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The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin

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Thèse de doctorat en Langues et cultures des sociétés
anglophones

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Abstract:

The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin responds to what writer James Baldwin observed as White America's apathy of the heart during the African American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968). I offer a reading of Baldwin's early fiction as companion pieces that chronicle the writer's evolving critiques on post-WWII American Whiteness. As an ensemble, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962) and *Going to Meet the Man's* "This Morning, This Evening So Soon" (1965) respond to shifting discourses surrounding race, sexuality and nationhood that dominated the post-WWII era. By adopting a Critical Whiteness Studies approach, I explore how the demands of post-war White identity both psychologically alienate Baldwin's White characters and create institutions that inadequately respond to anti-Black violence. I use *White Innocence as* a discursive tool to underline how innocence becomes a marker of self-identification that masks the brutality of Whiteness and Western power. Whiteness proposes to protect its bearer from the reality of the present by effacing the history which has produced it. Paradoxically, this act of protection renders White America ill prepared to face the moral challenges which help define 20th and 21st centuries.

Keywords : James Baldwin, White Innocence, History, Gender, Sexuality, Transatlanticism

Titre : Le Paradoxe de l'innocence blanche dans les premiers récits de James Baldwin

Résumé :

Le Paradoxe de l'innocence blanche dans les premiers récits de James Baldwin répond à ce que l'écrivain James Baldwin a identifié comme l'apathie du cœur de l'Amérique blanche pendant le mouvement des droits civiques des Afro-Américains (1955-1968). Je propose une lecture des premières œuvres de fiction de Baldwin comme un ensemble de pièces complémentaires reflétant l'évolution des critiques de l'écrivain sur la blancheur de l'Amérique de l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale. Dans leur ensemble, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962) et « This Morning, This Evening, So Soon » (1965) répondent aux discours en mutation sur la race, la sexualité et la nation qui ont dominé l'ère de l'après-Seconde Guerre. En adoptant une approche fondée sur les études critiques portant sur la blancheur, j'explore la manière dont les exigences de l'identité blanche aliènent psychologiquement les personnages blancs de Baldwin et créent des institutions qui réagissent de manière inadéquate à la violence antinoirs. J'utilise l'innocence blanche comme outil discursif pour souligner comment l'innocence devient un marqueur d'auto-identification qui masque la brutalité de la blancheur et du pouvoir occidental. La blancheur se propose de protéger son détenteur de la réalité du présent en effaçant l'histoire qui l'a produite. Paradoxalement, cette protection rend l'Amérique blanche peu apte à faire face aux défis moraux qui marquent les 20e et 21e siècles.

Mots clefs : James Baldwin, la blancheur, l'innocence blanche, l'histoire, genre, sexualité, le transatlantisme

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Introduction

Thesis project

The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin responds to what African American writer James Baldwin (1924-1987) publicly declared as the moral apathy and death of the heart of White America during the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968). The December 1955 arrest of NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) secretary and activist Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott which challenged the legality of racial segregation in Alabama's city public bus systems. The success of the boycott emboldened the NAACP and other civil rights organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (1942-1970) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (1960-1971) to campaign in nationwide protests. Baldwin's early writings include observations on Whiteness which Baldwin hoped would allow socially liberal Whites to reflect on how their inaction contributes to White supremacy, albeit in nuanced ways and to varying degrees. I believe that reading *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962) and *Going to Meet the Man's* "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" (1965), in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, highlights how Baldwin's early fiction responds to shifting discourses on how racial identity influences personhood, sexuality and national identity. I suggest that a Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) approach to understanding how Whiteness negatively impacts Baldwin's White characters reveals novel discourses on how to approach America's relationship to racial ideologies and responds favorably to issues of "White accessibility." Baldwin's early fiction is a literary negotiation, depicting the resilience of the Black family and community and the self-alienation that social ideologies surrounding Whiteness provoke in his White characters. Where Black readers see depictions of Black lives

and experiences which contradict the country's image of what it means to be an American, White readers are forced to question the myths surrounding race, sex and nation that govern American life. Baldwin offers multidimensional and fallible characters who bear witness to Black America's political and economic marginalization in inner cities and rural areas, while assuring readers that the victims are not the source of America's race problem. As such, White readers begin to understand that the "the Negro Problem" is a myth which conceals America's "White Problem" which only Whites can mitigate.

My decision to focus on Baldwin's early fiction is informed by the publication of Toni Morrison's *James Baldwin: Early Novels and Short Stories* (1998) and Lynn Orilla Scott's *James Baldwin's Later Fiction* (2002), both titles suggesting a break between what I consider is his early works and what critics have christened his *later fiction*. Of course, the distinction between these bodies of writings is negatively connotated, since his later fiction is criticized as demonstrating a lesser degree of literary artistry. However, I attribute any recognizable shift as a thematic evolution, rather than Baldwin's failure to honor the declarations he made in "Everybody's Protest Novel." I believe the assassinations of Civil Rights activists Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. heavily influenced Baldwin to rethink the focus of his art.

Baldwin's early fiction exposes how Whiteness and White racism negatively impact the lives of both Blacks and Whites by uncovering strategies which maintain Whites blind to the alienating effects of Whiteness on the White Subject. The main aim of this thesis is to explore such strategies which paradoxically deny, justify and render invisible human suffering. I excavate Baldwin's writings to show how Whiteness—a marker of social belonging—and White racism negatively affect Baldwin's Whites characters. Whiteness offers safety, by rejecting the experiential knowledge conferred by such experiences as birth, pain, suffering, love and death. This disassociation limits one's ability to empathize, making unintelligible

history which explains contemporary issues surrounding race and anti-Black violence and paradoxically rendering White America what Baldwin calls “a moral monster.”

The past quarter century has heralded an increased interest in Baldwin’s writings. The beatings, shootings and murders of African American citizens have influenced artists and activists to revisit Baldwin’s insightful observations on race in America. In my assessment of the inadequate responses to anti-Black violence, I discuss cases of brutality against Blacks in America, before, during and after the Civil Rights Movement. However, I would like to mention a few cases of racially motivated murders and attacks which I believe have collectively helped reinvigorate Baldwin’s writings both nationally and abroad, especially in use of the global Marriage Equality Movement, the #MeToo Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement. In 1991, bystander George Holliday secretly filmed a mob of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King who suffered a broken leg, severely bruised face and a chest burn from being tased; the 1999 shooting and subsequent death of Guinean student Amadou Diallo, shot 19 times by plain clothed New York City officers; George Zimmerman’s 2012 murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin who was walking to his uncle’s home after buying Skittles from a local store; Renisha McBride’s 2013 murder, after she crashed her car under the influence and the owner of the house she approached for help shot her dead; 12-year-old Tamir Rice’s 2014 murder by police while playing with a toy gun in a public park; Breonna Taylor’s murder by the hands of police who mistakenly raided her apartment and shot her dead in her bedroom; the 2014 murder of Eric Garner who was stopped and detained by police for allegedly selling single cigarettes. A police officer knelt on his throat, as Garner screamed, “I can’t breathe.” Garner died at 43 years old. The following section offers a selective overview of Baldwin scholarship which highlights the novel ways Baldwin explains and responds to anti-Black violence, by focusing on humanity—the hopes, dreams, fears and imperfections—of his characters.

Recent Baldwin Scholarship

The monographs presented below have been groundbreaking in their scope of philosophical and literary inquiry and have heavily influenced my decision to focus on Baldwin's critiques of Whiteness as the source of anti-Black violence. Trudier Harris's *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (1985), Dwight A. McBride's *James Baldwin Now* (1999) and Lynn Orilla Scott's *James Baldwin Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey* (2002) have spurred novel avenues to understanding Baldwin as a Black artist and political activist who strove "to be an honest man and a good writer."¹ Harris's groundbreaking *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* is the first full body of work dedicated to Baldwin's treatment of Black women, confronting temptations to consider Black women characters as secondary to Baldwin's literary imagination. Exploring such themes as guilt, faith and sisterhood, Harris demonstrates how Black women in Baldwin's fiction learn to "move out from under the shadow of their own guilt and doubt about their humanity to singing praises to life and living."² McBride's *James Baldwin Now* consists of four thematic parts, ranging from more known themes like race, sexuality and exile in books like *Little Man, Little Man* (1976) and *Another Country* to exploring novel approaches to what I call Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic. Notable in McBride's edited collection is Michelle M. Wright's "'Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity," which offers a transatlantic reading of "Everybody's Protest Novel." Wright suggests that Baldwin's escape to Paris allowed him a better understanding of the African American Subject or what Baldwin calls "a kind of bastard of the West."³ This observation leads Wright to conclude that "it was important

¹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* in *James Baldwin's Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 9.

² Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 11.

³ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 7.

for [Baldwin] to renounce publicly an ideology and a literary tradition that discussed racism in terms that focused on socially constructed identities at the expense of the Subject's 'humanity.'"⁴ Chapter Four of this thesis is inspired by Wright's final assessment that "the African American [must] come to acknowledge his or her transatlantic status [...] because an exploration of the nature of this transatlantic status allows us to understand that which we have previously misunderstood as specific only to our particular nations, cultures, and races."⁵ Therefore, an assessment of Baldwin's early fiction from a transatlantic perspective suggests that the African American Subject offers critical insight into how to deal with the Western concerns of the 21st century: demographic shifts, the global surge of White racism, climate change and the increasing threat of fascist regimes.

Also of particular interest in McBride's collection is Lawrie Balfour's "Finding the Words: Baldwin, Race Consciousness, and Democratic Theory," in which the scholar describes how Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel" provides "an alternative standard for moral and political critique."⁶ Balfour analyzes Baldwin's essay and public dispute with Richard Wright in the context of democratic theory, arguing that democratic theorists' rejection of the experiential over the abstract undermines antiracist work: "Abstract conceptual theory, by supposing it is possible to make arguments at the level of principle, where race is not relevant, may thus serve to protect the sort of racial innocence Baldwin attacks."⁷ Ultimately, Balfour suggests that theorists must balance the lived experiences of racialization and the abstract nature of theory, while avoiding investing social meaning into skin color and ignoring the personal and public implications that color has on millions of lives.

⁴ Michelle M. Wright, "'Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity," *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 212.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶ Lawrie Balfour, "'Finding the Words: Baldwin, Race Consciousness, and Democratic Theory,'" *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

In *James Baldwin's Later Fiction*, Lynn Orilla Scott argues against the negative criticism of Baldwin's later novels. As scholars have noted, these early critiques suggest that Baldwin's later fiction suffers from the same racial tropes he admonished in *Notes of a Native Son*. Scott explores *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) and *Just Above My Head* (1979) as novel avenues to understanding America's race problem and suggests that three themes connect them to his earlier fiction: "the role of the family in sustaining the artist; the price of success in American society; and the struggle of the black artist to change the ways race and sex are represented in American culture."⁸ The three works illustrate Baldwin's commitment to (re)describing false narratives surrounding human life which impede growth in peoples' private and public lives. According to Scott, Baldwin "giv[es] testimony to our desires and dreams for a new identity and a new nation."⁹ Scott succeeds in highlighting the complex depictions of Baldwin's characters. She looks at how Baldwin's Black Subjects interrupt traditional ways of being American, by resisting, in their art and lives, political forces which reject how they live and love.

Michele Elam's *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (2015) offers insightful essays, ranging from Baldwin's FBI file to a comparative analysis between his literary form and social concerns. The collection covers a large range of Baldwin's work, from the aesthetic and thematic shift in his later fiction that Scott discusses, to the musicality of his poetics. Of particular interest to this thesis is Jacqueline Goldsby's "'Closer to Something Unnameable": Baldwin's Novel Form," which tackles the aesthetic and thematic differences between his earlier and later fiction, asking: "Did the craft-minded Baldwin relinquish his long-standing commitment to advancing the novel's aesthetic form?"¹⁰ Like Scott, Goldsby assesses *Tell Me*

⁸ Lynn Orilla Scott, *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey* (East Lansing, MA: Michigan State University Press, 2002), xxiii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Goldsby, "'Closer to Something Unnameable": Baldwin's Novel Form," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 25.

How Long the Train's Been Gone (1968) to uncover Baldwin's artistic experimentation with narrative "formlessness."¹¹ Ultimately, Goldsby sides with critics Robert Reid-Pharr and Scott that this formlessness allows Baldwin's characters and readers an uncharted journey to self-discovery. "[B]y letting his protagonists explore unpredictable ranges of human attraction, desire, and even disgust," Goldsby observes, "Baldwin unbinds the novel from norms of theme and content."¹² Other fascinating reads in the collection are Meta Duewa Jones's essay "Baldwin's Poetics;" Soyica Diggs Colbert's "Go Tell It on the Mountain: Baldwin's Sermonic" and Radiclan Clytus "Paying Dues and Playing the Blues: Baldwin's Existential Jazz," which all offer interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the various ways Black music informs Baldwin's narrative structure.

Of course, there is also Keith Clark's *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines and August Wilson* (2002); *A Political Companion to James Baldwin* (2017), edited by Susan J. Williams; Alice Mikal Craven, William E. Dow and Yoko Nakamura's *Of Latitudes Unknown: James Baldwin's Radical Imagination* (2019) and Eddie S. Glaude Jr.'s recent publication of *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* (2021) which discusses Baldwin's literary and social critiques in the context of White nationalism's rising influence in contemporary America. Read as a memoir, Glaude's book reminds us of why "so many people today reach for Baldwin to help them understand this latest iteration of the American nightmare."¹³ However, Glaude ends with the hopeful message that Baldwin's work is as much about celebrating life as it is criticizing the institutions and people who reject the underlined truth that all human life has value.

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² Ibid., 27.

¹³ Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* (New York: Crown Trade Paper Edition, 2021), 26.

In the following section, I discuss Baldwin's journey from being a reluctant spokesman to an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. As my critiques of American Whiteness are contextualized during the Civil Rights era, I believe it is important to nuance our understanding of Baldwin as a Civil Rights activist. That he considers himself a writer first and foremost suggests that his particular situation as a displaced artist in a political movement offers insight into his hopes for the Movement, the paths it should take and the legacy it should leave behind. Indeed, Baldwin's participation in the movement was riddled with obstacles. For one thing, Baldwin was in Paris when Rosa Parks was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for refusing to give up her seat to a White passenger on a public bus, and it was a difficult decision for him to return to the US after a decade abroad. It was not so much that Paris was a utopia for the young Black writer as it was a viable alternative to living in America where the thought he would surely perish. Baldwin's decision to take part in the Civil Rights Movement was partly out of love for his country and countrymen and partly putting his money where his mouth was; by 1955, Baldwin had already written extensively on America's race problem. Now he had the opportunity to take part in antiracist work, converting his literary rhetoric to political action. As a human being, Baldwin's fear and hesitation to return to the home he thought he would die in must not be minimized. Lastly, his many speeches, interview, debates and trips to the American South attest to his dedication to finding his "own moral center and mov[ing] through the world hoping that this center will guide [him] aright." Baldwin believed that he had "many responsibilities, but none greater than this: to last, as Hemingway says, and get [his] work done."¹⁴

¹⁴ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 9.

James Baldwin and the Civil Rights Movement

Baldwin's introduction to the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) took the form of a series of articles he wrote for *Harper's Magazine* and *Partisan Review*. "A Fly in Buttermilk" (1958), "The Dangerous Road before Martin Luther King" (1961), and "Nobody Knows My Names: A Letter from the South" (1961) are the fruits of his efforts to bearing witness to the discriminatory and subjugating laws and cultural practices which sustained America's White hegemony. These essays chronicle his numerous interviews, political activism activity and meetings which have made him known as an infamous writer and social critic. However, Baldwin's prominence in the Movement was not cemented until *Time* magazine featured him on their May 1963 cover page. Baldwin's arresting presence on the *Time* cover and the subsequent publication of *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Elam observes, "signaled his rising influence as a writer and thinker across the color line."¹⁵

The *Time* article frames Baldwin as a literary prophet who discusses the cruelty of man, as a metaphor for White America's apathy toward the anti-Black violence in Southern communities and Norther cities. Baldwin asserts that he "[speaks] not for himself but for all Negroes to all whites [which is] the unending story of man's inhumanity to man, of the white's refusal to see the black simply as another human being, of the white man's delusions and the Negro's demoralization."¹⁶ Five pages of the article are dedicated to commentary, accompanied by violent images of a young protestor, "sprawled on his back and spinning across the pavement, while firemen batt[er] him with streams of water so powerful that they could strip bark off trees."¹⁷ The piece informs readers of Bull Connor's police troops who hose protesters, while yelling "[t]hose black apes," as some protesters began to "[lob] bricks and bottles at the

¹⁵ Michele Elam, "Introduction: Baldwin's Art," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁶ "Nation: The Root of the Negro Problem," *Time* (17 May 1963), 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17

lawmen.”¹⁸ Eugene “Bull” Connor, the city’s Public Safety Commissioner, is characterized as a villain one might come across in the protest fiction Baldwin condemned. It is suggested that Connor has “cowed Negroes for 23 years with hoarse threats and club-swinging cops,”¹⁹ without offering any intimate understanding of the Commissioner beyond his “official duties.”

Even though the *Time* article often employs such terms as “whites” and “the white man” to designate the supposed source of Black unrest, the piece fails to connect these terms with the lives of its White readership. However, this choice preserves the psychological remove with which White America understands its role in the country’s racial structure. At a superficial level Baldwin’s works function much like the *Time* article, reassuring Whites that racism is not about them, to seemingly preserve that psychological disassociation necessary to sustain the idea of White American exceptionalism. Upon reflection, however, Baldwin’s White readers are invited to engage and respond to his works that talk about Whiteness as much as they do Blackness. Therefore, White readers are forced to question their role (be it passive or not) in the racial conflicts upon which Baldwin’s works bear witness. Acknowledging this relationship is essential for accountability and holding Whites responsible for their actions and passivity in the face of anti-Black violence.

As such, the *Times* piece contradicts its intended purpose which is to “see the Negro in human terms.”²⁰ The article on Baldwin comes directly after the events in Birmingham and implies, whether intentional or not, that Bill Connor’s specific brand of blatant racism—Southern racism—is the source of America’s social unrest.²¹ Any attempt to question

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²¹ Quoting *The Fire Next Time*, the *Times* article briefly compares Northern and Southern attitudes towards blacks: “Northerners never think about them, whereas Southerners are never really thinking of anything else”; The article’s use of Baldwin’s quote stratifies White racist behaviors, seemingly suggesting that Northern attitudes are more tolerable because they manifest less violently. Connor’s tactics are therefore highlighted as

Whiteness is avoided, neatly ensconcing the White problem within the over-zealousness behavior of the Southerners that Bill Connor is supposed to represent. In a 1963 televised interview, Baldwin posits that the Civil Rights Movement is “the most significant, the most important, the most loaded demonstration to free Americans that has ever happened in this country.”²² The sit-ins, demonstrations and protests conducted by African Americans forced the White majority to confront the brutal conditions in which Southern Blacks were forced to live. It was Baldwin’s belief that if White America could see beyond the limits of their Whiteness, they could begin to question the paradox inherent in the US as “the leader of the free world while there are 20 million captive people living within its borders.”²³ The Civil Rights Movement forced America from the North and South to recognize the mistreatment of African Americans within the segregation scheme. The invisibilization of a coherent White identity renders it difficult to pinpoint White power and the institutionalized structures which guarantee its proliferation. In essence, the Movement made Whites recognize, possibly for the first time, their own Whiteness. Baldwin’s writings are an intermediary between this threshold of Whiteness and the dehumanizing social processes of racialization, racism and racial segregation on both sides of the color line.

After the acclaimed success of Baldwin’s first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) Baldwin was expected to follow in the tradition of Black writers who only wrote about Black Subjects. However, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956)—Baldwin’s second novel—shocked many critics with its treatment of exclusively White characters and unapologetic portrayal of same-sex relationships. Although the same-sex relationship between American David and his Italian lover Giovanni often eclipses attention given to the novel, scholars such as Marlon B. Ross

unacceptable White racist behavior. The article fails to articulate the relationship between the magazine’s White readership and the callous brutality Connor demonstrated in Birmingham.

²² “Civil Rights 1963 – James Baldwin and Marlon Brando” [YouTube video], August 28 1963, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjZBZxPk4Pc>> [Accessed 26 October 2019].

²³ David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: First Arcade, 1994), 187.

have recognized its critiques on American Whiteness demonstrating that “the color dilemma is mapped onto the question of same-sex desire” in the novel.²⁴

A constant in Baldwin’s work is his commitment to ending the destructive power that Whiteness yields over the world. *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) describes the symbiotic relationship between White power, manifested through anti-Black racism and the justice system, illustrated in the harassment Fonny and Tish experience throughout the novel by a White policeman who, ultimately, manipulates a victim of sexual violence into accusing Fonny of rape. In *Another Country* (1964), Mr. Ellis—Ida Scott’s White, music producer—; the John who propositions Rufus Scott for sex in exchange for food; and interracial couple Rufus and Leona’s codependent and mutually destructive relationship attest to the violent, psychosexual dimension of White power, a term I take to describe the European and Euro-American tradition of shaping the world into a Eurocentric image. Notwithstanding, this definition neither implies a consensus on what such an image should look like nor that this image is based on how Whites see themselves. Rather it suggests an intrinsic relationship between Whiteness and “the idea of ‘born to rule’ or ‘standard by which all others are judged’ or ‘grid through which all others should be perceived.’”²⁵ Placing Baldwin’s writings (both fiction and essays) as well as his political involvement within the context of the Civil Rights Movement allows for a richer, more in depth understanding of his literary and ideological trends that took place from the beginning of the Movement through the 1970’s. These trends “[exceed] the sociopolitical themes and racial characterizations expected in black expressive writing”²⁶ during the era. The shift in his late fiction, I believe, is directly connected to how Whiteness and, more specifically, White power adapted to the rapidly changing social politics of the 1950’s-1970’s. In the following

²⁴ Marlon B. Ross, “White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality,” *James Baldwin Now* ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 33.

²⁵ Roger Hewitt, “Seeing Whiteness through the Blizzard: Issues in Research in White Communities,” *Athanos*, n. 10 (2007), 41-50.

²⁶ Michelle Elam, “Introduction: Baldwin’s Art,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 4.

section, I place Baldwin's social and literary engagement within the Civil Rights Movement, focusing mainly on how Baldwin's vision of human rights differs from that of such figureheads as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. In the main, I redefine the word integration in Baldwinian terms which is the acceptance of peoples on moral terms who are placed in specific social categories used to maintain White, hetero-normative power.

Scholarly work on the Civil Rights Movement often focuses on Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's leadership and participation, both King and Malcolm X representing two diverging and very polemic ideologies on how to confront America's race problem. Indeed, King used the emerging influence of television and non-violent protest to highlight the injustice and immorality of racial segregation and White supremacy, in hopes that the US government would feel forced to intervene. Malcolm X, on the other hand, began as a separationist who believed that African Americans should attain freedom from subjugation and White aggression by way of, but not limited to, reactionary violence and economic independence through a Black-based economy. However, Baldwin's ideology lied somewhere in the middle, preferring integration to segregation, like King. Though as Robert Pfeffer points out, "[Baldwin] was never comfortable with the term [integration],"²⁷ which for Baldwin was essentially a question of African Americans being able to go where they wished.

King's brand of civil disobedience has garnered admiration and notoriety. In the main, this is due to his sermons and speeches on brotherhood and his unwavering belief that non-violent protest is the key to achieving legal equality. King believed that non-violent civil disobedience and protest "[created] a tension in the mind" which would "[...] create the kind of tension in society that will help [White] men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the

²⁷ Robert Pfeffer, "The Fire This Time: James Baldwin and the Civil Rights Movement," *Kaleidoscope*, <<https://leo.stcloudstate.edu/kaleidoscope/volume4/fire.html>> [accessed on February 15, 2020].

majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.”²⁸ King expected reactionary violence from Southern authorities, counting on media coverage to garner support, by way of sympathy, from Whites on the plight of Southern Blacks. A large part of King’s success is, arguably, due to his acceptance by White America. Notwithstanding, the peaceful marches and protests in both Alabama and Birmingham were condemned as “extreme” by the White Christian community from whom King hoped to garner support on the grounds that segregation was a societal evil. Nonetheless, King is taught, today, as the figurehead of justice and the American spirit. Contrary to Malcolm X and Baldwin, however, King does not attack the institution of Whiteness, itself. Instead, he focuses on the injustice and demoralizing nature of segregation, highlighting at the same time contradictions between White discourse of “patience” and inaction on the part of White communities.

In a 1968 interview with *Esquire* magazine, Baldwin asserted that “White [...] is not a color” but, rather, “an attitude” to which one prescribes, a conclusion Malcolm X also shared some years previously.²⁹ What Baldwin deems as “White,” I call, here, “Whiteness,” a term which considers less skin color but, rather, a set of beliefs and attitudes shared by people who are racialized as White. It is also worth noting that although Baldwin asserts that “black is a condition” of Whiteness, Malcolm X considers that Black is also an attitude, though he does not elaborate on his statement. That said, we can assume that Malcolm X is referring to the passive tactics employed in the Movement to obtain equal rights. Furthermore, where Malcolm X sees Whites as irredeemable—believing that segregation was a better option for Black progress—, Baldwin believed that White America could be saved and demands that Whites call into question their racial attitudes that help shape their perception of themselves as White and construct how they understand world. Only in doing so can they have the possibility to

²⁸ Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1963, vol. 212, no. 2, 78-88.

²⁹ James Baldwin, “James Baldwin: How to Cool It,” *Esquire*, July 1968, <<https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a23960/james-baldwin-cool-it>> [Accessed on December 19th, 2019].

comprehend that the country's self-image is fabricated from a cohesive, yet fragile image of the country as a White nation. This attitude, however, can only exist if White America has complete faith in it, and in the process ignores all evidence to the contrary. For Baldwin, White America's faith in such beliefs is the pillar upon which the Nation stands, giving rise to the nationwide protests and demonstrations during the era. The millions of non-White, American lives, Baldwin observes, constitute the evidence which contradicts the myth of the country as White. Therefore, the Civil Rights Movement was not merely a call to end *de jure* racial discrimination, but also signified the inevitable downfall of White power.

The violence to which protesters were subjected attests to the country's desire to maintain a White hegemony, one which requires that non-Whites remain at the periphery. Baldwin knew all too well that such ideologies could no longer hold ground, that Blacks would sooner or later revolt against their subjugation. The US was not only fighting wars abroad but one at home. The war on the moral implications of segregation seemed it would tear the country apart. When asked how the Nation might be saved, Baldwin pointed out the pervasive nature of the "Negro problem": "It's in the social fabric [...] it's everything [...]. The first step has to be in the American conscious. The American white republic has to ask itself why it was necessary for them to invent the 'Nigger.'"³⁰ On a personal level Baldwin knew all too well about the Negro Problem. After having spent some time as the "token"³¹ Black messenger at a leftist paper. In New York, Baldwin was eager to demonstrate his prowess as a writer. In 1944, at the age of twenty-two, he secured a job as a book reviewer for *The New Leader*, understanding that for the publication "the color of [his] skin made [him] automatically an expert"³² on the Negro Problem:

³⁰ James Baldwin, "Civil Rights 1963 – James Baldwin and Marlon Brando" [Youtube video] < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjZBZxPk4Pc> > [Accessed: 3 July 2023].

³¹ David Leeming, *James Baldwin: a Biography* (New York: First Arcade Edition, 2015 [1994]).

³² James Baldwin, "Autobiographical Notes," *Notes of a Native Son*, 5.

One of the difficulties about being a Negro writer [...] is that the Negro problem is written about so widely. The bookshelves groan under the weight of information, and everyone therefore considers himself informed. And this information, furthermore, operates usually...to reinforce traditional attitudes. Of traditional attitudes there are only two—For or Against—and I, personally, find it difficult to say which attitude has caused me the most pain. I am speaking as a writer; from a social point of view. I am perfectly aware that the change from ill-will to good-will, however motivated, however imperfect, however expressed, is better than no change at all.³³

Baldwin expresses the business of the writer to uncover the political and social implications of the lives to whom he hopes to give meaning. Baldwin continues:

But it is part of the business of the writer—as I see it—to examine attitudes, to go beneath the surface, to tap the source. From this point of view the Negro problem is nearly inaccessible. It is not only written about so widely; it is written about so badly. It is quite possible to say that the price a Negro pays for becoming articulate is to find himself, at length, with nothing to be articulate about.³⁴

Baldwin's response suggests that to answer the Negro question necessitates that Whites reflect on their past, present and future, going beyond the superficiality of post-WWII, middle class, White identity that unifies, conforms and alienates the country. Baldwin observes, however, that "[i]n the context of the Negro problem neither whites nor blacks, for excellent reasons of their own, have the faintest desire to look back."³⁵ Yet, it is the past "that makes the present coherent."³⁶ Baldwin's message confronts this idea of the Negro problem as a self-containing entity that exists separately from the White, social sphere. Rather, he starkly suggests that the Negro problem is a byproduct of the project of Whiteness, created so that the idea of a White republic could exist. Whiteness and the Negro problem are, therefore, symbiotic, one unable to exist without the other. At present, I offer a brief review of scholarship in Critical Whiteness Studies, thus far.

³³ Ibid., 6-7.

³⁴ Ibid, 7.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Overview of Critical Whiteness Studies

Literary expressions of the African American experience often include inquiries on the meaning, function and effects of Whiteness. Critical Whiteness Studies has developed as an area of academic and research inquiry, dedicated to the study of White identities as objects of critical study. Two things make Whiteness a difficult object of study: (1) its adaptability; (2) the ability of Whites to disavow participation in its maintenance, while benefiting from its existence. Writers such as James Baldwin, W.E.B. Dubois, Frederick Douglas, Franz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Ida B. Wells and Richard Wright take analytical approaches to describing Whiteness from the Black gaze as an act of emancipation and resistance.

François Bernier's *Nouvelle division de la terre*³⁷ (1684) is often credited as the beginning of scientific inquiries on the existence of distinct races in the human species. Contemporarily, Bernier (1625-1688) is better known for being a French physician and traveler who remains famous for his travel writings which chronicle his long stints in Indian and South-East Asia. *Nouvelle division de la terre* is an accumulation of Bernier's observations, offering a categorization of the human species based on biological instead of religious terms, as Siep Stuurman notes that "neither the sons of Noah nor the Lost Tribes of Israel have any role to play in his account of world population."³⁸ Bernier divides the world population into four separate categories: (1) The "first" race; (2) "The African negroes"; (3) "The East and Northeast Asian race"; (4) "The Lapps." Admittedly, this schema differs drastically from our modern conception of race. However, Stuurman observes that "[t]he major axis of difference

³⁷ "A New Division of the Earth"

³⁸ Siep Stuurman, "François Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 50 (Autumn, 2000), 2.

is between the ‘first’ race and the Africans, and here Bernier surely anticipates later racial discourse.”³⁹

By “later racial discourse,” Stuurman refers to the racial binary— between the “first race” (White) and “African Negroes” (Black)—, which influenced the creation of racial narratives during the slave trade, and, centuries later, gave rise to the racially biased laws that created the *per jure* segregation in the American South and de facto segregation in the North. Although Stuurman points out that Bernier’s racial schema was not racially motivated, he also acknowledges that the roots of modern racial thought “can be firmly located in the intellectual world of the late seventeenth century.”⁴⁰ I evoke Bernier’s essay to pinpoint a global shift that began in the mid to late 1600’s, a shift which originated in Europe and spread throughout the world, planting the seeds of racial ideologies as biological evidence for White superiority.

At the height of France’s colonial influence, the First Minister of State Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) established the French West Indian Company (1664-1674) and introduced the *Code Noir* (1685) to regulate the slave trade in French territories; in South Asia, diplomatic missions resulted in trading outposts in Siam; French missionaries wandered as far as China, Japan and Tonkin to expand France’s trading influence. Of course, France was not the only Western country to express colonial ambitions. Under the Oldenburg Monarch, Denmark and Norway established the Danish West Indian Company in 1671 which brought African slaves to the islands of Saint Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix. Although the Dano-Norwegian crown abolished the practice in 1792, slavery on the islands continued until 1848 due to heightening fears of slave revolts. It is important to pay attention to legality when discussing slavery and legal rights, since, although legal statutes present “a body of ideological and moral thinking that both categorizes people in the essence of their being and defines relations between

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

people as being free and holding rights, or being enslaved and having others holding rights,”⁴¹ it does not always smoothly translate into practice. Let us take for example the island of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) which experienced a brief period of freedom in 1794, when France abolished slavery during the height of the French revolution. England quickly employed troops to invade the Island, as it was one of the most lucrative colonies at the time but failed in its endeavors. In the mid-19th century, France attempted to regain control of Haiti through government sponsored genocide. The idea was to exterminate the island’s inhabitants and import new African slaves. Haiti managed to resist multiple attacks throughout the century and ultimately gained independence by agreeing to pay France, Germany and the US indemnities for their lost earnings. Although in the centuries that followed, the ways in which the US indoctrinates and categorizes racial difference has become unique to the country due to numerous social, environmental, economic and religious necessities, there is no doubt that America’s race problem is a uniquely European invention, which has heavily influenced the contours of the West’s intellectual and artistic life.

In scholarship, the past two decades have witnessed an increased interest in Critical Whiteness Studies. In *Faulkner and Whiteness* (2011) editor Jay Watson asks: “After all, in a society whose central legal, social, and political institutions are still controlled largely by whites [...] what do we accomplish by [...] putting whites in the proverbial spotlight?”⁴² The book responds to Watson’s inquiry with engaging contributions from Deborah Barker, Joh N. Duval, Betina Entzmigner, Taylor Hagood and Baldwin scholar Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, to name a few. The collection explores the vast space that is the literary imagination of Faulkner, including how the marble faun has led to the intertwined discussion between “imperial power”

⁴¹ Baz Lecocq and Eric Komlavi Hahonou, “Introduction: Exploring Post-Slavery in Contemporary Africa,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 48. No. 2 (2015), 186.

⁴² Jay Watson, “Introduction,” *Faulkner and Whiteness*, ed. Jay Watson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), vii.

and “cigar-store Indian” in such works as *Soldiers’ Pay* (1926), *Mosquitoes*(1927), *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and “Black Music” (1934).⁴³ The essays explore the paradoxes and conflicts of interest Faulkner’s works demonstrate, strategically positioning the writer as a stakeholder in Whiteness. His works explore his “preoccupation with white deviance, dysfunction, and decline,”⁴⁴ in the context of racial passing and queered desires in *Light in August*, to how Jim Crow laws “worked to construct and consolidate a white racial identity for economically and/or spatially peripheral whites sampling the new goods, services and pleasures”⁴⁵ in movie houses.

E. Lâle Demirtürk’s *The Contemporary African American Novel: Multiple Cities, Multiple Subjectivities, and Discursive Practices of Whiteness in Everyday Urban Encounters* (2012) discusses the ideal of normative racialized boundaries of American Whiteness in urban spaces. Demirtürk investigates such novelists as Walter Mosly, John Edgar Wideman, Percival Everett and Martha Southgate (to name a few), to show how the interracial relationships of their characters suggest a newly forming discourses on “how instances of racialization are generated through discursive practices of whiteness in the everyday life in interracial social encounters.”⁴⁶ However, Demirtürk’s work works within the Black-White paradigm to show how White characters process the loss of certain privileges associated with their Whiteness, provoked when “blacks engage with cultural ‘border crossing’ by performing whiteness as a strategic challenge to transform prevailing dominant [...] notions of authority and power enacted by white individuals [...]”⁴⁷ Demirtürk contextualizes this racial “border crossing” in the rise of Barack Obama (2009-2017), the US’s first African American president, who challenged preconceived beliefs of racial performance established in the George W. Bush era

⁴³ Ibid., xxi

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., xxvi.

⁴⁶ E. Lâle Demirtürk, *The Contemporary African American Novel* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2012), xix

⁴⁷ Ibid.

(2001-2009). Demirtürk observes that Obama invited Americans to reconsider what constitutes Whiteness and Blackness, or safety and threat, not simply because Bush is white or Obama is black, but because the ways Obama performs his blackness challenges the “whiteness of Bush’s politics.”⁴⁸

Edited by George Yancy, *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (2012) takes a Christological approach to understanding Whiteness, juxtaposing the church and notions of “home” to investigate how Whiteness informs Christianity to create spaces of White supremacy and Black alienation. The book explores how White Christian congregants engage with publicly shared discourses on racial inequality, in a White supremacist society. It goes from suggesting that Whiteness is an existential threat to Christianity to exploring how “the spectacle of human suffering [in the North American media spectacle] is a re-inscription of social roles of race, gender, and class dominance and subordination,” using political theology to implore White Christians to be active participants in social change, instead of passive observers.⁴⁹

In Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance (2014), Faedra Chatard Carpenter explores how African American artists perform Whiteness in their works. By this I mean how works such as Douglas Turner Ward’s *Day of Absence* (1965), Lydia Diamond’s stage adaption of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and the television series *Chappelle’s Show* use “whiteface performances that animate” discussions surrounding how Whiteness continues to dominate social and artistic discourses. Carpenter uses the term “Whiteface” to “examine both textual tropes and embodied enactments of whiteness [...]”⁵⁰ She dedicates her work to

⁴⁸ Ibid., xi.

⁴⁹ George Yancy, “Introduction: Framing the Problem,” *Christianity and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, ed., George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13.

⁵⁰ Faedra Chatard Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), 9.

both scholars and practitioners of performance art “to reconsider and redirect the various ways in which racialized identities are constituted in contemporary art and everyday life.”⁵¹

The Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness (2022) offers a refreshing post-colonial/decolonial lens to understanding Whiteness from a global perspective. Although the work is not the first inquiry into the global impact of industrial coloniality, it contributes to “re-historicising and re-spatialising the study of bodies and identities in the world system of coloniality.”⁵² Included in the textbook-length handbook are contributions from such prominent scholars of Critical Whiteness Studies as Arun Saldanha whose chapter “Emerging Whiteness in Early-Modern India: A Nietzschean reading of Jan Huygen van Linschoten,” discusses the emergence of Whiteness in 19th century Goa, India, using “a materialist ontology” to “shift our sensibilities towards [a historically and spatially expansive intervention] by bringing us right into contact with the lived practices of the people making ‘early whiteness’ [...]”⁵³ The book’s commitment to the theorization of lived experiences surrounding being White and experiencing the effects of Whiteness in a global context makes for compelling reading. One way the book manages to achieve this is by challenging the ideological line between how scholars theorize Whiteness against “lived experiences.”⁵⁴ In this spirit, Bernard Matolino’s “Curtailling Imagination: Modern African Philosophy’s struggle against Whiteness,” challenges the idea of an homogenous African philosophy, arguing that “a contemporary insistence that seeks to assert African philosophy by setting it up against whiteness as vacuous ideology and epistemology traps African philosophy in circuitous protest thought.”⁵⁵ Amanprett Ahluwalia’s “‘The Feeling in My Chest’: Unblocking Space for People

⁵¹ Ibid., 5

⁵² *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, eds., Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen (New York: Routledge, 2022).

