asserts that his encounter with the cool activist arrests Jesse’s sexual potency and agitates his psyche enough to dislodge a series of memories from their repressed state. Those memories trace how events in his childhood that reiterated violent and sexualized racism structured his masculinity. The final memory of an event so disturbing that it requires the successive obfuscations provided through fetishizing white women, black women, and black men, is a lynching to which his parents take him as a child. Without having explained beforehand what Jesse will see, at the lynching his father lifts him onto his shoulders to ensure his unimpeded view of the victim’s torture by fire, then castration. The white men who perform these acts are friends of Jesse’s father, an association that connects them metonymically with the father, through that connection imbuing him with the same power and eroticized desire to castrate, especially given the father’s excitement about the lynching, evidenced by a “strange cruel curve” to his lips, while he “wet his lips from time to time, and swallowed” as the family approaches the site (Baldwin, 1965, p. 244).

Baldwin (1965) takes care to establish that, until the lynching, Jesse has a black friend named Otis, with whom he “wrestled together in the dirt” (p. 240) and to whom he turns for explanations of phenomena Jesse can’t comprehend (p. 243). This friendship implies that Jesse does not arrive at the lynching with the sadistic, sexualized racism he encounters there. Moreover, when his father’s friend holds the victim's genitals and a knife, "the dying man's eyes [look] straight into Jesse's eyes—it could not have been as long as a second, but it seemed longer than a year" (Baldwin, p. 248). At the moment of castration, the crowd and Jesse simultaneously scream (Baldwin, p. 248), which Paul Griffith (2002) reads quite plausibly as orgasmic (p. 509). However, that reading does not account for how the scream immediately follows Jesse's sustained eye contact with the lynched man. Only with Jesse does he share that mutual gaze, and it occurs at the last moment when Jesse can still psychologically afford to recognize a black male as evincing a "self-consciousness" like his own—recognition untainted by a fully racialized power dynamic, of which Jesse's friendship with Otis implies he has been capable.

The gaze sustained between boy and man reminds readers of the one that the adult Jesse and activist share and provides a key for reading it. Both instances agitate Jesse, not only through sadistic sexual associations established in his mind by witnessing the lynching, but also because the gaze of recognition directly precedes Jesse's fully racist formation as a white man, when tendencies toward identifying with or objectifying the man conflict. The mutuality of their gaze suggests that Jesse identifies with the victim until he comes to fully objectify him and derive pleasure from the fact that he—rather than Jesse—is castrated. Jesse finds the victim "the most beautiful and terrible object he had seen until then" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 247), in keeping with Freud's notion that a fetish object evokes fear as well as desire. By virtue of his identification with the tortured man, Jesse's crying out with the crowd, then slumping forward immediately after the man is castrated, signifies relief at escaping a fate he expected to share because until that moment he identified with the lynched man, while it also signifies how objectifying the man cools his fears while simultaneously piquing then releasing his desires. As a white man in this time and situation, Jesse's ability to recognize black men as self-conscious subjects like himself thus becomes repressed, obscured by his greater desire to see them as fetish objects.

That desire comes from a need to obscure something more terrifying: for Jesse, the lynched man as fetish object obscures from consciousness Jesse's fear of castration by and erotic associations with his father. Jesse watches a white man metonymically associated with his father perform the castration while sitting on his father's shoulders—a position that emblematizes how one generation of white racists forms out of its contact with the previous one. This position also must entail Jesse's feeling, with legs spread, his penis rest against the back of his father's neck—erotic contact ensured by his father's first having placed him there, his "hands [holding Jesse] firmly by the ankles" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 246) and then, when his father's friend displays the knife with which he will castrate, "Jesse [feels] his father's hands on his ankles slip and tighten" (Baldwin, p. 247). Jesse forms erotic associations with the lynching's sadism and castration of a black man while simultaneously forming erotic associations through genital contact with his father that are linked to terror that he too may be castrated, given his identification with the victim that their eye contact suggests. This is the terror and desire that his erotic arousal from torturing the activist and his memory of the lynched man both evoke and obscure. Baldwin represents a racist system by which white, father-son homoerotic contact and the threat of castration form inextricably with whites' sadistic, erotic objectification and castration of black men.

By the story's end, the repressed memories that have emerged in Jesse's consciousness could produce an understanding of how sadistic, eroticized racism has configured his psyche. The pieces by which he might recognize what puzzles him about his reaction to the activist are consciously available. But instead, still in bed with the memories of the activist and lynching in mind, Jesse finds himself released from impotence and whispers to his wife that he will "do [her] like a nigger" and urges her to "come on, sugar, and love [him] just like [she'd] love a nigger" (Baldwin, 1965, p. 249). His remembering has enabled him to identify with a black man only in racist parody and reinstate white and black women as fetish objects that obscure the homoerotic foundations of his racism and masculinity. Similarly, recognition of the activist's cool and the ensuing agitation that loosed Jesse's memories—that threatened how his psyche is configured by threatening to make him aware of that configuration—are obscured from awareness.

THE RADICAL POWER OF BALDWIN'S COOL

Most readings of "Going to Meet the Man" focus on its assertions about the psycho-sexual foundations of white racist masculinity and the horrific treatment of African American men on which they depended, which clearly form the story's main thrust. Sara Taylor (2008) aptly noted that in "Going to Meet the Man" and the other stories published with it, "[Baldwin] creates a holistic portrait of the relationship between black and white masculinities, an endeavor in race and gender identity studies far ahead of his time" (p. 45). Jones (1966) did mention that the story suggests that "perhaps the greatest fear of all is that, somehow, the Negro will force the white to look at himself and admit the ugly realities of his being in this relationship" (p. 109), but he did not say how such self-recognition is forced. Tiffany Gilbert (2011) found that what sets the story's recollections in motion is how "the image of the boy's writhing body thrills Jesse and excites a long-suppressed memory out of his consciousness" (p. 242), while Benoît Depardieu (2002) said "the confrontation with the young black activist is but the repetition of the lynching" (p. 4). The sexual horror of both torture scenes distracts readers from the radical power of the activist's cool to disturb Jesse, thereby setting the plot in motion. While Baldwin (1965) places a cool African-American man under the fetishizing gaze of a white man, that gaze is returned. And because the cool represented is not limited to the activist's style or to a simple, reactive defiance, but asserts an ethical authority beyond the scope of white power structures and knowledge, it defies objectification. Moreover, this cool agitates through a person-to-person rhetorical situation. A representation of such contact could be commodified, but it would always point to a situation that cannot be. Baldwin thus provides us with an extraordinary portrait of cool's significance.

The June 17, 2013, protest of "Standing Man" Erdem Gunduz entailed his standing still and silently gazing at one building for eight hours in Istanbul's Taksim Square, even when searched and prodded by police. His behavior not only attracted their attention; it also inspired a movement to emulate him (Carvin, 2013) and earned international notice, including the German M100 Media Award "for his 'courageous commitment to freedom of expression and human rights'" ("Turkey's 'standing man,'" 2013). In the wake of political protests in Turkey that had developed into violent conflict with police, Gunduz' nonviolent cool thus defied witnesses' expectations and incited agitation, underscoring how cool operates through the rhetorical dynamics of specific situations. This instance of nonviolent activism and the notice it provoked shares qualities with Baldwin's activist and the power he exercises, marking how "Going to Meet the Man" represents significant aspects of the cool that both address and exceed the racialized psychodynamics of its American context.

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SENECA VAUGHT

11. JAMES BALDWIN VS. WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR. FOR THE SOUL OF AMERICA

The 1965 Cambridge Union Debate

In the fall of 2009, a short clip of James Baldwin debating William F. Buckley, Jr. in England went viral on YouTube. There, nestled in what seems to be a crowd of one thousand students, a small man with large piercing eyes read a sermon that momentarily rippled through the cacophony of the Twitter-verse, Facebook, and a million other millennial distractions. This debate, a single point in the much-studied and critically-acclaimed life of James Baldwin, presents an interesting moment for analysis. What was it about this particular debate that an audience of so-called post-racial America found so intriguing?

There are numerous commentaries on the debate and its aftermath written by academics, journalists, and intellectuals. For example, a brief *Salon* article entitled, “Racism and the *National Review*” discusses a recurrent theme of racial politics, race-baiting, and how Buckley became a hero of working-class ethnics during the 1965 New York City mayoral election (Walsh, 2013). John Warner’s (2012) “Why James Baldwin Beat William F. Buckley in a Debate, 540-160” also provides interesting analysis, highlighting Buckley’s emphasis on civilization and making some poignant comparisons to the current debate on same-sex marriage.

One of the common themes running through all of these assessments of the Baldwin-Buckley 1965 debate is a critical evaluation of Baldwin’s skill as an orator. It is impossible to watch the debate without being mesmerized by Baldwin’s ability to connect with his audience as he provides them a window into the experience of Jim Crow America. There were other debates that highlighted Baldwin’s thought such as the one with Malcolm X (1963) and the three-way paper debate between Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Norman Mailer (Weatherby, 1977). However, the Cambridge Union debate presents an important message to those teaching and learning about the life and work of Baldwin in the so-called “post-racial” era.

James Baldwin’s 1965 debate with William Buckley urges teachers and students to critically reengage an important historical moment connecting Baldwin’s literary work with his public intellectualism. This essay addresses two major themes that emerge in this historical moment. First, it illustrates how the debate highlighted Baldwin’s deep understanding of black America but also his critique of white conservatism at a pivotal time in America’s civil rights history and his own literary career. Secondly, this essay addresses the significance of the Baldwin-Buckley debate in its historical and literary context. This chapter highlights how readers of

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Baldwin may engage his polemics as a pedagogical strategy to confront the social construction of whiteness in modern American political thought, contextualizing political arguments in a critical racial narrative.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE DEBATE

The debate would bring two men from two opposing sides of the political universe together. Ironically, they both claimed New York as their home, perhaps one of the only American cities with room enough for the breadth of both of their personalities. None could have come from a more humble background than James Baldwin. Baldwin was a product of Harlem, born during that other Renaissance, in an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood. He saw himself as an orphan of Harlem, the product of a city that he both loved and hated. Although he had been born in New York in 1924, he readily identified himself as a southerner that had been fostered in a Northern metropolis (Boyd, 2008, pp. 3-4).

William Buckley, Jr. on the other hand was the epitome of privilege and elite society. His father, the son of Irish immigrants and a devout Catholic was an oil magnate who had made millions and had sought to instill a cosmopolitan conservative ethic in his children (Judis, 1988, pp. 18-21, 32-34). Buckley was a product of Forest Hill and summers at Sharon, Connecticut where he and his five siblings were attended by a governess, three Mexican nurses, a cook, a butler, two maids, a groom, an assistant (for equestrian), and two music tutors (Buckley, 1997, p. 2).

Although Baldwin and Buckley called the same city home, from their youth they set out in diametrically opposite paths. In 1943, a very Roman Catholic Buckley was drafted to serve as a Spanish sex-hygiene lecturer in the Army to Hispanic recruits at Fort Sam (Buckley, 1997, pp. 22-23). Meanwhile a sexually-curious James Baldwin evidenced another kind of courage. In 1948, he would bravely embark on the beginning an international journey that he pursued for the remainder of his life. Baldwin sojourned abroad, trying to escape the racist environs of the United States, seeking a place to call home (Bobia, 1997, p. 2).

Following the war, William Buckley pursued a formal education at one of the nation's most prestigious universities. As an undergraduate student at Yale, Buckley studied political science, history, and economics. Following a somewhat typical progression for white men of his age and background, he would go on to Mary Patricia Taylor, the daughter of a rich industrialist Austin Taylor and settle down in a traditional marriage. Less typical of that popular American narrative, Buckley served as a CIA agent in Mexico in 1951. He returned to the United States to found the radical mouthpiece of the conservative movement in the *National Review* four years later (Bogus, 2011).

According to Buckley biographer Carl Bogus (2011) the first issue of the publication marked the day the conservative movement was born (p. 141). Buckley, *National Review*, and the conservative movement all came into the fore as the Civil Rights Movement was developing in the wake of the *Brown v. Board* case, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the murder Emmett Till. These historical milestones were central issues in black America and well-covered in the national news (Bogus, p. 150). Simultaneously, from 1955-1988, the *National Review* became the most important periodical in American conservatism and began to play a prominent role in framing views on the race question in the conservative movement, developing an adversarial position to civil rights legislation.

As Bogus (2011) puts it:

> There was no philosophical reason for conservatives to oppose civil rights … one could not have argued that libertarianism—or conservatism of any stripe—justified inferior black schools and the rest of Jim Crow. It was the presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and, most especially, Richard Nixon in 1972 that exploited resentment over civil rights and caused the South to shift from the Democratic to the Republican Party, but it was *National Review's* raw position on race in the late 1950s that made that possible by placing conservatives in opposition to civil rights. And *National Review's* position flowed not from any preexisting conservative philosophy but from Buckley's personal background. (p. 160)

Baldwin accounted for his time during the 1950s quite differently. Baldwin attended DeWitt Clinton High School and the New School but also traced a series of his formative experiences in the pulpit, in the press, and in Paris as the basis of his educational acculturation. He had attended P.S. 24, one of New York's best public schools, especially if it were judged by the long-term output of its graduates. The psychologist and civil rights advocate Kenneth Clark and Baldwin both had fond memories of teachers and experiences there. While Buckley was attacking the Warren Court in the *National Review* (Bogus, 2011, p. 153), Baldwin's extended public education included his first visit to the American South. In 1957, he began to cover school integration stories for *Harper's Magazine*. He would go on to travel to Little Rock, Arkansas and Atlanta, Georgia to cover the movement and witness the struggle firsthand. Nine years later, Baldwin and Buckley would both give an account of their take on the American dream from these vastly different vantage points.

They stood in Cambridge in 1965, two giants that represented the literary and intellectual aspirations of two people and one nation. A key difference between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, Jr. was that Baldwin discounted the racial beliefs of Western civilization—whether explicitly stated or implicitly affirmed. For Baldwin the understanding of the world based in the Renaissance was one that was deeply flawed and that no longer held current to the experience of injustice in the world in general and the challenges that African Americans faced in particular. In 1961, during a previous debate at Hofstra College, Baldwin discussed these views with Ben Shahn and Darius Milhaud. In that debate, he outlined his distrust and distaste for conceptions of image and aesthetics rooted in a purely Western context (Standley, 1989, p. 25).

It was no surprise that Cambridge Union would be the site of this debate. Dating back to the early 1800s, the Cambridge Union had a distinguished history of housing the best minds to debate on a variety of issues (Parkinson, 2009). One member of Parliament, Norman St.John Stevas, described the appeal of this event by reflecting on the 150-year history of the Cambridge Union he could not recall a better-attended debate than this one. The crowd huddled around the two men in a packed auditorium. Each speaker was introduced and then had an overview of his views broadly sketched by one of the Cambridge Union members. Baldwin's presence on the debating floor may have not only marked the first time an African American was invited to Union but one of the earliest ambassadors to address a British audience on the stakes of the modern Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32).

David Heycock introduced Baldwin first. The Union member briefly sketched the racial conflagration smoldering in the United States. Heycock emphasized that the "consistent and quite deliberate exploitation of 1/9th of its inhabitants" begged the question of precisely what type of dream were Americans living. Pointing out that one man in nine in the United States was prohibited from realizing his full potential, how could a society advance? He then recounted details from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Selma," which decried the fact that more blacks were in prison than on the voting rolls of the city. At the time, said Heycock, only 1% of Dallas' black population could vote. He outlined the situation from Selma to Marion in which hundreds had been arrested, detained, and by some accounts even tortured (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32).