⁵³ Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen, “Preface,” *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, xxii.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xxiii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

of Colour in Critical Whiteness Studies,” compliments the respective works of Saldanha and Matolino, by using her lived experience as “Sikh woman of Punjabi descent” whose “love of [her] life is a white German man”⁵⁶ to challenge normative approaches to discussing the field of Critical Whiteness Studies, “to enable conversations that reflect the intricacies of both working and living towards racial justice.”⁵⁷ Likewise, other scholarly works have appeared during the writing of this thesis; Reni Eddo-Loge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2018), Carol Anderson’s *White Race: The Truth about Our Racial Divide* (2020) and Ella Myers’s *The Gratifications of Whiteness: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Enduring Rewards of Anti-Blackness* (2022) have also offered new observations the prevalence of racial ideology. These works highlight the enduring effects of racial ideology on the world and demonstrate an enduring commitment to social justice and racial equality.

The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin uses Critical Whiteness Studies methodologies to focus on how Whiteness intersects with gender, class, geographical location, history and nationalism. Baldwin conceives Whiteness as a European invention, pivotal to the cohesion of American identity and nationhood. Through the 17th to 19th century, European expansion through Africa, Asia and the Americas signified a major, ideological shift in how Western European powers understood their position in the world. Although such countries as France, England and The Netherlands were in direct competition to spread their influence, the codes, treaties and laws which governed the slave system of Africans were the first steps in the construction of a coherent White identity. Europe established its global foothold through the assignation of an inferior racial identity to those peoples who inhabited the territories it wished to exploit, a process called racialization. Following Steve

⁵⁶ Amanpreet Ahluwalia, “‘The Feeling in my Chest’: Unblocking Space for people of colour in critical whiteness studies,” *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, eds. Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen, xxii.

⁵⁷ Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen, “Preface,” *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, xxiii.

Martinot, I define racialization as “[t]he process through which White Society has obstructed and co-opted differences in bodily characteristics and made them modes of hierarchical social categorization.”⁵⁸ The prevalence of racialization was not a byproduct of European expansion but, rather, served as scientific justification for the economic exploitation of their extra-European territories, against the prevailing ideologies of Western Christianity, and, in the post-WWII era, shaped the contours of political and economic allegiances.

I designated the term “West” or “Western” in reference to what Edward Saïd calls “Europe, a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans.” In the context of defining what Europe designates as “the Orient,” Saïd pinpoints the primary function of “The West” as a signifier of cultural meaning, to create a sense of sameness, distinguished from the “difference,” or, rather, inferior attributes Europe associates with non-Europeans regions. Saïd writes: “indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.”⁵⁹ Therefore, hegemony and otherness are what fundamentally characterize the West from other regions. Of course, the term “hegemony” refers not only to perceived common physical attributes like skin-color but also the ordering of societal structures, cultures and public and private institutions. The sciences and life of the mind have also attributed to the construction of “otherness,” which, in turn, solidified a cohesive yet “flexible” identity:

Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instance of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Steve Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 180.

⁵⁹ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003 [1978]), 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Additionally, the “scientific logic” of Oriental difference is greatly influenced by “a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.”⁶¹ That Said is careful not to reduce the West’s relationship to “some nefarious ‘Western’ imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world,” validates Baldwin’s observation that Whiteness in America was used as a national building tool. Rather, Said defines “the Orient” in terms of geographical location, an intertwined history, shared personal and political desires and the prominent ‘texts’ it has produced, which have influenced the social, economic and political trajectory of the region.”⁶²

Indeed, the US’s victory and subsequent ascendancy onto the world stage, after WWII, meant that the rising country’s military, economic and technological advancements made it possible to replace the former European empires, which were now in debt, rebuilding their war-torn countries and dealing with insurrections in their colonial territories. Not only did the US replace such countries as France and Britain but it also “approached it as France and Britain once did.”⁶³ Although the US has reproduced previous traditions of conquering Asia, it has also found novel ways to exploit the region’s resources, racing “Arabs” and “Islam” for economic exploitation and creating a cohesive consensus, since the 1970’s, on what I interpret as “the Arab menace.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² Ibid., 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 285-286.

Overview of Chapters

The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin is broken down thematically into four chapters, offering a close reading analysis to develop such themes as the innocence of Whiteness, historicity, gender and sexuality and transatlanticism. In doing so, I demonstrate how Baldwin's early fiction works together to offer a multidimensional critique of post-WWII Whiteness. I believe that looking at these works against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement not only clarifies Baldwin's political engagement in the Movement, but also reveals the pattern in literary strategies Baldwin employs which invites readers to reconsider their identities against the recurring issues of racism and anti-Black violence in the United States.

Chapter One begins with a discussion on "White Innocence," to support the hypothesis that *Giovanni's Room* describes the psychological impact the post-war demands of Whiteness have on White American David, Baldwin's protagonist. I argue that (homo)sexuality is a discursive tool which helps unpin the *naturalness* of American Whiteness. I evoke the term "innocence" to articulate the psychological remove David develops to distance himself from how his actions destroy the lives of those around him. I argue that Baldwin describes innocence as a product of Whiteness, which protects Whites against the realities of anti-Black racism. Furthermore, I highlight the paradox inherent in White innocence which creates what Baldwin calls "a moral monster." Furthermore, I discuss how the American suburbs became a metaphorical Garden of Eden which allowed Whites to disassociate themselves physically from the US's "race problem." Like White innocence, however, this Eden becomes a prison of moral ambiguity. I go on to discuss how Baldwin uses doubt as a first step to understanding oneself beyond the social matrix of Whiteness. Lastly, I describe how Baldwin uses doubt in political terms to influence Attorney General Robert Kennedy to change his stance on Civil Rights

matters, leading President Kennedy to become an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement.

Chapter Two describes how *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resists the penchant of Whiteness for historical revisionism. I explore how Baldwin's novel recreates the process of history writing, to challenge the US's perception of the past and present in relation to race relations. By looking at the genealogy of the Grimes family, I show how Baldwin's first novel describes Whiteness as a spectral figure which haunts the contours of Black life. I use "White spectrality" as a discursive tool which counters myths on American exceptionalism and beliefs that race is an isolated problem rather than a staple of what it means to be American. I evoke the works of Toni Morrison and bell hooks to demonstrate how Baldwin and other writers employ "White Spectrality" to describe Whiteness as a ghastly figure in the Black spaces Baldwin describes. In doing so, I articulate how White violence lingers along the physical and psychological periphery of Black life to show the hypocrisy of the American North. Lastly, I argue that Baldwin uses memory—photographs, reflections and images—to articulate how remembrance recuses the past from political necessity.

My third chapter discusses how Whiteness impacts post-war perceptions of sexuality and gender in *Another Country*. I argue that each relationship in the novel presents a specific critique on how Whiteness informs the relationships. Specifically, I argue that racialized sexual fantasies surrounding Whiteness impact each couple. Following the work of Judith Butler, I use such terms as "racial intelligibility" to articulate how Baldwin demands that his characters strive to understand each other, beyond the constructed identities norms, informed heavily by ideologies surrounding the place and role of Whiteness. Furthermore, Baldwin describes how Whiteness informs relationships and offers advice on how to go beyond the limited expressions of selfhood and love that racial ideologies impose.

The final chapter adopts a transatlantic perspective to understanding Baldwin's global antiracist philosophy, which he calls "world community." I offer an analysis of Baldwin's short story "This Morning, this Evening, So Soon," to highlight the relationship between African Americans and the White diaspora. Baldwin focuses on the North African Subject to show the transatlantic relationship between (White) American power and the power of the West. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss the novella alongside Nabile Farès's *Un passager du l'occident* (1971), offering a comparative interpretation of the ways the two works describe experiential knowledges as crucial to the type of antiracist transatlantic cooperation the two writers advocate.

Chapter 1: The Innocence of Whiteness in *Giovanni's Room*

In silence, we have spent our years watching the ofays, trying
to understand them, on the principle that you have
a better chance coping with the known
than with the unknown.
- Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*

1.1 White Innocence

James Baldwin's contribution to Critical Whiteness Studies, since the publication of such noteworthy works as *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), has been his insight into the fragility and destructiveness of American Whiteness. An interdisciplinary field of study, CWS has predominately dealt, since the 1990's, with the epistemology of Whiteness—or the intergenerational origins of Whiteness' contemporary conceptualization—, its penchant for historical revisionism and the power dynamic between White identities and anti-Blackness.⁶⁵ However, Baldwin's writings go a step further, drawing particular attention to the psychological effects of Whiteness on his White characters. In 1963, as America was engulfed in Civil Rights struggles, Baldwin published *The Fire Next Time*, in which he confronts with poignant clarity White America's moral ambiguity towards the racially motivated injustices Blacks faced:

I accuse my country and my countrymen and for which neither I nor time 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 [...] But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.⁶⁶

In Baldwinian terms, White innocence “protect[s] [one] against reality, or experience, or change, and [succeeds] in placing beyond the reach of corruption values [one] prefers not to

⁶⁵ Simon Clarke and Steven Garner, “Whiteness Studies in the Context of the USA,” *White Identities: A Critical Sociological Approach* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 15.

⁶⁶ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, found in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1963]), 292.

examine.”⁶⁷ To be clear, innocence is not a construct of Whiteness but, rather, an effect which transcends modes of “prepubescent or prelapsarian [conditionality],”⁶⁸ acting, rather, as a hiding place where one “won’t be hurt, in which [one] won’t have to think about [oneself] and in which [one] won’t have to change [or] be responsible for [one’s] neighbor.”⁶⁹ Baldwinian innocence attests to the fragility of Whiteness and the White consciousness, accounting for America’s unwillingness to acknowledge where it came from or confront its crimes against humanity, both past and present, by “protecting beliefs about the character of American society from the countervailing evidence of American history.”⁷⁰ In effect, White innocence creates a uniquely White sense of reality, further disassociating Whiteness from non-White historiographies to protect false historical narratives that have constructed White identity.

A contradicting tale of polarized worlds, Baldwin’s particular status as a Black writer has allowed him to see beyond the empty claims of innocence post-war, White America made when faced with the experiences of marginalized peoples. In this sense, innocence acts as a mask behind which attention is deflected from the absence of action or responsibility. White innocence, thus, becomes a marker of self-identification, forged in voluntary ignorance of the historical realities which explain the origin of Whiteness and White power. Baldwinian innocence goes beyond ignorance, however, describing a limited cognizance which molds the *self* and a world viewpoint, reified by the veil that upholds one’s sense of reality.

In such a situation, Black resilience has necessitated since the Antebellum years lucidity in the face of a *White* cognition which has necessitated the creation of the “Negro problem” to

⁶⁷ James Baldwin, “A Question of Identity,” found in *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 98.

⁶⁸ Michele Elam, “Introduction: Baldwin’s Art,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.

⁶⁹ James Baldwin and Mavis Nicholson, “Civil Rights: James Baldwin interview, Mavis on Four [YouTube video], 2 February 1987, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Wht4NSf7E4&t=689s>> [Accessed August 21st 2020].

⁷⁰ Lawrie Balfour, “The Appeal of Innocence: Baldwin, Walzer, and the Bounds of Social Criticism,” *The Review of Politics*, vol. 61. no. 3 (1999), 374.

deflect attention from what Baldwin calls the “White problem.” In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin appropriates W.E.B Du Bois’s “color line” in his assertion that the history of Black experiences in America may be reappropriated to shatter America’s false consciousness and morally guide the US towards its promise of freedom and democracy:

‘The problem of the twentieth century,’ wrote W.E.B. Du Bois around sixty years ago, ‘is the problem of the color line.’ A fearful and delicate problem, which compromises, when it does not corrupt, all the American efforts to build a better world—here, there, or anywhere. It is for this reason that everything white Americans think they believe in must now be reexamined.⁷¹

African Americans possess a unique perspective on Whiteness which Du Bois notoriously calls “double-consciousness,” a term the historian uses to answer the unspoken question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Du Bois observes:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.⁷²

Du Bois’s “double consciousness” has been both a pivotal and a decisive tool for scholarly research in such fields as Black Studies, Queer Studies and Gender Studies. It has helped to address and formulate into words the internal conflict, provoked by identity politics, that a minority group experiences in an oppressive society. The term describes how Blacks understand themselves through a socially constructed identity conceived from the gaze of the White majority. Baldwin’s use of Du Bois’s philosophy articulates this unique perspective Blacks have on Whiteness. Put simply, how Whites perceive Black life says more about Whites than it does Blacks. As such, Du Bois’s “second-sight” allows Blacks to understand Whiteness better than Whites understand it themselves. Therefore, Du Bois’s “double consciousness” explains and supports Baldwin’s own observation on White innocence, that the “Negro problem” is a White one.

⁷¹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 345.

⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1903), 5.

As such, “double consciousness” and “White innocence” represent two sides of the same metaphorical coin. Du Bois’s “No true self-consciousness” is congruous with Baldwin’s White innocence. Although both writers refer to seeming antithetical sides of the “color line,” both terms work in harmony to describe the interrelatedness of America’s racial identities. They articulate a false consciousness from which the identities of all Americans suffer. These *forces* are the psychological mechanisms, the specific modes of articulation used to render intelligible Du Bois’s racial “color line,” and in order to effect meaningful change, these forces must be dealt with both internally and externally, with genuine effort. Even though the social, political and economic contexts into which Baldwin and Du Bois were born differ in many ways—Du Bois lived in the Jim Crow era and Baldwin’s first novel appeared only a year before the Supreme Court’s *Brown vs Board of Education* decision—their race-centric experiences evoked the inner stirrings of emotions, the catalyst, that shaped their lifelong vocations as writers, activists, and intellectuals. In the following, I offer an overview of scholarly works which explore White innocence in Baldwin’s work.

In recent years, scholarly work on Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies has given needed attention to the incongruity of White innocence and racial equality. In “‘Payin’ One’s Dues’: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin,” (1999), Robert Tomlinson privileges a Jamesian conception of Baldwinian innocence, showing how expatriation and the experience of living abroad challenge unacknowledged truths about one’s private life, that inner world that longs to be expressed.⁷³ In “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America,” Joel Alden Schlosser acknowledges Baldwin’s critiques on White innocence by suggesting that the prevailing

⁷³ Robert Tomlinson, “‘Payin’ One’s Dues’: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin,” *African American Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 135-148.

incoherencies inherent in innocence “[...] describe the product of delusions pervasive in American life, the resulting incongruity between mythic innocence and reality, between the illusions by which most people live and the actual conditions of collective life,” reiterating Baldwin’s claim that “such incoherence is also born from inarticulacy about one’s past and how it has formed the present.”⁷⁴ Schlosser’s research project sheds new light on Baldwin’s critiques on Whiteness, situating Baldwin’s work within “a kind of Socratic examination transposed to the context of racial domination and white supremacy.”⁷⁵ Schlosser suggests that by centering Baldwin’s political thought around “the history of race and white supremacy as the indispensable condition of any plausible vision of American democracy,” the writer “provid[es] theoretical resources for challenging power inequalities related to race, gender, sexuality, and class.”⁷⁶ Baldwin’s narratives carry to the 20th century a desperately-needed “practice of *examination*: the interrogation of self and world to recognize the delusions and blindness that contribute to persist structures of oppression.”⁷⁷ Though Schlosser recognizes that Baldwin’s *Another Country* contributes to this “interrogation of self and world,”⁷⁸ the scholar also acknowledges that the knowledge gained through this critical examination of the self may not suffice to curtail White innocence.

In the same spirit, Lawrie Balfour’s “The Appeal of Innocence: Baldwin, Walzer, and the Bounds of Social Criticism” (1999) focuses on race consciousness to capture the ways that Americans perceive “Whiteness’ and ‘Blackness’ in their everyday encounters.”⁷⁹ To this end, Balfour uses Baldwin’s critiques on Whiteness and race consciousness to articulate the process

⁷⁴ Joel Alden Schlosser, “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 3 (September 2013), 495.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁷⁹ Lawrie Balfour, “The Appeal of Innocence: Baldwin, Walzer, and the Bounds of Social Criticism,” *The Review of Politics*, vol. 61., no., 3 (Summer 1999), 374-375.

of racial meaning. She suggests that Baldwin “urges readers to adopt a stance of self-consciousness about the ways in which their own outlook is informed by racialized assumptions.”⁸⁰ Balfour quotes political theorist Michael Walzer, writing that “the moral world has a lived-in quality, like a home occupied by a single family over many generations, with unplanned additions here and there, and all the available space filled with memory-laden objects and artifacts.”⁸¹ From this account of Walzer’s “moral world,” we can deduce that certain racial laden elements are also carried through this proverbial space, called America. Thus, post-generations’ inherited “objects and artifacts” lose, in time, their points of reference but not their social significance and add, along the way, modifications which respond to contemporary concerns. This makes race consciousness for Whites nearly impossible because the origin of the symbols and signs are lost in a maze of incoherencies.

In *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016), Gloria Wekker offers the most comprehensive examination of White innocence as a pervasive form of White resistance to acknowledging prevailing traditions of anti-Blackness, situating her analysis in the cultural context of the Netherlands, her home country. Wekker views White innocence as a “desired state of being” which is wholly “self-representative,” sentiments which, she argues, explain the Dutch tradition of perceiving the Netherlands as a country of human rights and ignoring its part in both slavery and colonization.⁸² This “self-representative” outlook allows the Dutch to conceive their national identity “as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground [of history and] thus a guiding light to other folks and nations.”⁸³ Like Baldwin, Wekker suggests that White innocence necessitates the erasure of Whiteness itself and, thus, cannot

⁸⁰ Ibid., 375.

⁸¹ Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20.

⁸² Gloria Wekker, “Introduction,” *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke university Press), 16.

⁸³ Ibid., 2.

recognize the historical circumstances which have led to its institutionalization as a pervasive form of power.

Lastly, my research follows Lynn Orilla Scott's claim that "Baldwin wrote against an ideology that reified racial categories insisting that 'white' and 'black' were inventions that oppressed blacks but also imprisoned whites in a false innocence that denied them self-knowledge."⁸⁴ My research focuses on how David's innocence—in relation to his Whiteness—reifies his false sense of reality, making him unable to recognize the promise of love Giovanni offers and his eventual complicity in his lover's death. In this sense, *Giovanni's Room* serves as a microcosm for US race relations. Notwithstanding, the novel's heteronormative paradigm is not merely analogous to the Black-White experience; rather, it is a literary blueprint that maps out how White innocence operates in predominately White spaces and explains the predominance of White characters in the novel.

The relationship between Whiteness and the building of the US is a central concern in Baldwin's works. He understood that Whiteness created, in the 19th and 20th century, a coherent, Anglo-American identity to alleviate interethnic turmoil amongst newly arrived European immigrants and settlers. In the 20th century, newly arrived European immigrants adopted anti-Black attitudes to assimilate into White society. "America became white," Baldwin observes, "because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation."⁸⁵ Baldwin's literary epistemology urges readers to recognize Whiteness as a form of social cohesion, a nationalist experiment, with the distinct function of solidifying nationwide solidarity during moments of social, political and economic crisis.⁸⁶ David's

⁸⁴ Lynn Orilla Scott, *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002) 4.

⁸⁵ James Baldwin, "On Being 'white' and Other Lies," found in *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to be White*, ed. David R. Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1998 1984) 178.

⁸⁶ Admittedly, within the spectrum of Whiteness certain immigrant groups considered themselves whiter than others. Finns, for example, fluctuated between being considered White and non-White, a phenomenon other

description of himself, in *Giovanni's Room*, places strong emphasis on his European heritage: "My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past."⁸⁷ As an inheritor of Whiteness, David defines himself and operates in opposition to undesired values which are associated with Blackness. This conjecture leads to the inevitable conclusion that Whiteness (and David as its defender) "represents the standards to which the country aspires."⁸⁸ The racial aspirations of the US are encompassed in the *American Dream*, a "nightmare" which chillingly defines and limits the US's potential as a leader in freedom and democracy. America's relationship with race displays not the potential but the limits of the term.

In *Giovanni's Room* and "Going to Meet the Man" (1965), Baldwin forces a confrontation with White readers by writing the stories from the perspectives of White protagonists. "In all of [Baldwin's] southern trips," David Leeming argues, "his novelist's instincts had gravitated to the white minds behind the racism he observed. The effects of racism on the white southerners [...] was 'worse' than the effect on their victims, because their souls have been 'destroyed.'"⁸⁹ The various ethno-national populations of Europe who strove for assimilation needed to adopt American Whiteness as a standard: "No one was white before he/she came to America," Baldwin reminds us. "It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country."⁹⁰ The acceptance of White nationalist sentiments engenders the

Nordic groups did not experience. See: *Nordic Whiteness and Migration to the USA: A Historical Exploration of Identity*, eds. Jana Sverdjuk, Terje Mikael Hasle Joranger, Erika Jackson, Peter Kivisto (New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁸⁷ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 221.

⁸⁸ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, found in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1961]), 216.

⁸⁹ David Leeming, *James Baldwin, a Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1994), 249.

⁹⁰ James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies," 178.

rejection of non-Whites in America's democratic process and, therefore, furthers their subjugation.

In "On Being White and Other Lies" (1984), Baldwin writes that, "[t]he crisis of leadership in the white community is remarkable—and terrifying—because there is, in fact, no white community."⁹¹ The absence of a "white community" stems from the rejection of White relationality in favor of hyper-individuality. In other words, Whites refuse to understand themselves as being intimately related to other Whites and to Blacks, choosing instead a social discourse of hyper-individualism that only recognizes the "I" and not the "we" when discussing matters on race. As an argument against hyper-individuality, Baldwin opts for an argument that repositions Whiteness within the relational and historical discourses which have made Whiteness a prevailing social identifier. Yet White cohesion is limiting in its potential because "no community can be based on such a principle [...] no community can be established on so genocidal a lie."⁹² During a talk at Harvard University, Baldwin reacted to a White student's earnest inquiry on the Negro problem, responding, "It's not the Negro problem. It's the white problem. I'm only black, because you *think* you're white."⁹³ The lie is what Baldwin calls "The White Problem," a moral choice which creates "a terrible paradox [in which] those who believe that they could control and define black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves."⁹⁴

Baldwin understood that the Europeans in America had to pay a hefty price to become White: the first being an interdependent relationship between Whiteness and White racism as highlighted in "Going to Meet the Man." That Sheriff Clark needs to imagine he is enacting extreme violence upon the body of a Black man in order to sexually perform with his wife

⁹¹ James Baldwin, "On Being 'White and Other Lies,'" *Essence*, 1984.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ As Quoted in David Leeming's, "The White Problem," *Pen America* (January 8, 2007) [Accessed: 26 July 2021] < <https://pen.org/the-white-problem/> >.

⁹⁴ James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies," 180.

demonstrates an almost obsessive fixation (emotional and sexual) on a perverse vision of Black life. Secondly, the adoption of Whiteness has necessitated that its bearers forgo the experiences, embedded in personal and collective memory, which forced European immigrants to brave the treacherous waters of the Atlantic Ocean. When we allow ourselves to lose the precious teachings that experience offers, we accept ignorance, believing “as even no child believes, in the dream of safety. Because they think they are white, however vociferous they may be and however multitudinous, they are as speechless as Lot’s wife—looking backward, changed into a pillar of salt.”⁹⁵ Baldwin’s writings bear witness to the brutal history of the American empire which lives inside all Americans and sways the course of the nation. Baldwin’s fiction highlights the dangers that ensue when Americans deny themselves self-knowledge, a decision which Baldwin describes as the “renunciation of the personal.”⁹⁶

Baldwin’s retelling of what it means to be American contradicts the Western-centric ideologies that govern the American scene: Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. These myths justify White supremacist ideologies by romanticizing (and glorifying) White America’s crimes against humanity: “White men from Norway,” Baldwin argues, “became white: by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women.”⁹⁷ By repositioning Americanness in the experiential, Baldwin rearticulates what it means to be White within the beauty and terror of an ambivalent humanity as evidenced in human history.

In this respect, Baldwin rejects the moral compass by which America claimed to be guided in the post-War II era, recognizing that any moral stance the country made, both nationally and abroad, was tainted by experiences the country refused to constructively evaluate. Notwithstanding, Baldwin’s oeuvre offers an artistic restitution, visceral and vivid, of

⁹⁵ James Baldwin, “On Being White and Other Lies,” 180.

⁹⁶ David Lemming, 258.

⁹⁷ James Baldwin, “On Being White and Other Lies,” 179.

America's lived experiences, oftentimes addressing his White readership who might otherwise feel a sense of alienation from a history they consider not their own. Baldwin purposefully reframes the dialogue on race to include Whites in the conversation, arguing that racism is not a Black problem but, rather, a White one that necessitates deliberate action by Whites if the US ever hopes to unpen protean forms of anti-Black violence.

1.2 *Giovanni's Room* as a Critique on American Whiteness

Giovanni's Room is a literary blueprint which reconstructs the latent operations of (American) Whiteness and deconstructs the praxis of White innocence, showing how innocence influences the moral compass of David, the novel's White protagonist. Yet despite the avant-garde critiques Baldwin presents, *Giovanni's Room* has traditionally been characterized as raceless, or at best, having racial undertones. This confusion, I believe, stems from the presence of the novel's all-White characters and the European setting: Paris, France. Admittedly, recent research has revisited race in the novel. Mae G. Henderson's "James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*: Expatriation, Racial Drag and Homosexual Panic" (2005) excavates the importance of race in *Giovanni's Room*, offering insights into the connection between the novel and Whiteness, or what she calls "racial drag": "[in the novel], geographical expatriation combines with the literary act of racial expatriation—or what I call "racial drag"—to create a space for the exploration of the homosexual dilemma within and beyond the social and geographic contours of post-World War II America."⁹⁸ Henderson describes the novel as a geographical and racial expatriation or a "literary masquerade."⁹⁹ Henderson's observation suggests, however, that race in the novel is secondary to the homosexual dilemma, that Blackness is an "absent presence" disguised in "racial drag" or "whiteface." As Henderson observes, Baldwin "repositions himself at a site that interrogates the borders and boundaries of nation, gender, and sexuality."¹⁰⁰ However, I agree with Aliyyah I. Abur-Rahma that it is more prudent "not to dismiss the Whiteness of the characters to access their putative Blackness."¹⁰¹ Rather, it is better to focus on how Baldwin considers "the complicated rendering of power

⁹⁸ Mae G. Henderson, "James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*: Expatriation, Racial Drag and Homosexual Panic," *Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 236.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Aliyyah I. Abur-Rahma, "'Simply a Menaced Boy': Analogizing Color, Undoing Dominance in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*," *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 479.

hierarchies that both include and exceed racial difference.”¹⁰² I suggest that the novel’s lack of Black characters gives desperately needed attention to America’s “White problem.”

To describe the novel as having racial overtones is problematic: first, this assumption places the race question secondary to sexuality. Second, it diminishes the emphasis Baldwin puts on exploring America’s “White problem,” at a time when literary and cultural norms meant that (Black and White) writers turned to Blackness as the subject of literary investigation when discussing the prevailing effects of racialization. However, *Giovanni’s Room* is a literary critique whose central preoccupation concerns the internal process of self-alienation brought on by the post-war cultural demands and social norms surrounding Whiteness. Although just as important, the topics of (homo)sexuality and expatriation are present, to force Baldwin’s White protagonist to question how American society limits his possibilities by presenting as natural limited forms of masculinity and sexuality.

The novel’s positive portrayals of homosexual relationships have led some to distance its major themes from the Black experience, reducing homosexuality to a White issue. In the early 1950s, Baldwin was still riding high on the coattails of his first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Notes of a Native Son*, his second book of essays. When Baldwin submitted *Giovanni’s Room*, his publisher was hesitant to accept the novel for publication, because of its positive portrayals of homosexual love, at a time when same-sex attraction was socially unaccepted. As Josep M. Armengol acknowledges, the negative criticism over *Giovanni’s Room* was due, at least partially, to homosexuality’s implicit connection to Whiteness; Baldwin’s explicitly queer characters are White and “a reader already uncomfortable with sexual variance may avoid at least some discomfort by segregating Blackness from same-sex desire.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Joseph M. Armengol, “In the Dark Room: Homosexuality and/as Blackness in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” *Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 673.

If the demographic to which Armengol refers is the Black constituency that hailed *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, which focuses on the Harlem community's relationship with Christianity and the church, the same-sex depictions, indeed, steer from more common representations of Black life. Furthermore, Baldwin did not explicitly depict representations of homosexual love amongst Black characters until *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) and *Just Above My Head* (1979), the former published over ten years after Baldwin introduced readers to the sexually ambiguous David in *Giovanni's Room*.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the assumed connection between homosexuality and Whiteness reinforces the illusion that the novel lacks the race-conscious commitment Baldwin demonstrated in his earlier writings, a commitment which led to his success in the political and literary landscape of the Civil Rights era.

Because the novel's critiques on race (Whiteness) have been widely overshadowed by the question of (homo)sexuality, criticism over David's sexuality is representative of long-Civil Rights era critiques on the novel which sought to imbue Blackness with masculinity and heteronormative desires by focusing on heteronormative-Black, male subjectivity. Herein, I explore the critiques of political activist and writer Eldridge Cleaver, specifically, because his rejection of Baldwin's humanist vision and portrayals of nuanced expressions of racial identity and sexuality exemplifies these misunderstandings which have limited the powerful critiques on race the novel offers. I argue, furthermore, that the absence of Black characters not only draws attention to the "White problem" but also to how Whiteness operates within predominantly White spaces to underline further how race negatively affects Whites as much as Blacks (albeit in different ways and to different degrees). Secondly, I posit that David's performance of his heteronormative identity demonstrates how he internalizes and performs the national experience of Whiteness. Lastly, I show that by placing the novel outside the social and political context of the US, Baldwin makes visible a ubiquitous American form of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Whiteness, rendering describable the pervasive effects race has on David and the other White characters in the novel.

Baldwin explains that the absence of Black characters was a necessary artistic choice to analyze the sexual-moral dilemma inherent in American Whiteness. This would, then, leave room to confront the Black-White binary in later works:

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 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.¹⁰⁵

In the novel, Baldwin discusses the human condition and posits that American Whiteness denies it for the sake of an opaque morality, one which David internalizes and acts upon. David’s sexual ambiguity (or queerness) is, thus, necessary in Baldwin’s exploration of how American Whiteness operates, because it argues against the era’s sexual myth of cultural and moral purity which many artists, activists and intellectuals attempted to debunk. One such attempt is the Kinsey Reports of 1948 and 1953 in which Alfred Kinsey and other scientists “explored the myth of a puritanical America.”¹⁰⁶ The Kinsey crew interviewed over “18,000 white adults,” reporting that “over a third of the men [said] that they had achieved orgasm via a homosexual act.”¹⁰⁷ Although national conversations on sexual diversity began to take hold in public debates, many still considered homosexuality a White issue, and unfortunately the Kinsey Report’s overwhelming emphasis on White subjects did not help. Furthermore, many in the Movement associated heterosexuality with Black masculinity, family and community, which meant that there was no room for novels like *Giovanni’s Room* in the Black struggle.

¹⁰⁵ James Baldwin, *Conversations with James Baldwin*, ed Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1989), 239.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152.

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York: Oxford University Press; 2000) 152.

In *Soul on Ice* (1968), writer and Black nationalist Eldridge Cleaver associates the virtue and virility of heterosexuality with Black masculinity and the source of Black power and describes Baldwin and same-sex desire as a “racial death-wish”¹⁰⁸ for Blacks. Although Baldwin never admitted to being homosexual, the same-sex themes in his work led to increasing speculation surrounding his sexuality and limited his direct involvement in the Movement.¹⁰⁹ And yet, Cleaver’s negative comments on Baldwin derive from presuppositions and the mid-century homophobic views Cleaver expressed in his writings:

[...] many Negro homosexuals, acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man. The cross they have to bear is that, already bending over and touching their toes for the white man, the fruit of their miscegenation is not the little half-white offspring of their dreams but an increase in the unwinding of their nerves—though they redouble their efforts and intake of the white man’s sperm.¹¹⁰

Elsewhere, Cleaver attempts to reconstruct an intersectional praxis between racial domination and sexuality, for example in “Lazarus, Come Forth,” where he muses over American celebrity and poignantly describes “boxing as the virility symbol of the American masses”¹¹¹—but his ultimate rejection of the conspicuous diversity found in human sexuality creates a conceptual blind spot which comes closer to reaffirming the social dominance he attempts to unpin. This is evidenced in his referring to himself as a “stud”¹¹² (a term which glorifies the sexual prowess of men and the *conquistador*-like¹¹³ attitude attributed to men-women sexual relations) in a

¹⁰⁸ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (1968), 103.

¹⁰⁹ In an interview, Baldwin admitted having had affairs with both men and women. He also elucidated that he did not consider himself to be homosexual. Further, scholars Douglas Field and William J. Maxwell analyze the FBI’s surveillance of Baldwin, highlighting their judgement that Baldwin was indeed a homosexual. For further reading see Douglas Friend, “Baldwin’s FBI Files as Political Biography,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 194-210 and William J. Maxwell, *James Baldwin: The FBI File* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2017).

¹¹⁰ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992 [1968]), 133.

¹¹¹ Maxwell Geismar, “Introduction,” *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992 [1968]), 26.

¹¹² Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992 [1968]), 78.

¹¹³ In the Spanish language, the verb *conquistar* (to conquer) also means to seduce.

lucid account of his writing woes in prison, coupled with his opinion that Baldwin's purported homosexuality is a "racial death-wish."

Admittedly, *Soul* was published some twelve years after *Giovanni's Room*. However, Cleaver's comments encompass post-war attitudes on race and sexuality which limited understanding of Baldwin as an artist and activist, prescribing a finite and utilitarian vision of Black art and activism. This vision, argues Mark Schauer, stems from the influence Black intellectuals such as Richard Wright and Malcolm X had on Cleaver while Cleaver was serving time:

That Cleaver's prison tome *Soul on Ice* was in the tradition of Richard Wright's *Native Son* and, especially, Malcolm X's autobiography was evident to critics from the start, even to Cleaver: "I have, so to speak, washed my hands in the blood of the martyr, Malcolm X, whose retreat from the precipice of madness created new room for others to turn about in, and I am now caught up in that tiny space, attempting a maneuver of my own."¹¹⁴

That Wright and Malcolm X influenced Cleaver's writings is not surprising, as both intellectuals respond, respectively, to what Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo describes as a Black masculinity, limited "by the discursive, juridical, and material limits placed on the possibility of black male subjectivity in the racist United States of the 1940s and 1950s."¹¹⁵ By the time *Soul* was published, many of the middle-ground figureheads of the Movement had been assassinated. This left very little room, in the wake of rising Black nationalist ideologies, for the type of intersectional approach *Giovanni's Room* presents. In brief, Cleaver's homophobic rant, in what regards human sexuality and the unlimited potential of the novel as a form of artistic expression, leads many to overlook why *Giovanni's Room* lacks Black characters and displays queer expressions of sex and love. Among Baldwin's novels, I believe that *Giovanni's*

¹¹⁴ Mark Shauer, *Cleaver's Soul on Ice as descended from Malcolm X* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2012), accessed 1 October, 2021. <https://www.grin.com/document/230265>; Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992 [1968]), 95.

¹¹⁵ Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Consuming Malcolm X: Prophecy and Performative Masculinity, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Spring, 1997), 291.

Room offers the most comprehensive assessment on American Whiteness which is carried out through an examination of White innocence. Secondly, where past research has focused, mainly, on how Whiteness and innocence negatively affect Black lives, *Giovanni's Room* illustrates how it impacts Whites American David, by trapping him in a paradox of moral ambiguity and leaving him ill prepared to face the challenges of human life, mainly suffering, death and love.

In *Giovanni's Room*, readers follow the American David in 1950s Paris, after he flees New York to escape the memory of a same-sex experience he has during his teenage years. At the start of the novel, David contemplates the futility of leaving New York, because he could not escape his same-sex desires, his relationship with Giovanni serving as the proof of this failure:

I repent now—for all the good it does—one particular lie among the many lies I've told, told, lived, and believed. This is the lie which I told to Giovanni, but never succeeded in making him believe, that I had never slept with a boy before. I had. I had decided that I never would again. 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—the yard, in the meantime, having grown smaller and the bulldog bigger.¹¹⁶

David rejects his homosexual desires—described in the excerpt as “the bulldog in [his] own back yard”—for the safety of a post-war puritanical morality that characterizes the 1950s and 1960s. Before the Stonewall riots of 1969, gays, lesbians and transgendered people were relegated to the metaphorical closet. Same-sex desires and diversity in sexual expression were limited to heteronormative ideals surrounding marriage and reproduction. “LGBT people were structurally and systematically oppressed in American society,” Marc Stein writes in *Stonewall the Riots* (2019). They were “commonly treated as criminals by law, sinners by religion, diseased by science, defective by business, deviant by popular culture, and faulty by family and friends.”¹¹⁷ As Yasmin Y. DeGout observes, the anti-gay environment of the post-war era

¹¹⁶ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 223.

¹¹⁷ Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 7.

only allowed for same-sex love and desire to manifest in secret. For example, gay men could only meet at informal venues like public toilets, bathhouses only becoming popular post-Stonewall. In “Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni’s Room*,” DeGout connects the failure of David and Giovanni’s relationship as a result of a “tragic failure of a society which produces deviant behavior,”¹¹⁸ asserting that the novel represents the tragedy of same-sex life that Baldwin witnessed in his lifetime. Homosexuals went to desperate lengths to feel some sort of normalcy—to be able to express their sexuality and experience romantic affection and love. Take for example the scandal that hit the White House in the 1960’s. Then Chief of Staff Walter Jenkins had been “arrested with another man [...] and charged with performing ‘indecent gestures’ in a basement restroom of the Y.M.C.A. two blocks from Jenkin’s office in the White House.”¹¹⁹ Jenkins, a married man, felt pressured, like many other gay men of the time to conform to society’s expectations—mainly to marry a woman and have children. Jenkins cruised public restrooms to satisfy his sexual desires. In effect, American society forced Jenkins and other gay men to engage in the behavior it deemed deviant. If the 1950s-1960s US had stressed the normalcy of same-sex relations, there may have been fewer gay men resorting to clandestine avenues for same-sex sexual expression.

In *Giovanni’s Room*, Baldwin superposes the reality of love over the fallacy of public morality, which led Jenkins to lose his job and suffer public humiliation. In such a hostile environment, it is no wonder many gay men hid in the shadows. Baldwin uses the “sexual deviancy” surrounding David’s same-sex desires and his rejection of those desires as a point of departure to understanding the novel’s tragic ending. David rejects Giovanni’s love in his pursuit of the promise and safety of a heterosexuality he connects to his identity as a White middle-class man. I believe that the anxiety David feels towards his sexual desires stems from

¹¹⁸ Yasmin Y. DeGout, “Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni’s Room*,” *African American Review*, vol. 26. No. 3(Autumn, 1992), 426.

¹¹⁹ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York : Routledge, 1994), 148.

an internalized fear of losing his White identity and its social benefits. David adopts heteronormative norms surrounding sexuality to preserve the social benefits of his status as White. Although David escapes the external pressures of American society, his sexual desires follow him to Paris where he meets Giovanni and resumes the same pattern of self-denial that drove him abroad.

The Parisian setting of *Giovanni's Room* attests to the importance that both living abroad and the expatriate experience have had in Baldwin's life and in his writings. Paris allows David to escape the external pressure of American morality surrounding sex. His choice to follow his sexual desires necessitates, however, that he gives up his vision of a straight world and how he understands his role in that world. "I wanted to find myself," David narrates, "an interesting phrase [...] which certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced."¹²⁰ David's nagging feeling encapsulates the memory of the sexual experience he spends his adulthood vehemently trying to escape. At seventeen years old, David has sex with his best friend, Joey. Their sexual encounter awakens confusion and fear, which triggers David's self-destructive behavior. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist confesses that this moment of affection with Joey is the catalyst of the denial and deceit that leads to the death of his lover Giovanni, during his time in Paris.

The novel begins with David in a state of emotional paralysis, as he attempts to understand himself beyond the mask of Whiteness he has used to escape his homosexual desires. David begins with a consideration of the origin of his identity as White:

I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past.¹²¹

¹²⁰ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1956]), 236.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

Although David's sexual orientation is not described in clear terms, readers understand shortly after this description that he harbors same-sex desires. David is unable to accept this queerness, understanding how politically charged and socially ostracizing such desires are. Consequentially, David creates a metaphorical barrier between himself and the nature of his sexuality. "The bulldog" follows him to France where he engages in a romantic relationship with Hella, an American expat, who at the novel's end leaves him and returns home.

As critics have noted, David's ancestry as a White American is presented in the first paragraph of the novel which indicates that his White identity is an influential factor in the plot of the novel and—on some level—causes the death of his lover Giovanni. Harry Thomas writes, in "'Immaculate Manhood': *The City and the Pillar*, *Giovanni's Room*, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man" (2013), that "David wants to sleep with men, but he wants to do so while retaining the privilege that comes along with being a middle-class white man."¹²² In "Finding the Jimmy in James" (2015), Christopher Stuart suggests that David "illustrates how a white American can be so oblivious of his own fallen condition that, although he literally reeks of his impoverishment, decay, and disease, he remains secure in his own value and purity [...]"¹²³ David's racial heritage and his own impending doom—described as "[...] the most terrible morning of [his] life"—are intimately linked through physical spacing to indicate that David's European heritage does not act merely as a physical descriptor, but rather as a social signifier. Baldwin posits that the typical American is White and male, "someone who is kind of a cross between the Teuton and the Celt." According to Baldwin, such an image represents "the national self-image." Baldwin writes, "It is an image which suggests hard work and good clean fun and chastity and pity and success." The point is that it has almost nothing to do with what

¹²² Harry Thomas, "'Immaculate Manhood': *The City and the Pillar*, *Giovanni's Room*, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man," *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 59, no. 4 (winter 2013), 607.

¹²³ Christopher Stuart, "Finding the Jimmy in James: How James Baldwin Discovered 'Giovanni's Room' in Lambert Strether's Paris," *MELUS*, vol. 40, no. 2, (summer 2015), 60.

life is.” Therefore, David typifies the emptiness that lies “beneath this bland, this conqueror-image, a great many unadmitted despairs and confusions, and anguishes and unadmitted crimes and failures [...]”¹²⁴

Secondly, Baldwin positions David in direct opposition to himself evoking a dichotomy of Black-White experience through which Baldwin deconstructs Whiteness. This manifests itself through Baldwin’s critiques on the mechanisms which compose David’s multilayered identity. David is “tall [...] like an arrow” and has “blond hair which “gleams” in windows. Baldwin is Black, of small build, with dark brown hair. David’s European ascendants “conquered a continent.” Baldwin is a descendant of African slaves, conquered and kidnapped from the continent of Africa, brought to the Americas where they were forced into slavery. David is compared to an arrow, tall and straight, but which also connotes violence and gender identity. Effectively, Baldwin is placing himself—and the Black experience—within the frame of Whiteness, I suggest, to highlight the fundamental role false consciousness plays in David’s agency and, thus, how the novel plays out.

In “As Though a Metaphor were Tangible’: Baldwin’s Identities,” Abdur-Rahman notes that David’s identity is “relational, contextual, processual, and contingent”¹²⁵ upon social markers of otherness and normality. David’s Whiteness—coupled with how he understands his own manhood—upholds the homogeneity of American Whiteness. Therefore, *Giovanni’s Room* does not center merely around sexuality. It uses sexuality as a rhetorical device to map out the boundaries of Whiteness. Yet, how does *Giovanni’s Room* describe innocence as integral to White identity? David’s innocence manifests in the relationships he has with the various characters of the book, notably: Giovanni, Hella, Sue and Jacques. In this section, I

¹²⁴ James Baldwin, “In Search of a Majority,” *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1961]), 218.

¹²⁵ Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, “As Though a Metaphor Were Tangible’: Baldwin’s Identities,” *The Cambridge Guide to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2015), 164-179.

demonstrate how White innocence informs these interpersonal relationships and leads to David's alienation from himself. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin observes that:

The person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality—for this touchstone can be only oneself. Such a person interposes between himself and reality nothing less than a labyrinth of attitudes. And these attitudes, furthermore, though the person is usually unaware of it (is unaware of so much!), are historical and public attitudes. They do not relate to the present any more than they relate to the person. Therefore, whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves.¹²⁶

David attempts to escape reality, experience and change by placing between himself and his same-sex desires a puritanical morality that Baldwin condemns. By following David's path of destruction, Baldwin highlights how White innocence traps Whites within a stunted morality that leaves room for neither growth nor change. David's denial of his humanity is a paradigm which expresses how White innocence operates and limits Whites' understanding of themselves beyond their Whiteness. White innocence insulates David within a false reality that shields him from the consequences his actions have on Giovanni, Hella and an American girl named Sue. In the process of denying himself and those around him genuine expressions of self, or what Baldwin calls *the sensual*, David becomes unable to accept how his actions impoverish the lives of those around him. I posit, furthermore, that David's pursuit of a heteronormative life reveals the internalized racism, misogyny and homophobia that dominate the American scene. By the novel's end, David demonstrates the bankrupt character of American morality through his vindication of a heteronormative identity to preserve the social rewards he receives from his White identity. By placing the reader in the role of a witness to David's destruction, Baldwin forces White readers to confront the pervasive effects of race in their own lives.

1.2.1 Reality

¹²⁶ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 312.

In a 1986 interview with Clayton Riley, Baldwin was asked to comment on the artistic merit of literature as it relates to the legacy of fellow writer and Harlemiter Langston Hughes. Baldwin connects literature to a larger responsibility the writer has to describe the seemingly inarticulable emotions and social forces which govern human life:

[Literature] is one of the ways we have of confronting reality with the intention of changing it. Someone once told me years and years ago when I was in terrible trouble. He said, "describe it." It didn't make sense to me at first. He said, "describe it. If you can describe it, you can get past it." I think literature in short is that. If I can describe it and you recognize it, you can get past it. You can alter reality. It's one of the ways human beings have of confronting and altering reality.¹²⁷

Baldwin's description of the potentiality of literature echoes a traditionally pragmatist conceptualization of the world found in such American philosophers as William James. "Pragmatism," James writes in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, "is willing to take anything to follow either logic or the senses, and to count the humblest and most personal experiences."¹²⁸ The validity of any theoretical concept resides in its ability to make a difference in practical terms. Reality is a collective enterprise, a state of being rather than a detached entity, which articulates how we relate to and interact with the world around us. White innocence impedes the personal and collective acquisition of experiential knowledge through the denial of the covenant called our humanity. This unacknowledged truth derives from the desire to forge a post-war identity that denies what Baldwin concedes is the state of our human condition. "The state of birth, suffering, love, and death are extreme states," Baldwin examines, "extreme, universal, and inescapable. We all know this, but we would rather not know it. The artist is present to correct the delusion to which we fall prey in our attempts to avoid this knowledge."¹²⁹ Even the act of love must confront the experience of suffering and death. Choosing to reject this stark truth means that we can neither learn from nor grow through

¹²⁷ James Baldwin and Clayton Riley, "James Baldwin on Langston Hughes," *The Langston Hughes Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter 1997), 136.

¹²⁸ William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975 [1907]).

¹²⁹ James Baldwin, "The Creative Process," *Creative America*, (New York: Ridge Press, 1962).

loving, nor can we learn from the pain and suffering we inflict upon others. It is, thus, the power of literature and the moral duty of the writer to disseminate this human truth by describing what James articulates as “the humblest and most personal experiences,” if we ever hope to “get past” (in Baldwinian language) the harm these states inflict on human life.

As post-WWII America celebrated a blooming brand of hyper-individualism which placed emphasis on the nuclear family and economic prosperity, public references to pain, suffering and death became sparse in depictions of American life. The “middle class” became synonymous with a high standard of living—as represented in a burgeoning, suburban lifestyle—but, more importantly, a set of moral beliefs and values which, according to Charles L. Ponce de Leon, came to “transcend socioeconomic categories”¹³⁰ and included less obvious social groups. Notwithstanding, racial and ideological conformity made up the backbone of this new American way of life. This included dogma on ways of being American which erased the weight of human suffering in depictions of public life. As a moral stance, innocence ignores that human life involves death, pain and suffering. Ignorance of these human states is meant to absolve Whites from the responsibility of recognizing how these states influence their lives and how they—as individual agents—provoke these states in the lives of others. Baldwin finally concludes, however, that this process of alienation from the human condition is a coping mechanism that all societies must overcome to evolve:

The entire purpose of society is to create a bulwark against the inner and the outer chaos, in order to make life bearable and to keep the human race alive. And it is absolutely inevitable that when a tradition has been evolved, whatever the tradition is, the people, in general, will suppose it to have existed from before the beginning of time and will be most unwilling and indeed unable to conceive of any changes in it. They do not know how they will live without those traditions that have given them their identity. Their reaction, when it is suggested that they can or that they must, is panic [...] ¹³¹

¹³⁰Charles L. Ponce de Leon, “Making Sense of the Post War Middle Class, *Reviews in American History*, vol. 43, no. 1 (March 2015), 168.

¹³¹ James Baldwin, “The Creative Process,” *Creative America* (New York: Ridge Press, 1962),

“If you can describe it, you can get past it” alludes to the revolutionary potential literature possesses to expand our knowledge of how death, love and pain continue to influence perceived reality. In the writer’s endeavor to circumvent the lies that define human existence, literature offers the potential to redress social ills, like racism, by describing its reality in such a way that renders human conditionality tangible and thus intelligible. It is, therefore, the hope of the writer to describe the inner workings of a given society, so that the people who inhabit it may shed the masks “[they] fear [they] cannot live without and know [they] cannot live within.”¹³² Baldwin confronts the false reality that White innocence creates by countering it with what he calls “the sensual,” an ontological project which attempts to redescribe how Whites interact with reality. The relationship between Whiteness and sexuality, I posit, explains David’s romantic relationships and allows him to abscond, without any sense of responsibility, from the consequences his actions engender. To achieve individual growth, however, David must learn to accept that he will experience death and pain, forces which govern the existential meaning he gives to life and, thus, how he chooses to live it.

Giovanni’s awaited execution and Hella’s leave-taking evoke an inner stirring of emotional turmoil from which hope emerges for David, who has escaped, until now, any sense of guilt or responsibility for the life he lives. By this, I mean that David treats his interpersonal relationships (sexual and platonic) as self-serving and dispensable. David describes his relationship with Hella as shallow and emotionally abstemious: “I liked [Hella], I thought she would be fun to have fun with. That was how it began, that was all it meant to me [...]”¹³³ He likens her to an object that reaffirms his heteronormative identity and, therefore, protects him from the consequences of his same-sex desires. However, the end of David’s charade begins when he visits a gay bar with Jacques. David, a self-professed heterosexual man, patronizes a

¹³² James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*,

¹³³ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 222.

gay establishment with no apparent cause. David's description of the bar, in the following excerpt, exemplifies how his sexuality is tightly bound by his narrow idea of suitable behavior for a heterosexual man in the post-war era, behavior he connects to his social value and sense of self-worth:

This bar was practically in my quartier and I had many times had breakfast in the nearby working man's café to which all the nightbirds of the neighborhood retired when the bars closed. Sometimes I was with Hella, sometimes I was alone. And I had been in this bar, too, two or three times; once very drunk. I had been accused of causing a minor sensation by flirting with a soldier. My memory of that night was, happily, very dim, and I took the attitude that no matter how drunk I may have been I could not possibly have done such a thing. But my face was known and I had the feeling that people were taking bets about me. Or, it was as though they were the elders of some strange and austere holy order and were watching me in order to discover by means of signs I made but which only they could read, whether or not I had a true vocation.¹³⁴

Suffice it to say that attending a gay bar in the 1950's constitutes deviant behavior, an observation supported by Guillaume, the bar's owner, who "warn[s] his favorite customers that if they were not armed with identification papers they might be better off elsewhere [when the bar] was raided by the police."¹³⁵ David's description of the bar and its patronage, further, articulates a social disdain for queer culture, highlighted in his use of "paunchy," "bespectacled" and "*les folles*" when referring to its patrons.¹³⁶ David rationalizes his presence at Guillaume's bar, alongside Jacques, who he knows desires him sexually, by suggesting that the close proximity of the bar—"the bar was [...] in my *quartier*"—explains his presence, while at the same time offering an imprecise number of times he has frequented it: "two, or three times." David creates ambiguity surrounding his sexuality and his relationships, whether heteronormative or same-sex. Yet, this ambiguity is further highlighted when David implies that he may have flirted with a soldier, a situation that is simply dismissed: "I took the attitude that [...] I could not possibly have done such a thing." David's reactionary dismissiveness psychologically protects him from the dangerous gaze of "the elders of some strange and

¹³⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 30.; "the queens."

austere holy order” who question his “true [sexual] vocation” and, therefore, threaten the safety that his Whiteness affords him. This scene effectively establishes the ambiguity which later defines David’s actions and relationships with the other characters in the novel. Since the motivations behind his actions are always unclear, he is able to dismiss any suspicion or accusations of “wrongdoing” as mere misunderstandings which further strengthen the delusion in which he lives.

If David is a man who searches for safety through self-delusion, Giovanni lives a life of moral honesty. Still at Guillaume’s bar, David and Jacques order a drink. After a quick and unsuccessful attempt at flirting with Giovanni, Jacques abandons his pursuit, leaving David at the counter with the Italian bartender who promptly begins to flirt. As David orders a drink from Giovanni whom David describes as “insolent and dark and leonine,” admitting that “it was as though his station were a promontory and we were the sea,”¹³⁷ David inadvertently reveals his attraction to Giovanni, as he flutters and “blush[es] and realize[s] by a faint merriment on Giovanni’s face as he served us that [Giovanni] had seen it.”¹³⁸ Both Jacques and David dance around the subject of David’s sexuality, as Jacques also notices that David is attracted to Giovanni, suggesting that David invite Giovanni to accompany them for a drink. David immediately refuses on the grounds that he is “queer for girls,”¹³⁹ and Jacques points out that David does not “have any objection to allowing men to spend money on [him],”¹⁴⁰ but quickly reassures him that his manhood is still intact: “I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that [...] immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy.”¹⁴¹ Shortly after, David and Giovanni find themselves alone at the bar and David’s façade of

¹³⁷ Ibid., 241.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 242.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.; the original text reads, “I could see Jacques struggling not to say that I didn’t have any objection to allowing men to spend money on *me*.” For continuity, I italicize the singular third person pronoun “him.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 244.

heteronormativity quickly begins to crumble. He admits: “I realized that I was quite happy to be talking with [Giovanni] and this realization made me shy. And I felt menaced since Jacques was no longer at my side.”¹⁴²

Their encounter, however, promptly unfolds like a game of chess, where Giovanni questions—attacks even—David’s perception of the world, and David unconvincingly defends it. At one point, David begins to note the opposite natures of Paris and New York, explaining that New York is “[...] very high and new and electric—exciting” and that “[...] it’s very—twentieth Century.”¹⁴³ This declaration is an insinuation that Paris is old—a city in which one can feel the passing of time, the events and lives which have passed through its streets. Giovanni’s prompt response underlines America’s ability to separate itself from its past: “I don’t see why the world is so new for Americans [...] After all, you are all merely emigrants. And you did not leave Europe so very long ago.”¹⁴⁴ To this, David responds, “The ocean is very wide [...] We have led different lives than you, things have happened to us there which have never happened here. Surely you can understand that this would make us a different people?”¹⁴⁵

Baldwin’s exploration into the passing of time suggests that David has a distinct perception of time which differs from that of Giovanni, their conversation revealing diverging philosophies on time. David’s perception of the speed with which time passes, Giovanni suggests, is part of his American heritage:

The Americans are funny. You have a funny sense of time—or perhaps you have no sense of time at all, I can’t tell. Time always sounds like a parade *chez vous*—a *triumphant* parade, like armies with banners entering a town. As though, with enough time, and that would not need to be so very much for Americans, n’est-ce pas? [...] as though with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place. And when I say everything, [...] I mean all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which you Americans do not believe.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Ibid., 245.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 246

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 247

In this scene Giovanni is antagonistic towards David's beliefs about time. Their conversation reveals diverging philosophies on time. Giovanni attacks David's Americanness, suggesting that David (an American) has no real sense of time, and Americans have the particular habit of creating structures, physical and metaphorical, to hedge against past suffering. Equally, David's perception of time demonstrates an arrogant or "triumphant" attitude towards the human condition, suggesting that Americans have succeeded in overcoming suffering through their inventions which support a sense of uniqueness or cultural superiority. These inventions and social structures protect Americans from the truth that suffering is universal and connects all people.

Whiteness offers David an escape from suffering and pain. This protects him from how his deceit has affected the lives of Giovanni and Hella. Yet taking responsibility for his life means that David must be honest about what connects him to the process of living: suffering, pain, love and death. "You accept life as it is," Baldwin suggests. "You see it as it is before you can change it. In order to change myself, I have to admit that I am not six feet tall, I'm not blue-eyed. I've got to accept limitations before I can discover my possibilities."¹⁴⁷ David ultimately rejects Giovanni's love, because American norms surrounding love propagate predominately positive images, coupled with happiness and feelings of exaltation. David's relationship with Giovanni differs from his relationship with Hella because his love for Giovanni forces him to acknowledge how his actions affect the well-being of his Italian lover and renders visible the heterosexual mask he hides behind. However, the moment of this confrontation marks the end of their relationship, as David begins to view life without the safety of the mask:

I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning. In the beginning, our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn every day. Beneath the joy, of course, was anguish

¹⁴⁷ John Hall and James Baldwin, "James Baldwin, A Transition Interview," *Transition* no. 41 (1972), 24.

and beneath the amazement was fear; but they did not work themselves to the beginning until our high beginning was aloe on our tongues. By then anguish and fear had become the surface on which we slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity, and pride. Giovanni's face, which I had memorized so many mornings, noons, and nights, hardened before my eyes, began to give in secret places, began to crack. The light in the eyes became a glitter; the wide and beautiful brow began to suggest the skull beneath. The sensual lips turned inward, busy with the sorrow overflowing from his heart. It became a stranger's face—or it made me so guilty to look on him that I wished it were a stranger's face. Not all my memorizing had prepared me for the metamorphosis which my memorizing had helped to bring about.¹⁴⁸

David's self-destructive behavior is framed as the legacy of his Whiteness. His Whiteness manifests itself through his American pride, the American Dream. In "The Discovery of What it Means to be American" (1959), Baldwin dissects the American conundrum that is identity in the form of the American artist abroad. Baldwin writes that "every society is really governed by hidden laws, by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people." David fights so hard to achieve a false promise of post-war notions of Whiteness but only succeeds, I demonstrate below, in destroying his own life and the lives of Giovanni and Hella.

1.2.2 Experience

In *Giovanni's Room*, trauma is taken as a point of departure to navigate the tragedy of the novel which is the "heighten[ed] sense of the hero's might have been and lost potential while also showing that the hero's actions are his responsibility."¹⁴⁹ In the midst of America's post-WWII role as a world leader and the tensions of the Cold War with the USSR, American Whiteness represented the apex of human potentiality. In order to protect the authority of conservative values of the middle-class, any experiences that threatens Whiteness's legitimacy and, therefore, the authority of those institutions that proscribe its borders, are deemed deviant and dangerous. Yet Baldwin understands that the post-war ideologies surrounding expressions of personhood limited Whites' emotional, moral and intellectual growth through its rejection of knowledge that does not neatly fit the post-war conservative social model. Baldwinian

¹⁴⁸ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 281.

¹⁴⁹ John Truby, *The Anatomy of a Story* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2007), 103.

experience entails, therefore, a confrontation between that which we think we know and the contradicting evidence presented to us. The process of experiencing is therefore conflictual in nature and favors practice over principle. “[Baldwin’s] ability to discern and describe the resonances of political principles in everyday life,” Lawrie Balfour writes, “illuminates the meanings of the principles and evokes what Stuart Hampshire calls ‘the tension of unrealized possibilities.’”¹⁵⁰ The lost “potential” and “possibilities,” which David’s life represents, express the inadequacy of a post-war, bourgeois Whiteness as a theory of being.

As David looks upon his reflection in which he sees an archetypical American during and after WWII (a tall male, White and blond), he remembers the sexual experience he had during his adolescence with Joey. One summer, David and Joey are left on their own, as Joey’s parents are away, and David decides to spend the weekend at Joey’s home. The two teenagers run the New York City streets in search of adventure and girls. As the sun sets and their attempts to garner either are unsuccessful, the pair decides to return to Joey’s apartment. In what follows, Baldwin offers an eloquent and passionate love scene between two friends, making David’s ultimate rejection of and cruelty towards Joey all the more heartbreaking. While sleeping in Joey’s bed, David awakes to find Joey examining the sheets for bedbugs. David badgers Joey for his lack of hygiene, and something stirs in them, and their relationship transforms into something deeper and more mature:

[Joey] looked at me with his mouth open and his dark eyes very big. It was as though he had just discovered that I was an expert on bedbugs. I laughed and grabbed his head as I had done God knows how many times before, when I was playing with him or when he had annoyed me. But this time when I touched him something happened in him and in me which made this touch different from any touch either of us had ever known. And he did not resist, as he usually did, but lay where I had pulled him, against my chest. And I realized that my heart was beating in an awful way and that Joey was trembling against me and the light in the room was very bright and hot. I started to move and to make some kind of joke but Joey mumbled something and I put my head down to hear. Joey raised his head as I lowered mine and we kissed, as it were, by accident. Then, for the first time in my life, I was really aware of another person’s body, of another person’s smell. We had our arms around each other. It was like holding in my hand some rare, exhausted, nearly doomed bird which I had miraculously happened to find. I was very frightened; I am sure he was frightened too, and we shut our eyes. To remember it so clearly, so painfully tonight tells me that I have never for an instant truly forgotten it. I feel in

¹⁵⁰ Lawrie Balfour, "Finding the Words: Baldwin, Race Consciousness, and Democratic Theory." *James Baldwin Now*. Ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 78.

myself now a faint, a dreadful stirring of what so overwhelmingly stirred in me then, great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst. But out of this astounding, intolerable pain came joy; we gave each other joy that night. It seemed, then, that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love.¹⁵¹

I quote the novel at length, because within this mutually required moment of self-expression through physical and emotional intimacy, David and Joey “discove[r]” their sexuality which, before this moment, had gone inaudible, unrecognizable from the inexperience oftentimes associated with youth. The moment, however, goes beyond the sexual, sparking maturation, expressed as an “intolerable pain” which inevitably brings the “joy” of self-knowledge. “The vision of life expressed in Baldwin's works,” Robert Tomlinson acknowledges, “is essentially a tragic one, the same contained in two key elements of the Aristotelian definition of the genre, anagnorisis and pathos, the latter not a brutish, animal suffering, but suffering consciously paid as the price of self-knowledge.”¹⁵² The “beat[ing] [of the heart] in an awful way” and the “trembl[ing]” of the body are, therefore, physical manifestations of the internal “[...] dreadful stirring,” that “great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful” which engulfs the senses and pushes the boundaries of the characters’ self-awareness and self-perceptions. New experiences often begin with hesitation brought on from the fear of the unknown and the discomfort that comes with growth. David’s declaration that “a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love” does not refer so much to sex as it does to a commitment he is making to confronting the societal challenges of a same-sex relationship. The two teenagers discover and, thus, become cognizant of an unknown part of themselves through this newly established bond Baldwin calls “the act of love.” Within the intimate space of Joey’s room, David begins to understand his friend in what Baldwin calls *the sensual*, which is a stark difference from how David understands the girls he chases, admitting that if any of

¹⁵¹ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 224-225.

¹⁵² Robert Tomlinson, “Payin' One's Dues”: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin,” 138.

them had acknowledged his advances, “the ocean would not have been deep enough to drown our shame and terror.”¹⁵³

In Baldwinian terms, the sensual is divorced from its hedonistic interpretation, instead expressing a form of knowing, deeply rooted in the experiential, exceeding sexual fantasies to offer “a way of being and action,” which does not divorce the “concept of love from the experience of loving.”¹⁵⁴ “The word ‘sensual,’” Baldwin writes, “is not intended to bring to mind quivering dusky maidens or priapic black studs. I am referring to something much simpler and much less fanciful. To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.”¹⁵⁵ The sensual is, therefore, a practice of the authentic, the genuine and honest, in how we understand ourselves in relation to life and the complexity of our humanity. Sensuality and felt reality counter the ways Whiteness cuts itself off from feeling reality, choosing instead social ideals over lived experiences. Such terms as “dusky maidens” and “priapic black studs” allude to the racially charged sexual fantasies that Baldwin confronted during his time in Greenwich Village. After his graduation from the prestigious De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx, Baldwin briefly moved back home to help his mother attend to his eight siblings. However, Baldwin wanted to be a writer, and the jobs he took to make ends-meet prevented him from following his literary ambitions. Thus, he moved to Greenwich Village which Lynn Orilla Scott describes as “a gathering point for artists and radicals and the locale of a homosexual community that in the postwar years was just beginning to be open.”¹⁵⁶ Although Greenwich was supposed to be an artistic haven and multiracial cosmopolitan, it turned out not to be the creative Eden Baldwin hoped it would be. There, he experienced several homophobic

¹⁵³ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 224.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 714.

¹⁵⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 311.

¹⁵⁶ Lynn Orilla Scott, *James Baldwin's Later Fiction*, xvii.

attacks which Scott describes as a product of America's myths surrounding sex: "Targeted as a 'queer' by 'straight' white men who wanted to have sex with him, or as a 'black stud' by white women who wanted to have a 'Negro experience,' or who wanted to 'save' him from his homosexuality, Baldwin felt himself menaced by American racial and sexual myths."¹⁵⁷

Baldwin's conceptualization of the sensual demands that readers see how the world actually is instead of through the myths created in a futile attempt to avoid suffering and pain. The experience of living fully "is to rejoice in the sensual,"¹⁵⁸ and the American Dream is woven into the fabric of what it means to be American and detracts from the complexity of our humanity for a lie which creates, what Sean Kim Burtorac describes as, "[the] inability to partake in the sensual and effective pleasure of life."¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, David's moment of genuine affection towards Joey is abruptly interrupted as the sun rises revealing the boys' naked bodies and bringing a sweeping tide of fear, shame and homosexual panic:

I was 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 in me seemed monstrous. But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: But Joey is a boy. I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. Precisely, I wanted to know that mystery and feel that power and have that promise fulfilled through me. The sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. I wondered what Joey's mother would say when she saw the sheets. Then I thought of my father, who had no one in the world but me, my mother having died when I was little. 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. And I made my decision.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ James Baldwin, "The Discovery of What it Means to be American,"

¹⁵⁹ Sean Kim Burtorac, "Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, and the Politics of Love," *Political Research Quarterly*, September 2018 vol. 71, no. 3, 713.

¹⁶⁰ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 225-226.

Baldwin juxtaposes a sensual exploration of same-sex love—melodically expressed as a “great thirsty heat [...] and tenderness so painful”—with the homophobic panic that arises shortly after, to locate the moment David begins his flight from those desires. The importance of this scene is twofold: Firstly, David is unable to “rejoice” in his affection and desire for Joey, because he focuses on the act of sex, which he believes should make him happy. The act of lovemaking with Joey, however, frightens him. He characterizes Joey as “an abyss” and is afraid of where his affection may lead. The mystery of Joey’s body and affection force David to become aware of his positionality in the spectrum of heteronormativity and his potential rejection from it as expressed in utterances such as: “a black opening of a cavern,” “dirty words,” “shame” and “terror.” David calls his same-sex attraction “monstrous” as he realizes that Joey is a man. He is afraid of having to make excuses for not fitting the social model, which is supposed to lead to happiness. Secondly, this scene expresses the loss of self-knowledge, constructed from the responsibility taken on when loving another. In the “power and the promise and the mystery” that Joey becomes for David, Baldwin explores his conceptualization of love. Although this thesis does not explore Baldwinian love in detail, I mention it here because the writer believes that love can be an efficient catalyst for meaningful change. The tragedy in this moment is the lost opportunity for personal growth that Joey’s love could have offered David. In David’s case, what rescues him from complete neglect of the sensual is his queerness. If in the first excerpt David begins to understand an intimate part of who he is, the second part narrates his “decision” to reject the promise of love and forego self-knowledge that the act of loving offers.

Baldwinian experience is represented in David’s emotional awakening and articulated in David’s unbridled affection towards Joey. However, as fear and shame quickly overtake David, he begins to reject this transformative process (from adolescence to manhood) in a futile attempt to return to a state of innocence which has already been lost to experience. As Baldwin

makes clear, David's social positionality as *the gatekeeper* of American civilization leads him to become afraid of his desires as they go against normalized depictions of American public life. This realization leads him to find refuge in the puritanical morality and narrowly defined masculinity which paradoxically are the sources of his fear of social alienation.

Although sexuality appears to be at the forefront of the novel, Baldwin suggests that David's same-sex desire is a discursive tool rather than a recurring motif:

[David] is in the middle. [*Giovanni's Room* is] not about homosexuality at all. It's about what happens to you if you can't love anybody [...] if you can't love anybody, you're dangerous because you have no way of learning humility. You have no way of learning that other people suffer and no way of learning how to use your suffering and theirs to get from one place to another. In short, you fail even responsibility which is to love each other.¹⁶¹

The breakdown of David and Joey's friendship reveals the inevitable tragedy that ensues when a society denies the truth of human complexity. In the novel, David's insistent denial of his complex sexuality impedes the process of love when he rejects the possibilities love can bring. Stuck "in the middle" of his desires and social expectations, David flees, physically and emotionally. The longer David runs from his experience with Joey, the harder it becomes for him to keep "the bulldog" at bay. Thus, the larger the "bulldog" becomes, the more the lie grows out of David's control. In time, "the bulldog" becomes inescapably connected to his sense of self and distorts his sense of reality. *Giovanni's Room*, therefore, chronicles the chaos that ensues from the deceptive behavior David adopts in pursuit of the limited possibilities heteronormativity offers.

1.2.3 Change

In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin writes that "Americans, who evade, so far as possible, all genuine experience, have therefore no way of assessing the experience of others and no way

¹⁶¹ James Baldwin, "Civil Rights - James Baldwin Interview - Mavis on Four" [YouTube video], 12 February 1987, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Wht4NSf7E4&t=5s>> [Accessed: 23 May 2023].

of establishing themselves in relation to any way of life which is not their own.”¹⁶² The process of “assessing” and “establishing” our perception of reality is paramount to defining the terms of our relationship to the world at large, and to others. Baldwin asserts that the promise of this relationship is its ability to reveal our positionality in hopes of changing the world and guiding us towards a more moral place. In Baldwinian thought, change is therefore a transformative process connected to moral growth, through the type of self-knowledge that only experience brings. Only by accepting how the world is and recognizing our place in its social fabric can we learn to change the circumstances that have brought us to our present point. True change only comes, therefore, from the fortitude acquired from the experience of knowledge acquisition. At present, I highlight how Baldwin understands *change* as a process undertaken to achieve moral growth through the questioning of the moral compass that guides us through life. Grounded in the reality of the human condition, as opposed to the myths that govern American life, Baldwinian change opposes White innocence which provokes moral and social stagnation. In the novel, David is unable to change and thus achieve morality because innocence denies him the moral courage to go through the transformative process provoked by his love for Giovanni. In the end, David sacrifices Giovanni, metaphorically and literally, to remain in a state of innocence that he believes will hedge the social consequences of a life with Giovanni. This belief offers an analogy for race relations in America.

I return back to the scene where David moves into Giovanni’s studio apartment, having been kicked out of the room he rented. While David and Giovanni explore each other, Hella is traveling in Spain. It is in Giovanni’s room that the two men begin to fall in love, a process which Baldwin uses to track the speed with which David begins to escape the responsibility he bears for the man he loves:

I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning. In the beginning, our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn every day. Beneath the joy, of course, was anguish

¹⁶² James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 32.

and beneath the amazement was fear; but they did not work themselves to the beginning until our high beginning was almost on our tongues. By then anguish and fear had become the surface on which we slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity, and pride. Giovanni's face, which I had memorized so many mornings, noons, and nights, hardened before my eyes, began to give in secret places, began to crack. The light in the eyes became a glitter; the wide and beautiful brow began to suggest the skull beneath. The sensual lips turned inward, busy with the sorrow overflowing from his heart. It became a stranger's face—or it made me so guilty to look on him that I wished it were a stranger's face. Not all my memorizing had prepared me for the metamorphosis which my memorizing had helped to bring about.

David quickly goes from accepting the reality of his same-sex desires and envisioning a life with Giovanni to an abrupt rejection of those desires through his debasement of Giovanni. This description of their life in the room reads similarly to David's first same-sex encounter where David feels "joy," juxtaposed with "anguish." However, the difference is that David now possesses the foresight of experience to understand that these two emotions are not necessarily antithetical. Rather, joy and anguish are born of the unknown. The "mystery" of Joey's body gives way to Giovanni's "hardened" face, suggesting that the newness, the excitement of the unknown is slowly, but surely, fading into a form of domestic banality. And, David begins to see himself through the eyes of his lover and begins to understand the demands of love.

Though tragic, David's affair with Joey can be explained by the type of inexperience that youth brings. With Giovanni, however, he has the foresight to understand that a life with Giovanni means an end to a life of safety. "Any real change," Baldwin observes, "implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety." Baldwin continues, "And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or thought one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed."¹⁶³ David clings to the familiarity and safety of a heterosexual life in the face of the uncertain future of a homosexual relationship. The importance of this scene is that it describes the moment David's desire for a safe life impedes the process of moral growth and change. David's incremental rejection of Giovanni

¹⁶³ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 209.

is callous, because “[he] attempt[s],” as Tomlinson remarks,” to take pleasure without paying his dues,” a fact that “colors his affair with Giovanni with [...] moral irresponsibility and sexual guilt.”¹⁶⁴ Baldwin transforms homosexuality into David’s saving grace, and David sacrifices Giovanni to remain imprisoned by safety, untouched and unchanged by the messiness of human existence.

As David watches Giovanni’s “sensual lips turned inward,” he begins to feel the weight of responsibility that comes with caring for Giovanni. In response, he becomes an acting “housewife,”¹⁶⁵ cleaning the dirt of Giovanni’s room, which is a metaphor for Giovanni’s chaotic life: “This was not the garbage of Paris, which would have been anonymous: this was Giovanni’s regurgitated life.”¹⁶⁶ Within Giovanni’s room, as in Joey’s room, David fears the transformative power of intimacy, or what he refers to as “the beast,” wondering if emotional honesty is a tangible reality or a futile endeavor:

[...] Giovanni smiled his humble, grateful smile and told me in as many ways as he could find how wonderful it was to have me there, how I stood, with my love and my ingenuity, between him and the dark. Each day he invited me to witness how he had changed, how love had changed him, how he worked and sang and cherished me. I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this is your life. Stop fighting it. Stop fighting. Or I thought, but I am happy. And he loves me. I am safe. Sometimes, when he was not near me, I thought, I will never let him touch me again. Then, when he touched me, I thought, it doesn’t matter, it is only the body, it will soon be over. When it was over, I lay in the dark and listened to his breathing and dreamed of the touch of hands, of Giovanni’s hands, or anybody’s hands, hands which would have the power to crush me and make me whole again.¹⁶⁷

Once Giovanni becomes emotionally invested, David begins to recoil. With Hella, David does not feel responsible for her well-being, because he is able to maintain an emotional remove: “she was fun to have fun with.” He acknowledges that that was all their relationship meant to him. Here however, Baldwin describes David’s aversion to change as expressed in the “terrible

¹⁶⁴ Robert Tomlinson, “Payin’ One’s Dues”: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin,” 141.

¹⁶⁵ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 291.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

confusion” he experiences once he has to take responsibility for more than himself. On the other hand, he admits that he has found happiness and comfort in Giovanni’s love: “this is my life.” Giovanni elicits a positive shift in how David interacts with reality. Yet, David chooses emotional stagnation over Giovanni whose ability to confront the difficulties of life allows him to evolve morally.

If Giovanni represents moral honesty, then David encompasses the stagnation of White America’s morality as Baldwin makes it clear that David’s behavior is typically American. David uses moralized cleanliness to sanitize not the shame of love, but the responsibility that comes with the act of loving and, thus, elects a perpetual state of developmental limbo, as evidenced in a passage where he narrates a seemingly banal moment in their lives. As he and Giovanni go to get David’s mail at the American Express office, where Giovanni hopes David’s father will send him desperately needed money, David ponders what it means to be American, whether his *Americanness* reveals and, therefore, betrays some unspoken collusion between himself and his countrymen. David narrates:

Sometimes I left Giovanni over our afternoon breakfast, blue smoke from a cigarette circling around his head, and went off to the American Express office at Opéra, where my mail would be, if I had any. Sometimes, but rarely, Giovanni came with me; he said that he could not endure being surrounded by so many Americans. He said they all looked alike—as I am sure they did, to him. But they didn’t look alike to me. I was aware that they all had in common something that made them Americans, but I could never put my finger on what it was. I knew that whatever this common quality was, I shared it. And I knew that Giovanni had been attracted to me partly because of it. When Giovanni wanted me to know that he was displeased with me, he said I was a “vrai américain”; conversely, when delighted, he said that I was not an American at all; and on both occasions he was striking, deep in me, a nerve which did not throb in him. And I resented this: resented being called an American (and resented resenting it) because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was; and I resented being called not an American because it seemed to make me nothing.¹⁶⁸

Although Baldwin does not explicitly describe the Americans in this scene as White, there is strong evidence that suggests they are. David uses the phrase “common quality,” to place himself in a similar category as the other Americans. This quality appears to be the cheerfulness

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 292

which Baldwin writes is an aversion to experience and responsibility. Baldwin writes in *Notes of a Native Son*: “What one vainly listens for in this cacophony of affirmation is any echo, however faint, of individual maturity. It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, where Baldwin writes that the quality of Black faces is the “pain [their] smile[s] [are] witness to,”¹⁷⁰ the cheerfulness in the faces suggest a rejection of experience or pain. Therefore, this scene demonstrates David’s fear that being White is all that connects him to his White countrymen. Later described as, “active, so disquietingly cheerful horde,”¹⁷¹ the only thing that seems to connect the Americans in the American Express office is their nationality. However, nationality must not be misinterpreted as sharing a common experience. As Baldwin writes, “it becomes impossible [...] to predicate the existence of a *common* experience. The moment one thinks about it, it becomes apparent that there is no such thing. That experience is a private, and very largely speechless affair is the principal truth, perhaps, to which the [American] colony under discussion bears witness [...]”¹⁷² Putting aside Baldwin’s assertion “that experience may perfectly well be meaningless,”¹⁷³ to be White American is to be lost within a labyrinth of suppositions which have no basis in reality. David finds it difficult to relate to the Americans around him, because he prefers to think of himself as an individual who is unmarred by the racial politics of home. Giovanni denies him, however, the luxury of escaping the White crowd of which he is an integral part. Rather, Giovanni weaponizes David’s Americanness, by reestablishing his connection to a people whose customs appear odd. He suspects that Americans may not have culture in the same way Europeans do. Therefore, David’s Americanness sticks out, because it is deeply rooted in his racial identity which is understood among Americans. In this instance,

¹⁶⁹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 323.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 91.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

David is an oddity, not because of his sexuality but from the unique way he and the American crowd perform their Whiteness which Giovanni interprets as *Americanness*.