Buckley's introducer, Jeremy Burford, began emphasizing that the purpose of the debate was not to justify the current treatment of blacks under Jim Crow but rather to prove the American Dream was not at the expense of blacks but "in spite of it." Burford began with statistics that placed the material progress of blacks in an international context. He coyly advanced evidence that the per capital income (money income not real income) of American blacks was the same as that of people in Great Britain citing an article in *U.S. News and World Reports* from July of 1963. His assertion was followed by a cacophony of laughter in the auditorium. Apparently the audience thought it absurd to evaluate material wealth alone outside of a political and cultural context. Before taking his seat, Burford reiterated that the debate was not a question of civil rights but addressed "whether the American Negro has paid for the American with his suffering or rather the American Dream has furthered Negro equality" (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32)

THE DEBATE

As James Baldwin approached the lecturer's podium, he was greeted by a warm round of applause and then began slowly, methodically, outlining the experience of American blacks in a matter-of-fact litany amplified through his own experiences. He justified his viewpoint by stating how one answers the question is really based in one's "system of reality." In doing so, Baldwin intimated that segregationists perceived blacks as insane to attack a system to which whites owed their collective identity (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32). On the other hand, these assumptions were held so deeply that many whites were scarcely aware of them. Jim Crow exploited black Americans to serve the interest of white supremacy; the logic was circular and self-serving in perpetuating the so-called American Dream.

After a strategic pause, Baldwin presented his most perceptive claim in the debate. At the center of his forensics were three central points that confronted the social construction of whiteness in modern American life. He laid part of the blame directly at his host's feet. He said that Western or European systems of reality were a source of these notions of white supremacy that were at play in America—that in fact Europe not United States was the birthplace of white supremacy (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32). Baldwin pointed to the problem of oppression in psychosocial terms, arguing that it destroyed the black sense of reality. This pervasive oppression impacted a father's ability to have authority over his household as well as his own conception of manhood. This was a well-known theme developed in Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1963), a work in which he interpreted his own experiences as a child in the household of a father who hated him.

A blissful ignorance of all things racial permeated the childhood of American Negroes, said Baldwin, until about age five or seven. This age range had recently been confirmed as a critical period in which black youth began to evidence a preference for white skin. This dilemma had been explored by the psychology experiments of a fellow Harlemite Kenneth Clark (1963) in the groundbreaking work *Prejudice and Your Child* (pp. 48-49). In the pliable years of before the tenth birthday, children slowly but inevitably became racially awakened. Baldwin then revealed in the most stunning part of the debate how painfully aware he and millions of blacks in the United States were of this psychological research in real terms. To his dismay, Baldwin recounted that we [black people] had been rooting for Gary Cooper [white people], who had been killing the Indians, as it unfolded to us in horror that all along the "Indians" had been us (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32). Sometime around thirty years of age, Baldwin suggested, came a pivotal moment. There was an awakening to the racial reality that there was nothing that a black person could do to transform the society but only hope to cope, to survive.

In defining "expense," Baldwin pointed to the fallacy that somehow the Negro was a ward of American society. In this part of the debate Baldwin attempted to place the contributions of the Negro as central to the wealth and foundation of democracy in the United States. Baldwin then began to catalog contributions that blacks had made to American society. Speaking poetically and in the first person he affirmed:

> I am speaking very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: I picked cotton, I carried it to the market, I built the railroads under someone else's whip for nothing. For nothing. The Southern oligarchy which has still today so very much power in Washington, and therefore some power in the world, was created by my labor and my sweat and the violation of my women and the murder of my children. (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32)

Baldwin's next point in the debate centered around notions of whiteness and how white identity in the American dream came at the expense of blacks but also at a loss of a sense of humanity on the part of whites. Baldwin identified the paradox of what had happened to white southerners was *worse* than what happened to Negroes in the process:

> But what happens to the poor white man's, the poor white woman's, mind? It is this they have been raised to believe, and by now they helplessly believe, that no matter how terrible some of their lives may be and no matter what disaster overtakes them, there is one consolation like a heavenly revelation—at least they are not black. (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32)

Baldwin claims that somehow in the process of becoming oppressors, white people had lost their sense of humanity. This is a theme that also appeared in Frantz Fanon's 1952 work *White Skin, Black Masks* (Rabaka, 2010, pp. 67-68) of which Baldwin was well aware. He had cited several instances in which the "sense of reality" of the colonizer came into conflict with the oppressed, whether it be the French seeking to displace the world view of the Algerian exile or the South African seeking to silence the protest of Africans. The Cambridge audience was familiar with these themes not only from the television but also in the reading of his most recent publication *Another Country* (1962).

Baldwin also deeply resented the self-righteous tones from recent immigrants who protested against quasi-racial hardships while simultaneously assimilating into the very image of the whiteness they had once criticized. Here, between the lines of the debate, Baldwin was referring to a meeting several years before in New York with the Attorney General Robert Kennedy. In the meeting, the third-generation Irishman had appealed for Baldwin, Harry Belafonte, Lorraine Hansberry and other civil rights leaders to be patient. Baldwin was irate that a third-generation Irish immigrant, whose brother sat in the White House, could lecture him about when the country *might* be ready for a Negro president. Baldwin retorted that blacks had already been in the country for four hundred years (Boyd, 2008, p. 208; Schlesinger, 1978, pp. 330-333).

Following Baldwin's final claim, Buckley approached the podium broadcasting a sense of smug self-confidence. According to his biographer Carl Bogus (2011), Buckley was a prisoner of his (un)fortunate circumstances that worked, unbeknownst to him, to his downfall on that February day. As Buckley began to speak, it became clear to him and everyone else in the room that he had underestimated the abilities of his adversary. Scrambling to gain control of the momentum, he appealed to an imagined common Albion ancestry, reasoning with descendants of a common cultural heritage. This was a tactic that worked among conservative and segregationist audiences in the United States but clearly fell flat in Cambridge, exposing a convoluted racial logic at the core of his argument.

Buckley immediately claimed that Baldwin's arguments and "flagellations of our civilization" were welcomed in the United States and that Baldwin was not treated as "a Negro" but quite respectfully there. Buckley then argued that it was impossible to deal with the indictments of Mr. Baldwin unless one is prepared "to deal with him as a white man. Unless is one is prepared to say to him that the fact your skin is black is utterly irrelevant to the arguments that you raise" (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965, p. SM32).

Buckley then turned to race-baiting tactics quite common among segregationists in the South that pitted black demands for equality in a zero-sum game against whites. Misquoting Baldwin out of context from the *Fire Next Time*, he read: "The only thing that the white man has that the Negro should want is power." Buckley then accused Baldwin of not indicting America for having insufficient ideals but for having no ideals at all and in doing so "jettisoning *our* entire civilization" (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965). As the audience became visibly upset, Buckley rhetorically responded by asking what should be done to address these psychological humiliations Baldwin claimed, remarking that it was impossible to avoid the daily humiliations heaped on Baldwin and blacks in the United States.

Buckley became visibly angered with how the audience had ridiculed the statistical comparison made previously by his introducer Burford. He raised the point that 7/10th of the white income of America is equal to the income made by the average Negro and that capitalization of $15,000-17,000 per job in the United States was not a result exclusively of the American Negro but "my great-grandparents worked too and yours also" and that "nothing has been created without the expense of something" (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965).

The focal point of Buckley's argument centered on the so-called facts of the situation. He argued that American blacks were doing quite well by global standards and therefore the American Dream was not at the expense of the American Negro (Riverbends Channel, 2012; "The American Dream," 1965). Here Buckley was inferring subjective intention from objective consequences, precisely what he had often accused his opponents on the both the right and left of doing. To support his claim, Buckley called upon the scholarly authority of the book *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Glazer, 1970; Painter, 2010, pp. 380-382). Paraphrasing the conclusions of one chapter, Buckley proposed that the challenges blacks faced were partially the result of the American Negro himself—hence the term the Negro problem. The decrease in black doctors during the 20th century, Glazer argued, did not come from a lack of opportunity but from a lack of initiative, especially when compared to other immigrant communities.

Following this point, Buckley made an appeal to a common white heritage—the "faith of our fathers" as he put it (Riverbends Channel, 2012). There was a fundamental racial assumption that Buckley endorsed here. He was not referring to his affinity for England, though he had schooled there at St. Johns, Beaumont near Old Windsor as a young boy. Nor was he referring to the contentious history of Catholicism and Protestantism in England. He was explicitly appealing to an implicit assumption that a common cultural tradition of Anglicized Christianity created a common religio-cultural foundation for whiteness—whether Anglo or American—that was being threatened by a new order of cultural inclusiveness.

This assumption was one that Buckley would continue to uphold for the remainder of his life and that would become part of the conservative contempt for cultural pluralism (Buckley, 1997, pp. 37-38).

As his time dwindled down, attendees began to exit the room before the debate had finished. Buckley turned to a call to arms quite literally, accusing Baldwin of inciting racial violence. Responding that under no circumstance must America be told to overthrow the "faith of our fathers" and that "if it ever becomes confrontation we will fight the issue" waging a war to save "civilization" on the scale of World War II against Nazi Germany (Riverbends Channel, 2012). The Cambridge Union was not convinced as final votes were tallied. Baldwin had won 544-164.

THE AFTERMATH

There were significant connections between Baldwin's public intellectualism, the civil rights struggle, and his literary career that followed the debate. Just three days after James Baldwin's debate with William F. Buckley, Jr. Malcolm X was dead. In a press conference with reporters Baldwin uttered a particularly dark saying that the press had difficulty following. Reporters asked him about his thoughts on the situation, emphasizing that it was a black man who had murdered Malcolm X. Baldwin was so overcome with grief that he could not answer forthrightly but later explained that "whatever hand pulled the trigger did not buy the bullet" (Leeming, 1996, p. 246).

As Baldwin's official biographer David Leeming (1996) wrote, "What Baldwin was communicating was that the murder of Malcolm X was a revelation of the deep ideological rift in America that were byproducts of the 'white problem' not the audacity of blacks to confront it" (p. 246). For Baldwin, the overwhelming tendency for violence to be considered a black problem was misguided. The murder of Malcolm X was revelatory of a deeper psychosis in white America in which the value of black life was not equated with any value or significance.

It was clear in that debate that Buckley was unable to critically examine the problems with the conservative line of reasoning around race as deftly he was able to dissect other issues. For example, he realized quite early on that the John Birch Society (JBS), one of the most important right-wing political groups was endangering the conservative movement overall because it was being led astray by Robert Welch (Buckley, 2008a, pp. 53-54,). Welch had made some rather outrageous arguments during the 1950s, asserting that President Eisenhower himself was at the heart of a communist conspiracy. Welch's accusations threatened to discredit the legitimacy of the growing conservative movement. Buckley was part of a coordinated attempt by Barry Goldwater and William Baroody to distance themselves from the irrationality of Welch but to keep the support of the JBS. Through the *National Review*, Buckley would expose "the fallacy," which he defined as "…the assumption that you can infer subjective intention from objective consequence: we lost China to the Communists, therefore the President of the United States and the Secretary of State wished China to go to the Communists" (Buckley, 2008b, p. 61).

Buckley was able to parse political strategy handily but was confounded on the race question. In fact, Buckley used the momentum of the debate to go in a completely opposite direction on racial matters. In April of 1965, Buckley gave a speech at Communion Breakfast of Catholic policemen with more than 5,000 police present to launch his bid for the mayor of New York City. In the speech, he praised the police shortly after brutality charges had been filed by black leaders in the city and shrewdly defended the actions of police in Selma (Judis, 1988, pp. 235-236). Crudely commenting on the murder of Viola Liuzzo, a white woman from Detroit who had joined civil rights protests in Selma, Buckley suggested that sympathy for the Civil Rights Movement was misplaced because the protesters had in fact asked for it (meaning their use of non-violent direct action). He was intent on using black protest against police brutality as a wedge issue to develop his standing on a racially-coded law and order platform. Buckley's comments were particularly insensitive, even for that time. Furthermore, by throwing his full support behind the city policeman—in light of recent request by black clergy for police review boards—it was apparent that he was appealing to the racial prejudices of white constituents.

Ultimately, Buckley lost his bid for the New York mayoral seat but his time advocating on behalf of conservative causes was fruitful. In the following year, Buckley became host of the *Firing Line*. The show was established in the debate format that pitted guest from a variety of ideological and political perspectives in the "line of fire" across from himself. While it would be inaccurate to say that Buckley's debate with James Baldwin was the only experience that prepared him for the show, his forensic exercise with black America's Jeremiah certainly publicized the debating abilities of the conservative ideologue and prepared him for a sustained period in the public eye. The Buckley that appeared on the *Firing Line* was much more aware of how personal quirks and eccentricities could exude arrogance and project influence. As Lee (2010) has discussed, he paid much more attention to adapting his personal element in "gladiatorial style" to complement his political commentary (p. 217). Buckley now recognized, as his confrontation with Baldwin demonstrated, polemical and expository styles were changing with public sentiment on the issues. Buckley continued to evolve his rhetorical position on civil rights, reflecting on the debating technique of *ignoratio elenchi*, as he put it, "the technique of acting as though you have answered Proposition A by confuting Proposition B…the legislator who argued that certain proposed civil rights legislation was unconstitutional, rebutted by the legislator who proclaimed the equality of the races" (Buckley 1989, p. 21).

The *Firing Line* would became important because it would provide a national televised space for the conservative movement to air its views and to promote its ideology. To Buckley's credit, he invited keys spokesman on the cause of black liberation such as Huey Newton, Muhammad Ali, James Farmer, and Jesse Jackson. However, never again was he so effectively trounced as with James Baldwin in the Cambridge Union.

By 1972 James Baldwin had returned to Paris as part of a critical second phase of his residence from 1970 to 1975. During this period Baldwin published *No Name on the Street* (1972) in which he reflected on major events and figures of the civil rights era. He revealed his admiration for the debating skill of Malcolm X, who apparently had influenced his own style:

> Nothing could have been more familiar to me than Malcolm's style in debate. I had heard it all my life … All I could do was elaborate on some of Malcolm's points, or modify, or emphasize, or seem to try to clarify, but there was no way I could disagree with him. (Baldwin qtd. in Boyd, 2007, pp. 78-79)

Baldwin felt vindicated after the Civil Rights Movement had come of age. Since he shared the podium with Buckley in 1965, two additional civil rights acts had been signed into law by Congress. Baldwin remained skeptical that legislation alone could change deep-seated views at the heart of American identity but acknowledged the importance of attempts to rectify past wrongs. He also remained concerned with how systems of reality were evolving into a new racial attitudes. In 1972, he sat for an interview with *Transition Magazine* where he shared his perspectives on contemporary politics. The ascendancy of Richard Nixon in the election of 1968 was particularly troubling for Baldwin. He warned that the presence of Nixon in the White House confirmed and sealed an essentially racist attitude (Baldwin, 1972, pp. 39, 41).

Buckley ultimately came to acknowledge that conservatism had come down on the wrong side of the civil rights issue. In a 2004 interview, Buckley accepted a key regret of his life was not supporting civil rights reform and acknowledging that federal intervention to end Jim Crow was a necessary act of government. Buckley did not however retreat from his civilization thesis that centered on a racial assumption of Western European progress as the source of political and cultural ideas of progress. If anything, Buckley became more determined to underscore this position.

FOR THE SOUL OF AMERICA

The debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, Jr. remains an important one for critical readers and teachers of Baldwin to consider. Perhaps one of the most important reasons is that it moves observers to a more critical understanding of the soul of whiteness—the logic of the racial binary—in America. For Baldwin, the United States had reached a place that could only be redeemed by blacks in collaboration with whites who dared to shatter the idols of a false historical consciousness. The efforts of civil right protest moved the nation to create a new history and a new dream to replace old mythologies, racial nightmares, and false systems of reality. It was only in confronting the blatant denials of a violent past rooted in abuse, self-hatred, and guilt that America's soul could truly be redeemed.