Baldwin's conceptualization of moral growth and change asks White readers to concede their freedom from the states of being (birth, death, pain). This freedom, however, does not come from the denial of these states but, rather, from their sublimation. As David's feelings for Giovanni begin to wane, he does not ponder why. David's innocence hedges against the growth and change Giovanni represents, because David believes, contrary to all evidence, that pursuing a life with Hella and denying Giovanni will allow him to walk more easily through the mundane and unintelligible life the crowd of White Americans represent. However, David must first grow beyond moral ideology through the recognition that something is amiss. In the face of his crumbling life, David's innocence stunts his growth, because it protects him from his wrongdoings. David commits the same errors, for example, as his father because he cannot recognize that the moral compass which guides their actions has gone awry. Baldwin reflects upon the transformative power of change by describing it as a dream greater than anyone can imagine:

And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges.¹⁷⁴

The Italian Giovanni is depicted as a faulty character who makes many mistakes but tries to learn from them. He understands, for example, that he can seek a heteronormative lifestyle, but he is cognizant that marrying a woman would be an act of selfishness. Rather, he takes into account the woman he might marry, her wellbeing and what he can offer her, materially and emotionally. In the novel, Jacques and Guillaume are incapable of the type of change that elicits growth. Towards the novel's end, David stands at a crossroads where he can choose to learn

¹⁷⁴ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 209.

from Giovanni's impending execution, allowing it to set him free from what Abdur-Rahman calls American "ideologies of difference on social relations,"¹⁷⁵ as exemplified in American morality. Morality, however, is a subconscious performative action, related to David's American racial identity. Like Whiteness, heterosexuality acts as a barrier between what David wishes to believe and the reality of the life he lives.

The liaisons David has with the different men and women of his life do not allow for love's promise of growth, because the affairs, according to Baldwin, are effervescent. They deal in the immediate, love being something that moves through time and space. In the essay "The Male Prison," Baldwin informs us that "[...] today's unlucky deviate can only save himself by the most tremendous exertion of all his forces from falling into an underworld in which he never meets either men or women, where it is impossible to have either a lover or a friend, where the possibility of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased. When this possibility has ceased, so has the possibility of growth."¹⁷⁶ Baldwin posits, however, that the post-war generation would be the one to achieve the American promise and renew American morality. "Without this endeavor," Baldwin charges, "we will perish. However immoral or subversive this may sound to some, it is the writer who must always remember that morality, if it is to remain or become morality, must be perpetually examined, cracked, changed, made new."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, "'As Though a Metaphor Were Tangible': Baldwin's Identities," 167.

¹⁷⁶ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name : More Notes of a Native Son*, 234.

¹⁷⁷ James Baldwin, "As Much Truth as One Can Bear," *The Cross of Redemption*, 59.

1.3 The Paradox of White Innocence

Only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger,
darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power
that will free us from ourselves.
—James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”

In February of 1962, Baldwin escaped to the Swiss village of Loèche-les-Bains where he had finished writing *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, a decade earlier, to complete what later became one of the two essays in *The Fire Next Time*. Sick with a serious case of bronchitis, Baldwin was also weary from his transatlantic travels, which brought him from Turkey to Dakar by way of Paris. In his fatigue, Baldwin drafted a letter to his agent Robert P. Mills, expressing a sense of doom for his fellow countrymen, believing that America might never move beyond race, mainly because it offered Whites a reprieve, a hiding place, from their powerlessness in the face of human existence:

There is a very grim secret hidden in the fact that so many of the people one hoped to rescue could not be rescued before the prison of color had become their hiding place [...] Life has the effect of forcing you to act on your premises—the only key I can find to my spectacular recklessness—and I have said for years that color does not matter. I am now beginning to feel that it does not matter at all, that it masks something else which does matter: but this suspicion changes, for me, the entire nature of reality.¹⁷⁸

The quintessential question Baldwin attempts to answer is how this “prison of color” informs America’s sense of morality from which our subjective reality is constructed and decisions that govern the US are made. Yet, the stark difference between *what is* and how Whites wish things *were* creates a moral paradox: “By a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality.”¹⁷⁹ The paradox inherent in the innocence of Whiteness is that the innocence which is supposed to protect Whites from suffering and pain, warps their sense of moral direction and imprisons

¹⁷⁸ James Baldwin, “Loèche-les-Bains, February 1962,” *The Cross of Redemption*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York, Pantheon Books, 2010), 259.

¹⁷⁹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 294.

them in a world of immorality. This world depends on the “imprisonment” of Black men, women and children within the same myths and legends which become the building blocks of Whiteness. Since the innocence of Whiteness is imbued with virtue and goodness, however, this makes Whites essentially “good people” whose actions are *essentially* well intentioned, no matter their dangerous effects. Outcomes are, therefore, never malicious but misunderstandings, leaving no room for fault or any sense of personal responsibility.

In this section, I show how David’s sense of morality is warped by his desire to remain within the safety of his White American identity. My argument is informed by David’s abandonment of Giovanni, his deceiving Hella into an emotionally dishonest relationship and his callous use of Sue, an American woman with whom he has a one-night stand. David finds himself within a maze of moral ambiguity, created by norms surrounding American Whiteness. Moreover, I show how innocence creates what Baldwin calls “a moral monster.” Through the ritual sacrifice of Giovanni, Hella and Sue, David becomes a moral monster in the face of an immoral abyss. Lastly, I suggest that the White hiding place is the American suburbs which Baldwin describes, in the novel, as a Garden of Eden, a place where innocence is boundless, and the limits of morality go unquestioned. The White hiding place is a fountain of moral authority, even in the face of evidence that contradicts that authority.

After being rejected by David, Giovanni murders Guillaume, the owner of the bar in which he works. Yet shortly after David and Hella reunite, Hella discovers David and Giovanni’s affair, and readers return to where the novel begins: David finds himself alone “at [...] this great house in the south of France.”¹⁸⁰ Giovanni is about to be executed and Hella is on a boat for the US. And although readers may think that this moment (Hella’s leave-taking and Giovanni’s execution) marks the end of David’s desire for a *simple* life, it is exactly the moment

¹⁸⁰ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 221.

David abandons Giovanni that his flight from responsibility comes to an end. After receiving a letter from Hella announcing her return, David finds himself at a moral crossroads; should he accept the uncertain but honest future of Giovanni's love (and his sexuality), or should he attempt a life with Hella who represents safety in a White heteronormative life, in which he must lie, continuously, to his partner and himself?

This moral dilemma, however, becomes all the more complicated by Giovanni being fired from Guillaume's bar, and David is forced to make a choice:

[Giovanni] suddenly sat down on the edge of the bed, bent over. I saw then that he was also in a state of rage. "Ils sont sales, les gens, tu sais?" He looked up at me. His eyes were full of tears. "They are just dirty, all of them, low and cheap and dirty." He stretched out his hand and pulled me down to the floor beside him. "All except you. Tous, sauf toi." He held my face between his hands and I suppose such tenderness has scarcely ever produced such terror as I then felt. "Ne me laisse pas tomber, je t'en prie," he said, and kissed me, with a strange insistent gentleness, on the mouth.

His touch could never fail to make me feel desire; yet his hot, sweet breath also made me want to vomit. I pulled away as gently as I could and drank my cognac.

"Giovanni," I said, "please tell me what happened. What's the matter?"

"He fired me," he said. "Guillaume. Il m'a mis à la porte." He laughed and rose and began walking up and down the tiny room.

"He told me never to come to his bar anymore. He said I was a gangster and a thief and a dirty little street boy and the only reason I ran after him—I ran after him—was because I intended to rob him one night. Après l'amour. Merde!" He laughed again.

I could not say anything. I felt that the walls of the room were closing in on me.¹⁸¹

This scene presents Giovanni as emotionally fragile in the face of being fired. His "rage" and "tears" are signs of emotional distress that also come from the powerlessness of his situation as a poor, immigrant worker with little social capital. Guillaume holds social and monetary power over Giovanni who explains that "[w]hen something has happened to humiliate [Guillaume] and make him see [...] how disgusting he is, and how alone, then he remembers that he is a member of one of the best and oldest families in France."¹⁸² When the Italian refuses

¹⁸¹ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 305-306.

¹⁸² *Giovanni's Room*, 306.

his boss's sexual advances, Guillaume uses power—his family name—as moral righteousness, positioning himself as the victim and Giovanni as the immoral seducer, “a gangster and a thief and a dirty little street boy” who “intended to rob him.” It is difficult not to feel a deep sense of sorrow for Giovanni's situation, made all the worse by David's coldhearted, but predictable reaction to Giovanni's powerlessness. David feels a sense of aversion towards what he describes, later, as Giovanni's vulnerability. David feels “terror” and malaise which makes him feel that “the walls of the room were closing in on [him].” This is brought on by the revelation that he may have to take on responsibility for Giovanni which goes beyond hollow words and meaningless gestures of good faith. However, David cannot afford to feel responsible for his lover, because to feel responsible would mean that he would have to act on what he knows. “To act is to be committed,” Baldwin observes, “and to be committed is to be in danger.”¹⁸³ Action and commitment are perilous, because they are the first step towards change. Change implies the recognition that something is amiss in a current situation and demands a commitment, regardless of the consequences, to altering that situation for the better.

Baldwin constructs this scene as the moment David makes the conscious decision not to act on what he has learned through Giovanni's love, not to accept the transformative power of honesty in the face of a delusion. David's decision not to act on what he knows mirrors the moment Whites must decide to take responsibility for the lives they live. If not, they risk being trapped within the false safety of good intentions. “For, in the generality, as social and moral and political and sexual entities,” Baldwin observes, “white Americans are probably the sickest and certainly the most dangerous people, of any color, to be found in the world today.”¹⁸⁴ Baldwin's words come from Black America's role in America's nation building project, as human sacrifices which sustain the economic prosperity of the country but also has

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹⁸⁴ James Baldwin, “No Name in the Street,” 386.

the effect of defining the contours of the country's White identity. In David's rejection of Giovanni, Baldwin demonstrates how David rationalizes, step by step, sacrificing, not just his relationship or love, but the wellbeing and life of Giovanni for unattainable ideals. Yet, when David informs Giovanni, sometime later, that he is leaving him, Giovanni does not fight but bids David goodbye, telling him that he is sealing his own doom: "The Americans have no sense of doom, none whatever. They do not recognize doom when they see it."¹⁸⁵ Admittedly, Giovanni may be referring to his own future, penniless and homeless. However, I believe that Giovanni is describing the moral doom David will have to face for the physical and spiritual sacrifice of Giovanni and Hella.

1.3.1 A Moral Monster

David is the moral monster Baldwin describes in "A Conversation with James Baldwin," a 1963 discussion with Dr. Kenneth Clarke on race in America. "I'm terrified at the moral apathy," Baldwin declares, "the death of the heart which is happening in my country. These people have deluded themselves for so long that they really don't think I'm human. I base [this] on their conduct not on what they say, and this means that they have become, themselves, moral monsters."¹⁸⁶ Baldwin's statement describes the brutality Black protestors faced at a recent protest in Birmingham. He recognizes the absurdity in the situation; according to White America, the United States is "a free country."¹⁸⁷ However, Baldwin highlights the American tradition of anti-Black violence which Whites consider an exception to its commitment to freedom and democracy. The Black bodies of the protestors are sacrificed to maintain the law and order of the land. The law is ordered, however, to incriminate the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 338.

¹⁸⁶ James Baldwin, "A Conversation with James Baldwin," *WGHB, American Archive of Public Broadcasting* (Boston and Washington: GBH and the Library of Congress), <<http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-15-9m03xx2p>> [Accessed: 29 August 2022].

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

victimized scapegoat instead of the guilty, or what Baldwin refers to in Christian terms, as “the sinner”:

That the scapegoat pays for the sins of others is well known, but this is only legend, and a revealing one at that. In fact, however the scapegoat may be made to suffer, his suffering cannot purify the sinner; it merely incriminates him the more, and it seals his damnation. The scapegoat, eventually, is released, to death: his murderer continues to live. The suffering of the scapegoat has resulted in seas of blood, and yet not one sinner has been saved, or changed, by this despairing ritual. Sin has merely been added to sin, and guilt piled upon guilt. 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.¹⁸⁸

As the “sinner,” David attempts to purify himself, by offering Giovanni and Hella on the conjoined altar of Whiteness and heteronormativity. Giovanni and Hella suffer throughout the novel, because David refuses to accept his sexuality and how that sexuality contradicts American forms of White normativity. Of course, all the characters share the blame for their fates. There are no innocents. That said, the novel is about David and his internal struggle to deal with himself in honest terms. Giovanni’s moral integrity is rewarded with death, and Hella returns home where she will most likely become an unfulfilled wife, like Cass Silenski from *Another Country*. David, however, is still a prisoner locked within a cell of self-deception and deceitfulness.

In many ways, David and Guillaume, the bar owner, are similar. First, they use Giovanni as a scapegoat, a sacrifice for their identities which they believe absolve them of guilt or responsibility for their moral dishonesty. That said, Guillaume perishes from his power, due to his frank attitude surrounding his homosexuality, whereas David lives on to repeat the same cycle. Like Giovanni, Blacks in America are sacrificed to pay for the White delusion of safety. The truth is obscured and replaced with a racial fantasy, to escape cosmic judgement that is inescapable. Like innocence, truth-bearing brings a sense of righteousness and power. The novel describes this power dynamic in monetary terms. Economic freedom is translated as

¹⁸⁸ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 386.

power and a source of agency. David's father often withholds money, to yield power and influence over his son's life. "My father had money in his account which belonged to me," David narrates, "but he was very reluctant to send it because he wanted me to come home—to come home, as he said, and settle down [...]"¹⁸⁹ Money is frequently referenced in the novel. When David's father stumbles home drunk, late one night, David's aunt Ellen chastises him for paying for the company of women: "That's where you always are and that's where all your money goes and all your manhood and self-respect, too."¹⁹⁰ Likewise, David meets Giovanni the evening he "had been turned out of [his] room"¹⁹¹ for not having enough money to pay the rent. David leaves Giovanni when he must reciprocate the same financial assistance his Italian lover willingly offered him. Lastly, Giovanni's despair and financial situation become dire when Jacques refuses to lend him money, after David runs off with Hella.

The scene where David decides to leave Giovanni illustrates the doubt, he begins to have over how he treats those around him. Of course, cheating on Hella and Giovanni is a moral transgression. However, Giovanni's love is David's saving grace, forcing him to see how the world as it is, instead of accepting the fantasy of a heteronormative life. If David were morally honest, he would leave Hella—saving her from a lifetime of falsehoods—and accept the scary but liberating truth of who he is when with Giovanni. However, David scapegoats Giovanni with his emotional baggage, releasing the weight of his deception without concern for the lives of Hella or Giovanni.

David's desire to be *normal* comes from his desire to perpetuate the moral codes he learned from his father's example. Heteronormativity is a form of social capital dependent on

¹⁸⁹ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 237.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

“obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms.”¹⁹² David conforms to the lifestyle he has been taught from childhood to be morally correct—which is the only way to be a “man.” He believes heterosexuality, and all it encompasses, is beneficial to society. Therefore, to live a heterosexual life, to get married and to have children is to perpetuate a social status quo built on the structure of race and class relations.

If our environment instills in us a set of goals, then David’s goals are based on the perceptions of good and bad, right and wrong of the people who make up his reality. Baldwin conveys to the reader that David’s true intention is to achieve and, thus, perpetuate, Whiteness as intrinsically moralistic. David’s vision of heteronormality originates from his father. Early in the novel we learn David has a strenuous relationship with him. One night, as a young boy, David overhears a dispute between his father and his aunt, Ellen. Ellen confronts his father over his late nights and suspected affairs with various women. She fears that David will acquire an unhealthy idea of how a man should carry himself. Confronting him she questions, “Do you really think [...] that you’re the kind of man he ought to be when he grows up?”¹⁹³ David’s father is an alcoholic and a womanizer. Though David is too young to understand the origins of the dispute, he decides to hate both his father and his aunt. In the narration, Baldwin indicates that David is not sure why he despises them both, but “it allowed all of Ellen’s prophecies about him to come true.”¹⁹⁴ As a result of his father’s actions, David eventually arrives on the same path as his father, in search for his manhood.

The search for manhood, one that continues until the end of the book, and undoubtedly beyond the final page, is a consequence of the admission David overhears from his father, “all I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don’t mean a

¹⁹² James S. Coleman, “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, (1988), 95.

¹⁹³ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 230.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

Sunday school teacher.”¹⁹⁵ David takes his father’s words as referring to his sexuality. He believes that “a Sunday school teacher” equates being a weak man and reacts by being the contrary. To be a “real man” is to adhere to promiscuity and emotional detachment. For David, his father embodies this heterosexual consciousness, having all the attributes an American man should possess.

David’s choice to act like his father is an effect which stems from his desire to preserve the innocence that he believes frees him from the guilt of mistreating his lovers. The acceptance David receives from society is to be considered a benefit. Furthermore, David’s father embodies the social pressure to which the protagonist feels he must conform. In the letters his father sends, he frequently tells his son to abandon France and return home. He wants David to find a job, get married and have children. He writes, “aren’t you ever coming home? There’s nothing over there for you. You’re as American as pork and beans, though maybe you don’t want to think so anymore.”¹⁹⁶ David believes that to be happy is to mirror his father’s sexuality and misogynistic attitude towards women, which only perpetuates tragedy and results in death.

In “‘Under a Foreign Sky:’ Place and Displacement in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” Njelle Hamilton describes *Giovanni’s Room* as dealing with the internal, rather than a physical space.¹⁹⁷ Thus, *Giovanni’s Room* refers not just to a physical space but to the private world David attempts to contain, being unable to reconcile the man he is in the room with the fictions that govern his public identities: White, American and male, identities he fears abandoning, no matter the cost. David runs towards an unattainable innocence to escape suffering and pain, an innocence which is born from denying the suffering and pain of others. To deny these states for moral reasons makes David a moral monster. Giovanni, Hella and an

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 294.

¹⁹⁷ Njelle Hamilton, “‘Under a Foreign Sky:’ Place and Displacement in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” *Paroles gelées*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2010), 27-48.

American woman named Sue constitute the other to be sacrificed on the altar of safety. The novel's unpredictable narrative structure is David attempting to pass off his breakup with Giovanni as inevitable and, thus, the Italian's death as out of his control. Therefore, Hella's arrival comes with "a certain relief." David narrates:

It seemed that the necessity for decision had been taken from my hands. I told myself that we both had always known, Giovanni and myself, that our idyll could not last forever. And it was not as though I had not been honest with him—he knew all about Hella. He knew that she would be returning to Paris one day. Now she would be coming back and my life with Giovanni would be finished. It would be something that had happened to me once—it would be something that had happened to many men once.¹⁹⁸

In many ways David does not see Hella and Sue as active agents, with hopes, fears and desires of their own. Rather, they serve as vessels which will guide him to the warm glow of safety. Hamilton suggests that a typical, nuclear family is the cultural manifestation of safety. However, this reductive imagery of human life cannot stand firm against the complexity of human existence. Hamilton observes:

[W]alking along the Quai de la Seine, [David] imagines, without visual corroboration a perfectly nuclear familiar scene, and then concludes: "I want children. I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed [...] I wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground, like the earth itself, where I could always be renewed." And he wants this, even if it means forcing himself to produce an interior self—and behaviors—consonant with those normalizing fictions, whose production he undertakes, first by using an American girl [...]"¹⁹⁹

Baldwin depicts David's desires for this fictional life as vulgar and an affront to the morals by which America claims to be guided. Hamilton concludes that David seeks, in women, to return to the Garden of Eden in which he will be safe from Giovanni's room.²⁰⁰ Finally, David admits that "It would help if I were able to feel guilty. But the end of innocence is also the end of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 297

¹⁹⁹ Njelle Hamilton, "'Under a Foreign Sky:' Place and Displacement in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*," 43.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

guilt.”²⁰¹ David chooses to stay in the Garden of Eden where innocence blossoms and suffering and pain are moral abstractions.

1.3.2 The Garden of Eden

It is difficult to assess accurately the sincerity of David’s guilt over Giovanni’s death, mainly because he exhibits contradictory degrees of involvement. Upon Giovanni’s arrest, for example, he assigns guilt to Jacques who had the financial means to help the Italian: “I thought for a long while that he, with his big apartment, his well-meant promises, his whiskey, his marijuana, his orgies, had helped to kill Giovanni. As, indeed, perhaps he had.” However, David admits just after that “Jacques’ hands are certainly no bloodier than mine.”²⁰² This revelation arrives just after Giovanni’s arrest. David has been *incognito* from his gay acquaintances, since Hella’s return, to find some normalcy in his life. Yet, in a small city like Paris, he stumbles upon Jacques at a café terrace. Their conversation resembles a metaphorical game of table tennis, one fiercely attempting to place the blame in the others court:

‘You’ve heard,’ he whispered, as I joined him, ‘about Giovanni?
I nodded yes. I remember the winter sun was shining and I felt as cold and distant as the sun.
‘It’s terrible, terrible, terrible,’ Jacques moaned. ‘Terrible.’
‘Yes,’ I said. I could not say anything more.
I wonder why he did it,’ Jacques pursued, ‘why he didn’t ask his friends to help.’ He looked at me. We both knew that the last time Giovanni had asked Jacques for money Jacques had refused. I said nothing. ‘They say he had started taking opium,’ Jacques said, ‘that he needed the money for opium. Did you hear that?’

David and Jacques attempt to absolve themselves of guilt, with David blaming Jacques and Jacques smearing the reputation of Giovanni. In a lucid moment of catharsis, Jacques observes that his using money to buy affection and David’s flight into Hella’s arms were pursuits doomed to fail. David responds that “[i]t might have been better [...] if [Giovanni had] stayed down there in that village of his in Italy and planted his olive trees and had a lot of children

²⁰¹ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 311.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 238

and beaten his wife.” With lucidity, Jacques responds that, “[n]obody can stay in the garden of Eden [...] I wonder why.”²⁰³

In this section, I compare the American suburbs to the Garden of Eden mythology, or what Lester R. Kurtz calls “a social response to crises” which helps mitigate social and economic turmoil by providing “systems of beliefs, myths, legends, ideology [...] invoked by people in an effort to respond to crisis.”²⁰⁴ In “Freedom and Domination: The Garden of Eden and the Social Order,” Kurtz clarifies that mitigation infers “elimination of conflict, just as managing a corporation or a baseball team does not require the corporation’s or team’s diminution or elimination. Conflict management refers to attempts by various parties to maximize their control over the conflict, attempting to diminish, sustain, or heighten the level of conflict, or to affect its direction or content in the interests of a group.”²⁰⁵ The American suburbs, as a substitute for the biblical Eden, became a way for the White middle-class to deflect attention from racialized systems of social control by making racial issues such as the “Negro problem” a vague abstraction. The suburbs constitute, thus, a system of beliefs that helps uphold Black subjectivity as abstract, rather than a lived reality.²⁰⁶

The epistemology of an American Eden stems from the post-WWII years in the US which marked the beginning of economic prosperity and saw the exponential rise of the American middle class. As returning soldiers began to extend their households, housing became a central issue in American politics to meet the needs of the post war baby-boom. It was at this time that the American suburbs were created, thousands of Americans flocking to these newly erected

²⁰³ Ibid., 239.

²⁰⁴ Lester R. Kurtz, “Freedom and Domination: The Garden of Eden and Social Order,” *Social Forces*, vol. 58, no. 2 (1979), 443.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 444.

²⁰⁶ For more information on what may be called “literature of the American suburbs,” see: Jérémy Poitier, *Banlieues d’Amérique : poésie d’un lieu commun* [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation], Université Toulouse – Jean Jaurès (2022).

suburbs to escape overcrowded apartment dwellings and the decay of the city. The suburbs became an integral part of the American Dream and the middle class, terms which became synonymous with a comfortable lifestyle:

Millions of young American families settle in the suburbs—in new developments like Levittown on Long Island and in the previously agricultural San Fernando Valley adjacent to Los Angeles. Large contractors erected acres of tract houses whose inexpensive price (about \$7000) and gleaming electrical appliances almost compensated for the absence of individual character. Hoping to create instant communities, developers also built schools, swimming pools, and baseball diamonds. The federal government smoothed the way by providing low-interest, long-term mortgages, and new highways to get to and from work and shopping centers.²⁰⁷

Though these areas are sold as an idyllic place where people of distinct classes lived amongst each other, non-Whites (Black, Asian, Chicano, Native American and Mexican) found it difficult to obtain the government-subsidized mortgages Whites used to buy houses. Furthermore, women “were still expected to become cheerful housewives and mothers,”²⁰⁸ a status which had drastically changed during the war years when women replaced their drafted male counterparts in many fields.

Leah Mirkaor evokes artists like James Baldwin and photographer Robert Adams to illustrate how the comforts of suburban life represented the American ideal, offering illusory forms of happiness which alienated people from Nature and themselves. Although the suburbs offered “the promise of comfort, security and safety,”²⁰⁹ the newly envisioned lifestyle did not uphold the promises it claimed. In Denver, Colorado, Adams saw “[t]he [housing] developments filled with people who had migrated west in search of a new Eden, only to discover themselves isolated in an artificial landscape [...] People had moved [to Denver] to enjoy nature, but found that nature was mostly inaccessible except on weekends.”²¹⁰ Instead of

²⁰⁷ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Leah Mirakhor, “Resisting the Temptation to Give Up: James Baldwin, Robert Adams, and the Disavowal of the American Way of Life,” *African American Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 653.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

freedom from the harshness of life, “this new landscape was built on a premise of alienation”²¹¹ in diverse forms.

In “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” Baldwin writes that “[w]e take our shape 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.”²¹² Baldwin describes the US as a Garden of Eden and more specifically the American suburbs, which distances the question of race from the White middle-class. Although David comes from Brooklyn, a borough of New York City, his dream of safety stems from the post-WWII beliefs on family, sexuality and race that the suburbs represent. David even admits that he comes from a better neighborhood than Joey, his childhood friend he describes as “dark” (“[Joey] was a very nice boy [...] very quick and dark [...]”²¹³). Although he does not explicitly describe Joey’s racial category, David places the distinction of color and class at the heart of their relationship. Later in life, David thinks of the Garden of Eden as an idealized world in which people can live as they wish, further validating the suburbs as the Garden. He narrates,

I have thought about Jacques’ question since. The question is banal but one of the real troubles with living is that living is so banal. Everyone, after all, goes the same dark road—and the road has a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright—and it’s true that nobody stays in the Garden of Eden. Jacques’ garden was not the same as Giovanni’s, of course. Jacques’ garden was involved with football players and Giovanni’s was involved with maidens—but that seems to have made so little difference. Perhaps everybody has a Garden of Eden, I don’t know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both. People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence; and the world is mostly divided between madmen who remember and madmen who forget. Heroes are rare.²¹⁴

The excerpt reiterates Baldwin’s message on suffering, pain and death. People construct Edens based upon what makes them happy, but no matter the dream, it is but an illusion. If we take

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 16.

²¹³ James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 223.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 239.

“the same dark road” to mean the treacherous road of life, then Baldwin begs readers to accept that life is painful. Interestingly, he does not ask readers to forget Eden or stay in it. Rather, readers must both remember that Eden exists and strive to go beyond the ideals of safety and comfort it offers. Here, Baldwin uses religious language from the Pentecostal church, a large influence on the writer throughout his career. Baldwin learned from his mother that racism and “hatred hurt the racist and hater as much as the racist’s victim.”²¹⁵ Whites suffer from a form of madness that will eventually bring upon them the biblical “flaming sword,” which the cherubim—winged creatures in the Bible—wield to smite those descendants of Adam who attempt to enter Eden before God’s judgement.²¹⁶

The gospel Baldwin offers in *Giovanni’s Room* extends to Whites who seek to return to Eden, to the innocence which necessitates that the suffering of the racialized Other be ignored in the name of that intangible dream which the American suburbs embody. Baldwin reminds readers that the price of Eden is the ritualistic sacrifice of human life. The novel transports this human sacrifice to Paris, where Giovanni dies for David’s safety. Beauford Delaney once said to Baldwin that, “what one sees and cannot see says everything about you.”²¹⁷ Baldwin integrates this message in the novel, where David is representational of the reckoning Whites must face in order to find the meaning of life beyond racial identity. Whiteness is all David has and clings to it in vain. By the novel’s end, however, he must choose to remain innocent or accept the reality that life is messier and more complex than in the Garden of Eden.

²¹⁵ David Lemming, “The White Problem,” *Pen America*, January 8, 2007, <<https://pen.org/the-white-problem>> [Accessed: August 6th, 2020].

²¹⁶ For further reading on the Garden of Eden and the flaming sword, see: Jonathan Edwards, “East of Eden,” *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, eds. M. Valerie and H.S. Stout (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 346.

²¹⁷ Leah Mirakhor, “Resisting the Temptation to Give Up: James Baldwin, Robert Adams, and the Disavowal of the American Way of Life,” 653.

1.4 On Doubt

“We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what
we have. Our doubt is our passion,
and our passion is our task.”
-Henry James, *The Middle Years*

Kenneth Clarke’s 1963 interview with Baldwin begins with the expression of a belief, shared between the two intellectuals, that the Civil Rights Movement was a unique moment in American history, because of the genuine dialogue taking place—between Blacks and Whites—on the dire situation of Black America: “One of the significant things about the present revolution of the Negro people in America, is maybe the fact that for the first time there is genuine communication between Negroes and whites,”²¹⁸ observing that oppression hurts the oppressor as much it does the oppressed. “The great victims in the country,” Baldwin continues, “of the institution called segregation, which is not a Southern custom, which has been for a hundred years a national way of life, the great victims are the white people, the white man’s children.”²¹⁹ The writer’s words reaffirm his position that Whiteness curses White men, women and their children by creating moral monsters who cling to their racial identity, instead of free individuals who have agency over their lives. In the end, Baldwin and Clarke place the burden on the White audience to doubt the implications, morality and vitality of their racial identities. For Baldwin, doubt is the first step to social change. By doubt, I mean the questioning of beliefs that govern how we understand ourselves and our place in the world through the lens of those beliefs. Therefore, Baldwin calls for Whites to question whether their belief in the American way of life represents who they are on a profound level.

²¹⁸ James Baldwin, *Conversations with James Baldwin*, 40.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In this short section, I describe Baldwinian doubt as a transformative process of change, juxtaposing blind faith with scepticism to improve social relations. Baldwin invokes the Black experience in America as a rhetorical device to force Whites to question their blind faith in national narratives on White identity and to take an honest step forward, towards racial healing. In this spirit, I evoke Vilém Flusser's *On Doubt* (1966) to illuminate the philosophical processes and the endless possibilities that doubt possesses to engender revolutionary change. Later, I illustrate how the television, as a new medium helped create doubt in the minds of many Whites who, from a mix of segregation, McCarthyism and Cold War politics, demonstrated an almost blind faith in the American Dream "that taught Americans to praise their country, work hard, and consume joyfully,"²²⁰ Flusser discusses doubt within the context of blind faith, ideology and dogma I associate with the American Dream as political rhetoric:

Doubt is a polyvalent state of mind. It could mean the end of a faith or the beginning of another. It could even, if taken to the extreme, be instituted as "scepticism," that is, as a kind of inverted faith. In moderate doses it stimulates thought. In excessive doses, it paralyzes all mental activity. Doubt, as an intellectual exercise, provides one of the few pure pleasures we know. As a moral experience, it is torture. Doubt, allied to curiosity, is the cradle of research, therefore, of all systematic knowledge. In a distilled state, doubt kills all curiosity and is the end of all knowledge.²²¹

Flusser eloquently describes doubt as an activity of the mind, "an inverted faith" which kills the belief that came beforehand. Like Baldwin, Flusser privileges a nuanced approach which "stimulates thought" over grand gestures that "paralyz[e] all mental activity." Doubt sparks thought, which I understand to mean question-asking. In moral terms question-asking can lead to "torture," because it holds the potential to (re)assign shame or guilt where there was once innocence.

Giovanni's Room navigates the process of doubt David undergoes in the wake of tragedy, attempting to pinpoint, throughout the novel, where his life went wrong. David's story

²²⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960's*, 11

²²¹ Vilém Flusser's *On Doubt*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novae (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014 [1966]), 13.

begins with the announcement that something horrible has occurred, changing him forever. Although readers are unaware if this experience will lead David to change that part of himself that has led to “the most terrible morning of [his] life,” David clearly questions if he will be able to return to a state of reckless innocence:

I was thinking, when I told Hella that I had loved her, of those days before anything awful, irrevocable, had happened to me, when an affair was nothing more than an affair. Now, from this night, 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 various to be treated so lightly. I am too 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.²²²

The “awful, irrevocable” experience of heartbreak and loss has thrown David into a whirlwind of emotions which weaken his blind faith in the conservative attitudes surrounding sexual identity that have led him to this moment. Inconsequential affairs give way to waves of guilt, and the cure of promiscuity transforms into “pretentious masturbation.” Essentially, David is describing Flauser’s “torture” that comes with a “moral experience.” From the novel’s beginning, David doubts whether his affair with Hella and his sacrificing the love of Giovanni were worth it. To this, readers do not get a definitive answer. Rather, the process of question-asking is more important, and whether David will choose to learn from this tragedy is left ambiguous. Though it would not be farfetched to assume that David eventually succumbs to social conformity, it is clear that he has a choice. He was never as innocent as he thought, a realization that leads him to doubt the masks he has worn to avoid dealing with the complexity of his sexuality.

Throughout *Giovanni’s Room*, David looks upon his reflection, seemingly trying to persuade himself that the color of his skin reveals a deeper sense of who he is. Although I discuss photographs and reflections in Chapter Two, in the context of remembrance, I will say here that throughout Baldwin’s literary oeuvre and stint as a prominent figure in the Civil

²²² James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 223.

Rights Movement, Baldwin emphasizes the importance of observing oneself through physical reflections which cut one off from the clutter of social meaning. In this way, we are forced to face the image which is ourselves and see ourselves beyond the myths and legends that create the contours of our social categorizations. The television was an effective tool to invest White America in the political, social and economic plight of Blacks, by broadcasting images of brutal violence that had become the everyday experience for many Southern Blacks. Baldwin and other activists mediatized witnessing, using images which contradicted the democratic ideals that characterized the US. I argue that as a mode of witnessing, the television helped cast doubt on race relations and brought the brutality of Southern segregationists into America's White Northern suburbs. Baldwin's T.V. appearance with Clarke expresses the ever-growing influence network television had on post-war American life. As a mode of media communication and information transmission, the television allowed Civil Rights activists to deliver images of anti-Black violence into living rooms across White America. However, the Civil Rights Movement ultimately helped usher in what Randy Ontiveros calls the "Golden Age" of network TV, making it an important American institution. Baldwin and Clarke's TV interview perfectly demonstrates how news media and network TV began to be known for their serious journalism and intrepid discussions on race relations during the 1950's-60's.²²³ Although early coverage of the Movement predominantly remained a vested interest in Black journalism, mainstream TV journalism later became a medium which helped bring national attention to activists who worked closely with networks to meet mutually beneficial ends.²²⁴

²²³ Randy Ontiveros argues that although TV journalism was significant in swaying how mainstream America envisioned racial relations, networks often failed to cover the civil rights struggles of other minority groups. He presents the case of Chicano activism which was often depicted, "through a very narrow filter in which Chicanos and Chicanas were framed as threats to the integrity of the nation." See: Randy Ontiveros, "No Golden Age: Television News and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement," *American Quarterly*, vol 64, n. 4 (December 2010), 897.

²²⁴ Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Although Baldwin doubted whether American T.V. would “edify America’s future generations,”²²⁵ the point is that White audiences across the US were confronted—many for the first time—with images of Black protestors being beaten by White officers in cities like Montgomery, Tallahassee and Birmingham (think Chief of Police Bull Connor who used administrative influence over the police department to attack peaceful demonstrators with fire hoses and attack-dogs). These scenes of horror captivated the nation for over a decade, as the country clung to televised images of King, for example, who travelled by foot from Memphis to Montgomery and famously described rioting as “the language of the unheard.”²²⁶

Civil rights activists understood well that TV journalism played an important role in shaping how Americans perceived race. Jack Nelson eloquently describes this confrontation as “[...] the importance of the news media in shaping the public opinion that shapes the law in our democracy.”²²⁷ The greatest benefit that TV journalism offered Civil Rights leaders and activists is arguably that it helped cast doubt on the morality of the burgeoning innocence in the suburbs of Eden, or what Lauren Rusk describes as “the white world’s socially constructed blindness to African Americans in all their human intricacy.”²²⁸ White innocence begins to fade where Du Bois’ color-line disappears, forcing White America to confront the sacrifices Blacks pay for the American way of life.

Therefore, the call for social reform in the American South and elsewhere in the country is due to the uproar these images stirred during the era. Whites began, nationally, to reimagine Black life through the gaze network television produced—and largely influenced by Black activists—instilling a nationwide sense of doubt about the trajectory of American freedom and

²²⁵ James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010) 243.

²²⁶ Although this quote has been used in recent moments of social unrest to condone the practice of rioting, in this same interview, it is important to note that King denounces rioting, describing it as, “self-defeating and socially destructive,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0BWXjv5s>> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

²²⁷ Jack Nelson, The Civil Rights Movement: a Press Perspective, *Human Rights*, vol. 28, n. 4 (Fall 2001), 4.

²²⁸ Lauren Rusk, “Selfhood and Strategy in *Notes of a Native Son*,” *James Baldwin Now*, 365.

democracy, exposing what Marco Lambardo calls “the irreducible gap that presents [...] between the nature of an ideal and the reality of lived experience.”²²⁹

In the novel, David transforms into an active participant in the trajectory of his life, made possible by witnessing Giovanni being sacrificed to the guillotine. If innocence encourages stagnation within the spirit and mind, then doubt promotes moral curiosity. Baldwinian doubt provokes questions about the moral validity of an identity that necessitates the destruction of the Other. Giovanni’s life, love and honesty make David doubt his belief in the social structures which dictate the terms of his sexuality and White identity. Like Baldwin’s T.V. appearance with Clarke, Giovanni provides another gaze on the world, inviting David to look within for answers. This heuristic approach to doubt provides access to the type of personal growth and change Baldwin prophesizes. The writer privileges internal observation on how social and historic forces construct identities and produce a uniquely American perspective on the world. David begins to perceive the world and understand his relation to it differently. The dissonance jettisoned from the collision of opposing beliefs creates an opportunity for David to free himself from the safety of his hiding place and begin the long journey towards self-knowledge and responsibility.