For Baldwin, the center of one's sense of reality was rooted in one's concept of self. Many whites and especially Southern segregationists, Baldwin argued, arrived at a conception of self through a corrupted past. They negated the humanity of black people through a system of reality that was equally self-negating. Still for Baldwin, white people themselves, even the most the vile of racists, were *not* monsters. A Sheriff Jim Clark, of Dallas County, Alabama infamy, was able to have loving and caring relations with other people such as his wife and his children. He was not a sociopath. However there was something at play within society itself—a system of reality—in which the very essence of his identity required him to distinguish himself from black people. When this could not be accomplished by assaults on the intellect and psyche, physical violence became necessary. This "system of reality," Baldwin debated, was the framework in which millions could justify the pressing an electrified cattle prod into the breasts of black women, never once considering this behavior to be inhumane (Riverbends Channel, 2012). As Baldwin (1965a) explored in "Going to Meet the Man" the process of denying black humanity had become horrifically self-affirming.

On the other hand, Buckley basked in the glory of Western supremacy, never seeing how cultural imperiousness laid the foundation for the legal and cultural practice of Jim Crow violence. He upheld a prevailing view of the time that identified Europe (and the United States by extension) as the sole source of moral, intellectual, and political progress. Buckley had no problem with framing ideas of God, religion, and human progress through a mono-cultural lens. In doing so, he falsely equated white Americanism within a pseudo-historical framework of Europe without regard to significant differences in the cultural, political, and economic landscape that had come to characterize race politics. Most importantly, he arrived at conclusions about race that repulsed many Europeans without considering what the perception of that experience meant to a world outside the racial logic of the United States. Using American cultural shorthand, Buckley ascribed racial problems to personal behavior that could be easily remedied by individual action. The problem of prejudice in Mississippi was not so much the byproduct of injustice flowing from the fount of white supremacy but rather a problem of education, a dilemma of human will.

Baldwin's experiences in a racist society combined with his travels abroad had made him much more critical of the American dream (Baldwin, 1965b). This critical self-reflection of Baldwin as an insider/outsider was a theme throughout his most powerful literary works, enabling him to render some of the most searing indictments of white American society during the debate. As readers and teachers of Baldwin, the lessons of his cosmopolitanism urge a reconsideration of blackness through a critical global lens. However, being well-travelled in itself is not a panacea. We saw how Buckley's educational, personal, and political experiences abroad had brought him to precisely the opposite conclusions. Buckley's travels had made him much more extroverted in his analysis, spending most of his time critiquing the decay of cultural and political tradition in the United States and very little time examining the role of race in the midst of it all.

Baldwin's critiques of whiteness were perhaps so powerful because they begin with the experience of being a victim of whiteness first. In order to arrive at these conclusions Baldwin had to not only consider the perspectives of blackness but also deeply engage the worldview of whiteness. This ability to humanize both perspectives is what gave Baldwin such a unique appeal to critical readers of the time. He was able to discuss what it meant to be human from a variety of social lenses. It is insufficient for teachers of Baldwin or race to present only the black side of the experience. Baldwin's debate demonstrates the need to critically discuss how the experience of blackness deeply informs and shapes white culture and continues to impact the experiences of recent immigrants to the United States not yet initiated into the racial binary.

Buckley on the other hand was unable to appeal to black audiences with the same fervor that Baldwin was able to reach white audiences. One reason for this was that Buckley's worldview was so deeply rooted in whiteness—outward-looking and other-negating. His overarching premise was a polemic based on civilization and not on the meaning of a common experience of humanity. Whether in condemning godlessness at Yale or engaging police in New York, Buckley's perspectives can be broadly characterized as that of a cultural gatekeeper of sorts, preserving a certain worldview from corruption by the masses.

Many ideas that were sketched by Baldwin and Buckley are central to the political debates that continue in the present. They are central to the misunderstandings not only between the right and the left but also between black, white, yellow, and brown Americans in a "post-racial" society. For example, the view that public expenditures on the urban poor (racially-coded language for black and brown populations) are fiscally irresponsible, while tax rebates to business owners (racially-coded language for white populations) are not is one instance of how systems of reality can justify a racial logic (Hurwitz, 2005). Systems of reality and racially-coded language continue to be used in appeals to white middle and upper-class fears of black culture in a manner very similar to what Buckley advanced in Cambridge.

These ways of viewing and structuring the world play a significant role in ongoing debates that are at the heart of what whiteness means in a "post-racial" society. Whiteness means being able to reap the social benefits of society without incurring any of the social costs; it is defining one's identity based on what one is not. In other words, white identity in the "post-racial" American context is exactly the same as before. It is an identity created in oppositional terms. To be white has historically functioned as the opposite of being black but problematically in the United States the identity never really engaged a social meaning independent of its binary relationship to blackness.

Perhaps the ultimate paradox in the debate is that of religion. Baldwin had long turned away from the pulpit, disgusted by its inability to empower black people to address the depths of their own despair. Buckley was well aware of the Baldwin who wrote in *Fire Next Time*, "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him." However Buckley's system of reality prevented him from acknowledging why Baldwin and many blacks increasingly advanced this view. It was impossible for Buckley to understand this black crisis of faith but unbeknownst to him, this moment was also an indictment of mainstream American Christianity. Although Baldwin had lost the faith, he remained emphatic about deeper spiritual sentiments. Baldwin affirmed, even while critiquing white conservatives and liberals alike, that "something does connect us, and what it is hidden. It is not science or prosperity; it is not to be found in any church, so far as I know" (Standley, 1989, p. 26).

On the other hand, Buckley became more entrenched in his religious beliefs as his life progressed. He became more incensed at the audacity of non-religious sources of introspection, perhaps even more than when he had written *God and Man at Yale*. For the rest of his life, Buckley continued to defend the theological relevance of his religious experience. He bemoaned the lack of interest in debates over the morality of slavery, eternal punishment, indulgences, and scriptural literalism (Buckley, 1997, pp. 67-85). As history would have it, Buckley's appeals to preserve the "faith or our fathers" has largely been regarded as political arguments of a culture warrior, while ironically Baldwin's diatribes against racial injustices have been recalled in deeply religious terms. We hear echoes of Baldwin in prophetic sermons, moving jeremiads, and global appeals to redeem the soul of humanity—black and white, rich and poor, heterosexual and homosexual.

The vantage points from which Baldwin and Buckley debated remain significant well into the present. At the center of each of their perspectives is embedded a view of culture and of the world that continues to define critical issues of the day. One way of viewing the world endorses the American dream in terms, purely binary, a civilization thesis, with those properly educated and endowed attempting to preserve their stake in its future. This America is based on a narrow vision of what is possible in racial terms. Baldwin's world, however pessimistic, is rooted in a much more extensive understanding of the possibilities of both the American dream and the human spirit. It looks beyond the foil of whiteness to debate the deeper problems of what does it truly mean to be human.

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PEKKA KILPELÄINEN

12. JAMES BALDWIN'S GOSPEL OF POSTCATEGORICAL LOVE

Transgressing and Transcending Boundaries

Persistent questioning and rejection of the social categorization of human beings lies at the very heart of James Baldwin's writing. His work challenges the essentialist notions of race, sexuality, and gender, in particular, and calls attention to the ways in which they are used as instruments of oppression in order to establish and maintain disproportionate power hierarchies in society. Baldwin's approach to these issues is twofold in the sense that he constantly documents and explores the various layers of social oppression in the United States, but also envisions ways of eradicating them and thereby projects alternative visions for the future.

To conceptualize the central underlying thematic current that runs throughout the entirety of Baldwin's oeuvre, this essay foregrounds what I will call the idea of *postcategorical utopia*, a vision of—or, rather, an impulse and desired movement toward—a world in which identity categories would lose their capacity for oppression. Baldwin never defines this ideal in any detail, except in negative terms as the absence of categorization. He does, however, offer us a glimpse of how this utopian mode of being could be attained, and this is what I conceptualize as the notion of *postcategorical love*—love in a specific, politically charged sense as opposed to the conventional, overly sentimental and romanticized Hollywood meaning of the word.

This essay will focus on how the politics of race and sexuality and the concomitant categories of identity function and receive provisional resolutions in Baldwin's writing. The ideal of postcategorical love appears as the ultimate mediator between the strictly categorized world, in which we still live, and the possibility of a better state of being, beyond the reach of the incarcerating effects of the labels we bear. I will trace the manifestations of this postcategorical ideal in Baldwin's novels, especially the degree to which his characters transcend various conventional categories, but usually fail to produce any lasting state of personal happiness or any changes on a larger social scale. Despite the transgressive behavior of these characters, the world around them appears to remain unchanged, and we see only utopian glimpses of and allusions to what might lie beyond this world of late modernity governed by oppressive categorization.

The notion of postcategorical love finds an eloquent definition in one of Baldwin's (1964) most famous essays, "Down at the Cross" (originally published in 1963):

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> Love takes off the masks that we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. (pp. 81-82)

There is obviously more at stake here than mere personal affection and attraction: for Baldwin, love signifies a rejection of dishonesty—the removal of the masks—in other words, to assume a distinctly political point of view, an eradication of the illusion of white supremacy and black inferiority, which he sees as a fundamental part of the ideological foundation of white America. The Baldwinian concept of love reads as a protest and counter-reaction against the conventional heteronormative, racist, and sexist concept of love impregnated with restrictions, taboos, deception, and dishonesty. Echoing Jameson's (1981, p. 79) thinking, the ideal of postcategorical love may be seen to emerge from Baldwin's writing as a symbolic response and imaginary resolution to the conventional identity categories according to which human beings tend to be classified and evaluated.

Broadly speaking, the postcategorical impulse of Baldwin's humanist agenda is based on his conviction that human beings are capable of moral progress and positive change. One of the most eloquent expressions of this reads as follows:

> One day, perhaps, unimaginable generations hence, we will evolve into the knowledge that human beings are more important than real estate and will permit this knowledge to become the ruling principle of our lives. For I do not for an instant doubt, and I will go to my grave believing, that we can build Jerusalem, if we will. (Avedon & Baldwin, 1964, p. 704)

This passage underscores Baldwin's humanism by juxtaposing humanity and material wealth in favor of the former. The reference to New Jerusalem as a mythical, spatial conceptualization of a better state of being is a prime example of Baldwin's use of Judeo-Christian imagery in order to enhance the rhetorical power of his ideas. The origins of this utopian impulse are expressed in an autobiographical passage in Baldwin's (1998) essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (originally published in 1985):

> [A]ll of the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered, thank heaven, very early in my life. Not without anguish, certainly; but once you have discerned the meaning of a label, it may seem to define you for others, but it does not have the power to define you to yourself. (p. 819)

Baldwin understood the capacity of these categories to produce and maintain relations of oppression, and he devoted his life and work to resisting and dismantling the ideological power invested in them. Another example of Baldwin's (1995) rejection of categorization can be found in his seminal essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" (originally published in 1955):

> Our passion for categorisation, life neatly fitted into pegs, has led to an unforeseen, paradoxical distress; confusion, a breakdown of meaning. Those categories which were meant to define and control the world for us have boomeranged us into chaos; in which limbo we whirl, clutching the straws of our definitions. (p. 24)

It is exactly this conundrum of definitions and categorizations that Baldwin's writing constantly struggles against.

Crucially, the distrust of categorization is intertwined with Baldwin's literary ambitions and what he regards as the major flaws in protest literature, both black and white. The most famous example of this is Baldwin's (1995) criticism of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940):

> we find ourselves bound, first without, then within, by the nature of our categorisation. […] We take our shape, it is true, within and against that cage of reality bequeathed us at our birth; and yet it is precisely through our dependence on this reality that we are most endlessly betrayed. […] The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorisation alone which is real and which cannot be transcended. (pp. 25, 28)

By pointing out the shortcomings that he sees in Wright's writing—that is, Wright's dependence on exactly the same categories and stereotypes that he sought to resist—Baldwin challenges the tradition of protest literature and, simultaneously, seeks to establish a central place for himself within that tradition. As Balfour (2001) has pointed out, Baldwin saw the moral vision perpetuated by *Native Son* and much of the tradition of protest literature as based on a simplifying division of the world into "good and evil, innocent and guilty" (p. 114). According to Balfour,

> [i]nadequate to the task of grappling with either slavery or racial injustices, this moral vision copes with their existence by assigning individuals and their behavior to simple categories and mouthing moral formulas. The protest novel proclaims its good intentions but does so by providing so flat a picture of the evil it aims to overcome that readers are not required to recognize racial injustice in their own lives. (p. 114)

This is what Baldwin criticized and sought to avoid in his own work. He saw that categorizations tend to become instruments of power through which relations of inequality and oppression are imposed on us. This is where Baldwin's thinking also assumes a position of resistance against the ideological tradition of Western modernity, which is based largely on such categories as gender, race, sexuality, and class. Baldwin was far ahead of his time in his radical questioning and challenging of the essentialist conceptions of identity that these categories entail.

It is important to note that Baldwin's fundamental message in terms of postcategorical utopia does not refer to the concept of utopia in the everyday sense as a perfect place of happiness or a model society, but rather as a progressive impulse, or desire, that probes into central social dilemmas and seeks ways of resolving them. This is in line with Levitas's (1990, pp. 7-8) and Kumar's (1991, pp. 2-3) thinking, according to which utopia should not be dismissed as some trivial, unattainable daydream, but, instead, as a politically potent force that helps reveal and analyze social issues and, ultimately, projects alternatives. Jameson's (1971) argument restores the focus of discussion to literature:

> [A] kind of allegorical structure is built into the very forward movement of the Utopian impulse itself, which always points to something other, which can never reveal itself directly but must always speak in figures, which always calls out structurally for completion and exegesis. (p. 142)

Answering Jameson's call requires an analysis of the manifestations of the Baldwinian utopian ideal of postcategorical love in two of his later, still too often ignored novels: *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) and *Just Above My Head* (1979). These texts provide apt examples of how Baldwin's writing constructs precisely such allegorical structures that Jameson refers to, which both register and seek to resolve the huge, persistent social dilemmas that continue to haunt us.

THE TRIANGLE OF INTERRACIAL AND SAME-SEX DESIRE

The echoes of the utopian notion of postcategorical love are clearly detectable in the narrative of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, albeit in an allegorical form. This is particularly evident in the complex of interracial and same-sex relationships between Leo, Barbara, and Christopher that constitute what Sedgwick (1985) has called the erotic triangle (p. 21). According to Girard (1988), the triangle is a spatial metaphor that can be used to analyze triple relationships: "The triangle is a model of a sort, or rather a whole family of models. […] They always allude to the mystery, transparent yet opaque, of human relations" (pp. 2-3). What lends this triangle an especially remarkable allegorical significance in this novel is the fact that all the relationships of which it consists transgress and seek to transcend at least one ideological boundary. The interracial relationships between Leo, a poor black man, and Barbara, a rich white heiress, and between Barbara and Christopher, a young black drifter, reach across the boundaries of both race and class, while the same-sex relationship between Leo and Christopher challenges the heteronormative conventions of sexuality.

The erotic triangle that is constructed in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* may be understood as consisting of three representatives of "the relatively conscious whites and relatively conscious blacks" on whom Baldwin (1964) calls to "end the racial nightmare" (p. 89). In a rather schematic and simplified allegorical reading of the novel, Leo comes across as a representative of the nonviolent wing of the Civil Rights Movement, Christopher seems to endorse the rising militant ideology of Black Power, and Barbara may be read as a personification of white liberalism. Although these characters are clearly much more complicated than this classification would imply, they assume a larger and intensified political significance as symbolic and allegorical figures representing different, partly parallel and partly conflicting, social forces that were instrumental in redefining the black resistance against the forces of racism in the 1960s. By reaching across the ideological divides of race, sexuality, gender, and class between each other, these characters become more complex and are invested with acute political urgency. It is with these actors that *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* illustrates love in the Baldwinian sense. As a consequence, the erotic triangle may be recontextualized and reconceptualized as the triangle of postcategorical love.

The interracial relationship between Leo and Barbara, between a black man and a white woman, is central in the novel, whereas the sporadic sexual encounter between Barbara and Christopher is mentioned only in passing. The main function of the latter seems to be the completion of the allegorical triangle of postcategorical love. It is clear from the outset that the possibilities of sustaining an interracial relationship are drastically reduced by the issues of racial categorization. Neither whites nor blacks approve of Leo and Barbara's relationship, which renders their daily existence as a couple exceedingly problematic. The difficult position of interracial relationships in the context of racism and the concomitant issues of gender and sexuality become evident in the novel, as Leo and Barbara are constantly confronted with the intolerant attitudes of the racist society around them. In Barbara's words addressed to Leo:

> I know this situation is impossible. I even know, in a way, that *I'm* being impossible. And everyone I grew up with would think so, and many people think so who will never dare admit it. I don't care about those people. I care about whether or not *I* know what I am doing. You're black. I'm white. Now, that doesn't mean shit, really, and yet it means everything. (Baldwin, 1994, p. 237; original emphases)

Reverse racism becomes particularly evident through the behavior of Leo's brother, Caleb, and their mother. Caleb's recent religious conversion and his consequent vocation as a preacher do not prevent him from adopting a racist and sexist attitude towards Barbara: "Caleb kept her carefully quarantined in the limbo of unregenerate harlots—unregenerate because she was white, harlot because she was a woman, in limbo because she was both" (p. 289). Furthermore, completely contrary to Leo's expectations, his mother's attitude is even more negative than Caleb's. Her expression of the anger and horror of finding out that Leo is involved with a white woman resonates with explicit tones of reverse racism: "I am not going to have no fair-haired, blue-eyed baby crawling around here and calling me Grandmama" (p. 289). In this context of ubiquitous racist prejudice, the interracial relationship between Leo and Barbara exists in a liminal space between antagonistic worlds, accepted by neither of these.

Despite the ideological stranglehold of oppressive identity categories, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* becomes a socially symbolic act in its own right by providing indications of postcategorical utopia in the context of interracial love. This becomes evident especially in the passionate sexual encounter between Leo and Barbara, which occurs in a deserted, secluded hotel:

> I seemed to know, that night, that we were trapped, trapped no matter what we did: we would have to learn to live in the trap. But that night it did not seem impossible. Nothing seemed impossible. Barbara began to moan. It was a black moan, and it was as though, trapped within the flesh I held, there was a black woman moaning, struggling to be free. Perhaps it was because we were beneath the starlight, naked. I had unzipped the sleeping bag, and the August night travelled over my body, as I trembled over Barbara. It was as though we were not only joined to each other, but to the night, the stars, the moon, the sleeping valley, the trees, the earth beneath the stone which was our bed, and the water beneath the earth. With every touch, movement, caress, with every thrust, with every moan and gasp, I came closer to Barbara and closer to myself and closer to something unnamable. […] The moment of our liberation gathered, gathered, crouched, ready to spring, and Barbara sobbed; the wind burned my body, and I felt the unmistakable, the unanswerable retreat, contraction, concentration, the long, poised moment before the long fall. (Baldwin, 1994, p. 307)

In this passage, Baldwin's use of emotional signifiers constructs a utopian space in which Leo and Barbara are in harmony with each other and the world around them. This is accomplished by using natural imagery, which creates a mythical, otherworldly atmosphere, somewhat reminiscent of biblical paradise. However, Baldwin's language also suggests that this utopian space created by means of transgression and temporary seclusion cannot last; in a world governed by oppressive categories, human beings must face an inevitable fall from grace.

According to Dievler (1999), Baldwin regards love-based sex as a way of transcending the oppressive categories of sex, race, and gender (p. 163). This is clearly indicated in the aforementioned scene. In their sexual union, Barbara, in Leo's view, becomes black as they transcend the racial barrier by means of love-based interracial sex. This may be read as a manifestation of Baldwin's (1964) conviction that the only solution to the racial problem in the United States is for white people "to consent, in effect, to become black" themselves, "to become a part of that suffering and dancing country" that they both envy and fear (p. 82). In this scene, Barbara becomes an emblem of such transcendence. This could arguably be read as an indication of the alleged influence of Black Power ideology and its insistence on the superiority of blackness on Baldwin's thinking, but this would dilute Barbara's transformation to a symbolic act of merely rejecting one racial category in favor of another. To counter this rather simplified reading, it must be remembered that, at this point in the novel, Leo has *already* stepped over the boundary between the black and the white worlds—first as a result of his choice to pursue a career as an actor (a predominantly white profession at the time) and second because of his relationship with a white woman. As a consequence, this interracial sexual act becomes a fleeting moment of mutual transcendence, a transitory escape from the rigidly categorized world, "that cage of reality," denounced by Baldwin (1995, p. 25). Leo and Barbara seem to abandon their identities as a black man and as a white woman in favor of a kind of hybridity, thereby challenging the essentialist definitions of identity. In the process, the space of the deserted, deteriorating hotel is transformed into what I regard as a *utopian enclave*, an imaginary space, where, according to Jameson (2005), "new wish images of the social can be elaborated and experimented on" (p. 9). Through this incident, which occurs within these clearly delineated constraints of time and space, the horizon of postcategorical utopia becomes momentarily visible.

The enclave of liberation and postcategorical love that this utopian space provides is prolonged until the next morning:

> Naked, I built the fire, and boiled our coffee. Naked and happy, facing each other, we drank it. We became drunk on the sun and the coffee and our nakedness and touched each other's bodies with a terrible wonder everywhere and we had to make love again. […] Then, the sun was high, warning us that the world might be on the way, and we got dressed. (Baldwin, 1994, p. 308)

The temporary nature of this utopian fulfillment is conveyed by the fact that the world around the lovers has not changed at all. The momentary postcategorical microcosm that Leo and Barbara have managed to build is unable to withstand the crushing strain of the prejudiced, rigidly categorized society.

Same-sex desire, which the relationship between Leo and Christopher encompasses, is another mode of postcategorical love for Baldwin, as it represents a way of reaching across the boundaries of identity categories. As Baldwin was clearly aware, African American sexuality was, and continues to be, inevitably connected to the context of white racism in America, which renders it a complex and problematic issue. The problematic dimension stems from the failure or refusal to recognize the intersectionality of racism and sexuality as matrices of normative power. Butler (1993) has articulated this connection and emphasized that race must not be regarded as subordinate to sex and gender:

> Rejecting those models of power which would reduce racial differences to the derivative effects of sexual difference […], it seems crucial to rethink the scenes of reproduction and, hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested. (p. 18)

According to Collins (2005), the interconnectedness of race and sexuality in the African American context is complicated by the common traditional white view of the people of African descent as more primitive, instinctual, and closer to nature, which has entailed the presumption that homosexuality would be practically non-existent among black people because all their sexual energies are supposedly devoted to biological reproduction. This would result in the belief that "Black people were allegedly not threatened by homosexuality because they were protected by their 'natural' heterosexuality" (pp. 105-106). Hence, "[e]ither Black people could not be homosexual or those Blacks who were homosexual were not 'authentically' Black" (pp. 105-106). According to this logic, homosexuality has often been regarded as a predominantly white phenomenon. A consequence of this is the belief that homosexuality and allegedly authentic blackness would be mutually exclusive.

Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone challenges these presumptions by depicting homosexual desire between black men, thereby giving voice to the long-repressed black queer experience. Interestingly, the text places hardly any emphasis on the evidently transgressive significance of black male-male desire. Rather, it is treated as a given, not explicitly contested in any incident in the novel, in contrast to the conspicuous condemnation of the interracial relationship of Leo and Barbara. Only a few faint allusions to this transgressive significance can be found in Leo's thoughts as he reminisces about a discussion with Christopher: "If I was afraid of society's judgment, [Christopher] was not: 'Fuck these sick people. I do what *I* like.'" (Baldwin 1994, p. 373; original emphasis). A couple of other similar suggestions can be found in the novel, but they are never discussed further or emphasized in any way. Moreover, the homophobic attitudes that tended to plague the Black Power ideology are never explicitly addressed in the text either, although Leo and Christopher—who actually is a Black Power activist—contest these attitudes through their transgressive same-sex desire. This may be read as Baldwin's way of pointing out that revolutionary political activism and nonnormative sexuality are not contradictory. A parallel point has been raised by Abdur-Rahman (2012), according to whom "same-gender love functions in Baldwin's conception as one potential thread in the complex philosophical and political apparatus of black nationalism, not in explicit contradistinction to it" (p. 113).

The repression of the transgressive potential of same-sex desire in the text assumes remarkable polemical significance when juxtaposed with the dominant patriarchal view of sexuality in the twentieth-century United States. According to Sedgwick (1985), homophobia seems to be inherent in any patriarchy within modernity, because it is "knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations" (pp. 3-4). Sedgwick has also suggested that "[o]ur society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged" (p. 4). In this light, it becomes evident that the representation of the black queer experience in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* carries an important, albeit somewhat covert, political and ideological message: It challenges the prevailing power hierarchy and demands a profound reconsideration of its underlying principles and conventions. The fact that this social commentary is expressed in an implicit manner is particularly interesting for the present reading. In effect, the radical political significance of nonnormative sexuality, which can be regarded as a part of the novel's central ideological message, is evidently repressed by the surface of the text. This signals a discontinuity between the text and its socio-historical context, between the manifest surface narrative of the novel and the narrative of history. In the world of the novel, same-sex desire is a part of the lives of Leo and Christopher, not directly questioned or deprecated by any of the characters or by society as a whole; on the other hand, the historical and contemporary factors that gave rise to the novel in the first place were drastically at odds with the relatively unproblematic depiction of same-sex love between Leo and Christopher.

The socio-political significance of postcategorical love in the context of nonnormative sexuality receives rather little emphasis in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, particularly in terms of direct depictions of love-based sex. The narrative includes an incestuous homosexual act between Leo and his brother, Caleb, in their youth, which is portrayed as a profoundly positive encounter, free from any hierarchies of oppressive power or abuse. Thus, it functions as a brief moment of liberation, as a moment of a deep connection between them. The sense of transcending the rigid categories of sexuality eventually becomes annulled by Caleb's religious conversion, which indicates approval of and obedience to those very categories. Intriguingly, the novel does not depict any erotic encounters between Leo and Christopher, although such an encounter would effectively accentuate the emancipatory function of love-based sex and the importance of confronting the conventions of normative heterosexuality. This is another indication of how the socio-political function of nonnormative sexuality is partly repressed by the text.

Although the transgressive relationships that constitute the triangle of postcategorical love seem to wane towards the end of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, the utopian desire that underlies these relationships survives in the form of Black Christopher. He is Christopher, the young, aimless drifter, transformed into a hybridized figure, a synthesizing personification of the conflicting ideologies of nonnormative sexuality and Black Power militancy. This hybrid figure emerges as a product of the triangle of postcategorical love, as the ultimate outcome of the transgressive relationships that reach across the boundaries and conventions of race, sexuality, gender, and class. To articulate this in accordance with Jameson's (1981) theory of the political unconscious, the novel performs a socially symbolic act in which Black Christopher becomes the imaginary resolution to the real social problems of racism and heteronormativity (p. 79).

THE BALDWINIAN QUEERING OF THE GOSPEL

Baldwin's last novel, *Just Above My Head* (1979), contains articulations of interpersonal relations that further reinforce his emphasis on postcategorical love. Perhaps the most significant of these is the text's juxtaposition of gospel music and sexuality, with particular emphasis on male-male desire. This becomes manifest in various stages of the narrative, mostly through the protagonist, Arthur, whose vocation as a gospel singer is intertwined with his nonnormative sexuality. What may be detected here is a dual narrative strategy: Baldwin incorporates the element of male-male desire into performances of gospel music, while also employing allusions to gospel lyrics and call-and-response rhythms to depict homosexual acts. This exemplifies aptly the Baldwinian impulse to transcend the boundaries of conventional propriety as a means of dismantling the ideological tyranny of identity categories. This reading is consistent with Abdur-Rahman's (2012) argument, according to which this novel emphasizes that African American communities and culture should not be regarded as homogeneous, but, rather, as inherently diverse (p. 113). Despite the persistent façade of heteronormativity, nonnormative sexualities are an integral part of African American existence, according to Abdur-Rahman.

The ideal of postcategorical love resides not merely on the thematic level, but also comes across on the level of form and language. Early in the novel, there occurs a peculiar break in the midst of Baldwin's typical prose, in the form of an intense, erratic passage that articulates the internal chaos of a gospel singer's life, particularly the conflicts between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the sexual. As Scott (2002) has pointed out, Hall, Arthur's elder brother, who functions as the narrator, "improvises between the beat ('oo-ba oo-ba'), a disconnected collage of sex talk and phrases from gospel songs" (p. 145):

> *Jesus is all this world to me motherfucker hold on this little light of mine oo-ba shit man oo-ba oo-ba if I don't get my money hal-ay-lyu-yah! I don't want to hear that noise Jesus I'll never forget you going to have you a brand-new asshole you can't crown him till I oo-ba oo-ba boom-boom-boom yeah and how would you like till I get there a band-new cock and when the roll is why? you don't like called up yonder oo-ba oo-ba swinging on sweet hour of prayer my old one no hiding place! No more? Jesus I'll never forget man dig them oh they tell me titties man oo-ba oo-ba oh shake it off Mama an uncloudy cat's digging day you down below how did you man feel when you yeah baby keep digging come it ain't half hard yet out the wilderness oh baby! leaning don't go nowhere yeah sister fox oo-ba oo-ba yeah leaning oh you precious freak you leaning on oh don't it look good to leaning you now on the Lord come on back here 'tis the old yeah you stay ship right there of Zion it going be beautiful my soul I'm going let you have looks up a little taste to Thee. Lord. And yet: they walked by faith*. (Baldwin, 2000, pp. 14-15; original emphasis)

This passage could be read as Hall's recollection of a piece of street poetry that the boys of the gospel quartet, in which Arthur sings in his adolescence, might have come up with in order to amuse each other. In addition, it also comes across as a means of negotiating the tensions of their lives in multiple intertwined but largely incompatible contexts—the church, the streets, faith, sexuality, and poverty. The chaotic, almost rap-like medley that uses both sacred and secular language to juxtapose these contradictory contexts reads like an expression of a survival strategy and a mode of resistance in the world of social hardship and ideological conflict.

Just Above My Head questions and challenges the multiple layers of heteronormativity in society and culture, both in the mainstream American and African American contexts, through a process that may be conceptualized as the queering of the gospel. This involves a process of deconstructing and undermining the normative position of heterosexuality and, by extension, of any essentialized conceptions of identity. The text's transgressive function is evidenced by how

Baldwin narrates a performance of the gospel quartet, which is subsequent to the formation of the same-sex relationship between Arthur and Crunch, who is also a member of the quartet:

> He paused again, threw back his head to get the sweat out of his eyes, trusting every second of this unprecedented darkness, knowing Crunch and he were moving together, here, now, in the song, to some new place; they had never sung together like this before, his voice in Crunch's sound, Crunch's sound filling his voice,
>
> *So*
>
> *I know*
>
> *none*
>
> *don't tell me, I know, I know, I know!*
>
> as though Crunch were laughing and crying at the same time
>
> *but the righteous*
>
> *so true!*
>
> *none*
>
> *don't you leave me now!*
>
> *but the righteous*
>
> *and I hate to see that evening sun go down!*
>
> *none*
>
> *amazing grace—!*
>
> *none but the righteous*
>
> *yea, little fellow, come on in!*
>
> *shall see God.*
>
> Crunch and he ending together, as though on a single drum. He opened his eyes, bowed his head, stepped back. Red and Peanut looked as though they had been dragged, kicking, through a miracle, but they were smiling, the

> church was rocking, Crunch and Arthur wiped their brows carefully before they dared to look at each other. Peanut struck the chord, *Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh*, and Crunch stepped forward with the guitar, singing, *somebody touched me and*, they sang, *it must have been the hand of the Lord!* (Baldwin, 2000, pp. 200-201; original emphases)

The intertwining of gospel lyrics and sexual allusions becomes evident particularly in phrases such as "yea, little fellow, come on in" and "somebody touched me and…it must have been the hand of the Lord." This gospel performance, in which Arthur delivers a phrase, the call, to which Crunch responds, makes use of the call and response strategy, with Crunch and Arthur signifyin(g) on each other, in the sense coined by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1989), and, most significantly, on the heteronormativity of the tradition of gospel music. In so doing, they transform the meaning of the gospel song by repeating its phrases in the context of same-sex desire. This is where the political urgency of the text reaches its crux by juxtaposing and fusing nonnormative sexuality and the tradition of gospel music, which, in the context of heteronormativity, becomes a transgressive, socially symbolic act.