²²⁹ Marc Lambardo, “James Baldwin’s Philosophical Critique of Sexuality,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 1, (2009), 44.

1.5 The Baldwin-Kennedy Meeting

“When we left the Kennedys’ apartment I had a feeling of complete futility,
and as we got on the elevator I wondered if there is any way
to make the white people in this country *understand* [...]”²³⁰
Lorraine Hansberry, 1963

On May 12th, 1963, Baldwin sent Attorney General Robert Kennedy a telegram criticizing the Kennedy administration’s passive response to the police brutality and other human rights violations that King and other activists encountered during the Birmingham Campaign earlier that month. The nation witnessed images of protestors “brutalized by fire hoses,” like Charles Moore’s infamous photograph which “depict[ed] a young black man attempting to flee as police dogs [tore] the clothes from his body.”²³¹ Robert Kennedy was so moved by Baldwin’s plea for change that he invited Baldwin and a cohort of artists and activists to a May 24th breakfast at Kennedy’s New York City apartment to obtain insight on how the administration might mitigate the rising, nationwide protests.

Admittedly, Baldwin had reservations about Robert Kennedy’s investment in Civil Rights matters. He arrived, however, with enthusiasm, believing that JFK was the man for the job. During Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign against Republican frontrunner Richard Nixon, the then Senator portrayed himself as a warrior for civil rights. In a debate with Nixon, he promised to intervene in matters involving civil rights through legislative action and even went as far as to convene with Martin Luther King, in June 1960, to discuss civil rights matters, demonstrating a good faith commitment. John F. Kennedy’s presidency revealed, however, that his defense of civil rights for African Americans was merely rhetorical. For example, he did not pass any civil rights legislation in the first two years of his presidential mandate. Garth

²³⁰ Emphasis added.

²³¹ Davi Johnson, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 2007), 5.

E. Pauley offers us one possible reason for this slow pace, suggesting that Kennedy “did not comprehend the significance of race as the dominant factor in African Americans’ troubled lives,” rather “race was often just another political issue [seeing] civil rights [...] as a peripheral issue and [he] wanted to keep it that way.”²³² Baldwin understood the Kennedy administration’s track record on civil rights and was, thus, familiar with the political terrain ahead of him. It was for this reason he enlisted a cohort of Black artists, activists and intellectuals such as Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Lorraine Hansberry and Kenneth Clarke to offer a diversity of perspectives.

Unfortunately, the meeting did not end well with many of its attendees storming out and Robert Kennedy leaving with a sense of exasperation. During the meeting, Kennedy produced as evidence a list of facts and statistics to prove that he, the President and the Justice Department were doing everything in their power to defend the freedom and democracy of America’s Black population. Essentially, Kennedy’s message was that, if given enough time, the Federal government’s political measures would assuage state-sanctioned racial violence and discrimination in the South. At many points during the meeting, Robert Kennedy even expressed his frustration with the activists, urging them to have patience, at one point foreshadowing the 2009 Election of Barack Obama, stating that he believed the US would have its first Black president in 50 years. Although accurate, this statement outraged Baldwin who reminded the Attorney General that his family was relatively new to the US, whereas Baldwin’s ancestors had been in the country for hundreds of years. Baldwin found it grievous to ask for more time, and Robert Kennedy was perplexed by the activists’ anger. Hansberry expressed, later on, the feelings of futility and fatigue many of the attendees felt with the attorney general: “When we left the Kennedys’ apartment I had a feeling of complete futility, and as we got on

²³² Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency and Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race from Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 110-111.

the elevator I wondered if there is any way to make the white people in this country understand [...]"²³³

In this section, I argue that Robert Kennedy suffered from the White innocence that Baldwin describes in *Giovanni's Room*. I believe that the Attorney General's inability to comprehend the pleas of his Black guests can be interpreted as the failure of his liberal ideologies which, following Rebecca Aanerud, I define as a "social formation meant to designate those individual whites who want to distance themselves from racism—who want to be viewed as not racist."²³⁴ Post-war White, liberal ideologies falter to meet Baldwin's "demands of life," precisely because they attempt to reconceptualize Whiteness as non-racist instead of confronting it as a White issue. The political left of the era endorsed social liberalism as a cure for racism, classism and sexism. However, Baldwin refutes this assumption, by arguing that White liberalism is an "affliction" which perpetuates White domination. Framing the immediate failure of the Baldwin-Kennedy meeting against the backdrop of *Giovanni's Room* allows for an interpretation which pinpoints Robert Kennedy's missionary complex as the reason for the meeting's breakdown. Through David and Giovanni's complex relationship, Baldwin sheds light on how the Attorney General and the President grew to be known as prominent allies for civil rights. David and Giovanni's relationship illustrates how White liberalism fails to consider the complexity of human relationships when put into practice. I compare the Black and White dynamic to two lovers (think Giovanni and David), one attempting to escape reality and the other forcing him to confront impending doom, so as to avoid it.

²³³ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 356.

²³⁴ Rebecca Aanerud, "Now More Than Ever: James Baldwin and the Critique of White Liberalism," *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 60.

In *Another Country*, Vivaldo Moore is famously cited as the archetype of the White liberal. However, David is the precursor to Baldwin's reflections on the disconnect between the public and private life Whiteness engenders. On the political spectrum, David stands somewhere between 1950's social liberalism and conservatism. On the one hand, David portrays himself as a middle-class bohemian, who globetrots, has an assortment of international friends and is comfortable enough to frequent gay bars, teasing when being pursued by another man that he is "queer for girls." On the other hand, he appropriates a conservative stance on sex and sexuality which reinforces post-war sexual dynamics and is condescending to Hella and Giovanni when his American ideologies are threatened. David believes himself to have something the other characters need. This knowledge gives him a sense of power over them.

Likewise, Robert Kennedy's frustration, despite his guests' protestation, demonstrates what Nathaniel Mills characterizes as "white America's at-best condescending and at-worst racist misinterpretation"²³⁵ of the social roles Black and White play in American life, reinforcing the idea that Whites have some intangible gift which Blacks need. Baldwin responds to this presupposed relationship by arguing that the subaltern gaze has something invaluable to offer Whites:

What do they expect from us, the darker brother? I've had a hard life. But my dear [...] I would not be a white American for all the tea in China, for all the oil in Texas. I really wouldn't like to live with all of those lies. This is what is irreducible and awful. You the English, you the French, you the West, you the Christians. You can't help but feel there is something you can do for me, that you can save me. You don't yet know that I have endured your salvation for so long. I cannot afford it anymore. And that I can save you [...] I know something about you. You don't know anything about me.²³⁶

Attorney General Robert Kennedy demonstrated that he was not there to hear the activists, but, rather, to reassure them, essentially buying the Kennedy administration more time to tackle the

²³⁵ Nathaniel Mills, "Cleaver/Baldwin Revisited: Naturalism and the Gendering of Black Revolution," *Studies in American Naturalism*, Summer 2012, Vol. 7, No. 1, 50-79 (50).

²³⁶ James Baldwin, *Meeting the Man*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhan5YSbiso> [Accessed: 2 November 2021].

political damage, at home and abroad, that the Civil Rights Movement created in the mist of the Cold War. Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry, however, insisted that their perspective had wisdom to offer the Administration. Rather, they wanted the Federal government to recognize civil rights as a moral issue which should be fought in the hearts and minds of the American people and understand that the Movement was a moral campaign to preserve the nation's already fragile democratic process. For Baldwin, morality was an important issue, because he understood that the Civil Rights Movement was also about White America choosing their Whiteness over democracy, an observation Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi reiterated, in January 9th 2021, amidst the Capitol riots.²³⁷

It is also important to recognize that the Civil Rights Movement concerned, equally, the political trajectory of the nation and its future as a beacon of freedom and democracy around the world. At one point, Hansberry evoked the performative nature of White masculinity inherent in the relationship between White supremacy and anti-Black violence, evoking the brutal arrest by White police of a Black woman protesting in the South. Hansberry questioned, in essence, the state of a civilization that produces men who would stand on a Black woman's neck.²³⁸ In a later interview with *The Village Voice*, Hansberry echoed the sentiments of the activists present that Robert Kennedy scarcely understood why Blacks felt the need to protest at all. David Lemming observes that the activist, "were not there to hear statistics; their concern was to convey to Kennedy that time for compromise, for nonviolence, was running out."²³⁹ Many warned Robert Kennedy that more militant organizations were beginning to gain popularity amongst Black youth, and that if peaceful measures did not suffice to hedge anti-Black violence and legal discrimination, more extreme measures would inevitably be taken.

²³⁷ Nancy Pelosi, "Nancy Pelosi: Trump Insurgents Chose 'Whiteness Over Democracy,'" [YouTube Video] 11 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8NDsbFRZEw> [Accessed: 25 May 2023].

²³⁸ David Lemming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2015 [1994]).

²³⁹ David Lemming, 224.

Baldwin's skepticism towards White liberalism is informed by his encounters with the artistic left in New York's West Village of the early 1940's. Fresh out of high school, Baldwin sought to flee the dangers of poverty in Harlem, the constraints of racial segregation and the authoritarian presence of his fervently religious father. Baldwin wanted to be a writer who did not only write about the Negro Problem, which would prevent him from discussing the forces that create the human experience and connect all people. Yet he quickly realized that racism was a national phenomenon which followed him whether he was in New York working for *PM* (a liberal newspaper) as a messenger, or in New Jersey working in a factory or in San Francisco where he debunked the city's claim to racial progress.²⁴⁰ It was abundantly clear that White liberalism was a sedulous rebranding of Whiteness which offered "less racist" alternatives to overt racism, and in the meeting Robert Kennedy demonstrated a savior or missionary attitude, one which Baldwin believed had plagued the Americas since the early beginnings of colonization.

In the introduction to the *Price of the Ticket* (2021), Baldwin describes his brief time as a member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), and later a Trotskyite, as being of little interest. This is due, in part, to the political indoctrination he underwent, which he later describes as revolutionary sentimentality, a movement Baldwin denounced, in *Notes of a Native Son*, as "the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel."²⁴¹ He was introduced to YPSL by Eugene Worth, a close friend who, in the winter of 1946, committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. Baldwin later paid homage to Worth's death in *Another Country* with the suicide of Rufus Scott. During his affiliation with the Left, Baldwin met editor Saul Levitas who gave Baldwin his first book review assignments and became a lasting

²⁴⁰ See: *Take This Hammer*, a 1963 documentary which follows Baldwin as he investigates San Francisco's claim that it is a socially liberal and cosmopolitan sanctuary of social and economic freedom. Baldwin demonstrates, however, that like other cities in the US, San Francisco functions much like Northern cities. It suffers from de facto segregation and racial discrimination in education, employment and housing.

²⁴¹ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *Notes of a Native Son*, 12.

influence in Baldwin's life. The "old man"—as Baldwin affectionally called him—had a problem with understanding the connection between America and the Old world:

[...] white people are not white: part of the price of the white ticket is to delude themselves into believing that they are. The political position of my old man, for example, whether or not he knew it, was dictated by his (in his case) very honorable necessity not to break faith with the Old World. One may add, in passing, that the Old World, or Europe, has become nothing less than an American superstition, which accounts, if anything can, for an American vision of Russia so Talmudic and self-serving that it has absolutely nothing to do with any reality occurring under the sun.²⁴²

It was around this same time that Baldwin understood the essential problem with White liberalism and liberals like Robert Kennedy; their unwillingness to question the legitimacy of America's morals as evidenced in its treatment of Blacks. Furthermore, White liberals believed that they could save Blacks, by elevating them to the same social standing as Whites. This belief suggests that Whiteness possesses some intrinsic value that Blacks need and that Blacks have nothing to offer Whites. Baldwin already understood early on that he did not need to be saved. What did he need to be saved from? "I was not born to hope to become the equal of the slave-master,"²⁴³ Baldwin declared in *The Price of the Ticket*. White liberalism, as a social and political movement, falters as a viable solution to America's race problem, because it fails to assess its own positionality within the construction of a race-based system to which it owes its presumed moral authority.

Thus, White liberalism has no moral ground on which to stand, because it ignores how race informs its ideologies. "Whether in private debate or in public," Baldwin declares, "any attempt I made to explain how the Black Muslim movement came about, and how it has achieved such force, was met with a blankness that revealed the little connection that the liberals' attitudes have with their perceptions or their lives, or even their knowledge—revealed, in fact, that they could deal with the Negro as a symbol or a victim but had no sense of him as

²⁴² James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket*, 19.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.

a man.”²⁴⁴ Morality in Baldwin’s writings is a question of reconciling the public life with the private one. It is about relationality vs individuality, how we relate to each other beyond the social mechanisms we create. Baldwinian morality is a spectrum of contradictions that we must always endeavor to reconcile. In “On Being white and Other Lies,” Baldwin writes that “[t]he crisis of leadership in the white community is remarkable—and terrifying—because there is, in fact, no white community.”²⁴⁵ The process of racialization of Whites in America has transformed people who have no connection to one another other than their Whiteness. Yet because Whiteness has been rendered invisible, there is no tangible relationship. Only mythology gives intelligible meaning to what it means to be White in America. On one end, there is the American Dream. On the other, there is Manifest Destiny, two lies which have forged a set of traditions and beliefs about the role of Whiteness. In a 1986 interview with David C. Estes, Baldwin offered his vision of this American conundrum:

This is a curiously and dangerously fragmented society while, perhaps unlike any society in the past, it has all the stirrings of well-being. It has at its back the resonance of the American Dream and the history of conquest. But it is also based on a lie, the lie of Manifest Destiny. So it’s a country immobilized, with a past it cannot explain away. That’s why every one’s so cheerful, and the Americans who are crying have to be cheerful.²⁴⁶

Baldwin lays bare the fragmented psychology of the US, born ultimately from good intentions as expressed in the humanistic foundations set forth in the American Constitution: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These ideals, however, were fractured by a history of racial violence that such myths as Manifest Destiny cover up to rationalize the use of rape, murder, torture and enslavement to build the nation. Yet, when White liberals deny the reality of history, they

²⁴⁴ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 320.

²⁴⁵ James Baldwin, “On Being White and Other Lies,” 177.

²⁴⁶ As cited in Leah Mirakhor, “Resisting the Temptation to Give Up: James Baldwin, Robert Adams, and the Disavowal of the American Way of Life,” *African American Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 653.

undermine any internal or external moral basis for the decisions they make, both on an individual and a collective level:

Consequently, white Americans are in nothing more deluded than in supposing that Negroes could ever have imagined that white people would “give” them anything. It is rare indeed that people give. Most people guard and keep; they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be. One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself—that is to say, risking oneself. I one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving. And, after all, one can give freedom only by setting someone free.²⁴⁷

The Baldwin-Kennedy meeting reflects Baldwin’s observations on how the private life affects the public sphere. In the book-length essay *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985), the writer confronts the presumed neutrality and naturalness that is often associated with Whiteness. Baldwin postulates that Whiteness was effectively a social experiment in which European peoples of distinct ethnicities and nationalities became, upon the shores of America, one cohesive identity, sharing, expressing and propagating moral values which are inseparable from America’s spiritual life. The fact remains, however, that they are deeply racialized. Their social rise begins once they hit the shores of the New World, to become the unnamable enigma that is “White.”

On October 24th, 1968, Baldwin and Dick Gregory spoke to a group of radical West Indian students in London, on the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement. The talk took place just months after the assassination of Martin L. King, Jr. that same year. Directed by Trinidadian Horace Ové, the documentary *Baldwin’s Nigger* offers insight into how Baldwin reconciles the loss of his friends and the White liberal establishment that refuses to recognize how they relate to their death. As such, White liberals cannot understand that they suffer from their color as much as Black suffer from theirs:

To know quite apart from whatever his own attitudes, aspirations, morality may be—whatever they may be—he is, nevertheless, whether or not he likes it, a part of the people who at this very hour are jailing some black boy in Mississippi, who are at this very hour whipping some black,

²⁴⁷ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 336.

African slave, who at this very hour are perpetrating the most tremendous enormities against [...] people who look like me. That innocence can be in crucial moments a very grave danger. It can menace much more than the white liberal can imagine.²⁴⁸

Admittedly, *Baldwin's Nigger* was released six years after Baldwin's meeting with Kennedy. Baldwin's assertion demonstrates, nonetheless, the danger evidenced in the failure to critique ideologies that forge identities. The socio-political tradition of White liberalism ignores the ideological relationship it shares with anti-Black racism and hides that the same historical forces have created White liberal identity as much as it has created the behavior of "bad Whites." Like David, White liberals distance themselves from this symbiotic relationship between Whiteness and racism, and refuse to take responsibility for their history. Baldwin places David's European-American heritage at the forefront of the novel's drama, fueled by sexual, racial and national differentiation. The character's relationship to his heritage interrupts the process of self-knowledge and disrupts social relationships founded upon that history.

Baldwin postulates that human life is a tragic set of paradoxes for which "the finest principles may have to be modified, or may even be pulverized by the demands of life, and that one must find, therefore, one's own moral center and move through the world hoping that his center will guide one aright."²⁴⁹ White liberalism prioritizes its presumed role in the world over the well-being of those it claims to defend and fails to acknowledge the role of Whiteness as prescriptive, as being a dominant model of human potential, a hegemon placing itself at the highest echelon of a race-based hierarchy, covertly conveying the latent belief that Whiteness, invisible and universal, is a paragon of social and democratic virtue which should be adopted by non-White groups. This means that the paradox of White liberalism is that its own sense of value and purpose derives from the same problem (race) it hopes to solve:

White Americans find it as difficult as white people elsewhere do to divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some intrinsic value that black people need, or want. And

²⁴⁸ James Baldwin, *Baldwin's Nigger* [YouTube video], < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v5sfTgKCe8> > [Accessed: 28 June 2021.]

²⁴⁹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 9.

this assumption—which, for example, makes the solution to the Negro problem depend on the speed with which Negroes accept and adopt white standards [...] It is the Negro, of course, who is presumed to have become equal — an achievement that not only proves the comforting fact that perseverance has no color but also overwhelmingly corroborates the white man’s sense of his own value.²⁵⁰

The social function of White liberalism is inarticulable, mainly, because it focuses on the paradigm of good Whites vs. bad Whites, avoiding the type of self-awareness or question-asking necessary for true social change. As discussed earlier in this chapter, White innocence transcends what Michele Elam calls modes of “prepubescent or prelapsarian”²⁵¹ conditionality, acting as a racial hiding place in which Eurocentric ideologies are overlooked. White liberalism demonstrates this in its penchant for classifying racism as bad behavior, instead of confronting *race* as intrinsically racist. This leads White liberals to ignore structurally impregnated forms of racism inherent in Whiteness as a system of beliefs and demarcate racist attitudes as personal or individual.

That David refuses to accept his same-sex desires renders him inapt to recognize or deal with Giovanni’s suffering, brought on by his own self-hatred and insecurities. In the end, Giovanni is unable to reach his American lover, and the two become strangers who pass each other on the street. When Giovanni is arrested, David escapes to the South of France with Hella. However, she catches him in the arms of an American sailor, shortly after they arrive and decides to leave for the US. As she packs, David attempts to reassure her that his lying and cheating were not intentional: “I wish, anyway [...] that you’d believe me when I say that, if I was lying, I wasn’t lying to *you*.”²⁵² David realizes that he has been lying to himself and has sacrificed both Giovanni and Hella for moral standards that are impossible to honor. Yet David still fails to understand that his self-denial has effectively destroyed the lives of those around

²⁵⁰ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 340-341.

²⁵¹ Michele Elam, “Introduction: Baldwin’s Art,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.

²⁵² James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 355.

him. This scene is reminiscent of an earlier conversation David has with Jacques in Paris. The Belgian asks David if he will be honest to Hella about his feelings for Giovanni or treat his lovers as he has treated him (Jacques). Baldwin writes:

“You have been very unfair to me,” he said. “You have been very dishonest [...] I mean you could have been fair to me by despising me a little less [...]”

“I’m sorry. But I think, since you bring it up, that a lot of your life *is* despicable.”

“I could say the same about yours,” said Jacques. “There are so many ways of being despicable it quite makes one’s head spin. But the way to be really despicable is to be contemptuous of other people’s pain. You ought to have some apprehension that the man you see before you was once even younger than you are now and arrived at this present wretchedness by imperceptible degrees.”²⁵³

David refuses to see the pain in others or recognize the messiness of human existence. He describes Jacques’s life as “despicable,” but fails to recognize that the moral standards of the time give few options to nonheteronormative identities. David’s father, Giovanni, Hella, and Sue mirror the callous indifference with which David approaches his relationships. It is these confrontations that David has with Jacques, Giovanni and Hella that David learns not only that he has caused others to suffer but to recognize his own suffering in them. Although Baldwin does not offer David a neatly crafted conclusion, we understand that the American has reached a level of emotional maturity that allows him to empathize with others’ pain, instead of hiding from it. This means that he has the ability to recognize how he affects the world around him and hopefully help change it for the better.

Baldwin often employs seemingly unintelligible relationships to break the apparent intelligibility of normative relationships and uses love “[to] create the consciousness of the other [...] the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks,” two lovers who must not “[...] falter in [their] duty [...] to end the racial nightmare, and achieve [their] country,

²⁵³ Ibid., 265-266.

and change the history of the world.”²⁵⁴ David and Giovanni’s relationship challenges the color line by resisting the marker of belonging to a White hegemony. Their love story reveals how David’s decisions are motivated by issues of race, sexuality and nationality, which Giovanni challenges with the brutal honesty that can only be made possible when one lover forces the other “to see [himself] as [he is], to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”²⁵⁵ Although the Baldwin-Kennedy meeting was an initial failure due to Robert Kennedy’s inexperience in racial matters, it nonetheless bore fruit when, on June 11, 1963, JFK gave a televised speech in which he proposed legislation that became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. More importantly, the President borrowed the words of Baldwin and the other activist that civil rights were important to the moral trajectory of the nation. Therefore, Baldwin’s rhetoric appears to have swayed the Attorney General and the President from what David M. Lubin characterizes as “passivity or indifference toward a show of concern for racial equality in America.”²⁵⁶ Like one lover to another, Baldwin—and the other activist-artists—forced Robert Kennedy to shed his innocence and accept the country for what it is, in order to change it for the better.

Of course, *Giovanni’s Room* is not the first of Baldwin’s novels to discuss the question of race. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* focuses on the Grimes family. Through three generations of one family’s experience, the novel’s narrative structure resists the neatly framed historiographies which have produced the myths surrounding Whiteness that David has internalized as integral to his sense of self. Where *Giovanni’s Room* places Whiteness at the forefront of David’s intimate relationship to these myths, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resists these myths on a national scale by placing Whiteness at the periphery of the Black communities

²⁵⁴ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 346-347.

²⁵⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 294.

²⁵⁶ David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, (2003 [1959])), 274.

Baldwin describes. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* shows the brutality of Southern-style racism while exploring the Black exodus called the Great Migration. However, John Grimes story interrupts post-war ideologies that the North does not suffer from the same anti-Black racism as the South. Through the migration of Black bodies, Baldwin demonstrates that race and racism are influential to national dialogues of statehood and citizenry.

Although anti-Black racism is a prevalent force throughout *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin describes Black life beyond the narratives of social domination. John Grimes shines as a beacon of hope for his community, because his gift as a talented writer and his family heritage of struggle provide him with the tools to resistance trappings that lie ahead. In *History, Memory and Meaning in Go Tell It on the Mountain*, I argue that Baldwin uses personal memory as a form of witnessing which when correctly assessed resists politically invested historical narratives surrounding race. I introduce the term *White Spectrality* and *Materiality of History* to describe Whiteness from an African American perspective. Where the former describes Whiteness as a ghostly figure that haunts the contours of the novel's Black characters, the latter describes storytelling as a truth-seeking endeavor which resists false historical narratives and rescues history from the political and economic interests of the era.

Chapter 2: History, Memory and Meaning in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

La “vérité” est liée circulairement à des systèmes de pouvoir qui la produisent et la soutiennent, et à des effets de pouvoir qu’elle induit et qui la reconduisent.
“Régime” de la vérité.

- Michel Foucault, “Vérité et Pouvoir, entretien” 1977²⁵⁷

2.1 History, Memory and Meaning in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

History, Memory and Meaning are, arguably, the driving forces of Baldwin’s Christian aesthetic in his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Written against the backdrop of the Great Depression era (1929-1934) and the Great Migration (1899-1964), the novel disrupts neatly structured interpretations of race, poverty and religious faith in America. The novel follows the religious conversion and burgeoning sexuality of John Grimes, the novel’s 14-year-old protagonist, as he deals with family, race and the sexual identity politics of 1930’s Harlem, New York. John is destined to follow in his father’s footsteps to become a boy-preacher. As he embarks on his spiritual journey, the experience of the Black communities Baldwin describes transform into truth-telling artifacts, and memory becomes an ideological contender against national myths which claim that the past is “dead [and] the Negro himself has forgotten it.”²⁵⁸ From the novel’s beginning, Baldwin elevates memory to the level of prophecy and makes John the focal point of family revelation, sinful pride, forgiveness and the transformative power of memory. Baldwin writes:

²⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Michel Foucault: Collectif-Essai* (Paris: Éditions inculc, 2007 [1977]), 69; “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effect of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth.”; Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon and trans, Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980 [1977]), 133.

²⁵⁸ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 22.

Everyone had always said that John would be a preacher when he grew up, just like his father. It had been said so often that John, without ever thinking about it, had come to believe it himself. Not until the morning of his fourteenth birthday did he really begin to think about it, and by then it was already too late.

His earliest memories—which were in a way, his only memories—were of the hurry and brightness of Sunday mornings. They all rose together on that day; his father, who did not have to go to work, and led them in prayer before breakfast; his mother, who dressed up on that day, and looked almost young, with her hair straightened, and on her head the closefitting white cap that was the uniform of holy women; his younger brother, Roy, who was silent that day because his father was home. Sarah, who wore a red ribbon in her hair that day, and was fondled by her father. And the baby, Ruth who was dressed in pink and white, and rode in her mother’s arms to church [...]

Every Sunday morning, then, since John could remember, they had taken to the streets, the Grimes family on their way to church. Sinners along the avenue watched them—men still wearing their Saturday-night clothes, wrinkled and dusty now, muddy-eyed and muddy-faced; and women with harsh voices and tight, bright dresses, cigarettes between their fingers or held tightly in the corners of their mouths. They talked, and laughed, and fought together, and the women fought like the men. John and Roy, passing these men and women, looked at one another briefly, John embarrassed and Roy amused. Roy would be like them when he grew up, if the Lord did not change his heart. These men and women they passed on Sunday morning had spent the night in bars, or in cat houses, or on the streets, or on rooftops, or under the stairs. They had been drinking. They had gone from cursing to laughter, to anger, to lust. Once he and Roy had watched a man and woman in the basement of a condemned house. They did it standing up. The woman had wanted fifty cents, and the man had flashed a razor.²⁵⁹

“Everyone” refers to the congregants of the Temple of the Fire Baptized, the Pentecostal church where Gabriel Grimes—the family patriarch and John’s father—leads the parish and nourishes communal hope. In “Kairotic Time, Recognition, and Freedom in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” Robert Z. Birdwell recognizes the importance community plays in this introductory paragraph, revealing an “indeterminant” and “ambiguous” relationship between John and the religious community.²⁶⁰ The Temple of the Fire Baptized is a political space for activism, where congregants express their desire for social transformation and economic prosperity. A part of that social dialogue, John is the physical manifestation (the bearer) of community hope and memory, and “his earliest memories [...] which [...] were his only memories” guide him through the novel towards the pastorate, where his father hopes, futilely, that John will find salvation from the world that racial segregation and discrimination

²⁵⁹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 9-10.

²⁶⁰ Robert Z. Birdwell, “Kairotic Time, Recognition, and Freedom in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 4 (2018), 35.

have created. The novel often employs the pluperfect to express actions and events completed prior to some past point of time either specified or implied.

Biblical language and the temporal force of the pluperfect erases the temporal gap, articulating memory as a precursor to history. The phrases “[h]ad always said” and “had been said” express the prophecy of John’s future as a preacher through communal memory. Baldwin writes that the “image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful [...]”²⁶¹ The image of the Grimes family through their own memories offers readers an intimate picture of how faith and hope allow the characters to commune with those lost to racially motivated violence. Baldwin uses messianic language and biblical-inspired genealogies to insist that the Grimes are neither victims nor saints. This is achieved through a contrast of the Christian family with the sins of their neighborhood from which the family spiritually separates themselves and upon which their religious convictions and faith are strengthened: “These men and women they passed on Sunday morning had spent the night in bars, or in cat houses, or on the streets, or on rooftops, or under the stairs. They had been drinking. They had gone from cursing to laughter, to anger, to lust.” Baldwin reimagines the biblical prophet Paul’s warning to the Israelites that their self-righteousness towards the Gentiles is an offense to God (“That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith”²⁶²). Rather, the Israelites pursue righteousness through acts and not through experiential knowledge of the Word (“For I testify about them that they are zealous for God, but not on the basis of knowledge”²⁶³). Like the Israelites, the Grimes family presents itself as righteous when confronted with the “cursing,” “anger” and “lust.” However, Baldwin defines these feelings as born out of abject poverty and despair.

²⁶¹ James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone,” 22.

²⁶² The Berean Study Bible, Romans 9:30.

²⁶³ Ibid, Romans 10:2

Righteousness, however, cannot be obtained from acts or belief itself, but from God for the lives the family leads.

In this section, I argue that Baldwin articulates a conceptualization of history which rejects politically invested historiographies that support false narratives surrounding America's relationship to race and poverty. In "Vérité et Pouvoir" ("Truth and Power"), Michel Foucault observes that power anticipates narratives of truth to sustain and extend it. Baldwin arrives at a similar conclusion when he calls himself "a kind of bastard of the West." Baldwin writes:

I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this meant that in some subtle way, in a really profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building, a special attitude. These were not really my creations, they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any reflection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use-I had certainly been unfitted for the jungle or the tribe. I would have to appropriate these white centuries, I would have to make them mine-I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme [...]²⁶⁴

Baldwin recognizes that he is an integral part of the West and Western history. He is a bridge between the West and Africa. He reappropriates his unique position as a Black man in the West to offer novel ways to understand what is meant by history. Baldwin conceptually differentiates the "past" from "history" to address regimes of truth that articulate anti-Black violence as the "Negro Problem," effectively distancing history from Whiteness as a power regime. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin uses memory as a form of truth-telling to disrupt historical abstractions—as opposed to concrete experiences—to create new regimes of truth. "In the context of the Negro problem neither whites nor blacks [...] have the faintest desire to look back," Baldwin writes. He continues, "but I think that the past is all that makes the present coherent."²⁶⁵ In Gabriel Grimes's story, Baldwin shows that "it would no longer be possible to

²⁶⁴ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 7-8.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

make an abstraction of the individual black man or woman.”²⁶⁶ Political and economic necessity compels history to do its bidding as a regime of truth, with race and sex sketching the social contours of American life. In Chapter One, I explore how race, sex and class construct tangible realities which inform David’s fear-driven flight to accept safety over a life lived honestly. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Gabriel Grimes’ story is integral to American history, because his disappointment, anger, and hate for Whites articulate a unique experience in the history of America. I begin with an analysis on what Baldwin means by “the past” and “history,” to explore how the terms function in the novel and analyze Gabriel Grimes’ story against the backdrop of the Great Migration. By describing Gabriel’s move North as an escape from personal responsibility, I argue that Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resists simplified historical narratives which describe, in the case of the novel, the Great Migration as triggered by hope and opportunity, neatly placing personal narratives in the myth of the American dream.

The past is the site of all knowledge, by which I mean that the past offers revelations on contemporary challenges that are too often regarded as unsolvable. However, the perceived inscrutability of the present serves only to sustain regimes of power and hedge against positive change. The present is ever-changing and persists as an unlimited source of knowledge and inspiration for social change. As such, Baldwin discusses the past in historical terms to mitigate claims that history is an intellectual endeavor which begins and ends like a dream or nightmare. Rather, he defines history as a sensual experience, that moves through and affects the intangible and corporeal world alike:

History is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could be scarcely otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations, and it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is,

²⁶⁶ Ulf Schulenberg, “Speaking out of the Most Passionate Love”: James Baldwin and Pragmatism, *European Journal of American Studies*, vol 2. no. 2 (Autumn 2007), < <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/1333> > [accessed: 3 September 2022].

and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to recreate oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating: one begins to attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history.²⁶⁷

The past describes moments, places and events that are beyond the reach of those who inhabit the present. The past is unalterable, and any mistakes made remain stuck in time, forever. When Baldwin says that we must “assess the history which has placed [us] where [we are], and formed [our] point of view,” he means that we must strive to remember the past and understand how our history affects the present because the present's intelligibility depends on how we understand the past. Any hopes for a better future depend on understanding our history, or how the past manifests itself in the present. Baldwin describes “history” as the way the past appears in the present. History is the present, because “we carry it within us [and] are unconsciously controlled by it.” In *Go Tell It on the Mountain* the prediction of John's future is drenched in the past of a troubled family and a community shaken by racial and sexual violence. Baldwinian history uses the personal narratives of the Grimes family to emphasize that John is history. He is the personification of the past in the present, filled with the trauma, hopes and fears of his family and community.

Baldwin imbues history with meaning and calls upon it as a site for social transformation. What we call written history privileges what Cedric Robinson calls “regime maintenance”²⁶⁸ over the “complete picture” of human experience Baldwin reconstructs in the novel. “[T]he force of history” describes how the past controls his characters. At first glance, Gabriel Grimes is the antagonist of the novel, an overbearing father who imposes his will on his family with physical violence. However, readers learn that Gabriel's strict demeanor is a defense from the trauma he has suffered from the harshness of pre-civil rights racism and his abandonment of his son Royal, who is born out of wedlock and dies “in a Chicago tavern,

²⁶⁷ James Baldwin, “The White Man's Guilt,” *James Baldwin : Collected Essays*, 722-723.

²⁶⁸ Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, xiv.

[with] a knife kicking in his throat.”²⁶⁹ *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is divided into three parts: The Seventh Day, The Prayers of the Saints and The Threshing-Floor. “Gabriel’s Prayer” is part of “The Prayers of the Saints,” which recounts the stories of his sister Florence, Gabriel and his wife, Elizabeth. I focus on “Gabriel’s Prayer,” which comes after Florence’s story, because Gabriel uses his religious convictions as armor to shield himself from the anti-Black racism that controls his life. Rather than assess how his actions have negatively affected the lives of others, Gabriel relies on religious fervor to wash away the sin of his egotism. Through Gabriel’s story, the hopes and promise his Harlem community imbues him with become clearer. Finally, “Gabriel’s Prayer” illustrates that although the church cannot impede the effects of American racism, it offers a political and spiritual space where the past can become a site for hope, transformation and empowerment.

The novel tells the story of the hopes and dreams of each character and how life has led them out the South to Harlem. Gabriel’s story begins much like John’s, with a religious conversion during his younger years. The scene resembles a religious revival, where congregants “cry” and “moan” and shout in religious mediation against the sinful trappings of the secular world. Florence screams with exaltation as Gabriel receives God’s word: “This was the cry he had heard so many days and nights, before so many altars, and he cried tonight, as he had cried before: ‘Have your way, Lord! Have your way!’”²⁷⁰ The sentence is telling, describing the beauty, pain and agony Baldwin associates with the process of confession and forgiveness. However, the scene works twofold, foreshadowing the sexual promiscuity Gabriel is infamous for in his town, before his religious conversion.

Gabriel’s childhood is described as a sequence of bad behaviors that made “[a]lmost all of their neighbors, and even some of the white folks, [come] at one time or another to complain

²⁶⁹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on a Mountain*, 108.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

of Gabriel's wrongdoing."²⁷¹ In adulthood, Gabriel swaps childhood mischief for drunken, "vomit-covered" nights where he would "stagger up the moonlit road."²⁷² These nights are filled with a slew of one-night stands, reminiscent of David's life of irresponsibility in *Giovanni's Room*. Tired of taking care of their mother and Gabriel's egocentric attitude towards life, Florence decides to leave for New York. Gabriel cries and begs her to stay, because he does not want to care for his elderly mother.

"And you going," cried Gabriel, "this morning—just like that? And you going to walk off and leave your mother —just like that?"

"You hush," she said, turning to him for the first time, "she got you, ain't she?"²⁷³

The cause of Gabriel's irresponsibility is the belief that he has no future. Florence leaves her mother and brother in 1900, "when she [is] twenty-six."²⁷⁴ Although slavery had been over for almost forty years, "few members of the majority race questioned the demeaning etiquette that accompanied" the tradition of Jim Crow which "guarded prohibitions and exclusions."²⁷⁵ These exclusions restricted Black movement and employment opportunities: "in nearly every industry, there were strict lines dividing 'white' jobs from 'black' ones."²⁷⁶ Given the South's political stance on race relations at the time, it is not a stretch to assume that Gabriel's attitude towards responsibility is provoked—in part—by a feeling of hopelessness in the face of such odds. Though this may be true, what drives Gabriel is his egotism and deep sense of self-importance. In New York, Florence informs her husband Frank, before his death in WWII, that Gabriel is a "murderer."²⁷⁷ Apparently, he fathered a child with a woman other than his wife. She explains that "he done let this child's mother go off and die when the child was born [...]"

²⁷¹ Ibid., 68.

²⁷² Ibid., 70.

²⁷³ Ibid., 72.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *American Divided: The Civil War of the 1960's*, 27

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It*, 84.

And it sounds just like Gabriel. He ain't never thought a minute about nobody in this world but himself."²⁷⁸

Indeed, the young Gabriel readers encounter in "Florence's Prayer" is starkly different from the adult Gabriel who has five children with his wife Elizabeth and frequently resorts to violence when angry. He sees himself as his family's protector and moral compass and expects them to follow his leadership. For this reason, he finds himself "under the necessity of proving—by harsh means or tender—who, in a sanctified household, ruled."²⁷⁹ When his oldest son Roy comes home bleeding from a stabbing, one afternoon, Gabriel blames his wife Elizabeth for not having watched over him. Elizabeth reminds her husband that Roy is an uncontrollable force, not unlike Gabriel before his conversion: "You don't know what to do with this boy, and that's why you all the time trying to fix the blame on somebody. Ain't nobody to blame, Gabriel. You just better pray God to stop him before somebody puts another knife in him and puts him in his grave."²⁸⁰ In response, Gabriel slaps his wife "with all his might, he reache[s] out and slap[s] her across the face. She crumple[s] at once, hiding her face with one thin hand [...]"²⁸¹ Gabriel believes that if he uses physical violence towards his family, he can protect them. However, Florence reminds him that he cannot:

"Yes, Lord," Aunt Florence said, "you was born wild, and you's going to die wild. But ain't no use to try to take the whole world with you. You can't change nothing, Gabriel. You ought to know that by now."²⁸²

Florence's utterance that "you can't change nothing" refers to the poverty in which they continue to live. The violence Gabriel demonstrates towards Elizabeth is not minimized. Rather, Baldwin continues his project of truth-telling, through nuanced descriptions of his characters which reject the sentimentality he describes in "Everybody's Protest Novel."

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 84-85.