This queering of the gospel tradition is further enhanced by the fact that, in addition to introducing sexual allusions to a performance of a gospel song, the text also uses gospel lyrics to describe acts of homosexual love. An instance of this occurs shortly after the gospel performance quoted above:

> *So high, you can't get over him.*
>
> Sweat from Arthur's forehead fell onto Crunch's belly.
>
> *So low*—and Crunch gasped as Arthur's mouth left his prick standing in the cold, cold air, as Arthur's tongue licked his sacred balls—*you can't get under him*. Arthur rose, again, to Crunch's lips. *So wide. You can't get around him*. It was as though, with this kiss, they were forever bound together. Crunch moaned, in an absolute agony, and Arthur went down again.
>
> "Little fellow. Baby. Love."
>
> *You must come in at the door*. (Baldwin, 2000, p. 211; original emphases)

In this passage, the lyrics of an African American spiritual, "My God Is So High," are intermingled with the depiction of the love-making of Arthur and Crunch. Particularly significant is the phrase "little fellow," which appears both in the scene of the gospel performance and in this passage, thereby connecting these two parallel textual strategies of challenging and transgressing the norms of heterosexism. This is how Baldwin signifies on the tradition of gospel music: He portrays its political function in the context of the Civil Rights Movement—as Arthur sings in the fundraising rallies for the movement—but challenges its heteronormative premises and makes it play according to his own, postcategorical tune. The song has been revised and recontextualized, repeated "with a signal difference" (Gates, 1989, p. xxiv), in order for its redemptive message to be expanded and diversified to include nonnormative sexualities. Thus reconfigured, as Jimmy, Arthur's lover and fellow musician, proclaims, the song "will bring water back to the desert, that's what the song is supposed to do, and that's what *my soul is a witness* is about" (Baldwin, 2000, p. 576; original emphasis).

POSTCATEGORICAL LOVE IN MESSIANIC TIME

These readings indicate that Baldwin's writings do not construct any detailed and clearly delineated utopias per se, in the sense that Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and numerous other literary works do. Rather, Baldwin places his characters in a hostile and strictly categorized world in which no utopian enclave can offer more than a fragile and fleeting state of safety and happiness. Instead of building actual utopian communities or societies, these texts display the effects of the utopian impulse on a smaller scale, in terms of both time and space, occasionally on the level of family and, more frequently, on the level of interracial and same-sex relationships between individuals, and always in a provisional, transitory sense. As a consequence, the actual postcategorical utopia never arrives in a larger sense within these novels. Instead, it appears in a metonymical way in the guise of those momentary glimpses generated in the texts by means of the transgressive relationships based on the notion of postcategorical love. In so doing, Baldwin profoundly challenges the oppressive categories according to which political and social power is distributed within late modernity.

Understanding the allegorical significance of Baldwin's characters is crucial because it is their relationships that maintain and measure our capacity to imagine social change, which is exactly what Jameson (1999) has identified as the crucial political function of the concept of utopia (p. xvi). In other words, instead of detailing precise utopian programs or societies, Baldwin's novels express the utopian impulse that keeps alive the possibility of change. They construct transitory moments of transcendence and postcategorical love, flashes of a utopian world in which identity categories would cease to function as instruments of political power and oppression. In the process, they open up the elusive horizon of postcategorical utopia that can be imagined and temporarily visited, but not permanently attained.

The fact that postcategorical utopia never actually seems to arrive inevitably evokes issues of temporality. Consequently, the idea of postcategorical utopia may be considered in terms of *messianic time* (Benjamin, 1973; Caputo, 1997). This suggested connection between utopia and messianic time has been articulated by Caputo as follows:

> [m]essianic time is prophetic time; the time to come is the time of the justice to come, that disturbs the present with the call for justice, which calls the present (*au-delà*) itself. For the most unjust thing of all would be to close off the future by saying that justice is present, that the present time is just. (p. 81; original emphasis)

For Caputo, then, the political function of utopia is to keep the future open in order for a more just order of things to be able to emerge. Related to this is Benjamin's (1973) view, which emphasizes "a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (p. 265). In this formulation, messianic time appears in the present as fleeting glimpses of another time to come. In Baldwin's writing, it is precisely the transitory moments of postcategorical love that allow the splinters of messianic time to become visible.

The conception of messianic time is in accordance with the definition of the utopian impulse as a progressive force that appears as a response to ideological and social dilemmas. The structural openness that enables us to imagine alternative futures is exactly what is at stake in Baldwin's novels. Their explicit and implicit visions of a better world, manifested as moments and spaces of postcategorical love, do not transpire in ordinary time; rather, they exist in and, simultaneously, construct a messianic present that opens up the horizon of postcategorical utopia. This allows us to see that the categories around which life within late modernity is largely organized are not fixed, natural, or immutable, but are constructed, ideological, and inherently mutable.

One more important aspect of Baldwin's notions of postcategorical utopia and postcategorical love requires further attention. His attempt to undermine the tyrannical power of identity categories does not indicate a desire to erase difference, to force individuals to conform to a uniform identity. This is where Baldwin's thinking is ultimately connected to Jameson's conception of utopia. According to Roberts (2000),

> [f]or Jameson, the danger of Utopian thinking is that it assumes a uniformity, a conformity: It has often been imagined as a place where everybody is happy *in the same way*, where people miraculously fit harmoniously with other people because nobody sticks awkwardly out from the whole. (p. 108; original emphasis)

In contrast, Jameson (1996) has characterized utopia as a state of being "in which the constraints for uniformization and conformity have been removed" (p. 102). This kind of a world would seem to coincide with Baldwin's thinking, which seems to endorse the idea of accepting and living with difference, as well as acknowledging that human beings contain various identities. As pointed out in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (originally published in 1985):

> we are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. (Baldwin, 1998, p. 828)

This marks Baldwin's understanding of identity at its most profound and most postcategorical. Instead of ignoring difference, he underscores the underlying unity that resides beneath the appearance of our differences and ultimately binds us together, that is, our humanity, in all its multiformity and diversity. In the light of this metaphysical, multifaceted androgyny, the incarcerating effects of the categories of our differences dissolve into a new understanding of a shared, postcategorical humanity.

It is important to stress that the notion of postcategorical utopia is not diluted or undermined by the suspicion that it may exist only in messianic time—that it may never actually come into being. Baldwin's teleological agenda relies on the fragments of this utopian vision that appear in his writing in the various guises of transgressive postcategorical love, generating and maintaining the hope for a better future and the impetus for change. He is convinced that, as human beings, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and cultivate the impulse towards a better world, the postcategorical utopia of a New Jerusalem. Baldwin's emphasis on the significance of constant change and mutability becomes manifest in one of the most eloquent expressions of his antiessentialist agenda:

> For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out. (Avedon & Baldwin, 1964, n.p.)

Beneath Baldwin's defiance of essentialist definitions and categorizations lies the notion of postcategorical love. It is what gives rise to the principles of hope, duty, and continuity—and obligates us to guard and nurture the possibility of a better world.

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JACQUELINE JONES COMPAORE

13. "FAME IS THE SPUR AND—OUCH!"

James Baldwin's Meditations on Fame in Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone

> "It's difficult to be a legend. It's difficult for me to recognize me … it's unbearable, the way the world treats you … it's unbearable because time is passing and you are not your legend, but you are trapped in it."—James Baldwin interviewed by Quincy Troupe (1987)

James Baldwin's attitude toward the corrupting nature of fame is apparent in his frequent use of the artist as a hero in his novels and short stories. In 1941 Baldwin wrote in his high school yearbook (quoting John Milton s "Lycidas"), "Fame is the spur. Ouch!" Even as a youth, he understood the punitive nature of fame. Baldwin's novels *Another Country* and *Just Above My Head* explore the rather complicated relationship between the production of art and the debilitating demands of fame. This essay focuses on a little known novel and examines Baldwin's novels not as protest fiction, but as meditations on the responsibilities of African American artists and the difficulty of escaping the trappings of celebrity. *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968d) one of Baldwin's lesser-known novels, offers a particularly painful examination of the African American artist. Baldwin often used his fiction to contemplate his struggles with his freedom as an artist and what he perceived as his obligations to the African American community. Ever the prophetic writer, Baldwin addresses the artist's struggle with his public and private identities, as well as the artist's obligation to use his talent to present truthful portrayals of American life. *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* reveals the high price of fame for the African American artist.

From his high school days until his death, Baldwin was conscious of what one gave up for notoriety, particularly African Americans. Fame, in Baldwin's view, could be extremely destructive:

> … the nature of the society isolates its artists so severely for their vision; penalizes them so mercilessly for their vision and endeavor; and the American form of recognition, fame, and money, can be the most devastating penalty of all. The isolation that menaces all American artists is multiplied a thousand times, and becomes absolutely crucial and dangerous, for all black artists. (Baldwin, 1968c, p. 182)

Certainly this is the image that is presented in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, a novel that traces an African American actor's pursuit and attainment of

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celebrity. Fame supplants honesty as the actor's goal and this error leads to his downfall. That the actor's misplaced priorities lead to acclaim and financial rewards is Baldwin's commentary on the perversion of American morality. As seen in *Train*, fame removes the artist-figure from his community, and this loss of intimacy leads to personal failure and professional success.

Because James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is a novel about an African American actor, it was assumed that Sidney Poitier, the most popular African American male actor of the period, was the real-life model for the protagonist. In an interview with Poitier for *Look* magazine in 1968, Baldwin (1968c) dispelled this notion:

> There's speculation that the central figure of my new novel, who is a black actor, is based on Sidney. Nothing could be further from the truth, but people naturally think that, because when they look around them, Sidney's the only black actor they see. Well, that fact says a great deal more about this country than it says about black actors, or Sidney, or me. (p. 186)

The only similarities between Sidney Poitier and Leo Proudhammer (the protagonist in *Train*) are that both are African American and both are actors. Indeed, Poitier, a husband and father, is the antithesis of Leo Proudhammer.

The 1950s saw the rise of the first successful African American male actor: Sidney Poitier. Prior to the late 1950s African Americans had been presented in films as servants and comic figures. Poitier followed in the gigantic footsteps of Paul Robeson, the African American actor, scholar, and athlete. As Bogle (2001) notes, "Robeson's greatest contribution to black film history...was his proud, defiant portrait of the black man" (p. 98). Conversely, by portraying noble, educated, and well-mannered characters, Poitier came to symbolize a kind of *New Negro* in film. I use the term "Negro" and not Black or African American in reference to Poitier's roles because of the integrationist attitudes that many of Poitier's characters seem to embody. Born in Florida and raised in the Bahamas, Poitier began his acting career in the theater. In 1950 he made his film debut (1950) playing a doctor in *No Way Out*. Perhaps best known for his role as Walter Lee in the stage (1959) and film (1961) adaptations of Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, Poitier won an Academy Award for his portrayal of an ex-soldier who helps a group of nuns in *Lilies of the Field* (1963).

Train is an exploration of the artist as a failure in terms of his professional and personal lives. It is significant that, at the pinnacle of his own celebrity, Baldwin wrote a novel that is a meditation on the negative effects of fame on the artist in American society. *The Fire Next Time* (1963), a non-fiction collection containing two essays concerning the fate of a racist United States, quickly became one of Baldwin's best-selling books. He was hailed as the most literate American writer of his time on the subject of race relations and even appeared on the cover of *Time*. Largely because of his social commentary, he became a celebrity. This development is slightly ironic because a disdain for fame runs throughout Baldwin's essays. Baldwin's elegant words and observations introduced him to a new audience, one that was unfamiliar with his fiction. He appeared on talk shows and was interviewed dozens, if not hundreds, of times. With success came fame, and it is the nature of fame that Baldwin probes in *Train*.

The title of the novel refers to the train as a motif for freedom in African American literature. Thus, "tell me how long the train's been gone" alludes to the length of Leo's imprisonment (he has missed the metaphorical freedom train). The price of Leo's liberation is the courage to face himself. He can be saved only by his acceptance of his identity as an African American, homosexual man; he must fall to the threshing floor. This he does not do. Leo articulates his inability to be an artist, as Baldwin defines it, through his closeted lifestyle and profession as an actor. His upcoming vacation fills him with fear because, without an acting job, he will be left alone to confront the real Leo, the one who desperately wants to be an artist, not a star:

> The world tends to trap and immobilize you in the role you play; and it is not always easy—in fact, it is always extremely hard—to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is. (Baldwin, 1968d, p. 51)

Autobiographical elements are sprinkled throughout the novel, but it is not clear what the reader is to make of them. Leo, the name of the protagonist, is also the name of Baldwin's astrological sign. Like Leo, Baldwin lived in an artists' colony and occasionally worked as a model. It is clear that he drew upon some of these experiences when he wrote the novel. A recent biographer views the similarities between Leo and Baldwin as a sign of ineffective writing: "Leo's voice is James Baldwin's voice, but the character can merely mimic his creator, and the result is parody" (Campbell, 1991, p. 227). Admittedly, some of Baldwin's attitudes toward fame are strikingly similar to Proudhammer's: "I have a public life and I know that, O.K. I have a private life, something which I know a good deal less. And the temptation is to avoid the private life because you can hide in the public one" (Auchincloss, 1971, p. 81). In *Train*, Baldwin presents an artist who succumbs to that temptation.

The Fire Next Time (1963) casts a shadow on the reception of *Train*. The entire country seemed to be waiting for James Baldwin to explain exactly how peaceful co-existence was possible. With the rioting that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968, civic and business leaders were looking for ways to pacify urban dwellers. As the title of an *Esquire* essay on Baldwin indicates, everyone was searching for ways to get black people to "cool it."

Baldwin's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement caused him to question the role, rights, and responsibilities of the African American artist. From "The Creative Process" (1962) to "Sweet Lorraine" (1969), Baldwin's attention was diverted from the experience of the American artist to the perils of being an African American artist. It is at this time that Baldwin visited Turkey to ponder his future and to write *Train*.

The most compelling portrayal of Baldwin during this period is that offered by Fern Eckman (1966) in her aptly titled book, *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin*. Part biography, part literary criticism, and part interview, Eckman's book endeavors to capture the essence of Baldwin and, in doing so, offers a portrait of a mercurial writer. Eckman succeeds in conveying a sense of the whirlwind within which Baldwin lived. Constantly surrounded by an entourage, Baldwin moved from one speaking engagement to another. Alternatively angry and mellow, the writer was only occasionally sober. Though he was seldom alone, the image of Baldwin that emerged was that of a lonely man: "he … feels himself a stranger everywhere, not least of all within himself" (Eckman, p. 246). Eckman identifies the demands of fame as the source of Baldwin's melancholy. As she comments,

> Yawning before him twenty-four hours a day is the trap Americans set for celebrities of every magnitude: the hungry attention that baits them into detours and tricks them into excess, until they finally confuse their flatulence with pronouncements of cosmic stature. (p. 246)

Accounts of Baldwin's life during the mid-1960s vary, but all share one common denominator: fame. It is no coincidence that *Train*, the novel Baldwin wrote during this period on several continents and amid much confusion, addressed this issue. Darryl Pinckney (2000) comments upon Baldwin's tradition of ending his books with the dates and places where he wrote: "As a way of singing off along the road Baldwin was travelling, such markers also said something about the glamour and cosmopolitanism that being a writer had always meant to him." He was frequently accosted by strangers, and was always searching for time and space to write. Surely the former Harlem schoolboy reveled in this attention, but he also was well aware of its dangers.

In 1968, at the pinnacle of his notoriety, Baldwin offered his newly expanded audience a novel that mocks celebrity by showing the way its negative effects on the main character. *Train* opens with its hero, Leo Proudhammer, suffering a heart attack during a performance. Leo Proudhammer is appropriately named because his beating heart—his proud hammer—is the source of his physical illness. Leo recovers and, as he does, becomes nostalgic and begins to reminisce. As Leo recalls the events of his personal and professional lives during his convalescence, we learn of his long-term relationship with Barbara King, a white actress, and his new alliance with Christopher Hall, a young black political activist. Leo's memories form the three sections of the novel and serve as an introduction to those people who had the greatest impact on his life: Barbara King, his onetime lover and now friend, and his brother Caleb Proudhammer. When Caleb goes to jail, so does Leo in a sense because the close emotional and sexual bond between the brothers casts a shadow over Leo's life. Only with Caleb does Leo feel loved and needed. After Caleb's arrest, Leo distances himself from everyone. He feels abandoned and is consequently afraid to love or to trust anyone. Leo creates a prison for himself, one created by profession, fame, and loneliness. More than anything, Leo is afraid and decides to distance himself from everyone. He refuses to reveal any personal emotion.

As an adult Leo seeks to duplicate the distance that he associated with actors and acting since his childhood. The accouterments of celebrity, the special treatment, the adoring fans, are all things that Leo uses to hide from himself: "I am ready: dark blue suit … Brazilian cufflinks, black pumps. I am a star again. I look it and I feel it" (Baldwin, 1968d*,* p. 309). Acting becomes Leo's mask. Instead of attempting to gain a secure identity, Leo prefers to adopt one each night at the theater. The title of Leo next motion picture, "Big Deal," is Baldwin's commentary on the emptiness of his life and career. Baldwin had examined the world of acting earlier in some of his short fiction and briefly in *Another Country*. The similarities between "Previous Condition" and "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" and *Train* suggest that the novel is in some ways a continuation of those short stories. If, as W.J. Weatherby (1989) states, Baldwin originally imagined *Train* as a short story, then perhaps it might well be read as an expanded version of one or both of them (p. 318). Not only are the narrators of the stories and the novel actors, but also they all suffer from the same affliction: the fear of confronting their innermost fears and desires. They are almost uniformly devoid of any sincere emotions and cannot fulfill the primary mandate of the artist as hero: to identify, acknowledge, and embrace his artistic fate. The protagonists are exiled from the African American community and, like *Train*, they conclude with the actors still estranged from those who love them. Only the artist hero in "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" recognizes and begins to remedy his stagnant state. The story concludes on a hopeful note as the actor, with his wife and child, prepares to return to the United States to confront his private fears.

The lack of one consistent emotional and sexual relationship in Leo's life is further evidence of his failure as an artist-hero. In many ways *Train* helps to define Baldwin's ideal artist-hero because it presents a portrait of everything the artist is not. Baldwin suggests that Leo's preoccupation with fame is the fate of the artist who avoids truth in his personal life and who refuses to express honesty in his art. By failing to achieve the most basic requirement for the Baldwin artist-hero, self-knowledge and self-love, Leo becomes Baldwin's anti artist-hero. Conceiving of *Train* as a study of "the divided self" provides additional weight to the image of Leo as a negative representation of the artist as a hero. Characterized by Maurice Beebe as confessional, artist-novels such as Ivan Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man* and Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* frequently present their heroes as being unable to reconcile their professional goals with their personal ones: "Most of the heroes are so self-absorbed that they have difficulty getting outside themselves and hence are naturally at odds with their environment" (Beebe, 1964, p. 54).

Meaningful artistic success eludes Leo because, as he acknowledges, he cannot pay the price: "My pride became my affliction. I found myself imprisoned in the stronghold I had built. The day came when I wished to break my silence and found that I could not speak: the actor could no longer be distinguished from his role" (Baldwin,1968d, p. 46). What Leo describes as pride might easily be described as fear. The image of Leo imprisoned by fame and denial is present throughout the novel. He is alienated from the African American community and his family. For Baldwin, the famous artist, particularly the actor, no longer honestly represents his community or himself because his work has been tainted and made more palatable for the sake of success.

Leo's desire to be an actor becomes entangled with his pursuit of stardom. In the only discussion of his approach to acting, Leo acknowledges his failure:

> I've always tried to do things I wasn't sure I could do … And then you just do the same thing over and over again and pretty soon you're not an actor, you're just a kind of highly paid--mannequin … Manipulated …. (Baldwin, 1968d*,* p. 71)

Leo becomes a celebrated actor after appearing as butlers and other domestic servants in various theater productions. He achieves fame when he plays a role intended for a white artist. The ease with which Leo achieves astonishing success illustrates his ability to remove himself from his ethnic and racial identity.

Isolation and alienation, the terms Baldwin uses most frequently to describe both the artist and his experience in America, characterize the nature of Leo's condition. Is this the price that the African American artist pays for financial success? Lynn Scott's (2002) detailed study of Baldwin's later fiction is a thoughtful meditation upon the complicated relationship between the artist and his family: "As a child Baldwin fantasized that worldly success would bring him approval and establish his place in the family" (p. xxvi). While it is a tenet that the artist-figure evolves in solitude, for Baldwin the artist-hero "is also enjoined to conquer the great wilderness of himself" (Baldwin, 1962, p. 30). Conquering the self requires understanding and accepting all of one's parts. The journey toward self-acceptance is an important characteristic of the artist-novel. The artist typically moves toward truth, not away from it. With his literal and figurative flight, Leo consistently fails these requirements for the successful artist-hero. Leo's negative self-image and his sexual confusion begin during his childhood when he repeatedly refers to himself as a sissy. He constantly runs away from unpleasantness and disappointments as a child. Twice he flees home, once by riding the subway and later by going to the home of one of his brother's friends. Each time he stays within the black community, but does not find the permanent refuge he seeks. As an adult, Leo's flight takes a more subtle form. He doesn't share his intimate thoughts and feelings, and his vocation as an actor encourages his evasive behavior.

Baldwin's hero has not been forced underground like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but instead imprisons himself behind a carefully constructed public persona. By becoming an actor, Leo hides behind the characters he portrays. Or, as Leo says, "It's hard, after all, for a boy to find out who he is, or what he wants, if he is always afraid and always acting, and especially when this fear invades his most private life (Baldwin, 1968d*,* p. 348). With this statement Leo acknowledges his deep-seated fear of intimacy. The artist's recognition of the precarious state in which he must reside can lead to an increased sense of isolation. This isolation leads not to introspection, but to a further distancing of self.

Reflecting upon the "success" he and his protagonist have attained, Baldwin adopts a somewhat cynical tone: "… [E]very Negro celebrity is regarded with some distrust by black people, who have every reason in the world to feel themselves abandoned" (Baldwin, 1968c, p. 56). At the novel's end Leo briefly alludes to a planned trip to Europe where he will attempt to connect with the self he left behind in Harlem, but Baldwin has led the reader to conclude that nothing will come of his journey. Baldwin ponders the meaning and impact of legendary status during a conversation about musician Miles Davis:

> In many ways I have the same difficulty as he has, in terms of the private and public life. In terms of the legend. It’s difficult to be a legend. It’s hard for me to recognize me. You spend a lot of time trying to avoid it … it’s unbearable, the way the world treats you … because time is passing and you are not your legend, but you’re trapped in it. (Goldstein, 1989, p. 189)

Other African American writers, most notably Ralph Ellison, learned from Baldwin’s harsh experience with celebrity. In his last interview, the reclusive Ellison offered these observations on the nature of fame:

> One of the advantages as a writer I still have is that people usually don’t recognize me … One of the mistakes that some good writers make is latching onto celebrity, being feted wherever they go. That blurs things. You can be lonely in a crowd. That isolation, which allows you to hear a little better, and sometimes to see with more perception. that’s what real novelists have. (Remnick, 1994, p. 41)

Ellison could be describing the last twenty-five years of James Baldwin’s life.

The double nature of celebrity was a concern for Baldwin early in his career. The interviews given after 1964 show a writer who is preoccupied with the responsibilities and effects of fame. He clearly differentiates between the achievement of honest expression in art and commercial success. As in “Sonny’s Blues,” the idea of success is juxtaposed with death: “Writers can die in many ways. Some perish in obscurity and others in the light. They die in the street and in the Waldorf Astoria sipping champagne” (Baldwin, 1968b, p. 661). This sentiment pervades *Train* in the persona of the emotionally dead Leo.

The African American artist has the additional hurdle or obligation of race to confront in his/her audience. In his touching remembrance of Lorraine Hansberry, Baldwin reveals the reasons underlying his respect for the playwright:

> She was wise enough and honest enough to recognize that black American artists are a very special case. One is not merely an artist and one is not judged merely as an artist: the black people crowding around Lorraine, whether or not they considered her an artist, assuredly considered her a witness. (Baldwin, 1969, pp. xii-xiii)

Here race adds a peculiar flavor to creative expression. As a witness, the African American artist must be committed to expressing the truth about his experiences as an African American in his work. The artist is, in Baldwin’s view, speaking for the group. Because Hansberry employs her vision to testify to the experiences of African Americans, she achieves meaningful success.

After spending his childhood in Harlem, Leo is well aware of the reality of his racial identity and of the value of fame. After collapsing on stage, he thinks only of being identified as a celebrity at the hospital: “I had not showered, I had not removed my makeup, I had not got [sic] my own face back … No one would recognize me where I was going! I would be lost" (Baldwin, 1968d, p. 11). Knowing how frequently African Americans are mistreated, he uses fame as his shield. The phoniness that marks all aspects of Leo's life arouses pity, not respect. Although he realizes the steps he must take to overcome feelings of isolation and confusion, Leo is afraid and unwilling to engage in the necessary self-analysis:

> My race was revealed as my pain … the possibility of creating my language out of my pain, of using my pain to create myself … My pain was the horse that I must learn to ride. I flicked my cigarette out of the window and watched it drop and die. I thought of throwing myself after it. I was no rider and pain was no horse. (Baldwin, pp. 102-103)

Leo's acknowledged refusal to express his pain through his art dooms him. His momentary contemplation of suicide links him with the doomed Rufus Scott of *Another Country* and is yet another sign of his failure as an artist.

Thus, another indication of Leo's failure is his lack of closeness with his own family. Despite the importance of the family in James Baldwin's paradigm of the artist as a hero, the Proudhammers play only a minor role in the novel. His lack of standing as an artist-hero is revealed through his relationship with his family that represents the African American community. Although he may be physically distant, the successful Baldwin artist-hero is forever linked emotionally to his community. Leo shares the same Harlem upbringing as John Grimes in *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, Sonny in "Sonny's Blues," Rufus Scott in *Another Country*, and Arthur Montana in *Just Above My Head.*

Because he privileges his identity as a celebrity, Leo loses his sense of self. He is a star, not just a relative, even within his own family: "I do not want to see Caleb, but Caleb will be meeting the plane in New York in spite of everything or perhaps because of everything. I am still his little brother and besides I am famous" (Train, p. 308). The young Leo removes himself from the community and, as he grows older, he desperately desires to repair the rupture.

Many critics and readers either ignore *Train* or point to it as evidence of Baldwin's limited talents as a novelist. Mario Puzo (1968) described the novel as a "soap opera" (p. 157). In his book length evaluation of Baldwin's work, Horace Porter mentions *Train* only twice, apparently feeling that only the homosexual relationship and the attention to political issues are important aspects of the novel. William Farrison (1977) was disgusted by the references to phallicism and the use of obscenities in the novel: "But is it probable, one wonders, that an established author such as Baldwin would need to resort to vulgar usage for want of a large vocabulary?" (p. 75). James Campbell (1991), one of Baldwin's biographers, offered one of the most negative reviews: "The story has no firm structure, and therefore no sense of inevitability. Most disappointing of all, the language is uninventive, and the book as a whole is lacking in artistic daring" (p. 227). The portions of the novel in which Leo reminisces about his childhood in Harlem are universally praised because many reviewers agreed with Irving Howe's appraisal that "James Baldwin can never be wholly uninteresting when he writes about

Harlem, especially Harlem as seen through the eyes of a vulnerable black boy" (Howe, p. 100). Because Noel Schraufnagel's interest in *Train* is restricted by his vision of the novel as evidence of Baldwin's renewed political activity, it is all the more surprising that he finds the novel to be "Baldwin's best since *Go Tell It on the Mountain*" (p. 187).

Many reviewers, like the *New York Times Book Review*'s Mario Puzo (1968), insisted on reading *Train* as Baldwin's "attempt to recreate … the tragic condition of the Negro in America" (p. 155). The assumption that the persona of the artist is incidental to the tale of the hardships and inequalities of Black life in America is evident in many reviews of not only of *Train,* but of *Another Country* as well. Evaluating his work exclusively in terms of race precludes many reviewers from noting that the focus of much of James Baldwin's writing is not race relations, but the experiences of the artist. Baldwin is forced into the role of a racial spokesman by various factions and, through his novels, he asserts his primary identity as an artist.

In *Train*, Baldwin condemns the price American society extracts for commercial success by painting a tragic portrait of the African American artist, alienated from his community, his friends, and even himself. Baldwin repeatedly refers to the price one pays, particularly the African American artist, to live a life of truth. "It is very strange to be a black artist in this country—strange and dangerous. He must attempt to reach something of the truth, and to tell it—to use his instrument as truthfully as he knows how" (Baldwin, 2010, pp. 86-86). The struggle of the artist figure to achieve a sense of self and a personal identity, free from racial or sexual categories continues in James Baldwin's final novel *Just Above My Head*. Baldwin biographer David Leeming (1994) describes *Just Above My Head*, whose two main characters carry Baldwin's middle name and nickname, as "an extended metaphor through which Baldwin could once again examine his own life and career as an artist and witness" (p. 345).

If the African American artist is to achieve any sort of success, it is necessary for him to resolve a way to remain true to himself and his community in a society that demands that he do exactly the opposite. An examination of the relationship between the artist to his audience and the price he pays, particularly if he is an African American artist, for commercial success is the focus of *Train*. Leo Proudhammer is more financially successful than any the other Baldwin characters who are artists, yet the price he pays for his achievement is a high one. The trappings of success, fame, and money make it more difficult for Leo to accomplish what Baldwin feels should be the primary function as an artist: to serve as a witness. *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is Baldwin's statement on the ravaging effects of fame and the shallow values that often accompany it.

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ERNEST L. GIBSON, III

14. “DIGGING THROUGH THE RUINS”

Just Above My Head *and the Memory of James Arthur Baldwin*

> [In] a sense the novel is a kind of return to my own beginnings, which are not only mine, and a way of using that beginning to start again. In my own mind I come full circle from *Go Tell It on the Mountain* to *Just Above My Head*, which is a question of a quarter of a century, really. And something else begins now. I don’t know where I go from here yet. —James Baldwin (Bender, *Conversations*, 1989, p. 191)

In Karen Thorsen’s (1989) acclaimed documentary on James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket*, there is a moment near the end—right before Baldwin speaks eerily about the New Jerusalem; right before the viewer hears him singing Mahalia Jackson’s rendition of “Precious Lord” —where his brother, David Baldwin, invites the viewer into a profoundly emotional space. David relays to the viewer, who at this point has become more witness than spectator, some of Baldwin’s last words before his death:

> I pray I’ve done my work so, that when I’ve gone from here, in all the turmoil, through the wreckage and rumble, when someone finds themselves digging through the ruins … I pray that somewhere in that wreckage they’ll find me. Somewhere in that wreckage they can use something that I left behind. And if I’ve done that, then I’ve accomplished something in life. (Thorsen)

Baldwin’s words, above anything else, highlight a desire for discovery—a perplex longing when one considers his notoriety, his success, his fame. And yet, it is precisely this paradox of visibility that governs much of his fictional work, which captures the Baldwinian revision of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, which hides itself as the subtext of his last novel, *Just Above My Head*. In terms of literary genealogy, *Just Above My Head* is an anticipated denouement in the *novel* of Baldwin’s creative oeuvre. Nevertheless, for the critical reader/lover of Baldwin, it is so much more. This last novel, while embodying the central themes of those that preceded it and though representative of, as Baldwin says, “a kind of return to [his] own beginnings” (Baldwin, 1989, p. 191), speaks to the project and problem of mythologizing. It is here, within the throes or tragedy of a regrettable finality, where Baldwin employs a series of male relationships to address themes of fear, possibility and memory with a more poignant literary aim and subtext—to tell and

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to teach, through the masking of literature, just how he wishes to be remembered, as a writer, as a man.