²⁷⁹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 12.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 47.

Although Baldwin's analysis of sentimentality is not the subject of this section, I will say that his approach to describing Gabriel rejects the character as a mere "time-saving invention."²⁸³ Rather, Baldwin connects his violence with the toll racism takes on him and his fear of not being able to provide for his family. Gabriel is often unable to feed his children: "Wasn't his fault," Elizabeth tells Roy. "Wasn't because he wasn't trying to feed you. That man shoveled snow in zero weather when he ought've been in bed just to put food in your belly."²⁸⁴ Gabriel has to work in hard conditions, is paid little, treated badly by Whites and given menial jobs, a reality that echoes the racial atmosphere of the early 20th century. More importantly, the effects of racism bruise Gabriel's ego. In what follows, I describe how Baldwin explores Gabriel's egoism in the context of the Protestant church, as he uses his status as a preacher to gain prominence, which feeds his sense of importance. I show that the Great Migration is secondary to Gabriel's story which is the story of a man who is unable to learn or be humbled by the mistakes he makes. In Gabriel's story, Baldwin explores nuanced expressions of the past, by complicating the simple narratives that explain the Great Migration. In doing so, Baldwin's novel resists the US's penchant for historical revisionism which simplifies human complexity. Baldwin explains Gabriel's move North as his attempt to escape his sins, instead of an attempt to find better employment or escape Southern racism.

Gabriel's memory reshapes, anticipates and describes the social forces that provoked two waves of Black migration known as the Great Migration, a term which describes two historical periods that saw Blacks flee the American South for better prospects in Northern cities. The first took place during and shortly after WWI, due to the racial tension and violence of White Southerners who, after the Civil War (1861-1865) and the Reconstruction era (1863-1877), all but took out their frustrations on the South's Black population. The second migration

²⁸³ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," 15.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

wave occurred from “the urgent need for soldiers to fight abroad and for wage-earners to forge an ‘arsenal of democracy.’”²⁸⁵

Mechanized cotton pickers shrunk the need for agrarian labor just as the lure of good jobs in war industries sapped the will to stay in the fields. Metropolises from Los Angeles to New York filled up with dark-skinned residents—and, after the war, the flow persisted. Between 1940 and 1960, 4.5 million black men and women migrated out of Dixie; African Americans were fast becoming an urban people.²⁸⁶

By the 1930’s Northern cities like Chicago and New York stood, in the imagination of Southern Blacks, as beacons of economic opportunity and advancement, and a reprieve from decades of racial oppression. Indeed, many Blacks in the South were able to double or even triple the daily income they had before the Great Depression. This change was due to a decrease in European immigration which provoked a labor shortage.²⁸⁷ However, the waves of Black migration created competition in housing and employment, previously reserved for Whites. In Chicago, “several hundred white residents organized the Hyde Park Improvement Protective Club, which announced that blacks must live in the ‘so-called District’ and that real estate agents must not sell homes to blacks in white blocks.”²⁸⁸ Baldwin explains this attitude in *Nobody Knows My Name* as the hypocrisy of the North in regards to race: “And exactly the same way that the South imagines that it ‘knows’ the Negro,” Baldwin writes, “The North imagines that it has set him free.”²⁸⁹ However, “[b]oth camps are deluded. Human freedom is a complex, difficult and private thing. If we can liken life, for a moment, to a furnace, then freedom is the fire which burns away illusion.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ronald Takaki cites Journalist Ray Stannard Baker who reports that a Black Georgian man was thinking of heading North, because he only earned “\$1.25-\$1.50 a day. I went to work at a dye house at Newark, N.J. at \$2.75 a day, with a rent-free room to live in ... The company paid my fare North.” In Chicago, a newspaper ran an ad seeking workers for “\$4.50-\$5.50 per day” as an experience molder; Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, 342-343; St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, vol. 1 (New York, 1962), 60.

²⁸⁸ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, 348.

²⁸⁹ James Baldwin, “Nobody Knows My Name,” 208.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

The North's "moral righteousness" on race originates from winning the Civil War and emancipating Black slaves from bondage in the South. However, the North constructed an illusion of moral righteousness that did not allow Blacks to live alongside them. During the Civil War, Blacks were an abstraction, a moral question between the North and the South, to be fought in Northern hearts and on Southern land. The Great Migration, effectively, brought the race question to the North's backdoor. Gabriel and his sister, Florence, travel to the North in hope of a better life. They flee hoping that the myth of Northern opportunity will guide them from the "tyrannical power" of the South.

The Great Migration has had a powerful influence on the Grimes' family, as in the lives of many Black Americans. However, Miriam Sivan reminds us that *Go Tell It on the Mountain* must not be reduced to a Migration story. Rather, the novel describes the experiences of the family from the Antebellum era to the Great Depression. "By including John's step-grandmother's story," Sivan observes, "the narrative spans two centuries of African American history." She continues:

Often the transposition to northern soil severed the anchoring connection to the black church. Many who forfeited this bond fell into an often destructive vacuum fomented by the pathology of an unmitigated racism and the treacherous social and economic conditions that were its most obvious symptoms. They could succumb more easily to a kind of nihilism, leading lives of debauchery and self-destruction.²⁹¹

Christianity has a historically important role in the political life of Black communities. When Africans and their descendants were deprived of their cultural heritage, they transformed Christianity "to fit their own peculiar experience of enslavement in America."²⁹² In the 20th century, Martin Luther King Jr. and other religious leaders created a coalition of Black solidarity with political organizations, artists and Christian churches nationwide, to build what

²⁹¹ Miriam Sivan, "Out of and Black to Africa: James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*," *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 51. no. 1 (Autumn 2001), "32.

²⁹² Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1978), 209.

became one of the greatest social movements in American history. However, Baldwin's demand for nuanced depictions of American life offers readers a perspective of how Christianity can also be a site for power and vengeance.

Gabriel's relationship to Christianity is a moral conundrum as he searches, in religion, for power through salvation and hopes that that power will absolve him of the "sins" for which he is afraid to ask forgiveness:

For he desired in his soul, with fear and trembling, all the glories that his mother prayed he should find. Yes, he wanted power—he wanted to know himself to be the Lord's anointed, His well-beloved, and worthy, nearly, of that snow-white dove which had been sent down from Heaven to testify that Jesus was the Son of God. He wanted to be master, to speak with that authority which could only come from God.²⁹³

Gabriel finds power in spiritual and moral righteousness, through deeds which are supposed to wash away his sins. His greatest deed is, arguably, his first marriage to Deborah. Gabriel marries Deborah, Florence's friend and an ostracized rape victim whom a community pastor describes as "ha[ving] been choked so early on white men's milk, and it remained so sour in her belly yet, that she would never be able, now, to find a nigger who would let her taste his richer, sweeter substance."²⁹⁴ At sixteen, Deborah was kidnapped, "taken away into the fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her to make her cry and bleed."²⁹⁵ The town's people refer to her rape as an "accident" which has made her a "living reproach, to herself and to all black women and to all black men."²⁹⁶ Deborah is, then, ostracized by the community for being "tainted." Carol Henderson observes that the interracial gangrape "obliterates her personal voice within the social discourse of the African-American community."²⁹⁷ Deborah represents forthwith "a historicized dialogic representative of the ills

²⁹³ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 88-89.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁹⁷ Carol Henderson, "Knee Bent, Body Bowed: re-Memory's Prayer of spiritual Re(new)al in Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Religion and Literature*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 82.

of slavery, the ills of helplessness felt by all black men and women still enclosed and defined within the social constructs of the new slave system in the South: post-emancipated poverty.”²⁹⁸

Deborah turns to zealous religious conviction to bear the memory of her rape and the subsequent abuse from her community. Gabriel and Deborah become acquainted when Deborah decides to visit his elderly mother, who is bedridden and, thus, unable to attend church services. Elder Peters, one of the pastors in question, disrespects Deborah on “the twelfth night” of “a monster revival meeting” in a hall “the saints had rented for the duration of the revival.”²⁹⁹ While the men are upstairs alone, Gabriel defends her honor by pointing out the pastor’s blatant cruelty and hypocrisy. Another pastor attempts to defuse the tension, by humorously suggesting that Gabriel would not marry her. However, the pastor’s words spark an initiative that makes Gabriel even more intent on following the path of righteousness. He decides to marry Deborah, believing that their union is the will of God and thus his moral duty as a spiritual leader.

Baldwin writes:

Yet Gabriel felt that he had surprised them; he had found them out and they were a little ashamed and confounded before his purity. And he understood suddenly the words of Christ, where it was written: “Many are called but few are chosen.” Yes, and he looked around the table, already jovial again, but rather watchful now, too, of him—and he wondered who, of all these, would sit in glory at the right hand of the Father?

And then, as he sat there, remembering again Elder Peter’s boisterous, idle remark, this remark shook together in him all those shadowy doubts and fears, those hesitations and tenderesses, which were his in relation to Deborah, and the sum of which he now realized was his certainty that there was in that relationship something foreordained. 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 and this idea filled him, in a moment, wholly, with the intensity of a vision: What better woman could be found?³⁰⁰

Gabriel’s marital commitment to Deborah, however, is a mix of pridefulness in the face of the hypocritical ministers, penance, fear and ambition. One of Gabriel’s faults, as a character, is his inability to assess his main “sin,” which is his egotism, confused with righteousness. Gabriel

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 82-83.

²⁹⁹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 96.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 103-104.

believes that his conversion to Christianity washes away the carnal lust he harbored in his earlier years. However, his obsession with carnal pleasure is merely replaced with a “spiritual lust” at least momentarily. This “spiritual lust” transforms into the religious righteousness he exhibits and uses as a shield from the effects of racism and his own stubbornness, later in life. The inherent contradiction between the “spiritual” and “lust” ultimately describes Gabriel’s hypocrisy and explains his move to the North which demonstrates the same remove between abstraction and practice.

Gabriel perceives the power of ministry as ordained and believes that he has been chosen —like Jesus of Nazareth—to deliver the final word of God. His self-righteousness is what drives his ambitions and kindles the beginning of his downfall. Gabriel’s religious conversion is meant to be a new beginning for him and the answer to his mother’s prayers. In “Florence’s Prayer,” readers learn that Gabriel and Florence’s mother was an ex-slave, emancipated during the Civil War. Rachel Grimes’s earlier children had either died or had been sold as slaves. The separation of slaves from their children was a common practice during slavery. Fredrick Douglass scarcely knew his own mother. In his narratives, the abolitionist suggests that children were separated from their parents to sever familial bonds. Douglass observes: “For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result.”³⁰¹

Therefore, Gabriel and Florence are the only children with whom Rachel has a relationship. However, Gabriel is favored as “the apple of her eye” and “a man-child” for whom “all else must be sacrificed.”³⁰² Gabriel’s conversion to Christianity is Rachel’s main worry,

³⁰¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009 [1845]), 16.

³⁰² James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 68.

during her old age, because he is not interested in a spiritual life like Florence. Rather he prefers the pleasures of women, gambling and alcohol, much like the Harlemites he and his family, later, pass on their way to Sunday church. In fact, Roy reminds Gabriel of his own reckless youth, which is why he beats his son so often. Gabriel does not want Roy to follow in his footsteps or end up like Royal, the son he abandoned, before marrying Elizabeth. Furthermore, Gabriel beats Roy because the boy's fighting, use of profanity and obstinance remind Gabriel of the sins he committed during his youth. Where Rachel submits to a higher power with humility, Gabriel remains prideful and unrepentant. Instead, he hides behind the authority he believes God has giving him as his chosen prophet.

After he marries Deborah, Gabriel feels unfulfilled by his conjugal duties: "Gabriel and Deborah never talked. The voice to which he listened in his mind, and the face he watched with so much love and care, belonged not to Deborah, but to Esther."³⁰³ For Gabriel, his marriage to Deborah signifies the beginning of his spiritually saved life. He does not see Deborah on a personal level, which would force him to consider her needs and desires. Like David in *Giovanni's Room*, Gabriel thinks very little of women beyond what they can offer him. Both men see women as hiding places, as opposed to sites of love, growth and the possibility of redemption. This is also illustrated when Gabriel smacks Elizabeth who talks out of turn, mentioning the death of Royal the illegitimate child he has with Esther. Gabriel and Deborah's union is riddled with silence and incomprehension. The holy spirit that brought them together is now mute, leaving only silence between them. Indeed, Gabriel is on the path of righteousness. However, when his religious convictions are tested, he gives in to his lust for Esther: "[...] in that moment Gabriel saw, as though for the first time, how black and how bony was this wife of his, and how wholly undesirable."³⁰⁴ Once Gabriel gets past Deborah as a

³⁰³ Ibid., 112.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 113.

spiritual reprieve, he has to deal with her in human terms. However, he sees his wife as “undesirable,” describing her “black” skin as unattractive. Gabriel’s attitudes towards Deborah’s dark skin reveals the self-hatred Baldwin observed in his own father who “was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him.”³⁰⁵ Gabriel attempts to live up to the moral and aesthetic standards of pre-Black Power rhetoric of the mid-20th century, because he believes that by adhering to these standards, he will be able to shield himself from the power the White world holds over him.

However, Gabriel begins an affair with Esther, shortly after he and Deborah marry. Esther is a woman who helps him revisit his “sinful” youth and dies giving birth to Royal whom Gabriel never accepts as his son. The life and death of Royal reminds Gabriel that he is a sinner, and thus a false messenger of God, like the angel Gabriel. Baldwin’s character wants to be considered chosen because it would give him agency over his life. However, Esther’s announcement that she is pregnant threatens his status as a respectable preacher and, also, God’s favor. Therefore, he accuses Esther of seducing him, effectively placing the blame and responsibility of their affair on her. Baldwin writes:

“Ruined,” he cried. “You? How you going to be ruined? When you been walking through this town just like a harlot, and a-kicking up your heels all over the pasture? How you going to stand there and tell me you been *ruined*? If it hadn’t been me, it sure would have been somebody else.”

“But it was you,” she retorted, “and what I want to know is what we’s going to do.”

He looked at her. Her face was cold and hard—ugly; she had never been so before.

“I don’t know,” he said, deliberately, “what we is going to do. But I tell you what I think you better do: you better go along and get one of these boys you been running around with to marry you. Because I can’t go off with you nowhere.”³⁰⁶

In many respects, Gabriel’s story mirrors the story of King David, who after defeating Goliath, was given dominion over his kingdom. However, David loses God’s favor when he sends his

³⁰⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 291.

³⁰⁶ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 126-127.

best friend Uriah away to war to steal his wife, Bathsheba. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Esther turns from beautiful to resembling Deborah. He describes Esther as “hard” and “ugly” and a “ruined” woman, because she refuses to submit to his will which, he believes, is the will of God. Whereas Deborah remains subordinate to Gabriel until her death, Esther dies. She never allows Gabriel to wash away his sins, insisting that her sin is his sin, and he cannot escape it but must confront it: “I want to know is what *we*’s³⁰⁷ going to do about it.” Like Gabriel in the Bible, Baldwin’s character loses God’s favor. Not only does Esther die during childbirth, but Royal is later murdered, and Deborah perishes. That the human embodiment of his salvation perishes suggests that he has allowed his lust and ego to impede the divine mission he has been given. Therefore, his lust and pride have led God to abandon him as one of his prophets.

Baldwin uses Gabriel’s egotism and search for power in religion to color the historical canvas that is the Great Migration and erases the temporal distance associated with the past and the present, by describing intimate stories against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the Great Migration. Although Gabriel is fundamentally shaped by the deaths of Esther, Deborah and Gabriel, it is guilt, shame and desire for power which inform his decision to go north. He does not ask God for penance, instead choosing to seek escape. That Gabriel smacks Elizabeth demonstrates that he is unable to release himself from the tyrannical power of his past. After Deborah’s death, he runs from the consequences of his egotism which drive his self-righteousness. Gabriel runs from his sins instead of assessing his selfish behavior by communing with the past and the teachings it offers.

Writing Gabriel’s story against the backdrop of the Great Migration gives meaning to the memories that make up John’s history. Gabriel’s flight North gives insight into John’s

³⁰⁷ Emphasis is my own.

prophecy as a “saved” man. John becomes, therefore, the physical manifestation of decades of hope, patience, struggle and pain:

It was a sound of rage and weeping which filled the grave, rage and weeping from time set free, but bound now in eternity; rage that had no language, weeping with no voice—which yet spoke now, to John’s startled soul, of boundless melancholy, of the bitterest patience, and the longest night; of the deepest water, the strongest chains, the most cruel lash; of humility most wretched, the dungeon most absolute, of love’s bed defiled, and birth dishonored, and most bloody, unspeakable, sudden death.³⁰⁸

Baldwin describes the characters’ motivations as how they deal with their human condition: birth, love and suffering. In doing so, he breathes life into salient forms of history writing, thus, making history—like reality—a collective enterprise which must include a multitude of perspectives to offer a more complete picture of social realities. History reveals, finally, more about the present than it does the past, an incomplete picture of the experience of what it means to be human. Baldwin urges the US to discover where the past lies in the present, to unearth the origin of America’s hopes and desires which affect the contemporary material world.

³⁰⁸ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 194.

2.2 The Spectrality of Whiteness

The night after Deborah's kidnapping and gangrape, a group of White men return to Gabriel and Florence's town. As Gabriel, Florence and Rachel sit in their cottage, they hear rustling outside their window. The noise stirs feelings of fear and terror and provokes a violent tension, produced from anticipation:

In the night that pressed outside they heard only the horse's hoofs, which did not stop; there was not the laughter they would have heard had there been many coming on this road, and no calling out of curses, and no one crying for mercy to white men, or to God. The hoofbeats came to the door and passed, and rang, while they listened, ever more faintly away. Then Florence realized how frightened she had been. She watched her mother rise and walk to the window. She peered out through a corner of the blanket that covered it.

"They's gone," she said, "whoever they was." Then: "Blessed be the name of the Lord," she said.³⁰⁹

This scene is particularly interesting, because Baldwin does not describe the White men: their dress, facial expressions or inner thoughts. He does not even characterize them as White. Their race is inferred from the family's intimate relationship with White violence, of "white men" claiming the lives of Blacks who "[cry] for mercy." The White men's appearance (and disappearance) is rather ghostly. They are formless but affect the material world, as evidenced in the sounds and shadows they produce. The threat of death, juxtaposed with the physical absence of the body, makes this scene all the scarier. One cannot defend oneself from a threat that one cannot see. Therefore, the sinister voices and the sounds of horse "hoofs" announce an impending threat to the children and their mother, who cower in fear. This extract describes a recurring event in African American communities of the South: lynchings. "When we hear the word 'lynching,' most of us think of a hanging body, what Billie Holiday famously called 'strange fruit,'"³¹⁰ Koritha Mitchell writes in *Living with Lynching* (2011). However, lynchings took many forms: being shot, dragged behind a car, burned—alive or dead—, drowned, etc. In

³⁰⁹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 65.

³¹⁰ Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1.

Michell's assessment of lynching plays by African American dramatists, she describes the often-public killings as "master/piece theater."³¹¹ Mitchell argues that Blacks viewed lynchings as a performative practice in which Whites sought "racial supremacy" and "used the black body as muse, antagonist, and stage prop."³¹² Yet what these performances of violence have in common is the performance/spectator dynamic. "Between 1890 and 1930," Mitchell observes, "lynchings were frequently theatrical productions, so newspapers often announced the time and location so that crowds could gather. Spectators knew that they would see familiar characters (so called black 'rapists' and white 'avengers') and that these characters would perform a predictable script of forced confession and mutilation."³¹³ White crowds flaunted, oftentimes, their attacks in public showing body parts or bones they collected from the bodies of Black victims. However, "limited supply" and desired anonymity caused many participants to covet photographs which "became souvenirs [...] [b]ecause photographs served as mementos."³¹⁴ As Baldwin demonstrates, however, anonymity can be just as frightening (or even more) and makes, consequentially, all Whites potential conspirators, a tactic White supremacists appropriated to induce paranoia and fear in Black communities, during the era.

In this section, I argue that anonymity transforms Whiteness into a ghostly presence, a shapeless specter, that lingers in Black community memory through rumors of race-based violence. I base my argument on the White characters who appear at the periphery of the Black communities Baldwin describes, associating Whiteness with the fear, terror and trauma which "[stalk] the borders of [John's] young life."³¹⁵ The ghostly works to curtail the "White American's distance from his conscience—from himself—by observing the distance between

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Miriam Sivan, "Out of and Back to Africa: James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*," 33.

White America and Black America,”³¹⁶ forcing Whites to see what Blacks *know* is true and what Whites wish to believe about their history. Where *Giovanni’s Room* places Whiteness in the foreground of the novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* focuses on how Whiteness looms in the background of the Black communities Baldwin describes—in the North and the South. Whiteness, however, is not secondary to Baldwin’s ontological project. Rather, he shifts the racial gaze to show how what I call *White spectrality*—absent and present—describes Whiteness from the African American experience. In the essay “Sweet Lorraine,” Baldwin writes: “I’ve very often pondered what [Lorraine Hansberry] then tried to convey—that a holocaust is no respecter of persons; that what, today, seems merely humiliation and injustice for a few, can, unchecked, become terror for the many [...].”³¹⁷ An allusion to Hansberry’s play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, Baldwin’s observation demands that readers view history through individual experiences, rather than broad narratives, which tend to dehumanize the people they are about, because such historiographies fail to communicate the fear, pain and terror one human causes in another. Describing how the White presence lingers at the novel’s periphery, I use the term *White spectrality* to communicate how Whiteness haunts Black lives and evokes fear and terror in the cultural memory.

In regard to scholarship on spectrality and ethnicity, past research has focused on how the ghostly figure articulates Black subjectivity lost to histories of violence and oppression. Arthur Redding’s “‘Haints’: American Ghosts, Ethnic Memory, and Contemporary Fiction” uses spectrality as a critical lens to “excavate alternative histories [...] by imaginatively summoning into presence those voices and beings that have been sacrificed to the march of progress and the consolidation of American literary and cultural traditions.”³¹⁸ Redding’s essay

³¹⁶ James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” 725.

³¹⁷ James Baldwin, “Sweet Lorraine,” 760.

³¹⁸ Arthur Redding, “‘Haints’: American Ghosts, Ethnic Memory, and Contemporary Fiction,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4 (December 2001), 164.

demonstrates how the spectral figure reexamines and reconsiders the agency of such oppressed groups as African Americans, women and sexual minorities. Redding turns to writers such as Morrison, whose works describe ghosts as “paradoxically powerful figures of powerlessness.”³¹⁹ The power of the ghostly figure emerges in its ability to pass, seamlessly, through socially constructed borders of meaning, to “spur acts of cultural invention and recovery.”³²⁰

Although such attempts to reclaim experience from an “obliterated history”³²¹ are not always successful, the ghostly threatens to expose false narratives of truth; or as Avery F. Gordon writes, “haunting rather than history (or historicism) best captures the constellation of connections that charges any ‘time of the now’ with the debts of the past at the expense of the present.”³²² White spectrality creates violent tension which demands immediate action, articulating the need to recognize with urgency that “the slaughtered, the sacrificed, is insistent, selfish, dangerous, and its gravity works against the American myth of individualist mobility and self-reliance,”³²³ as internal mechanisms which can overcome social barriers—race, sex, gender and class—to accumulate material wealth. White spectrality bears witness to the restricted roles oppressed groups play in social life and characterizes “more restrictively defined roles as bearers of culture,”³²⁴ to help reimagine them at the nexus of agency and memory transmission.

Go Tell It on the Mountain reimagines Whiteness, using the experiences of the novel’s African American communities. White spectrality is a rhetorical device which captures how

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1997]), 142.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 169.

³²⁴ Kathleen Borgan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 25.

Whiteness resonates in the lives of the Black characters and “participate[s] in this dialectic, between the production of identity as [White] ‘self-invention’ [...] and identity as historical destiny,” and has the potential to confer agency to Whites who are stuck in a sort of “historical amnesia.”³²⁵ “Because the pursuit of ownership and materialism distracts Whites from what they do not know,” Martin Japtok observes, “[they] are ignorant of how Whiteness haunts the lives of Black Americans.”³²⁶ However, Baldwin rejects narratives of Black victimhood which evoke scenes of extreme violence, instead opting to “portray black characters leading ordinary lives in domestic interiors where they affectionately sustain each other.”³²⁷ This makes White spectrality even more frightening, because readers confront the impending doom of “what mainstream discourse denied existed: loving black homes.”³²⁸ However, Baldwin affirms that “[w]hatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves.”³²⁹ White spectrality helps articulate an authentic Black perspective on how Whiteness haunts Black community members. I believe the term has the potential to begin genuine discussions on racial matters, informed by a multitude of perspectives.

Go Tell It on the Mountain works in harmony with *Giovanni’s Room* to depict the political and personal issues which surround post-WWII White identity. “David’s confessional reveries account for, but don’t free him from the prison of his guilt [...],”³³⁰ Jacqueline Goldsby writes. Interestingly, flashbacks announce each moment David wishes to forget. His mind drifts back to the past, and he is forced to relive the memory. David and Gabriel run from memories

³²⁵ Ibid., 76.

³²⁶ Martin Japtok, “‘The Gospel of Whiteness’: Whiteness in African American Literature, *Amerikastudien/ American Studies*, vol 49. no. 4 (2004), 483-498.

³²⁷ Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, 2.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 312.

³³⁰ Jacqueline Goldsby, “‘Closer to Something Unnamable’: Baldwin’s Novel Form,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 35.

they think are too dangerous. However, those memories refuse to be forgotten and, therefore, haunt the men, ultimately forcing them to remember. Thus, the process of remembering and forgetting continues to create a violent tension in the characters and offers no reprieve from the past that haunts them.

Where Baldwin makes visible Whiteness to illustrate how David's innocence transforms him into a moral monster, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* reimagines his White characters as ghostly figures, which depict the fear and terror Whiteness provokes in Gabriel and Florence's town. Baldwin writes his White characters as spectral figures to force White readers to reconcile with alternative narratives of the White presence. In "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," bell hooks argues that African Americans' attempts to imagine and understand Whiteness have been a coping mechanism, since slavery and segregation, to survive race-based attacks. Insight into the oppressor's emotional whims meant Blacks could adopt behavior to hedge race-based violence, before and after Emancipation:

Sharing the fascination with difference that white people have collectively expressed openly (and at times vulgarly), as they have traveled around the world in pursuit of the other and otherness, black people, especially those living during the historical period of racial apartheid and legal segregation, have similarly maintained steadfast and ongoing curiosity about the "ghosts," "the barbarians," these strange apparitions they were forced to serve.³³¹

bell hooks' use of "ghost" describes what I believe to be the polarity of Whiteness, at once present and absent, intangible but able to affect the physical world. bell hooks' "ghost" corroborates Baldwin's observation of the formlessness of Whiteness. "There is [...] no white community," Baldwin declares in the context of White America's lack of moral leadership, reverberating the polarity of Whiteness as at once present and absent. Baldwin and hooks designate *White* as a power relationship between Whites and non-Whites, relegating Whiteness to "a moral choice"³³² that affects the lives of Black men, women and children. Since there is

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² James Baldwin, "On Being White ... and Other Lies," *The cross of Redemption*, 175.

no White community of which to speak, Baldwin considers them a collectivity³³³ of individuals who—when the racial dynamic is ignored—are bound by nothing more than American identity.³³⁴ Whites distinguish, therefore, *community* from *collectivity*, the latter seemingly defining how Whites wish to view themselves. Because Baldwin believes that *White* is a moral choice and Whites prefer to see themselves as a collectivity of individuals, I feel that consideration should be given to understanding “community” and “collectivity” as moral stances. I believe that assessing the terms offers insight into the moral implications of their use.

Paul R. Dekar’s research on the moral trajectory of technological advancements in the 20th century sheds light on the subject. I turn specifically to Dekar’s research, because the technology boom of the 20th century increased post-war America’s cultural obsession with materialism as progress. “Collectivity” is used to express the prioritization of “material progress and prosperity, promotes science, is obsessed with productivity, favors reason over spirituality, and generates mindless technologies that dull human imagination and manipulate people.”³³⁵ On the other hand, the word “community” promotes “moral growth and dignity of every person, promotes a humanizing conception of work, supports spiritual and rational forms of knowledge, produces technologies that sharpen the intellect, and integrates body, mind and soul.”³³⁶ The term “collectivity” does not engage with the moral topography of American life. Rather, it promotes the assumption that materialism equals social progress and covertly abolishes any possibility of contrition. In the novel, Gabriel Grimes equates materialism with the modern world and believes that it is the cause of the White world’s spiritual death: “[John’s] fathers said that all white people were wicked, and that God was going to bring them low. He

³³³ James Baldwin, *Notes of A Native Son*, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1949]), 1-130.

³³⁴ In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin describes identity as “the terms on which [one] is related to his country, and to the world.”; James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 100.

³³⁵ Paul R. Dekar, “Community or Collectivity?” *Review of Returning to Reality: Thomas Merton’s Wisdom for a Technological World*, *Merton Seasonal*, vol. 38, no 1 (Spring 2013), 39.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

said that white people were never to be trusted, and that they told nothing but lies, and that not one of them had ever loved a nigger.”³³⁷

Whiteness moves in and about the lives of Baldwin’s Black characters and manifests as White desires and hopes for material pursuits. Again, Baldwin rejects a “simplistic essentialist ‘us and them’ dichotomy that suggests black folks merely invert stereotypical racist interpretations so that black becomes synonymous with goodness and white with evil.”³³⁸ Rather, the presence of Whiteness “emerges as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of white racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way black folks ‘see’ Whiteness.”³³⁹ Therefore, the Black gaze is inherently subversive as it resists Eurocentric regimes of *being* and threatens the postured *naturalness* of White dominance. Whites envision their own Whiteness as nonexistent, invisible and “shapeless.” White spectrality creates in Black life the terror Baldwin depicts in *Go Tell It in the Mountain*. Martin Japtok observes that intellectuals such as Baldwin and hooks rely “on childhood memories, [to] [remind] us that Whiteness, due to the legacy of slavery, segregation, and lingering racism, sometimes still evokes a sense of terror, a sense also reflected in much of African American fiction.”³⁴⁰ *Go Tell It on the Mountain* does not only give expression to how Whiteness affects the Black psyche but also to how Whiteness appears to those who have to *bear* it, daily. Returning to Rachel, Gabriel and Florence huddled in the cabin, the scene begins like a horror movie, shrouded in superstition and mystery:

It was night, the windows were shut tightly with the shades drawn, and the great table was pushed against the door. The kerosene lamps burned low and made great shadows on the newspaper-covered wall [...] The weak, unsteady light placed shadows under her mouth and in the sockets of her eyes, making the face impersonal with majesty, like the face of a propheticess, or like a mask. Silence filled the room after her “Amen,” and in the silence they heard, far up the road, the sound of a horse’s hoofs. No one moved. Gabriel, from his corner near the stove, looked up and watched his mother.

³³⁷ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 34.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 483.

“I ain’t afraid,” said Gabriel.

His mother turned, one hand raised. “You hush, now!”³⁴¹

The eerie ambiance creates panic and dread in Rachel and her children who find themselves helpless against the White mob. Readers imagine the little cabin in which the family lives, where darkness meets silence. Darkness and silence allow the imagination of the characters to run wild and create panic from anticipation and dread. The young Florence, Gabriel and their mother do not know if they will suffer the whims of White fear, hate, pleasure and desire. Aware of Deborah’s rape and her father’s murder, the family fears that the men seek to reinforce order (White, Southern dominance) through terror. Their mother, therefore, anticipates the return of the men as she prays in the darkness of a candle-lit hut. Where speechlessness and silence represent a lack of agency and power, Baldwin reclaims their power by allowing them to reimagine the men as figures of brutality and terror. The reimagining allows them to reclaim the agency the men attempt to take away. During slavery, the gaze was weaponized as a tool of White domination. A slave who dared to look at a White person in the eyes could be severely beaten. In this sense, to gaze and reimagine what it means to be White are political acts of resistance, a way for Blacks to reclaim their agency and make themselves seen.³⁴²

Nonetheless, the men attempt to scare the family into a panic-stricken silence which represents powerlessness. When the young Gabriel begins to speak, Rachel reminds him that it is his place to be quiet, because to speak in the White men’s presence—to make his existence known—is an act of defiance, punishable by death. Rachel connects the young Gabriel’s fate to the murder of Deborah’s father who dared to confront his daughter’s rapists and was killed. This is seen as a transgression of the racial power dynamic. However, Baldwin shifts the racial

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴² bell hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” 41-42.

dynamic by bearing witness to Whiteness, daring to see it as a spiritual force of destruction to reclaim personal agency for his Black characters. Articulating the violent nature of an invisible Whiteness is important, bell hooks recognizes, because “in white supremacist society, white people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze. As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other.”³⁴³ Baldwin’s narrative places Whiteness as an ominous dark cloud which at any minute might bring danger. This is supported by Deborah’s rape, the most explicitly violent depiction of the power of White misogyny. “*Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” writes Carol Henderson, “is a story about women, and their struggle to refigure a ‘self’ within the African-American church and community.”³⁴⁴ Deborah’s gang rape and subsequent ostracization is all the more heartbreaking when her “father had gone to one of the white men’s houses, and said that he would kill him and all the other white men he could find.” In response, the White men “had beaten him and left him for dead.”³⁴⁵ Baldwin juxtaposes Deborah’s rape with the revelation that Rachel, John’s grandmother, was also raped by a White man—her master. She was not allowed to see one of her children who had been taken to the master’s house. Baldwin does not specify whether Rachel’s master is the father. However, we can assume so, since her master offers the child as a gift to one of his White children.

The abuse of enslaved women for sexual gratification was common practice amongst White men involved in slavery and the slave trade. Baldwin as well as other writers such as Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Richard Wright and Toni Morrison touch on the subject of rape

³⁴³ bell hooks, 41.

³⁴⁴ Carol Henderson, “Knee Bent, Body Bowed: Re-memory’s prayer of Spiritual Re(new)al in Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” 75.

³⁴⁵ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It*, 64.

in realistically disturbing, but poignantly accurate ways. I do not believe that it is cliché to suggest that reality is often more frightening than fiction. In the essay “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” Edward E. Baptist shines light on what he refers to as “society’s half-denied and half-remembered assumptions about commerce and rape” of “mulatto women, and black people generally” during the antebellum period.³⁴⁶ As an anecdote, Baptist provides an 1834 letter from a New Orleans slaver to his business partner who bought and sold slaves, which illustrates the relationship between chattel slavery and rape:

In January 1834, the slave trader Isaac Franklin wrote from New Orleans to his Richmond partner and slave buyer, Rice Ballard: “The fancy girl, from Charlatts-villa [Charlottesville], will you send her out or shall I charge you \$1100 for her. Say quick, I wanted to see her [...] I thought that an old Robber might be satisfied with two or three maids.” Franklin implied that his partner was holding the young woman, one of many “fancy maids” handled by the firm of Franklin, Armfield, and Ballard, for his own sexual use. Unwilling, the jest implied, to share his enslaved sex objects, Ballard was keeping the desirable Charlottesville maid in Richmond instead of passing her on to his partners so that they might take their turn of pleasure. The joke, and the desire it did not seek to disguise, was business as usual.³⁴⁷

The humorous tone of Franklin and Ballard’s letter illustrates the prevalence of the rape against Black women—“fancy girls”—in the antebellum South. Baptist’s research and Baldwin’s depiction of sexual violence on Black women describe the power relationship inherent in sex and race which reveals that “fetishized commodification of human beings [is] one of the necessary bases of the economic expansion of the pre-Civil War South.”³⁴⁸ Indeed, this passage confirms Baldwin’s observation that Blacks and Whites are related, literally, by blood. Returning to the novel, the rape of Black women by White men sets the tone for the inherent relationship between race and sex that inspires Deborah and Rachel’s fears and prayers. Baldwin takes care not to alienate his characters from themselves. Rather, the novel “presents an innovative forum which allows female charters to ‘rescue their bodies’ from the static social

³⁴⁶ Edward E. Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 5 (December 2001), 1620.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1621.

and theological confines of black female femininity.”³⁴⁹ Although Whiteness and religion place restrictions on Black female subjectivity, they do not define it. Indeed, Baldwin writes his female characters at the mercy of the men (Black and White) who inhabit their worlds. For example, Deborah and Elizabeth bond over their feeling “that they will forever be at the mercy of men simply because they are women in a society that has judged them to be of lesser value.”³⁵⁰ Deborah and Rachel have been raped by White men who project their sexual desires upon the Black women. Deborah, Florence and Rachel nourish the hope that they will, one day, escape their oppression. This hope sustains the inner worlds—imaginative spaces—in which they are able to dictate the meanings of their lives. As such, the characters use their inner worlds to enact their roles in life, as opposed to accepting the place that their worlds have assigned them as Black women.³⁵¹

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (1992) Toni Morrison traces the contradictory nature of the White gaze on Black subjectivity, giving attention to the legacy of the Black presence in the writings of prominent White authors. Morrison’s arguments focus on how Whiteness conceives and experiences the Black presence as a saint or a monster. The connection is that by assessing and calling out how Blacks are portrayed in the White imagination, Black writers redefine those works from the perspective of the Black Subjects

³⁴⁹ Carol Henderson, “Knee Bent, Body Bowed: Re-memory’s prayer of Spiritual Re(new)al in Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” 76.

³⁵⁰ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 17.

³⁵¹ Trudier Harris argues that Rachel and Deborah are problematic characters, because their characterization heavily relies on their relationships to Christianity: “Setting them against such a backdrop, whether or not Baldwin ultimately approves of that church, is too restricting a model for complex development [...] lines are too sharply drawn in terms of good and evil.” I tend to agree with Harris’s assessment. Baldwin offers very little insight into their personal worlds: desires, fears, etc... Nonetheless, the female characters’ faith nourishes what I believe is their rebellious spirits. Rachel looks to religion for strength to bear the experience of chattel slavery, multiple rapes and the loss of her children. She affirms her self-agency through the act of hope, when centuries of brutal oppression suggest otherwise. Similarly, Deborah finds strength in prayer to deal with her gang rape, the murder of her father and ostracization from her community. She eventually marries and is happy, at least for a while. Although Gabriel disappoints her, she holds on to religion, not from blind faith but in rejection that she is the sum of her tragedies; Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 12.

they attempt to define. Therefore, their definitions of Blackness open the door to critical studies on Whiteness. Morrison writes: “Black or colored people and symbolic figurations of Blackness are markers for the benevolent and the wicked, the spiritual [...] and the voluptuous; of ‘sinful’ but delicious sensuality coupled with demands for purity and restraint.”³⁵² Baldwin makes a similar observation on how protest fiction reifies the racial ills it proclaims to denounce by ramifying the social framework, believed to be necessary: “Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone [...]”³⁵³ Baldwin and Morrison write to understand “the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasize in literature not written by them”³⁵⁴ and counter these discoveries, by depicting characters whose subjectivity is fully explored, not just as racially oppressed bodies but, rather, as complex beings whose inner worlds resist the social narratives that govern their material lives.