Nearly twenty-six years after publishing his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, James Baldwin publishes his last, *Just Above My Head* (1979) [*JAMH*]. The novel centers on the life of Arthur Montana, a famed gospel singer whose death, like Rufus Scott's in *Another Country*, coalesces the personal stories of those he loved. His brother Hall—the narrator Baldwin constructs for the job of punctuating the author's novelistic journey—tells his life. For many critics, this last novel hinges on a more expressed black male homoeroticism, an expression not readily found in the previous works. Such expression of male intimacy spoke to how the work performed by the novel reached beyond the textual moment, as, according to Douglas Field (2004), "Baldwin boldly prepared African-American gay writing for the 1980s, radically portraying the intense love between black characters such as Arthur Crunch, and Arthur and Jimmy" (p. 473). Despite this reality, as black gay writers following Baldwin owe a lot to how he pushed the literary and social parameters outlining acceptable and/or legible black male homosexuality, Baldwin's self-positioning within the tradition continues to puzzle both literary critics and historians. Undoubtedly, this stems from how the esteemed father of the black gay literary tradition was himself struggling with the politics of personal identity and public recognition, or put more pointedly:

> But even as Baldwin's reputation as an important—perhaps the most important—gay black American writer of the twentieth century becomes increasingly secure, a closer examination of his work reveals a myriad ambiguities, contradictions and uncertainties that sit uneasily with his increasingly iconic status. (Field, p. 457)

Field's understanding does two things: (1) It recognizes the difficulty of critically examining works like *JAMH*, where the meaning of the text is rendered illegible by the author's unidentifiable politicized self, and (2) It highlights how Baldwin might have strategically employed ambiguity in an effort to construct a new meaning for male intimate desire. As a result, *JAMH* provides an excellent site for the analysis of gender and sexuality, particularly as it relates to their interplay. It encourages us to reconsider how we read male intimacy and what we are to make of it in light of Baldwin's, I argue, intentional ambiguity. And it pushes us to ask: What exactly is this novel about?

In 1980, the *Boston Globe* printed an interview of James Baldwin conducted by Judy Bachrach. Within that piece, after capturing the peculiarly intimate exchange between Baldwin and his friend Frederick, Bachrach speaks to her impression, or perhaps society's understanding, of *JAMH*. According to Bachrach (1980),

> James Baldwin's most recent book, "Just Above My Head,"' is the story of a doomed gospel singer, not the kind of novel that could mold a generation, alter a national literary mood, or vanquish a reader. It is not, for instance, "Giovanni's Room," or "Another Country." He doesn't write that way any more. Perhaps he no longer can; perhaps he said young everything he had to say. But the book is almost 600 pages long and it took him four years of hard

> writing, and some of it—the passages on family and pain and their perpetual inextricability—is damn good. James Baldwin could only have written those passages now.

Bachrach's statement offers insight into societal feeling towards the novel while also revealing one of the fundamental disservices to it. Part of the novel's poor reception was dictated by an unfair comparison to the novels that preceded it, along with a misunderstanding of the authorial intent. Despite the fact that the reader has a degree of privilege in reading, the judgment of Baldwin's last novel was grounded in an irresponsible or selfish readership. Bachrach was not the only critic who fell victim to a misreading of Baldwin's novel. Stanley Crouch (1990), the noted African American cultural critic, claimed,

> It is Baldwin's sentimental and poorly argued attempt to present homosexuality as some form of superior erotic enlightenment that continually slackens the power of *Just Above My Head*. The sentimentality results from a tendency to overstatement, pretension, and pomposity, as well as the creation of situations and responses the sole function of which is to prove the degradation of black people at the behest of racism and sexual convention. (p. 39)

Crouch's subtextual heterosexism, inability to contextualize the emotionality of the novel, and simplistic reading of the nuanced relationship between race and sexuality is symptomatic of a much larger collective misreading. More importantly, his review identifies the criticality of revisiting the nearly 600-page novel and the need to wrestle with its core meaning. Beyond tense socio-political relationships that emerge because of systemic and structural inequality, and above the thematic repetition, *Just Above My Head*, to put it simply, is about *the price* of human love—its triumph and failure; its beauty and ugliness; its prison and freedom. When one reads it, it is not drastically different from the novels that preceded it—I am sure that it is not meant to be. In fact, it is the strategic and purposed culmination of them, an odic pastiche which pieces together the five other novels with an agonized textuality. The agony, of course, stems from how *JAMH* continues to highlight Baldwin's search for the *fraternal*,[1] how it carries his preoccupation with loneliness over 584 pages. But it also reminds the reader that each novel never really ends, that their publications were merely literary pauses necessary for new transitions. While different, this last novel returns one to every novel that Baldwin wrote. It forces one to remember *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, where young John experiences a fraternal crisis with his father Gabriel and is led to search for male intimacy in the figure of Elisha; Elisha being endowed with Baldwin's first sculpting of salvific manhood. One remembers *Giovanni's Room*, where David and Giovanni's love is destroyed by the former's inability to let go of American "innocence" and puritan morality; where Baldwin teaches the consequences that emerge when men are not strong enough to love themselves. *JAMH* also recalls *Another Country* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*, where the suicides of Rufus Scott and Frank Hunt come through solitary confrontations with racial absurdity while revealing the salvific power of male love—physical and emotional—to save. And lastly, it echoes *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, where brotherly loves of Leo and Caleb Proudhammer (in blood), and Leo and Christopher Hall (in spirit), are prescribed as necessary to overcoming a racially and socially hostile world. To a certain degree, *JAMH* symbolizes Baldwin's quest, as man and as author, for intimacy. Each page is saturated with emotion and capture, in the spirit of all the words that came before, Baldwin's radical philosophy of love.

Just Above My Head, like Baldwin's previous novels, foregrounds relationships between men and the power of male intimacy. Whereas its publication in 1979 follows major ideological shifts or realignments, it is not surprising that "Baldwin invokes the sphere of intimate relations to dramatize the pernicious mythology of black virility perpetuated by black nationalism, suggesting instead the power of brotherhood, an orientation rooted in the novel's very conception" (Shin & Judson, 1998, p. 255). However, more than any other, it features at least four prominent male relationships with a myriad of different outcomes. Baldwin thus creates an emotionally taxing experience for his reader, who is forced to anticipate and endure the ebb and flow of human tragedy and triumph. The relationships the protagonist Arthur holds with Crunch (Jason Logan), Jimmy Miller and Hall Montana (Peanut and Red's relationship also reveals traces of the fraternal), concludes an epic journey through Baldwin's longest piece of fiction and marks a fitting end to Baldwin's memoiristic novel-ing. Even more, these male relationships solidify the various ways in which Baldwin implicates himself as a character in his own fiction and how he was, to the last page of his last novel, in search of the *fraternal*. The search within *JAMH* is textured by thematic explorations of fear, possibility and memory, where Baldwin's constructions of male intimacy and relationships avail themselves to a larger didactic consideration—What do these relationships really tell the reader, what do they *mean* for the writer, and how are we to understand the purpose of the writing?

ARTHUR AND CRUNCH: HOW TO TEACH FRATERNAL FEAR

Part of the didacticism of Baldwin's work lies in the way in which he attempts to teach the reader about the consequences of fear. In this, he also gives us the resources necessary to teach all the novels that come before this one. To be clear, in order to pedagogically engage Baldwin, we must understand the slipperiness of his text, must identify how he metaphorically employs relationships for greater purposes. One of the common themes within all of Baldwin's creative work is that of fear. And he writes it in such a way in the last work so that the reader might be able to retrospectively apply its lessons to the readings of previous works. Therefore, the successful teaching of Baldwin must begin with the critical reading of Baldwin.

In book three of the novel, Hall recounts Arthur's first trip South with his gospel quartet, "The Trumpets of Zion." He notes that for the first time in his young manhood, his brother needs more than what the family can offer him alone. Within the basement of a church, Arthur becomes aware of his sexuality and of a longing much deeper than it. In this moment, his family and his passed horrifying sexual experience do not matter, but as Hall notes "a need is growing in him, a tormenting need, with no name, no object. He is beginning to be lonely—we, who love him, are not enough" (Baldwin, 1979, p. 181). Sister Dorothy Green cannot satisfy the growing need, either, and while her presence elicits a sexual reaction from him, he knows "that he is not for her." He thinks of Jason Logan (Crunch) in this moment, wondering where the eldest member of the group and his close friend is. After Baldwin details a somewhat terrifying sexual exchange between Arthur and Dorothy, he sets up the reader for one of the deepest representations of male intimacy within the novel.

The relationship between Arthur and Crunch is reaches a new stage once they are reunited in the South. Crunch has finally arrived in Nashville and while talking with him, "Arthur realizes, for the first time, consciously, that Crunch listens to him, responds to him, takes him seriously" (Baldwin, 1979, p. 189). One wonders if it is Arthur's realization or the natural tenderness in him that provokes a space of vulnerability, for Crunch opens up and voices his struggle to love the mother he knows to be a "whore." As he shares his longing for her to allow his love, he weeps; he shares with Arthur a vulnerability society has taught him, along with every other black boy for that matter, to hide. As Arthur and Crunch consummate their fraternal bond within a space of male emotion, it echoes the profound emotional exchange between Leo Proudhammer and his brother Caleb following the latter's release from prison in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*. More importantly, when Arthur comforts Crunch and they cry together, they learn something about themselves and each other. In an instance, they "discovered how much each cares about the other" (Baldwin, p. 191), and owe the space of vulnerability to it. Physical intimacy follows the emotional catharsis, the two men proclaim their love and bask in the awkwardness that comes when young men step into the complexity of male sexuality and allow their heteronormative selves to dance within the homoerotic. This newfound intimacy did not come without attachment, as both men shared themselves and bore themselves—naked. For Arthur, he learned the fragility of Crunch's manhood as "he wanted to take Crunch in his arms and protect him—from the dawn and the road and the cars and trees outside" (p. 193). Arthur's desire to protect was somewhat prophetic as, in the midst of their escape into each other and their sojourn in the South, Crunch announced that he was going to be shipped off to the Korean War. The news proved to be the first fraternal crisis between the two young men, and the intimacy they just discovered, the love that they were cultivating would inevitably be interrupted by America's need to make "the world safe for democracy again" and it's need for "some niggers for the latrine detail" (p. 203). Crunch's pending departure catalyzes the men's consummation of their fraternal bond and preemptively reconciles, for a moment, the symbolic space-in-between men that would be caused by the war.

Physical male intimacy between Arthur and Crunch, while definitely a challenge to heteronormativity and heterosexism, plays a powerfully symbolic role in *JAMH*. On one hand it amplifies the difficulty of same-sex relationships in the 1950s, while on another it speaks to the curative potential of male closeness. Thus, when vulnerability gave way to stimulation and the two men found themselves naked in each other's arms, the threat of the *space* that would unavoidably grow between them, dissipated. Given Arthur's youth, Crunch assumed the "burden" of moving the "train" alone, "he held him closer, falling in love, his prick stiffening, his need rising, his hope rising; the train began to move, Arthur held him closer, and Crunch moved closer, becoming more naked, praying that Arthur would receive his nakedness" (p. 208). Both men's bodies work together in this intimate moment to reconcile the budding space to come. Crunch's desire, a reflection of his loneliness and need for male intimacy, is answered, is received and eventually the men *move* each other to orgasm. The height of Arthur and Crunch's intimacy symbolizes the demand of love, the need for both parties to surrender in the face of adversity, of judgment and of fear. Baldwin writes this surrender through the physical act of consummation, where "Crunch lay on his belly for Arthur and pulled Arthur into him, and Arthur lay on his belly for Crunch, and Crunch entered Arthur—it was incredible that it hurt so much, and yet, hurt so little, that so profound an anguish, thrusting so hard, so deep, accomplished such a transformation" (p. 216). What may be reduced to sexual intercourse between two men must be read, indeed, for it's *transformative* effect. Their sexual exchange was metaphysical; it represented the surrendering of manhood, as both men relinquished his to the other. Arthur's love with Crunch, the emotional and the physical introduces the reader to the salvific power of male intimacy—Crunch was saved through Arthur's heart and body, Arthur saved through Crunch's.

The freedom of that night did not last for long; life has a way of intervening. Eventually, Crunch went off to war and, upon his return, presented Arthur with irreconcilable fraternal crises. In a sense, the war reconstructed Crunch's manhood, hardened him and placed him farther from the space of vulnerability. Additionally, perhaps because of this remaking, Crunch extended his male intimacy to Julia instead of Arthur. Such a re-positioning is hard to read, especially given how Julia suffered a crisis of womanhood in being raped by her father. Crunch, sensing her need for redemption, placed his salvific manhood within her world, leaving Arthur alone and without. Interestingly, it was neither Julia nor the war that finalized the fraternal crisis between Arthur and Crunch; it was something much deeper and something that Arthur, even with his salvific nature, could not overcome—fear. There existed no question that the two men loved each other, no question that Arthur meant more to Crunch than anyone else in the world, but the balance of what they meant to each other haunted Crunch:

> If he had felt a certain panic, bewilderment, at the realization that he had fallen in love with a male, this panic was as nothing compared to his private apprehension that he was more in love with Arthur than Arthur was with him. (p. 218)

Baldwin means to suggest here that fraternal crises are oftentimes the byproduct of fear, where one male in the relationship fears the possibility of losing the other. Inevitably, this is what ended Arthur's love with his first male love and what pushed him to the point of guarding his heart for the rest of his life. For Hall, "Crunch did not know how to deal with Arthur, or how to deal with the implications in his life as a man of having a male love. It would have been simpler if he had simply managed to stop loving him" (p. 346). Despite failing in his attempt, the effort alone was enough to push Arthur back into a search, a search for the male intimacy unable to be found in his brother or his father. It would be found again, however, in Julia's younger brother—Jimmy.

Baldwin uses Arthur and Crunch's relationship to highlight how paralyzing the fear of intimacy is within American culture. Even more, by writing Arthur's victimization, Baldwin also reveals how black men are tortured by a Western cult of true manhood, where heteronormative prescriptions regulate natural longings for and pursuits of intimacy. Tucked away within Crunch's *rejection* of Arthur—for the sake of Julia—is a strong didacticism that speaks to how black manhood is both constructed and mythologized. Crunch's vacillation, to and from Arthur, points to the reality of how fear takes hold of black male psyches. For Baldwin, this fear is learned, pathological and detrimental – an existential and metaphysical threat to the emotional selves of men. Fortunately, he also recognizes the space for emerging from that fear and taking advantage of the possibility for love and intimacy—a possibility that he constructs through Arthur's relationship with Jimmy.

Through an analysis of Arthur and Crunch, we are endowed with those essential elements critical to the effective teaching of Baldwin. Firstly, we understand that the physical is profoundly symbolic with Baldwin. Above the expression of intimacy, it comes to represent a more intangible connection between men, and, by extension, the larger public. To teach moments of intimacy within *JAMH* thus requires us to consider new ways of viewing physical intimacy, encourages us to question what else is going on within the text.