Of course, literature is not alone as a vehicle to understand how Whiteness expresses Black subjectivity. Forthwith, I offer a brief discussion on George A. Ramos’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) whose Black protagonist is defined and redefined based on the immediate needs of the White characters, attempting to survive a zombie apocalypse. Joseph L. Lewis’s research on the American Africanist as monster figure in American literature highlights “a concept of race, identity and representation via the monster”³⁵⁵ against the specific cultural backdrop in which literary works and films are produced and publicly received. Lewis evokes *Night of the Living Dead* whose Black protagonist Ben fights to keep the supporting White

³⁵² Toni Morrison, “Preface,” *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993 [1992]), ix.

³⁵³ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 15.

³⁵⁴ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, viii.

³⁵⁵ Joseph L. Lewis, “Monsters and Heroes : the Ironies of Black Subjectivity in Stephen Crane’s *The Monster* and Richard Wright’s *The Man Who Lived Underground*,” *Caliban : French Journal of English Studies*, vol. 31 (2012), 162.

characters and himself safe from a horde of zombies, threatening to end the American way of life. The film depicts Ben as a heroic figure whose struggles are compounded by the insistent panic and irrational decision-making of the White characters. In the film's beginning, for example, blonde-haired Barbra meets Ben while running away from zombies, after her brother is killed. Ben and Barbra lock eyes in a moment of hesitation. Barbra is frozen while zombies approach, because her first instinct is to consider Ben, a tall Black man, a threat. Ben realizes the absurdity of the moment and pushes Barbra in the house, as zombies swarm them. The apocalyptic event disrupts the town's relationship to race, as the White characters' desire to escape a violent death takes precedence over their need to uphold racial hierarchies. Thus, Ben is socially equal to the White characters, in so far as he can ensure their safety. However, once the zombies are killed and social order is reestablished, White townsmen mistake the Black hero for a zombie and shoot him dead. Lewis describes the ending as a lynching where an innocent Black man is rendered a monstrous figure, to justify his death and destruction of his body: "During the entire closing credits the members of the militia drag Ben's carcass on the ground. Ben's body is juxtaposed to the zombies that terrorize the white characters."³⁵⁶ During the credits, flickering images appear of the White mob, standing over Ben's lifeless body. The White men's moment of victory resembles so many of lynching postcards—or "pornography of violence"³⁵⁷—that created visual narratives of White victories over the perceived Black threat. Ramos's film offers racial undertones which demonstrate the dual role the Black presence plays in American life. This duality creates contradictions which the film highlights. Where Ben is supposed to be irrational, he is the only character that demonstrates coherent

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Kevin Heffernan's essay "Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing *Night of the living Dead* (1968) is an interesting read, revealing that the film was released in predominately Black neighborhoods during the matinee showtime. This meant that the first viewers of the film were inner-city, African American children who, as Roger Ebert puts it, "had no sources they could draw upon to protect themselves from the dread and fear they felt." As cited in Kevin Heffernan, "Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 59-60.

problem-solving skills. He is the only character who manages to maintain his composure and quickly accepts that he is in imminent danger, which allows him to act accordingly. The White characters either remain in denial or experience nervous breakdowns, which the film articulates as a consequence of their Whiteness. Ben transforms into Morrison's Black benevolent figure, continuously putting his life in jeopardy to save those in need. When the White townsmen regain control, Ben is killed by the gunslinging group who effectively view him as "wicked," and his dead body is dragged behind a car.

Indeed, *Night of the Living Dead* is a horror film, whose authenticity derives from its "mindful[ness] of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision."³⁵⁸ The film is terrifying, because it depicts the social norms surrounding race relations of the time and does not allow matters of genre to falsely depict Ben's experiences in a Southern White town, offering itself as an authentic representation of the 1960's and using zombies as witnesses and, thus, as sites of reliable memory. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* reveals, likewise, the importance Baldwin gives to reliable memory. The novel's third-person narrative allows readers to follow John as he reconstructs his family's experiences in the South. Readers rely on family memory to conceptualize descriptions of people and places and events. The novel, therefore, narrates Whiteness as "a phenomenon performed, enacted, and maintained not only by social structures and institutions but also through the everyday actions and interactions often invisibly informed by them."³⁵⁹ Baldwin dedicates "Part I: The Seventh Day" to the Grimes family dynamic, economic problems and the social ambiance that both weights on them and nourishes their spirituality. This part of the novel is a wholly Black space where readers are introduced to the characters beyond racial categorization. In other words, racial confrontation through the White presence is almost completely absent. The White presence

³⁵⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, xi.

³⁵⁹ Michele Elam, "Introduction: Baldwin's Art," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 7.

lingers at the periphery, appearing only once to highlight academic achievements. Baldwin reimagines the White presence as “a turning point, a kairotic moment, in [John’s] threshing floor experience. John sees the darkness no longer simply equated with Blackness but with whiteness—the white supremacist ‘armies of darkness’ responsible for this violence against African Americans.”³⁶⁰

2.2.1 The Hypocrisy of the North

Giovanni’s Room challenges assumption that Whiteness is congruous with social progress and identifies White Northern liberals as primary stakeholders in this belief. Baldwin recognized this hypocrisy that perpetuates White innocence surrounding the covert ways racism haunts the Harlem community in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. That Baldwin sets the novel in two distinct geographical spaces—Harlem, N.Y. and the deep South—suggests that the writer invites readers to take a comparative approach to what constitutes racism, offering a nuanced understanding of the many ways it affects the Grimes family. White spectrality is a discursive tool which exposes Northern hypocrisy on race that threatens the Grimes’ family wellbeing and safety. I argue that White spectrality helps reframe racism as a national issue and resists discourses that reduce it to a phenomenon unique to the South. By tracing the cultural specificities of Whiteness in both regions, Baldwin demonstrates that racism exists on a spectrum of behaviors which are predetermined by location, how one is raced, classed and gendered. Therefore, Deborah’s rape and the attention John’s White teachers give him are positioned on the same spectrum of racism as investments in Whiteness. Where the Southern town Baldwin describes resorts to extreme forms of violence, the North uses charity to perpetuate racial subordination and communal division. Baldwin juxtapositions Northern “goodwill” and Harlem’s poverty to underline the inadequacy and spurious quality he

³⁶⁰ Robert Z. Birdwell, “Kairotic Time, Recognition, and Freedom in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 4 (2018), 40.

associates with White liberalism. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* rejects what P.J. Brendese's calls "a segregation of memory" which polarizes American politics and functions "along the lines of color, class, and generation."³⁶¹ This segregated memory obscures our understanding of contemporary race relations, since the past of racially charged events becomes unintelligible to White memory, which shifts along the political lines of evolving racial discourse and functions as a malleable tool that imbues Whiteness with positive connotations.

In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin reappropriates racial discourses surrounding Black life to face "what whites have invested in the faces of blacks and the assumptions they have yet to disclose about themselves."³⁶² That John's White teachers praise him as a student of academic talent and view him as exceptional suggests that his academic performance is unexpected from a Black child. While in class, John's teacher asks him to spell a word on the blackboard. John acquiesces but is riddled with a strong sense of fear he is unable to explain.

Baldwin writes:

They were learning the alphabet that day, and six children at a time were sent to the blackboard to write the letters they had memorized. Six had finished and were waiting for the teacher's judgement when the back door opened and the school principal, of whom everyone was terrified, entered the room. No one spoke or moved. In the silence the principal's voice said:

"Which child is that?"

She was pointing at the blackboard, at John's letters. The possibility of being distinguished by her notice did not enter John's mind, and so he simply stared at her. Then he realized, by the way they avoided looking at him, that it was he who was selected for punishment.

"Speak up, John," said the teacher, gently.

On the edge of tears, he mumbled his name and waited. The principal, a woman with white hair and an iron face, looked down at him.

"You're a very bright boy, John Grimes," she said. "Keep up the good work."³⁶³

³⁶¹ P.J. Brendese, "The Race of a More Perfect Union James Baldwin, Segregated Memory, and the Presidential Race," 49.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁶³ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 17-18.

John's feelings towards his White principle are an uncomfortable mix of terror, wonder and praise. Indeed, the young boy's interactions with Whites are different from his father. That John is a boy and Gabriel is a man means that they are perceived by Whites differently. Gabriel is a threat, which must be controlled. That John looks younger than 14-years-old means that he is connected to childhood innocence. I do not mean to suggest, however, that John benefits from the same youthful innocence with which White children are often associated. However, John is not yet viewed as a dangerous Black man, whereas Gabriel has already been marked along the borders of race, class and gender which have given rise to the Black male as an existential threat. Therefore, the praise John receives and the menial jobs Gabriel is forced to work have similar epistemologies. That John is "on the edge of tears" expresses how vulnerable he is as a Black child in public institutions governed by White stakeholders who hold preconceptions of him as a Black child. The school principal uses demeaning language when she inquires about John's writing abilities. The utterance "Which child is that" suggests an impersonal attitude towards the students under her charge. And although the principal praises John, the young boy reacts to her attention with fear, bewilderment and uncertainty. As a White woman, John's principal represents the fear and promise for a hopeful future, because the young boy displays Western standards of intelligence, expressed as his advanced writing abilities. However, this promise heavily depends on the will of the White teachers who have the power to give him attention. Baldwin juxtaposes John's fear and the Whites' "good will" to articulate John's personal relationship with Whiteness, to illustrate how even the "good intentions" of Whites are tainted by racial dynamics.

In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin discusses the first time one of his teachers came to visit his house. Baldwin's father, David Baldwin, responded to the White teacher's arrival with suspicion, because his previous interactions with Whites had predominately been negative.

Whites only came to the house for administrative purposes which increases feelings of his parents' powerlessness: "The only white people who came to our house," Baldwin writes, "were welfare workers and bill collectors."³⁶⁴ Therefore, the caution of Baldwin Sr. and John's father is a mechanism of self-preservation, to avoid further humiliation—at best—and violence—at worst. Needless to say, the Baldwins met the anticipated arrival of the White teacher with vigilance. Baldwin observes:

Before the teacher came my father took me aside to ask *why* she was coming, what *interest* she could possibly have in our house, in a boy like me. I said I didn't know but I, too, suggested that it had something to do with education. And I understood that my father was waiting for me to say something—I didn't quite know what; perhaps that I wanted his protection against this teacher and her "education."³⁶⁵

The woman who visited Baldwin's home was the infamous Orilla Winfield ("Bill Miller"), a White elementary school teacher whom Baldwin writes about extensively, as introducing the young boy to the artists. Moreover, "Bill Miller" inspired Baldwin to seek refuge, in books, from his father's anger and gave him an appreciation for the theater which Baldwin called a certain "education," his father vehemently believed "was going to lead [Baldwin Jr.] to perdition."³⁶⁶ As in the South, the good intentions of Whites are, at best, dubious, because if misinterpreted, they can have dire effects. The price of Black people not staying in their *place* can lead to death (think Deborah's father). The consideration the principle gives to John's work suggests that John's *exceptional* talent may give him advantages from which he and his classmates are otherwise deprived.

Go tell It on the Mountain retraces the Grimes family's genealogy of racial experience to thwart politically interested beliefs that the North is *progressive* in race matters. White spectrality challenges the moral outrage the North expressed and resists historical narratives

³⁶⁴ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 67.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

that depict White racism as a Southern phenomenon, reframing race as a national tradition. Baldwin's first novel calls for a more complex understanding of how Whiteness affects Black life, whether by Southern campaigns of terror or compliments in the North where the threat of Whiteness is connected to John's academic potential. John finds refuge in books as a means of escape from his father's tyranny, and his White principle praises him as *special*, because he better fits European standards of intelligence, which feeds John's ego and threatens to alienate him from cultural traditions of Black resistance. John and Gabriel represent two generations whose relationships to Whiteness differ. Despite the White policemen who harass the young boy, John views Whiteness more positively than his father. John sees Whiteness in Central Park where "ladies, white in fur coats, [walk] their great dogs, or old white gentlemen with canes"³⁶⁷ and on Fifth Avenue "where graceful women in fur coats walked, looking into the windows that held silk dresses, and watches, and rings."³⁶⁸ John sees his White teachers who praise him for his intelligence, who when he was sick "bought him a bottle of cod liver oil, especially prepared with heavy syrup so that it did not taste so bad," to heal his cold. Gabriel's interactions with Whites have led him to believe that they cannot be saved. This is based off the violence he experiences in the South and the humiliating jobs he is relegated to work to feed his family. Inadvertently, Elizabeth reinforces John's romanticized view of Whites when she contradicts her husband. She believes that not all Whites are bad and, thus, deserve forgiveness. Inadvertently, this leads to John seeing the prospect of materialism as an alternative to the Christian values his father attempts to instill in him.

Northern Whites view themselves as more civilized than their Southern counterpart, because they perceive themselves as more attuned to the social, political and economic needs of the region's most vulnerable. This illusion leads to the inevitable conclusion that Blacks are

³⁶⁷ James Baldwin, *Go Tell on the Mountain*, 30.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

better off in the North than the South. “There is scarcely any way for him [the Northern Black] to join the black community in the South: for both he and this community are in the grip of the immense illusion that their state is more miserable than his own,”³⁶⁹ Baldwin observes in *Nobody Knows My Name*. However, the difference is “the etiquette” of humiliation. The South legalized its racism, whereas “segregation is unofficial in the North [...] a crucial difference that does nothing [...] to alleviate the lot of most Northern Negroes.”³⁷⁰

John is a stand in for the unknown Black boys who have been haunted and have suffered the effects of anti-Black racism. The limitations of race as an ideology of *being* leads to disastrous consequences from which John’s father attempts to protect John and Roy. One of the most highly publicized racially motivated murders of the civil rights era is arguably the 1955 kidnapping, torture and lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till, a Chicagoan teenager who, while visiting relatives in Mississippi, was accused of whistling at a White woman. Some days later, a group of White men kidnapped him from his uncle’s home, tortured him for hours and shot him dead. I evoke Emmett’s tragic story because Baldwin’s novel, published just two years before Till’s death, precludes the ethnic and cultural regimes of power that led to Till’s death. There are many reasons to compare John and Emmett. They are both fourteen. They both come from Northern cities, removed from the South by one generation and are products of the Great Migration. In “Emmett Till’s Ring,” Valerie Smith describes the discovery of Emmett’s body, by a young White boy, reminding readers of the perverse threat of racism on Black and White children:

Eleven days later, on Wednesday, August 31, Robert Hodges, a seventeen-year-old white fisher, discovered Emmett’s mutilated body floating in the Tallahatchie River, even though his murderers—J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant—had tied a cotton gin fan around his neck in hopes of weighing him down. For allegedly whistling at—or saying something in appropriate to—Bryant’s wife, Carolyn, in their store, Emmet had been killed. According to his mother’s description, his tongue had been choked out of his mouth and left hanging onto his chin. His right eyeball was resting on his cheek. Only two of his teeth remained in his mouth, and the

³⁶⁹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 197.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

bridge of his nose had been broken. His right ear had been cut almost in half and one of his murderers had taken a hatchet and cut through the top of his head from ear to ear. He had also been shot through the head.

Given its conditions, it is thus little wonder that Tallahatchie County sheriff H.C. Strider scrambled to get Emmet's body buried in Mississippi as quickly as possible. He and other local law enforcement officials wanted to try to minimize the impact of a heinous crime that had already captured national attention. Once Emmett's mother, then known as Mamie Bradley, learned that plans were being made to bury her son in Mississippi, however, she insisted that he be returned to Chicago. Authorities released his body on the condition that the coffin remain sealed. But Mamie Bradley was determined that she be allowed to identify the body of her only child. And famously, once she saw the body, she told the mortician that she wanted an open-casket funeral so that world could see what she had seen.³⁷¹

Emmett's story is the history of America, though not just because of the period's politics surrounding race which reflect the brutality of his murder. By using Emmett's ring as a focal point, Smith offers a well-crafted narrative of the teenager's family history which echoes the socio-political events which surround John's life. Moses Wright, the great-uncle whom Emmett had been visiting in Money, MS., was able to recognize his nephews mutilated body because of a ring he wore, which belonged to his father who had died in WWII. Private Louis Till, Emmett's father, killed in Italy in 1945.³⁷² In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Florence's husband, Frank, is killed during the war. Both Emmett and John's family members fought in Europe for democratic principles from which they did not benefit in their homeland. "By looking at his body and telling and retelling the story of that heartbreaking examination, [Mamie Bradley] took the first step toward ensuring that her son would live on in collective memory long after his body had been buried."³⁷³

The failed investigation into Emmett's murder demonstrates how racism affects American justice. Mississippi senator James O. Eastland investigated and exposed to the press the events surrounding Private Till's death, writing: "As it turned out Louis Till had been court-

³⁷¹ Valerie Smith, "Emmett Till's Ring," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. ½ (Spring-Summer, 2008), 152; For information on the impact Till's death had on America's political landscape of the Civil Rights Movement, see: Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence. The story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2003).

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 154.

martialed and found guilty of murdering one Italian woman and raping two others. He was hanged and buried in a numbered yet otherwise unmarked grave [...] in France.”³⁷⁴ This revelation confirmed White suspicions that Emmett was a sexual predator, casting further doubt on the Black teenager’s innocence. Emmett and John’s status as Black teenage boys in the racial climate of the Post-war era reflects White myths about “predatory black men and their lust for white women [...]”³⁷⁵ That Emmett’s mother did not allow the Mississippi authorities to conceal the evidence of her son’s brutal murder corroborates the attention Baldwin gives to preserving genuine experience, which in Emmett’s case is his birth in a Chicago ghetto and death by lynching at the hands of a White Mississippi mob. Therefore, Emmett’s tragedy is not a comma in the history of America, rather it is intrinsic part that defines US culture and politics.

That Emmett was raised in Chicago and murdered in Mississippi legitimizes the project Baldwin undertakes to reconcile the nation’s racial past from an intergenerational and interregional perspective. Mamie Bradley’s insistence that the body of her son be brought to Chicago essentially made the North face the South’s race problem, or rather, a Southern version of America’s brutal race system. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* contradicts the assumptions of Northern states that race relations are better in the North, or racism is a personal belief, rather than a way of life. Back in New York, Gabriel Grimes considers anything that might represent material life as evil, contradicting images of the North encompassed in such films as *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), where Liberal White parents in San Francisco discover that their blond-haired, blue-eyed daughter is to marry a young Black doctor, played by Sidney Poitier. Of course, Gabriel believes that materialism and spirituality are antithetical because he believes that he will be rewarded for his suffering in the afterlife and the Whites in Central Park, for example, will be punished for sacrificing Blacks for material wealth.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.,157.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

Baldwin's critique of director Stanley Kramer's film considers the hypocrisy of Northern ideologies on racism as misunderstanding. In the documentary *Take this Hammer* (1964), Baldwin demonstrates that the brutal contrast in housing conditions between Whites and Blacks in San Francisco, a city that championed itself as aggressively progressive in racial matters repeated similar traditions of anti-Black racism found elsewhere, mainly in the form of segregation. Over ten years later, Baldwin chronicles his impressions of San Francisco and Kramer's film in *The Devil Finds Work* (1976): "We are on the heights of San Francisco—at a time not too far removed from the moment when the city of San Francisco reclaimed the land at Hunter's Point and urban-renewalized the niggers out of it. The difficult and terrified city, where the niggers are, lives far beneath these heights."³⁷⁶ In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the Liberal parents ignore, that they live on San Francisco's heights because the previous African American residents were displaced so that "the father [who] is in a perfectly respectable, perhaps even admirable profession, and the mother [who] runs an art gallery" can live there.³⁷⁷ As Baldwin suggests, Poitier's charismatic character is not only there to test the antiracist convictions of the White characters but also to ensure them that "his presence in this landscape (this hard-won Eden) will do nothing to threaten, or defile it [...]"³⁷⁸

A genealogical memory³⁷⁹ is a viable resource to rebuild narratives on race by infusing historical narratives surrounding race with lived experiences which contradict the myth of White innocence that segregates the experience of Black trauma. Baldwin "[r]espond[s] to the relation between Whiteness and a whitewashed memory [...]"³⁸⁰ with historically entrenched

³⁷⁶ James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 531.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ For further reading on genealogical memory and the performance of postcolonial nostalgia, see: Jade C. Huell, "Toward Critical Nostalgia: Performing African-American Genealogical Memory," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2020) 109-130.

³⁸⁰ P.J. Brendese, "The Race of a More Perfect Union James Baldwin, Segregated Memory, and the Presidential Race," 50.

stories of racial trauma like Emmett's murder and his mother's resilience which resonate through generations and render mute White claims of innocence. "This innocence," Brendese writes, "is a willful disavowal of the presence of the past that sustains a mind-set that can accommodate both an earnest commitment to the principles of equal rights and freedom regardless of race and a tacit acceptance of racial division and inequality as normal."³⁸¹

The multi-linear narratives of the Grimes family thwart the North's belief that segregation is a Southern problem, bringing the memory of the US's Great Migration to the forefront of the Northern experience through the story of Florence, Gabriel and Elizabeth Grimes. Memory and the church act as anchor points which pinpoint where the *naturalness* of power meets choice. Although the characters' destinies are narrated as divinely crafted, Baldwin's novel advocates for them to incorporate heuristic ways "[to] intercede on their own behalf."³⁸² Personal memories restore a sense of the real, the brutal and beautiful to national narratives. Therefore, prophecy and memory work together to create a restorative force that traverses time and rescues the past. Memory finds meaning in its power to interpret the present, so that it can be understood and used to better the quality of human life.

In conclusion, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* shines like a beacon of truth and remembrance which casts light on the gloomy shadows of national narratives which gloss over the experience of race and racism. The Grimes family bears witness to how racism informs poverty and violence, placing them at the foreground of the spiritual life of a Harlem church, introducing Harlem as a microcosm for America at large, with the "saints" being saved by the grace of the heavenly light and the "ruder voices, the voices of their elders, cursing and crying in the streets"³⁸³ who exist beyond the promise of safety their church offers. The Temple of the

³⁸¹ Ibid., 49-51.

³⁸² Soyica Diggs Colbert, "Go Tell It on the Mountain: Baldwin's Sermonic," 58-59.

³⁸³ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 47.

Fire Baptized bears witness to the physical and psychological debasement of their community, borne in part from racism and poverty. The hospital that lies directly across from the church testifies to the physical “wounds” and death, to the sinful life that the church protects against. The church is connected to a national network of other Black churches around the country, representing the Black resistance to White racism, nationwide. Baldwin places Gabriel Grimes’s shortcomings as a man and a preacher against the Great Depression and Great Migration to give readers a deeper understanding of the historical periods Baldwin describes.

Christopher Freeburg suggests that racial ideologies allow White Americans to “lie” about who they are, a self-deception that goes beyond political relationships. Baldwin’s literary inquiry into human existence is “fundamentally moral and existential” and is “expressed historically as well as personally.”³⁸⁴ An appropriate site for examining history as an existential project is Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* (1945). If Sartre’s assertion that human subjects exist prior to any meaning society assigns to their lives and possess the agency to redefine what their lives mean to them, then it is possible to reassign meaning to history as a liberatory process which demands that readers ask questions about who they are in relation to the past.³⁸⁵ In absence of such philosophical inquiry, Whites ignore how race informs the material conditions that Baldwin describes in his fiction. That John is tempted by the materialism Baldwin associates with the White characters is problematic because if John allows himself to be seduced, he risks interpreting material accumulation as the meaning of life that would have the adverse effect of alienating him from spiritual forms of Black resistance, which Baldwin learned to appropriate in his life and art. Freeburg observes:

Baldwin’s version of “all existence” is materialized as the texture of history, but Baldwin wants readers to think of existence as exceeding history—transcending material life—which

³⁸⁴ Christopher Freeburg, “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam, 191-192.

³⁸⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* (London: Methuen, 1960).

encourages people to want mastery over their lives. Precisely in moments when they may have little or no control.³⁸⁶

Freeburg positions history as based mostly on the material world. Baldwin posits, however, that Whites must strive to transcend a conceptualization of human existence as merely material. Rather, materialism bogs down understandings of the self beyond the material world. To overcome social issues such as racism, we must face the past to which we owe the material present.

³⁸⁶ Christopher Freeburg, "Baldwin and the Occasion of Love, 191-192.

2.3 The Materiality of History

Baldwin views history-telling as a communal experience which should be in the service of generations to come and offer valuable insight into the meaning of human existence. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* achieves this by humanizing history. I argue that the novel resists the American tradition of history-telling, by shedding light on truths of human existence rather than focusing on *facts*. I juxtapose the novel's form with the critiques on storytelling Baldwin offers in "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," to highlight how the construction of historical narratives give way to political demands and to develop a heuristic approach to history-telling as a truth-seeking endeavor. This section is inspired by two seminal works which discuss the erosion of Civil Rights activists in national memory: Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig's "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy" (2005) and Derrick P. Alridge's "The Limits of Master Narratives in History Textbooks: An Analysis of Representations of Martin Luther King, Jr." (2006). With these works in mind, I position Baldwin's novel within a Black tradition of history-telling which resists the racialized myths that have disenfranchised African Americans. Finally, I assess Baldwin's attitude towards storytelling as a truth-telling endeavor which must be appropriated by historians to give meaning to narratives of the past.

In his January 15th, 1987, speech to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Republican President Ronald Reagan declared that King's civil rights work, though polemic, was necessary to force the government to cleanse itself of discriminatory laws which prevented Blacks from achieving the American Dream. Although the President declared that there was still work to be done for "our country [to live] up to its promise of liberty and justice for all," he introduced newly emerging rhetoric in conservative politics that the country offered more opportunities to African Americans, than ever before. Reagan declares: "[E]ach of you has more potential and more opportunity because of the hard work and courage of one remarkable

individual.”³⁸⁷ Reagan’s speech marks a turn in conservative politics, articulating racism and racial bias as personal beliefs to be fought on a personal level. “A good place to start,” Reagan suggests “is to be totally intolerant of racism anywhere around you. If someone, even a friend, uses an ugly word referring to another’s race or religion let’s make it clear we won’t put up with it. Racial, ethnic or religious slurs are vulgar, mean spirited, and there’s no place for them in a democratic free America.”³⁸⁸ However, Reagan’s message was not just about celebrating King’s legacy. Rather, it was a thinly veiled response to the racially motivated death of 23-year-old Michael Griffith, a Black man from New York which occurred just three weeks previous.³⁸⁹

On the evening of December 20th, 1986, Griffith, Cedric Sandiford, and Timothy Grimes’ car broke down in Howard Beach, a White neighborhood in Queens, New York. Griffith and two friends were attacked by a group of teenagers after seeking assistance at a pizza parlor, nearby. A mob of White teens chased and brutally beat the Black men. In the end, Griffith was struck by a car as he attempted to escape the White mob. Three of the teenagers were charged with manslaughter, while a fourth was found not guilty. Griffith’s murder followed a string of other racially motivated death of Black men in 1980’s New York City, namely Willie Turks’ (d.1982) and Yusuf Hawkins’ (d. 1989). In the wake of these deaths, Reagan’s speech demonstrates an almost compulsive obsession with individual responsibility over collective action as regards race and racial violence. This type of rhetoric distances the men’s deaths from the legacy of King’s achievements and assassination. In dismissing Griffith and the other men’s deaths as isolated incidents, rather than a nation-wide trend, Reagan attempts to erase the insidious nature of America’s relationship to race. Griffith’s death no

³⁸⁷ Reagan Library, “President Reagan’s Address on Martin Luther King’s Birthday from the Oval Office, January 15, 1987, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJarheOFo90> [Accessed: 5 October 2022].

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

longer reveals the systemic attitudes that King fought to unpin. By placing responsibility on the individual White American, Reagan bundles both racist acts and antiracist work into a neatly wrapped package of individual responsibility to qualify state-sanctioned programs as redundant, in the wake of King's political achievements which, according to Reagan, have effectively ended government sanctioned racism.

I mention Reagan who began his presidential mandate almost 30 years after the publication of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* because Baldwin's work anticipates the rise of such discourse and how it threatens to undo the civic work of the CRM to stir a sense of responsibility in White America on matters of race. The public rhetoric of Reagan's presidency effectively "change[d] Americans' perspectives on civil rights by invoking the memory of King [...]"³⁹⁰ Reagan used vestiges of King's speech and his memory in America's cultural imagination to emphasize a rhetoric of forgiveness and brotherhood, to overshadow and mute King's more "radical" agendas like reparations for Americans of African descent and social programs for the poor, both Black and White. Bostdorff and Goldzwig observe:

The focus on "I Have a Dream" in public discourse also made King ripe for appropriation because the emphasis on one speech and one issue served to obscure King's many other speeches and writings, as well as his less successful ventures, such as his effort to desegregate Chicago, his opposition to the Vietnam War, and the Poor People's Campaign [...]. As early as 1964, for example, King praised the Indian government's preferential college admissions policy for untouchables and argued that the United States must also find ways of "atoning for the injustices she has inflicted upon her Negro citizens" [...]. The civil rights leader called for "a broad-based and gigantic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged," parallel with the GI Bill of Rights [...] for a guaranteed annual income [...] and for "restitution" in the form of "radical changes in the structure of our society" that would provide African Americans with compensation in education, housing, employment, and health care [...]. The public focus on "I Have a Dream," with its simple poetic beauty, overshadowed the specific proposals that King had recommended in order to achieve his dream, again making it much easier for President Reagan to appropriate King for his own uses.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 662.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 667. For further information on King and his political discourse, see: Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There with You: the True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Free press, 2000); Drew D. Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); King, Jr., *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, selected by Coretta Scott King (New York: Newmarket Press, 1983).

Today, King is, arguably, an uncontroversial political figure in America's cultural memory, an assessment which contradicts what William C. Sullivan, the Assistant Director to the FBI's domestic intelligence division, wrote shortly after King's speech. In a memo, Sullivan characterizes King as "the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation,"³⁹² an assessment which confirmed J. Edgar Hoover's own fear that King and the Movement were affiliated—or at least sympathized—with Communist agendas, such as Fidel Castro's ongoing campaign in Cuba. Reagan's speech calls into question the difference between history-telling and collective memory. During his presidency, however, Regan often used "inclusive language" to undermine the specific needs of vulnerable populations, while he "mocked 'welfare queens' in public discourse, cut the budget for Housing and Urban Development by more than one third in 1981 alone, fired members of the US Commission on Civil Rights with whom he disagreed, vetoed congressional sanctions against South Africa, and slashed other social programs [...]"³⁹³ By the end of the 1980's, Debbie Howlett writes, "the black poverty rate was triple that for whites. A decade earlier, it had been doubled that of whites."³⁹⁴ King's Civil Rights era messages were altered to meet the political needs of Reagan's political agenda. His utilitarian approach to how the past is understood destroys any lessons it has to offer, creating a present that is utterly incoherent. Indeed, this type of historical revisionism fuels the same narratives which have led to the moral dichotomy of the cowboy and the Indian, in America's cultural imagination.

In the following, I discuss Baldwin's critiques on storytelling which argue for a more "complete picture" of the past, suggesting that history-telling should attempt to highlight how the human states Baldwin discusses motivate human action. On October 22nd, 1960, Baldwin delivered a speech on writing at San Francisco State College, in which he attempts to debunk

³⁹² As cited in: David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: from "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), 68.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Debbie Howlett, "Inner cities struggling to rebound from 'despairing time'" *USA Today*, June 10, 2004.

the hero-villain paradigm prevalent in the cowboy-Indian narrative. Later included in *Nobody Knows My Name* as “Notes for a Hypothetical Novel,” Baldwin’s speech describes people as “absolutely helpless and ignorant,”³⁹⁵ an observation which seems at first patronizing or condescending. However, this observation is made as he attempts to discuss the writing process, in which he creates a story, a novel, in front of his public. The subject of this hypothetical novel is an old, “very drunk, falling-down drunk”³⁹⁶ whom Baldwin calls the story’s “hero.” The drunk is a creation of the past and of Baldwin’s childhood in Harlem. Baldwin argues that he must be included in the novel, because whether America knows it or not, “the social realities with which these people [...] were really contending can’t be left out of the novel without falsifying their experience.”³⁹⁷ History is the chronicle of human experience. When we leave Baldwin’s drunkard out, we not only falsify his experience, but we construct a history that leaves no room for him. This means that the historical events that touched his life are also falsified, because he is missing from them.

Since the old man is from Baldwin’s childhood, and Baldwin was born in 1924, we can assume that Baldwin’s “hero” lived through the rise of the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1930’s), that he knew (or knew of) the poet Countee Cullen who, in 1935, became Baldwin’s “teacher and literary club adviser” at Frederick Douglass Junior High School.³⁹⁸ Therefore, it is also possible that Baldwin’s “hero” was also a victim of the Great Depression, at which point readers meet Baldwin’s heroic figure. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John inhabits the same world in which Baldwin’s “hero” stumbles along the Harlem streets. It is likely that John will read about the death of Emmett Till in his adulthood and will witness the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and hear about the assassinations of Civil Rights activists Edgar Evers, Malcolm X

³⁹⁵ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 224.

³⁹⁶ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 224.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁹⁸ Toni Morrison, “Chronology,” *James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, 845.

and King. Baldwin allows readers to imagine that John will recollect that old man whom Reagan uses history-telling to give meaning to his political rhetoric and distorts the memory of King's flaws in the cultural memory of America. To show King's flaws can therefore help hedge temptations of reductivism and utilitarianism.

It is under the sign of collective memory that "the long and painful experience of a people" becomes the long and painful experience of a person, a sign that Baldwin identified with literature itself. Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel" ushered the writer into a well-documented conflict with writer Richard Wright, his mentor, because Baldwin accused Wright of adhering to the same racially infused traditions the Mississippi native resisted:

Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses.³⁹⁹

Dwight McBride notes that Richard Wright was part of the Communist Party, which sought to use art in general and literature in specific as a tool not to revolutionize literature, but to revolutionize society.⁴⁰⁰ This was not to deepen our understanding of human nature, but as a means to an end—which Baldwin defines as "the Cause." However, Baldwin believed that literature is an artistic devotion to the truth. Baldwin's writings expand readers' vision of an existentialist-driven reality by demonstrating how race contributes to his characters' sense of the real and, by extension, the Self who inhabits the world. Baldwin attests to literature's potential to save the past from swirls of post-war political and economic interests which maintained the second-class citizenry of Blacks in the name of national and transnational interests, as evidenced in Reagan's neoliberal rhetoric. However, Baldwin describes the truth as "a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be

³⁹⁹ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," 22.

⁴⁰⁰ Dwight McBride, "Introduction," *James Baldwin Now* ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted.”⁴⁰¹ Baldwin searches for historical truth, described as “a series of riddles [which] has, since so many gospels are preached, the unfortunate tendency to make one belligerent.”⁴⁰² The past is complicated to navigate, because the humanity is riddled with contradictions and unanswered questions. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* makes it difficult for readers to imagine that a world of neatly organized narratives can exist. John’s relationship to his family is difficult to understand without the foresight of the history they bear, repeat and relive in the present. John is a possible break from the trauma of race and poverty. However, this can only be made possible if John acknowledges his past and makes it useful to him in the present.

In order to understand Baldwin’s literary engagement, we must first consider the significance of the political in his writings. Baldwin critiques politically engaged literature, because it presents a stock version of Black characters, leading them to act out the politically influenced arguments of the text. When Baldwin says that the function of literature or the role of the writer is to defend the truth—the things that are not said—he is, in fact, defining literature in political terms. In Baldwinian terms, politics prompts people to communicate their experiences and question the validity of their values. The artist illuminates blind spots in our perspective, and Baldwin’s writings are dependent upon the political and social circumstances which inform his perception of art and his engagement as a writer.

In this respect, Baldwin’s literary philosophy resembles, intimately, that of German philosopher Theodor Adorno. The connection is not evident—especially when considering their almost polarized conceptions of Jazz. However, Marxism influenced both writers (Baldwin became a Trotskyite during WWII and Adorno was a founding member of the Frankfurt School, which adopted Marxist theories), and they both had an aversion to political

⁴⁰¹ James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 22.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 12.

art. Adorno's 1962 essay "Commitment" chimes in on committed and autonomous art by positioning himself against Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1948). Adorno declares that autonomous art (art for art's sake) does not explicitly declare a political stance yet remains entrenched in the political through its existence. Therefore, the two forms are not in direct opposition, because autonomous work becomes political in its stance against the political. "A work of art that is committed," Adorno writes, "strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle pastime for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political."⁴⁰³ What Michael Riffaterre refers to as "a reliable representation"⁴⁰⁴—mimesis—Baldwin calls a "complete picture." Baldwin liberates his characters from the prison of their social categories, by acknowledging those categories and assessing their socio-cultural origins, as well as uncovering their impact on the agency of his characters. Baldwin writes: "[I]t is part of the business of the writer to examine attitudes, to go beneath the surface, to tap the source."⁴⁰⁵ *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* describe "the tensions of American life," to force White readers to question their own roles in society. "The time has come," Baldwin writes, "for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here."⁴⁰⁶ Baldwin places emphasis on the private life to highlight the larger mechanisms of American society. The secret American life, those unspoken beliefs and fears are paramount to understanding the larger mechanisms governing American society, because "[...] the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of

⁴⁰³ Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977 [1974]), 176.

⁴⁰⁴ My own translation; Michael Riffaterre, "Le Témoignage Littéraire," *The Romanic Review*, vol 93, no 1-2 (New York: Columbia University Press), 33-55.

⁴⁰⁵ James Baldwin, "Autobiographical Notes," *Notes of a Native Son, Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 7.

⁴⁰⁶ James Baldwin, "The Discovery of What It Means to be American," *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1961]), 142.

people have a tangible effect on the world.”⁴⁰⁷ At first, this may appear contradictory if we take into consideration the recurring themes in his works, i.e., race, sexuality and nationalism. These themes define and/or maintain the social categories from which Baldwin attempts to emancipate his characters. Baldwin’s main contention, however, is the ever-blurred line between literature and social politics. Uncle Tom and Wright’s Bigger Thomas are trapped within and, thus, limited by political intent, which is “confused [as] a devotion to Humanity [and] is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously blood-thirsty.”⁴⁰⁸

Go Tell It on the Mountain describes how “helpless” people are in the world they inhabit. When readers think of human life, they think of the engineered systems and operations which make the modern era possible: race, class, ethnicity, gender, technology, nationality, language, politics, sex and sexuality, economies and religion. They think about how we can control, manipulate, overturn, revolutionize these systems to reflect our ever-changing ideologies. Cyraina Johnson-Roullier describes Baldwin as “modernism’s ‘other,’” those writers who have “[brought] to light a number of alternative modernist canons.”⁴⁰⁹ Baldwin follows in the footsteps of the quintessential modernist Henry James, depicting social systems and categories to highlight their creations as our attempts to give order to the chaos, which Baldwin describes as our powerlessness and fear in the face of the human states. These systems are meant to protect us from the fact that death awaits us. However, they succeed only in making us immune to experience. The Grimes family is a typical American family, whose life is full of paradoxes and contradictions. “One’s short time on this earth,” Baldwin observes,” is

⁴⁰⁷ James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What It Means to be American,” *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [196&]), 142.

⁴⁰⁸ James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Cyraina Johnson-Roullier, “(An)Other Modernism: James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, and the Rhetoric of Flight” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 1999), 932.

very mysterious and very dark and very hard.”⁴¹⁰ The Grimes family speaks to the intimacy and mystery of life, inviting readers to acknowledge the webs of ambiguity and paradox in their own lives. The novel has no heroes. There are no villains. There is only a family who attempts to navigate the uncertainty of human existence. As such, the novel is a dialogue between the past and the present, between divided ideologies which are informed by American history. Baldwin dares readers to think about what they call American history through the prism of their own paradoxes and uncertainties.