PEDAGOGY AND POSSIBILITY: HOW TO TEACH INTIMACY BETWEEN ARTHUR AND JIMMY

Another important relationship within *JAMH* is that between Arthur and Jimmy. On the surface, similar to the aforementioned, it will appear to be another moment of "simple" male intimacy. However, as Baldwin labors with this relationship, we too must labor as readers and pedagogues to unpack the work that is being done. To teach the complexity of this relationship, one must understand it in context with the one that precedes it—that of Arthur and Crunch.

Arthur's failed relationship with Crunch is somewhat redeemed through the character Jimmy—the often neglected brother of a child evangelist. Though Baldwin offers the reader insight into the life and struggles of Jimmy and thus his need for Arthur's salvific manhood, one does not see the blooming of their fraternal bond until late in the novel. It comes as Hall reminisces on Arthur's sojourn in Europe and how he realizes that his younger brother is basking in a state of loneliness. In an effort to make sense of his brother's crisis—the absence of intimacy that surely haunts him—Hall suggests: "He wishes that I were there, but he needs someone else more than he needs me, he needs a friend. He needs someone to be with, needs someone to be with him" (p. 459). Hall's discernment in this reflection is Baldwin's intervention in the discourse of human relations, particularly around the question of intimacy. For both men, the written and the writer, familial and platonic love cannot attenuate the need for romantic love. Arthur needs, as diagnosed by his older, prescient brother, "someone to be with" and that someone willingly fills the prescription when the Montana's end up South after Arthur's return from across the great pond.

According to Hall, the distance once separating Arthur from Jimmy could possibly be the result of his relationship with Julia and Arthur's relationship with Crunch. In the absence of the latter relationship and with the transformation of the formal, Arthur's path to Jimmy was now clear. For Hall, this was inevitable and had it not been for the nebulosity of other bonds "Arthur might have realized that his reaction to Jimmy, what Jimmy caused him to feel, was not very far from what is called love at first sight: and what is not far from love at first sight probably *is* love at first sight" (p. 466). Hall reads the situation correctly, and Baldwin, quite purposeful in allowing a certain amount of time and distance between the two new love interests, illuminates the complexity of human love, especially as it involves two black men. Both Arthur and Jimmy needed time to grow, to love, to lose love and to fear so that they knew the important sacredness of their fraternal bond. Arthur, while older and suggestively more experienced in matters of the heart, "had to pull himself to a place where he could say to Paul, his father, and to Hall, his brother, and to all the world, and to *his* Maker, *Take me as I am!*" (p. 472). This is the proud proclamatory place that David of *Giovanni's Room* never reached, at least not in his textual life and connotes one of the struggles of salvific men—the dilemma of loving oneself enough to proclaim it to the world so that someone else can be saved by their love. Conversely, Jimmy needed to get beyond thinking that "his life then seemed to him to be nothing more than a series of ruptures" (p. 471). Together, through the words of Baldwin and the narration of Hall, one learns that Arthur and Jimmy become exactly what the other needs and that their fraternal love moves them beyond reconciling the crises of past and into constructing new things for the future.

Although committed to showcasing the beauty of male intimacy and same-sex love, Baldwin is careful not to romanticize or idealize Arthur and Jimmy's union. Like all relationships, theirs comes with quarrels, frustrations and moments of disconnect. *JAMH* never intends to be a romance novel, and is perhaps more tragic than anything else. Baldwin's pen seemed tilted towards such darkness, seemed bent on exposing what the world was either too cowardly or too apathetic to see. Nevertheless, even within this darkness, Baldwin paints an amazing picture of same-sex love and male intimacy. Through Arthur and Jimmy, he unveils the hope embedded in fraternal pursuits and intimates the *possibility* of redemption. Considering this, one understands Hall's reading of Jimmy and his presence in Arthur's life, one comes to believe him when he states:

> I mean that Jimmy's presence in Arthur's life, Jimmy's love, altered Arthur's estimate of himself, gave him a joy and a freedom he had never known before, invested him with a kind of incandescent wonder, and he carried this

> light on stage with him, he moved his body differently since he knew that he was loved, loved, and, therefore, knew himself to be both bound and free, and this miracle, the unending wonder of this unending new day, filled his voice with multitudes, summoned from catacombs unnameable, whosoever will. (p. 561)

What Hall captures in his reading is the power of possibility that resides in fraternal love. Jimmy's role, above the emotional and physical, was of a spiritual nature—he served as Arthur's source of salvation as Arthur had done for so many others in the novel, including Jimmy. Even more, Jimmy revealed Arthur to himself, reflected the beautiful manhood that he witnessed and allowed for him to believe. The tragedy comes in time, however. Baldwin, even while exalting such a powerfully fraternal moment, understands that the heart's serendipity is regulated by time. And unfortunately, he leaves the reader thinking along with the narrator, that despite this miracle of fraternal love, Arthur "simply, finally, saw it coming, saw that he couldn't avoid it, had been running toward it too long, had been alone too long, didn't trust, really, any other condition. Jimmy came too late" (p. 569). This sobering realization identifies the heart of Arthur's fraternal crisis. Not that the breakdown of human intimacy is too great to conquer, as his relationship with Jimmy testifies against the notion; rather, that when one has dwelled without the fraternal for so long, when one has been plagued by the absurd state of black male loneliness, even the greatest love one has felt fails in the effort of reconciliation. The possibility Jimmy symbolizes offers hope to that which Baldwin argues haunts the human heart. Nonetheless, as we learn, possibility alone is not enough. In the end, when the Trumpets of Zion have called a man home, all we have left in this search, this journey to reconciliation, to know and to love, is—memory.

Perhaps what Baldwin teaches the reader through Arthur's relationship with both Crunch and Jimmy is grounded in the idea that male intimacy and vulnerability require a journey from fear to possibility. Indeed, the way in which he writes these fraternal moments begs the question, "how does one wish to have his manhood mythologized?" Who knows but that Baldwin composed Jimmy to reveal his own vulnerability, to capture how, at some point in his life, the most vulnerable part of himself remained eclipsed by the gospel (read Julia) that he followed. Ultimately, as Jimmy, the character, grows older and Julia's life becomes more tortured (read the dissection of western religious cosmology for Baldwin), the reader is able to see the beauty of Jimmy's manhood. And to highlight the majesty of fraternal possibility, Baldwin allows the hardened Arthur to make room for the softer Jimmy. Stepping away from the text, while still considering it, this union represents Baldwin's reconciliation with himself and his gentle coaxing for men to embrace their inner vulnerabilities and capacity to love. While fraternal possibility carves a space for male intimate redemption, Baldwin's ultimate lesson lies in the idea of memory, as it is the memory of Arthur that defines his relationship with his brother Hall, which emerges, higher than anything else, to capture the spirit of the fraternal in Baldwin's last novel.

Through the critical analysis of Arthur's relationship with both Crunch and Jimmy, the pedagogue acquires a new tool for the teaching of Baldwin's final novel. Beyond discourses of intimacy, both physical and symbolic, Baldwin demands that we teach the transition. Here, it is important to remember that the possibility of redemption is arrived at by Baldwin's Arthur. When teaching this novel, one must not forget to teach the absence that lies in between the critical relationships. The destinations are indeed as important, if not more, than the travels in between. Possibility, unlike fear, is a more difficult concept to identify in Baldwin, but it is just as significant.

ARTHUR AND HALL: TEACHING MEMORY, TEACHING JAMES BALDWIN

Perhaps the greatest teaching element that one can grab from the reading and critical analysis of *Just Above My Head* is the way in which Baldwin gently offers how he wishes for his life to be understood and taught. Through the relationship of his narrator Hall and his most beloved character Arthur, Baldwin demonstrates the pedagogical import of memory. Even more, he highlights how fictional relationships are blueprints for interpreting real ones and how he might be read, remembered and taught if one nuances one of the most lasting relationships in all of his works.

JAMH ends as it begins, with Hall attempting to make sense of his brother's life through a series of memories. He implicates the reader in the way Ralph Ellison's protagonist evokes the reader near the end of *Invisible Man*, in the way W.E.B Du Bois addresses the reader at the end of *The Souls of Black Folk*—with a very palpable resolve. It is as if by narrating this story, like the Ellison's unnamed and Du Bois' spectral self, Hall learns something, reaches a destination he has been seeking. In a beautifully-apostrophic moment, he turns to the reader and notes:

> You have sensed my fatigue and my panic, certainly, if you have followed me until now, and you can guess how terrified I am to be approaching the end of my story. It was not meant to be my story, though it is far more my story than I would have thought, or might have wished. I have wondered, more than once why I started it, but—I know why. It is a love song to my brother. It is an attempt to face both love and death. (p. 517)

As the narrator, Hall uncovers his own quest and how he, like the other men of the novel, has been searching for some form of reconciliation. His narration, his story, is a way of him making sense of Arthur's death, surely. But it is also a way for him to understand his life. For Hall, "Arthur, the itinerant bluesman who sings of love and loss, transforms the traumatic history of African Americans into a prophecy of the future, and his voice becomes the oracle of a new world" (Shin & Judson, 1998, p. 257). However, even as Hall grapples with the sacredness of Arthur's voice, he must dissect the reasoning surrounding his death. As he recalls that tragic moment where "something hits [Arthur], lightly, in the chest, and between the shoulder blades …" when he notes that his brother "wants to get away from here, suddenly, away from these people, these eyes, this death. For, it *is* death, the human need to which one can find no way of responding, the need incapable of recognizing itself" (Baldwin, 1979, p. 581), he magnifies Arthur's most significant struggle. He understands why Arthur's heart ruptures and why he tumbles to his death in the London stairwell, understands it as the demand the world can make upon a person, upon an artist. Arthur's demise stems from his inability to recognize self in a world that wanted him to be its everything else; he had no space, no time, no connection with the one person meant to love him like none other—himself. As Hall points out, within that confusion, lied Arthur's fear: "all Arthur wanted was for the people who *made* the music, from God knows who, to Satchmo, Mr. Jelly-Lord, Bessie, Mahalia, Miles, Ray, Trane, his *daddy*, and *you*, too, mother-fucker, *you*! It was only when he got scared about what *they might think of what he'd done to their song—our* song—that he really started to be uptight about our love" (p. 577). Arthur's crisis, and his untimely tragedy, comes from the fear of judgment, the fear of not living a life or singing a song as the world expected. He was driven to a point of sacrifice and his death symbolizes how we, as a people and a world, push the most selfless among us to be our saviors. For this reason, and others, Baldwin's Arthur represents one of the strongest symbols of salvific manhood.

So then, what does one make of *Just Above My Head* as a novel? It is, as Hall confesses, "a love song for [his] brother." "[It] becomes a kind of elegy in which Hall, too, becomes a blues singer, trying to redeem his brother's life from the squalor of his murder in a men's toilet" (Shin & Judson, 1998, p. 255). By analogizing the novel to an elegy, Shin and Judson complicate our reading of the focus of the novel. If Hall is the singer who inevitably sings the blues characterizing his brother's life, what can be argued as the true subject? Perhaps the answer lies in a departure from the obvious, where we decenter the central character, Arthur, to better examine the those connected to him. In this regard, the narrative is not about Arthur, per se; rather, it is about Hall Montana and the search to find his brother. The novel offers such a consideration for, in a sense, "Hall realizes that there never was a place for Arthur in society, and his elegy is an attempt to make such a space" (p. 255). Although Hall's journey is mediated by a desire to make sense of his brother's life, to make meaning of his death, as critical readers we must dig deeper. There are moments, quite apparent, if one has indeed "followed," where the voice of Hall is lost to the voice of Baldwin. This is not just Hall's story; it is also Baldwin's. It is not a coincidence that gospel singer's name is Arthur, is not coincidence that his love or the possibility of love, comes through a character named Jimmy. In authoring this novel, Baldwin did not intend for it to be, but it became; he has wondered about why he started it, but, alas, he knows. In fact, in an interview he admits, "that book is not directly autobiographical at all, but it is autobiographical on a much deeper level" (Standley & Pratt, p. 278). And this is the strength of *JAMH*, it is the end of something for Baldwin—he has finally told his story, come to understand himself, to recognize himself through his novels. Literary critics will question and historians will deny, but one who reads him closely will know. Baldwin tucked himself into the pages of his novel, hoping that like the good brother Hall, someone would seek him out, sift through the mess and ambiguity and find him standing there, alone, singing a song about himself.

Hall's resolve comes through the responsible remembrance of his brother. The symbolic space-in-between them, captured and represented by Arthur's death, is reconciled through fraternal memory—the way one loves another when he has left this earthly place. Baldwin's labor, through flashback and memory, is to highlight Hall's realization:

> I wonder, more and more, about what we call memory. The burden—the role —f memory is to clarify the event, to make it useful, even, to make it bearable. But memory is, also, what the imagination makes, or has made, of the event, and, the more dreadful the event, the more likely it is that the memory will distort, or efface it. It is, thus, perfectly possible—indeed, it is common—to act on the genuine results of the event, at the same time that the memory manufactures quite another one, an event totally unrelated to the visible and uncontrollable effects in one's life. This may be why we appear to learn absolutely nothing from experience, or may, in other words, account for our incoherence: memory does not require that we reconstitute the event, but that we justify it. (Baldwin, 1979*,* p. 554)

I quote these last words at length for a variety of reasons. Most important of these stems from my reading of how we remember James Arthur Baldwin. Like most of our prominent African American figures, his life is prone to mythology. This is not, all in all, a bad thing, as the preservation of greatness comes with such an act. My struggle, however, is magnified by Hall's words, for like him, I understand that myth-making sometimes gives way to manufacturing and in that act, one runs the risk of distorting the subject being mythologized. We call this memorialization, never realizing the disservice we have done in selectively trying to preserve. We move, sometimes selfishly, knowing that "the song does not belong to the singer" (p. 576), or how "the sermon does not belong to the preacher" (p. 577). This is to say, the lives of our artists do not belong to them and sometimes we keep them from themselves. This was Baldwin's fate and if we are not careful, we run the risk of missing his last prophetic message – to remember his song as he sang it.

Just Above My Head has been critiqued for being different from Baldwin's other novels in creative dexterity; it has been cited as an example of the loss of his literary gift; it has been considered a reflection of his dying life as the literary giant that he was. Literary scholars continuously misread the recycling of themes present in his previous novels as indications that the muses no longer whispered his name. However, as Baldwin told us in the interview which epigraphs this essay, *JAMH* is a return to his beginnings. It represents, not a new departure, but a long-awaited reconciliation. Baldwin last lesson within his fiction is for men, and people in general, to be leery of the ways in which history may fictionalize their lives. Possibly more than in any other novel, "Baldwin clearly demonstrates his awareness of the fact that we are never free from history, though the energizing force of love would make us so" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 144). It is precisely this teaching and demonstration which confuses the larger American readership, as Baldwin looses the strings of his authorial cloaks, strips his characters of make-up and masks and bears himself to the reader with a nakedness more visible here than in any other work. *JAMH*'s subtext hinges on Baldwin's wrestling with memory and the imagining of how he shall be remembered, how he shall be re-composed. This novel encourages us to revisit the work of James Baldwin, calls for a responsible mythologizing, and teaches us that we must be careful—in our re-singing of another person's life—to preserve the voice that originally sang the song. In the end, I am convinced that when Baldwin was writing this final novel, he was singing to us as lovers, *Just Above My Head*, and praying to us as critics—"Take Me As I Am!"

NOTES

[1] By *fraternal*, I mean to suggest a profound relationship between men, regardless of relational ties. As such, fraternal bonds need not solely represent men bonded through religious fellowship, men of "brotherly" blood kinship, men of common organization, et cetera. Rather, it simply points to a fundamental connection forged between men, with the ever-present idea of the metaphysical, of love and of closeness – an intimacy between and proximity to each other.

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