For Baldwin, storytelling is about describing what it means to be human, both within and beyond a society’s ever-evolving social categories which dictate the material conditions of human life. Storytelling is an existential endeavor, an “attempt to relate the terms of my experience to yours and to find out what specific principle, if any, unites us in spite of all the obvious disparities, some of which are superficial and some of which are profound, and most of which are entirely misunderstood.”⁴¹¹ Race and class are just two of the many prevailing “superficial” “disparities” that haunt *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and echo Baldwin’s own childhood experiences in the 1930’s. Admittedly, literature and history-telling are not synonymous. However, both forms of knowledge writing are inspired by specific people, places and events that mark the past. In “History and the Novel,” writer Henry Allen suggests that history and literature “are similar in that they both offer a philosophical comment to the past, direct or understood, based on the same kinds of factual data drawn from the same sources. And they both combine similar kinds of truth, factual and artistic.”⁴¹² Allen’s emphasis on the artistic merits of truth-seeking narratives echoes Baldwin’s critiques in “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in which he advocates a form of story-telling which goes beyond “our passion for

⁴¹⁰ James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” 724.

⁴¹¹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 222.

⁴¹² Hervey Allen, “History and the Novel,” *The Atlantic* (February 1944), < <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1944/02/history-and-the-novel/655378/> > [Accessed: 28 September 2022].

categorization,” and which “has led to an unforeseen, paradoxical distress; confusion, a breakdown of meaning.”⁴¹³ Truth-seeking endeavors, like storytelling and history-telling, must articulate how social categories fluctuate to unpin their salience. This maneuver liberates the writer to investigate our humanity which transcends politics, or people’s relationship to other people, to come closer to articulating the human experience.

One of the artistic merits of storytelling is its power to construct the experience that we call fiction, “to make the reader feel that he has actually had a living experience of the dead past.”⁴¹⁴ In our present time, it is impossible to revisit the past, in the strict sense. Fiction writing, “[i]f supremely well done [...] gives the reader a more vivid, adequate, and significant apprehension of past epochs than does the historian, who conveys facts about them.”⁴¹⁵ Baldwin confronts the political reality of 1930s Harlem: the drugs, poverty, spirituality, despair and hope. He analyzes the racial politics which govern Harlem’s busy streets, high rents and crumbling buildings. Baldwin expands his artistic scope to include how his characters find meaning in their lives to reconcile “the psychological truth” of how they perceive themselves from the trenches of racial categorization. He describes how the world sees them. He describes the limits the characters’ worlds place on them. At the same time, Baldwin searches beyond the superficiality of social status to find out what the characters’ lives mean to them. Baldwin “impose[s] [himself] on these people as little as possible.” Rather he “examines their lives [...] to be able to make them convey to [himself] and to the reader what their lives mean.”⁴¹⁶ Therefore, Baldwin’s focus is not on how historical events characterize the human experience, but rather on how people have lived and survived these events using the same internal mechanisms that we use, today, in our contemporary world. As such, history-writing should

⁴¹³ James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 15.

⁴¹⁴ Hervey Allen, “History and the Novel,” *The Atlantic*.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ James Bladwin, *No Body Knows My Name*, 222.

communicate what the lives of the people it discusses mean and should imprint on readers, on our collective memory, how these peoples' lives attribute to our understanding of all human existence. This is the main inquiry which will make unnecessary the human need for the type of categorizations that leads Gabriel to choose religious righteousness over accepting his complexity.

To date, historiographies have failed mankind, as observes Baldwin infers from Lorraine Hansberry's comment that "a holocaust is no respecter of persons." However, why do they fail and what is the impact of this failure? Baldwin's stint in Greenwich Village gave him a sense of value that slowly faded as the cracks of racism began to appear:

But I didn't meet anyone in that world who didn't suffer from the very same affliction that all the people I had fled from suffered from and that was that they didn't know who they were. They wanted to be something that they were not. And very shortly I didn't know who I was, either. I could not be certain whether I was really rich or really poor, really black or really white, really male or really female, really talented or a fraud, really strong or merely stubborn. In short, I had become an American. I had stepped into, I had walked right into, as I inevitably had to do, the bottomless confusion which is both public and private, of the American republic.⁴¹⁷

If *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is a Civil Rights novel, what is Baldwin trying to tell the movement? Like Whiteness, sexuality lingers in the periphery. And like Whiteness, it threatens the world Baldwin describes. However, the two present two dramatically different problems. Whiteness is power, and power requires control or domination over something or someone. On the other hand, homosexuality threatens to expose and thus potentially disrupt the contours of the power system. Why does Baldwin call his protagonist a hero? Is it because he is the protagonist, or is it because despite his status as an alcoholic, he manages to survive and, thus, disrupt the apathy of power?

"It seems to me," Baldwin writes in *Nobody Knows My Name*, "that the situation of the writer in this country is symptomatic and reveals, says something, very terrifying about his

⁴¹⁷ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 227.

country.”⁴¹⁸ The US views the job of the artist and history-teller as similar endeavors. Baldwin is a Black writer who has sex with men. What can this mean for the Civil rights Movement which appropriated 20th century White standards of respectability and ostracized homosexuals? This means that Baldwin, a writer, is to be ostracized for not appropriating those standards that David seeks and of which John dreams, confusing materiality for morality. Then what is history-telling, and what is (or should be) its purpose?

Where history-telling expresses “those punctuations of time that have been accepted by the majority of intellectual communities as an authentic record of the past,” collective memories extend to a broader public and reflect “the public acceptances or ratifications of these histories [...]”⁴¹⁹ This leads to the conclusion that the task of historians buckles too often under the pressure of politics, or, at least, how they interpret history is heavily influenced by the political climate in which the interpretive process takes place. This is far from a novel observation in Black criticism of historical narratives. A century earlier, Du Bois criticized American traditions of history-telling as stale, unstable and volatile towards the experiences of Blacks and the White poor. In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), Du Bois observes that research on Black Floridians contributions to the Reconstruction era had been hindered by maneuvers to erase their contributions through the destruction of administrative records:

The whole development of Reconstruction was primarily an economic development, but no economic history or proper material for it has been written. It has been regarded as purely political matter, and of politics most naturally divorced from industry.

All this is reflected in the textbooks of the day and in the encyclopedias, until we have got to the place where we cannot use our experiences during and after the Civil War for the uplift and enlightenment of mankind. We have spoiled and misconceived the position of the historian. If we are going, in the future, not simply with regard to this one question, but with regard to all social problems, to be able to use human experience for the guidance of mankind, we have got clearly to distinguish between fact and desire.

In the first place, somebody in each ear must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish and desire and belief. What we have got to know, so far as possible, are the things

⁴¹⁸ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 228.

⁴¹⁹ Marouf Hasian Jr. and Robert E. Frank, “Rhetoric, History and Collective memory: Decoding the Goldhagen Debates” *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 63 (Winter 1999), 98.

that actually happened in the world. Then with that much clear and open to every reader, the philosopher and prophet has a chance to interpret these facts; but the historian has no right, posing as scientists, to conceal or distort facts; and until we distinguish between these two functions of the chronicler of human action, we are going to render it easy for a muddle world out of sheer ignorance to make the same mistake ten times over.

One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner, or that Thomas Jefferson had mulatto children, or that Alexander Hamilton had Negro blood, and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth.⁴²⁰

Du Bois underlines the problem of inaccurate history-telling as motivated by political rhetoric.

Both Du Bois and Baldwin observe that history-writing has been saturated with facts which provide information but do not give a complete picture of cause and effect, nor how these related forces are internalized and repeated. If historians fight for the “enlightenment of mankind,” they must strive to infuse information with meaning and interpretations which do not “conceal or distort facts,” but describe how these facts create a system of meaning. Historians are not scientists, in the purest sense. Rather, they are “chroniclers” of human experience who must make it their mission to enlighten their contemporary world on the truth of human complexity, a descriptor Baldwin uses in reference to humanity’s contradictory nature and how we deal with our powerlessness in the face of death.

Baldwin reiterates Du Bois’s assertion that accurate descriptions of the past have been deteriorated, likewise, by a moral binary which erases complexity and makes experience inaccessible to collective memory. The dichotomy between “good” and “evil” erases the nuances which help us understand, for example, why Washington and Jefferson were important figures in American democracy who allowed themselves to be seduced by the economic benefits of chattel slavery. In “The Limits of Master Narratives in History Textbooks: An Analysis of Representations of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Derrick P. Alridge notes this

⁴²⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 721-722.

oversimplification in the writing of textbooks which “often present[] simplistic, one-dimensional interpretations of American history within a heroic and celebratory master narrative.” Alridge continues, “The ideas and representations in textbooks present[] a teleological progression from ‘great men’ to ‘great events,’ usually focusing on an idealistic evolution toward American democracy.”⁴²¹ This interpretation of all human action as a natural progression towards the political ideas of freedom and democracy hollows out the past into a meaningless chasm, because it offers no compelling insight on the present. Even more insidious, however, is what Alridge denotes as textbooks’ penchant for “isolat[ing] [figures] from other individuals and events in their historical context, at the same time, the more controversial aspects of their lives and beliefs are left out of many history textbooks.”⁴²² Du Bois alludes to the isolation of historical events and figures from the larger context in his remark on the lack of intellectual inquiry on the relationship between politics, industry and the rise of poor Whites in Florida. This process of narrative erasure is political maneuvering to render mute, in the cultural imagination, historical figures and events so that their memory can be conjured to support contemporary rhetoric, even if their use is contradictory.

This utilitarian vision of history and historical figures reveals “the conflicting desires to promote inquiry and to indoctrinate blind patriotism” which downgrades history to “facts to be learned,”⁴²³ rather than promote a nuanced understanding of the complexities of American history to encourage intellectual inquiry on contemporary life. Therefore, Reagan’s evocation of King erases the complexity of the Civil Rights era. King is a complex figure who lived at a time of moral and political uncertainty. For example, if we ignore the many extramarital affairs King had while travelling to fight for civil rights, we risk omitting questions of the FBI’s

⁴²¹ Derrick P. Alridge, “The Limits of master Narratives in History Textbooks: An analysis of Representations of martin Luther King, Jr.” *Teachers College Record*, vol. 108, no. 4 (April 2006), 662.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 662.

⁴²³ James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 14-15.

overreaching power displayed when, upon Hoover's orders, the agency sent Coretta Scott King audio recordings of King cheating with different women.⁴²⁴ Without the backstory of King's many affairs, the FBI's attempts to discredit him is reduced to a mere anecdote, instead of offering pertinent insight into how far the Federal government was willing to go to ensure political stability through its support of the racial status quo.

The erasure of King's flaws takes away from his strength, resilience and brilliance as an orator, organizer and co-participant who wisely took counsel from the many great women and men around him. This lack of historical nuance highlights the brutality of Southern-style racism to sympathize with the Black struggle, but also a strategy to overshadow the North's own racist traditions, of which I consider the Federal Government and the FBI a major part. Baldwin was aware that political figures must be historicized with nuance to offer counsel to future generations. Too often, History is viewed as a natural progression towards the inevitable achievement of freedom. Unfortunately, this assumption hinders any nuanced interpretation of the racial dynamic at play in American politics. In "The Harlem Ghetto," Baldwin writes that "Black political figures are in an impossible position and that the handful motivated by genuine concern maintain this position with heartbreaking dignity." He continues:

The terrible thing about being a Negro leader lies in the term itself. I do not mean merely the somewhat condescending differentiation the term implies, but the nicely refined torture a man can experience from having been created and defeated by the same circumstances. That is, Negro leaders have been created by the American scene, which thereafter works against them at every point; and the best that they can hope for is ultimately to work themselves out of their jobs, to nag contemporary American leaders and the members of their own group until a bad situation becomes so complicated and so bad that it cannot be endured any longer.⁴²⁵

The politicians, drug dealers, drug addicts, prostitutes and other figures who inhabit John's world give human complexity to the largely unilateral descriptions given to figures of the Civil

⁴²⁴ For more information on the FBI's surveillance of James Baldwin, see: William J. Maxwell, *James Baldwin: The FBI File* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2017); Douglas Field, "Baldwin's FBI Files as Political Biography," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 194-210.

⁴²⁵ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 43-44.

Rights Movement. Baldwin shows the ugliness of humanity against the sterile narratives which, Kenneth S. Bigger posits, “characterize King’s message as a dream-like one of brotherhood and harmony among the races—a characterization that diminishes the sometimes-radical concrete political content of his activism.”⁴²⁶ The sterilization of public figures is only contradicted by those groups or figures who are politically designated as against America’s democratic project. Malcolm X, The Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam are the most prominent of those Black historical figures and organizations that resisted what Reagan described as King’s rhetoric of brotherhood.

History, or at least, describing and interpreting historical events depends on the political atmosphere in which those events are being described. Geralinde Joncich Clifford observes that “[t]he changeableness of historical interpretation has become axiomatic. Especially in this century, the currents of American historical thought have been re-channeled by new points of view, by sharp challenges to existing interpretations, and by the multiplication of approaches taken to the writing of history.”⁴²⁷ Baldwin asserts that the US’s understanding of Black America “hasn’t very much to do with the Negro [and] has never failed to reflect with a kind of frightening accuracy the state of mind of the country,” suggesting a particular intellectual skepticism on how and why Blacks are described or viewed in any given period. If the novel speaks to the Civil Right era—as I believe it does—what message does its description of the 1930’s communicate to readers? Or, how does the novel “reflect” the 1950’s? Is the setting of Baldwin’s semi-autobiographical novel anecdotal to his childhood experience in Harlem? With these questions in mind, how do we navigate the narrative importance of the novel? As argued, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* takes place in the rural South and the urban North to resist the

⁴²⁶ Kenneth S. Bigger, “The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, politics, and Religion by Lewis V. Baldwin; Rufus Burrow; Barbara A. Hommes; Susan Hommes Winfield,” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 83, no. 3 (July 2003), 491.

⁴²⁷ Geraldine Joncich Clifford, “The Uses of Personal-History Documents in the History of Education,” *History of Education*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1978), 183.

“Negro Problem” as the unsolvable problem of racism which has no measurable beginning or perceivable end. What the novel tells readers during the Civil Rights era is that racism is a quantifiable historical artifact. It is not just about personal convictions, rather it can be traced materially to the nation’s Founding Fathers and determined as an intrinsic part of America’s national heritage. Therefore, the question of race can be solved only if an honest assessment is made of its origin, how it manifests in the present and why it still exists.

Baldwin writes that he has “not known many survivors. [He] know[s] mainly about disaster, but then [he] want[s] to remind [us] again of that man [...] who haunts the imagination of this novelist. The imagination of a novelist has everything to do with that happens to his material.”⁴²⁸ By material, I understand the author’s experiences and the experiences of those who have come in and out of his life, how they express or bear their experiences and communicate them to others. Experience is a historical artifact whose misinterpretation overdetermines the US’s social consciousness and imposes strict guidelines on attitudes and behaviors towards social categories which overdetermine how Americans bear their human existence. As such, experience interposes itself on the present which depends on the measurable past to create intelligible, social meaning. Likewise, experience reestablishes a connection to present racial conditions through the idea that all “history [is] a questionable matter” which needs to be reassessed. Rather than an abstract concept “to be read,” history materializes present racial realities and “partake[s] in the material construction of the world.”⁴²⁹ Therefore, history must be nuanced and developed through the integration of individual narratives to humanize overly generalized narratives. This process of amplitude seeks to hedge against the erasure of experiences of racial violence and discrimination by describing race as a historical artifact which often overdetermines how the public perceives African Americans. The

⁴²⁸ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 226.

⁴²⁹ *The Materiality of Literary Narratives in Urban History*, ed. Lieven Ameal, Jason Finch, Silja Laine and Richard Dennis (London: Routledge, 2020)

materiality of history articulates a formal conceptualization of history through a more nuanced telling of the past which infuses personal narratives to thwart historicity and collective memory. Baldwin re-establishes a historically driven relationship between the artifactuality of Whiteness and the Black experience in America.

In a rather observant assessment of Harlem's relationship to New York Jews, Baldwin writes that "the Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him [the Jew] from the house of bondage. But America is the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him. What happens to the Negro here happens to him because he is an American."⁴³⁰ To rescue history means to save the present by preserving the integrity of the past's lessons. "The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro's understanding. It increases the Negro's rage."⁴³¹ For, any hope we have of constructing a more egalitarian future come from not allowing those lessons to be forgotten. Any sincere gesture of solidarity means that the US must recognize the millions of human lives (Indigenous and Black) that have been sacrificed to a settler colonial state whose aim was to form a White nation-state. Indeed, the US was founded upon "a presumption of sovereign entitlement and an unshakeable belief in [Europeans'] right to establish a state over which they could exercise permanent and exclusive control."⁴³²

Therefore, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is more than "a black boy's coming-of-age in Harlem amid the backdrop of family life and church."⁴³³ Baldwin is "the history-teller of the

⁴³⁰ James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because," 745.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 744.

⁴³² Monika Batra Kashyap, "U.S. Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and the Racially Disparate Impacts of COVID-19," 11 *California Law Review Online* 517 (Nov. 2020), [Accessed 28 April 2022] <https://www.californialawreview.org/settler-colonialism-white-supremacy-covid-19>.

⁴³³ Marc Lombardo, "James Baldwin's Philosophical Critique of Sexuality," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009), 41.

Supreme Court”⁴³⁴ who renders personal the American experience to call upon his countrymen and countrywomen to recognize themselves in the experiences of the Grimes family. Baldwin uses religious tones to redeem history from Reagan’s utilitarian overlords who elect social stagnation for American exceptionalism in a time when the US proclaimed itself as the global defender of democracy.

The confrontation that arises between what Whites wish to believe about their history and what *is* true is reflected in the innocence that betrays their good intentions: “Do not blame me, I was not there. I did not do it. My history has nothing to do with Europe or the slave trade [...] I also despise the governors of southern states and the sheriffs of southern counties, and I also want your child to have a decent education and rise as high as his capabilities will permit. I have nothing against you, nothing!”⁴³⁵ Oftentimes the questioning of history is, intrinsically, to question the intentions behind what has already been written. That we question history’s authenticity brings accusations of malice, dishonesty and aggression from Whites who obsessively cling to false narratives of the past. Baldwin observes:

The history of white people has led them to a fearful, baffling place where they have begun to lose touch with reality—to lose touch [...] with themselves—and where they certainly are not truly happy, for they know they are not truly safe. They do not know how this came about; they do not dare examine how this came about. On the one hand, they can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession—a cry for help and healing, which, is really [...] the basis of all dialogues—and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which, fatally, contains an accusation.⁴³⁶

Baldwin’s first novel establishes the relationship between signifier and signified to retrace the “record” of America’s “appallingly oppressive and bloody history.”⁴³⁷ The mid-20th century only has meaning, because of the contrast between these signs and how we interpret them. In

⁴³⁴ Irving Wohlfarth, “History, Literature and the Text: The Case of Walter Benjamin,” *MLN*, vol. 96, no. 5, (1981), 1005.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 723-724.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 724-725.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

the word “history,” Baldwin articulates the relationship of man to himself and, particularly America’s relationship to race which has an almost obsessive hold on the present.

2.4 On Photos and Reflections of Remembrance

In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Elizabeth, Rachel and Florence are arguably the only characters who come close to overcoming their trauma, failures and bitterness. Rachel is humbled from her life as a slave and is ultimately freed from slavery, by what she believes, is the grace of God. That her children can live safer and more prosperous lives than her gives her strength and hope to carry on. Baldwin makes it clear, however, that Rachel does not survive unscathed. Trudier Harris observes that “[Rachel] is willing to trade her bondage for a different kind of slavery as long as she has dwellings visibly separate from the whites.”⁴³⁸ Rachel endures living under White Southern rule and wants her children to accept their role the South has laid out for them, believing it is the only way for them to achieve safety. As a poor Black woman and daughter of an ex-slave, the only feasible possibility Florence has for a successful life is to marry and live a life of “biblical submission.”⁴³⁹ As such, Baldwin articulates the Black family unit as a possible site for stability and safety. However, Florence leaves Rachel and Gabriel in the South, because she does not want to submit to neither man (White or Black) nor God, preferring to choose the course of her destiny. Unfortunately, Florence’s move North amounts to little. Her husband Frank abandons her for another woman, then dies in France during WWI. “Fear of dying and guilt for her past actions,” Harris writes, “make Florence realize that she has not escaped and force her to judge herself, finally, by rules she has tried throughout her life to reject [...]”⁴⁴⁰ Likewise, Elizabeth frees herself from the aunt who raised her. Like Rachel, Elizabeth’s aunt shares a similar vision of the role of women in society, believing that “Elizabeth should exchange pride for humbleness and live out her life in quiet submission to biblical teachings.”⁴⁴¹ However, Elizabeth patiently awaits the day she is able to

⁴³⁸ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 14.

⁴³⁹

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

escape her aunt and the South. Up North, Elizabeth meets and becomes pregnant by John's father Richard who commits suicide after being falsely accused and imprisoned for a robbery. That Elizabeth chooses to remember these moments allows her eventually to overcome the pain of losing her family and her own failure to create a better, more stable life. However, she is unique to use her shortcomings as a site of strength to raise her children and bear poverty and racism.

In this final section of Chapter Two, I argue that remembrance through self-reflections and images is part of Baldwin's literary aesthetic. I believe that Baldwin presents Elizabeth as a model to overcome and make useful the hardships of life. I argue that photographs and reflections in the novel, are historical artifacts which offer insightful references into Elizabeth Grimes's past. "Elizabeth's Prayer" articulates the heuristic power of remembrance, through which photographs and reflective surfaces testify to the hardship, trauma and love she has endured. Contrary to Gabriel and Florence, however, Elizabeth frees herself from the terror and trauma of abandonment and death.

Baldwin's use of photographs and reflective surfaces, like mirrors and windowpanes, has been acknowledged as allowing characters to understand themselves in historical terms. Makeda Best's "Time is Now: photography and Social Change in James Baldwin's America" (2019) offers a historical perspective of Baldwin's interest in photographic images which hold "transformative possibilities" and "call to witness" what Baldwin concedes as "an alternative vision of American life and culture—exposing the fissures in American society and the emerging cracks in [American] myths of being and belonging."⁴⁴² Of course, Baldwin's collaboration with fellow Dewitt Clinton High School alumnus and celebrated photographer Richard Avedon, in *Nothing Personal* (1964), testifies to the potential Baldwin saw in

⁴⁴² Makeda Best, "Time is Now: photography and Social Change in James Baldwin's America," *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 5 (2019), 98.

photography to offer a new gaze on familiar subjects. Lynn Orilla Scott provides an enriching and very detailed analysis of how photographs and other reflective objects operate within the literary realm of Baldwin's writings. In assessing the authenticity of Tish Rivers' narrative voice in *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Scott takes the time to carefully navigate the transformative knowledge reflections offer Baldwin's characters. I quote Scott at length to demonstrate the richness and intricacy of Baldwin's observation on how reflective objects allow access to once forgotten knowledge, which in the novel Baldwin interprets as a kind of dispossessed memory:

The opening paragraphs of *If Beale Street Could Talk* are a mediation on identity that specifically invites a comparison between Tish Rivers and Baldwin's male narrators. Tish begins, "I look at myself in the mirror." *Giovanni's Room* opens with David seeing his reflection in a windowpane and ends with a long passage in which David examines his body "trapped in [his] mirror." At the beginning of "Sonny's Blues" the narrator stared at his reflection in a subway window, "trapped in the darkness which roared outside." Early in *Go Tell John Grimes* stares at his face in a mirror as though it were "a stranger who held secrets that John could never know." In the opening pages of *Just Above My Head*, Hall Montana describes his reaction to the news of his brother's death: "I was shaving someone else. I looked into my eyes: they were someone else's eyes." Baldwin's characters confront the "other" in mirrors, window, and other reflective surfaces. The mirror contains a part of the self that the character is not able to assimilate John's "ugliness," David's "troubling sex," or Sonny's brother's "darkness." Mirrors are symbols of divided selves and the means of exploring a character's conflict with sexual, racial, or religious identity. Mirrors also suggest that subjectivity is always formed in relationship to the other people in an individual's life. David not only sees himself in the mirror, but the image of Giovanni's face as he goes to his execution appears in the mirror as well [...] And both Hall Montana and the unnamed protagonist of "Sonny's Blues" suddenly find themselves looking at their reflection because they have lost a brother. In Baldwin's work reflective imagery suggests the intersubjective nature of personal identity; the degree to which subjectivity is formed in mirrors held up by the "other."⁴⁴³

Elizabeth's story is betrayed by the very objects that testify to the trauma and loss she has endured. Scott concludes that these reflections reinforce "connections with others rather than separation, and it is this sense of belonging that allows [characters] to resist the fatalism that almost overwhelms [them]."⁴⁴⁴ Elizabeth has been able to avoid the "fatalism" that haunts Gabriel and Florence who carry bitterness in their hearts. The distinction between Gabriel, Florence and Elizabeth is an important one. Although John is influenced by all three characters, Elizabeth is his guiding light through his feelings of shame, terror and guilt. These photographs

⁴⁴³ Lynn Orilla Scott, *James Baldwin's Later Fiction*, 84-85.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and reflective objects echo his mother's experiences and legacy as a witness whom Baldwin describes as "was there, and no one has ever accused her of being bitter."⁴⁴⁵ Therefore, John's gaze upon these objects reestablishes a maternal connection which Baldwin believes is a site for empathy, strength and hope in a racist society. As John looks at photographs of the past, he begins to engage in an intergenerational discussion on family trauma and communal healing. Baldwin uses objects such as photographs, mirrors and windowpanes as modes of remembrance which force John to confront himself as a creation of the past, using images as metaphors for the US's history with racial violence which Whites must face if the US hopes to overcome the control such past events hold over the present. Photographs and mirrors are synonymous with the kind of introspection that dares John to question the source of his identity. Baldwin places emphasis on these objects as modes of remembrance, which are indispensable to understanding contemporary issues like anti-Black violence. Photographs and reflections engage readers in an open and honest dialogue on John's social value in relation to Whiteness. Baldwin stresses the historical (intergenerational) aspect, of what Du Bois calls "two-ness," as a means to understand the racial Other who dwells within. This Otherness can also be familial and transmitted as testimony on how "to make it"—to overcome the difficulty of human life.

As John awakes one Saturday morning, Elizabeth asks him to "sweep the front room" which consisted of a "heavy red and green and purple Oriental-style carpet that had once been the room's glory [...]"⁴⁴⁶ The scene describes cleaning the carpet, whose dust falls back down, making futile all efforts, as an overbearing task, likening John to Homer's Sisyphus who endlessly pushes a boulder up a hill. Baldwin writes: "It became in [John's] imagination his impossible, lifelong task, his hard trial, like that of a man he had read about somewhere, whose curse it was to push a boulder up a steep hill, only to have the giant who guarded the hill roll

⁴⁴⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 292.

⁴⁴⁶ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 24.

the boulder down again [...]”⁴⁴⁷ The comparison Baldwin makes between Sisyphus and John’s seemingly endless tasks is a metaphor for the difficult responsibility Baldwin assumes to remember and honor the past, perpetually under threat of obliteration. However, Baldwin makes forgetting the past difficult by using reflections that force John to gaze upon himself as a historical creation. As John cleans the dust off a mirror in the living room, his mind wanders back to Sisyphus’s impossible task which is to bear witness. John looks at himself in a mirror and sees in his face something that suggests corruption:

Thinking bitterly of his birthday, he attacked the mirror with the cloth, watching his face appear as out of a cloud. With a shock he saw that his face had not changed, that the hand of Satan was as yet invisible. His father had always said that his face was the face of Satan—and was there not something—in the life of the eyebrow, in the way his rough hair formed a V on his brow—that bore witness to his father’s words? In the eye there was a light that was not the light of Heaven, and the mouth trembled, lustful and lewd, to drink deep of the wines of Hell. He stared at his face as though it were, as indeed it soon appeared to be, the face of a stranger, a stranger who held secrets that John could never know.⁴⁴⁸

By “secrets,” it is possible that Baldwin is referring to John’s (homo)sexuality which lingers at the periphery of his adolescent life and threatens to reveal itself at any moment. However, John’s face is also the face of his parents and, thus, alludes to the secret that Gabriel is not his biological father. The reference to Satan foreshadows this revelation, and what Gabriel hates in John are the sins of Elizabeth and Richard, John’s biological father who dies before John’s birth. In his life, Richard attempts to gain the respect of the White world. However, he falls short and commits suicide. Therefore, when John looks at himself, he sees his father’s defeat. Baldwin warns John, the son, not to follow in his father’s footsteps. Where Richard fights for acceptance, Gabriel hopes for vengeance and looks at the past with scorn, preferring to forget it. Gabriel hopes that if he sacrifices the teachings of his past, he will realize the Lord’s cosmic vengeance in the afterlife.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

After cleaning the mantel place, on which the mirror stands, John looks at the “photographs, greeting cards, flowered mottoes, two silver candlesticks that held no candles, and a green metal serpent, poised to strike.⁴⁴⁹ Baldwin asks readers to acknowledge a hermeneutic relationship between the serpent and the mottoes, as a card reads:

Come in the evening, or come in the morning,
Come when you're looked for, or come without warning,
A thousand welcomes you'll find here before you,
And the oftener you come here, the more we'll adore you.⁴⁵⁰

The motto is sweet in tone but when juxtaposed with the image of a serpent which in Christian imagery represents temptation, it takes a Hitchcockian turn into the eerie. Gabriel's contempt for John, his allusion to Elizabeth's sin and the image of the serpent remind readers that Gabriel prefers to forget that John was Richard's illegitimate child. The line “Come in the evening, or come in the morning” suggests that these family memories are inescapable and threaten to further destabilize the already fragile dynamic of the Black family. Oddly, Baldwin also describes them in positive terms, suggesting that they are heirlooms or historical artifacts of great value:

Against the mirror, like a procession, the photographs were arranged [...] These photographs were the true antiques of the family, which seemed to feel that a photograph should commemorate only the lost distant past. The of John and Roy, and of the two girls, which seemed to violate this unspoken law, served only in fact to prove it lost iron-hard: they had all been taken in infancy, a time and a condition that the children could not remember.⁴⁵¹

The photographs of the Grimes family are described as “antiques” which suggests that they are preciously valuable, because they allow the family access to displaced memories. At 14 years old, John cannot decipher the sentimental importance of the photographs, nor can he pinpoint the moment they were taken. Therefore, the photographs seem to offer no intelligible meaning. However, just because John cannot interpret their meaning does not mean he will not be able

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁵⁰ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It*, 25.

⁴⁵¹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 26.

to access them and use their teachings in adulthood. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin follows in the African American tradition of remembrance which began in the antebellum South when runaway slaves wrote slave narratives to bear witness to their life in bondage. This literary strategy forces White readers to reveal what the characters' lives mean against the backdrop of their own Whiteness. The point is not to provoke forms of White guilt. Rather, remembrance resists the temptation to forget through the segregation of memory and interrupts the binary experience of race, creating an image of the US as a community.

Slave narratives and abolitionist photography are forms of witnessing which articulate a deep-rooted tradition of remembrance in African American history. Slave narratives are biographical accounts of fugitive enslaved Blacks who bore witness to their experiences in bondage, creating a new literary genre whose focus was the process of witnessing to heal from trauma of mass kidnappings and forced labor. The history of African Americans is not just a series of events. Rather, the term acknowledges the tradition of a people which, Baldwin informs us, involves "that depth of involvement and unspoken recognition of shared experience which creates a way of life."⁴⁵² Therefore, the word "tradition" describes the everyday practices and cultural performances used to bear history, to help us reach communal growth and maturity, and "expresses nothing more than the long and painful experience of a people."

Baldwin continues:

It comes out of the battle waged to maintain their integrity or, to put it more simply, out of their struggle to survive. When we speak of the Jewish tradition we are speaking of centuries of exile and persecution, of the strength which endured and the sensibility which discovered in it the high possibility of the moral victory.⁴⁵³

Black traditions of remembrance were born from the experiences of African slaves and their descendants who endured the Atlantic Slave Trade, by way of the Middle Passage and perpetual

⁴⁵² James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 27.

⁴⁵³ James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 27-28.

enslavement which resulted in the erasure of their cultures and identities. These traditions were forged in the Americas as ways to “maintain their integrity [...] out of their struggle to survive” the oppression and destruction of the West’s economic dependence on Black slavery. Yet, the distinctive modes and operations of remembrance are just as important as the experiences they honor. Traditions of remembrance take such forms as dance, music, philosophy, poetry and prose. Indeed, slave narratives are, arguably, the first mode of public remembrance in African American culture. Described by Paul Gilroy as “a valuable clue towards answering the question of how the realm of freedom is conceptualized by those who have never been free,” the slave narrative makes public “the memory of the slave experience [which] is itself recalled and used” as a unique site of knowledge.⁴⁵⁴ Gilroy analyzes the writings of Black intellectuals beyond the temporal and geographical boundaries in which their works were conceived—beyond their “cultural canon”—to illustrate a “web of diaspora identities and concerns” of which the African American experience is a part. Gilroy observes that these narratives sparked an important “division of intellectual labour,”⁴⁵⁵ in which the testimony of ex-slaves became integral to the spiritual and intellectual life of White abolitionist ideologies:

The capacity of blacks to redeem and transform the modern world through the truth and clarity of perception that emerge from their pain is, for example, a familiar element in the theology of Martin Luther King, Jr., which argues not only that black suffering has a meaning but that its meaning could be externalized and amplified so that it could be of benefit to the moral status of the whole world.⁴⁵⁶

Slave narratives nuance morality, because Black slaves—as the subjects of philosophical inquiries—offer distinct experiences and voices to the works that champion their freedom. The autobiographical nature becomes a source of agency, offering a particular experiential framework to describe the world and reclaim one’s sense of self. The self-told experiences thwart oversimplified moral binaries which, as Baldwin observes in “Everybody’s Protest

⁴⁵⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (New York: Verso, 1993), 71.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

Novel”, many 18th and 19th century abolitionists appropriated. Slave narratives go beyond, therefore, the arena of the hypothetical horrors of Black subjugation. Rather, they are firsthand accounts of the brutality of race-based systems. These narratives break the Black/White power dynamic and allow ex-slaves to produce authentic and authoritative modes of storytelling and remembrance. Gilroy observes:

[...] a new discursive economy emerges with the refusal to subordinate the particularity of the slave experience to the totalising power of universal reason held exclusively by white hands, pens, or publishing houses. Authority and autonomy emerge directly from the deliberately personal tone of this history. Eagerly received by the movement to which they were addressed, these talks helped to mark out a dissident space within the bourgeois public sphere which they aimed to suffuse with their utopian content. The autobiographical character of many statements like this is thus absolutely crucial. It appeals in special ways to the public opinion of the abolitionist movement against the arbitrary power intrinsic to a slave system which is both unreasonable and un-Christian.⁴⁵⁷

Because these narratives come from the particular position of ex-slaves, they offer, likewise, what Du Bois calls slavery’s “effects upon the planter.”⁴⁵⁸ In an anecdote about George Washington, Du Bois recounts how America’s first president “sold a slave to the West Indies for one hogshead ‘of best rum’ and molasses and sweetmeats,” because the slave was “both a rogue and a runaway.”⁴⁵⁹ It was Du Bois who first argued that one of the first traditions in America was not racism but the slave trade which did not come from hatred of Blacks. Rather, hatred for Blacks was born as an economic necessity to maintain the slave system.⁴⁶⁰ It seems that the point of Du Bois’ story is the authenticity that the perspective of slaves gives to the White abolitionists. For Washington, his slave was insubordinate and “a rogue” for refusing to believe—as expressed in his attempts at escape—that he was undeserving of the freedom his master has. By running away, the slave was asserting that he was not a slave but a man who was held captive at gunpoint by White men. Even more startling is Washington’s barter for the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁵⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 45.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 45. For more information, see: Walter H. Mazyck, “George Washington and the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (April, 1932), 230-232.

⁴⁶⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 45.

slave, which reveals just how little human value the US's first president saw in the slave's life. The point is that remembrance also allows ex-slaves to redefine Whites from experiential knowledge. Du Bois' story reaffirms Baldwin's artistic choice to describe Whiteness through David's internalized homophobia in *Giovanni's Room*, Vivaldo's colorblindness in *Another Country* and Jesse's sexual frustrations and racialized fantasies in "Going to Meet the Man."

Like Gabriel and Florence, Elizabeth left the South to escape both her aunt and the brutality of Southern racism. As John awakes from a long night's sleep, he sees his mother gleaming in the redemptive light of the morning sun. This scene describes an intimate moment between mother and son, where Elizabeth represents a strong and loving figure in the young boy's life. As John thinks of his mother when she was younger, he imagines his own possibilities in adulthood:

Her face became the face that he gave her in his dreams, the face that had been hers in a photograph he had seen once, long ago, a photograph taken before he was born. This face was young and proud, uplifted, with a smile that made the wide mouth beautiful and glowed in the enormous eyes. It was the face of a girl who knew that no evil could undo her, and who could laugh, surely, as his mother did not laugh now. Between the two faces there stretched a darkness and a mystery that John feared, and that sometimes caused him to hate her.⁴⁶¹

The "darkness" to which Baldwin alludes testifies to John's conception of love and sin and becomes characteristic of the hate and guilt John and Gabriel share throughout the novel. This sin becomes the reason for John's resentment towards his benevolent mother and his strained relationship with Gabriel. Oftentimes, Baldwin plays with time as a precursor to coming events. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, it is John's awakening through the loss of his innocence; in *Giovanni's Room*, David's reflection "in the darkening gleam of the window pane"⁴⁶² foretells the self-reflection that propels the storyline, by way of the Parisian nightlife, eventually leading to Giovanni's execution, and finishing with David at a crossroads between salvation and

⁴⁶¹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 20.

⁴⁶² James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 221.

oblivion. Baldwin presents a chronology of these events through passing images, whether through reflective surfaces or photographs. The face of Elizabeth Grimes, as represented in the photograph taken “before [John] was born,” indicates the importance of her past experiences in John’s present and future as a Black man. The photograph bears witness to Elizabeth’s downfall but, also, the redemptive possibilities that the mother’s testimony offers her children.

Like David’s reflection in the windowpane of the house in the South of France, Elizabeth’s photograph testifies to the tragedies that led her to the North, where she became pregnant out of wedlock and married Gabriel. At eight years old, Elizabeth’s mother dies. Sadly, she does not immediately mourn the loss, because “she had scarcely known her mother and had certainly never loved her.”⁴⁶³ The cause of Elizabeth’s apathy is not from parental abuse but neglect. From early memory, her mother was often bedridden, “reading spiritualist pamphlets concerning the benefits of disease and complaining to Elizabeth’s father of how she suffered.”⁴⁶⁴ Elizabeth’s mother thinks of the afterlife and is, thus, absent from her daughter’s life. Sadly, Baldwin makes it clear that Elizabeth’s father is not in a better position to take care of his daughter. Baldwin alludes that her father manages gambling and prostitution from their home. Therefore, she is forced to abandon her only living parent to live with her aunt who “was always talking of [...] what great sacrifices she had made on her account, and what great care she took to see to it that Elizabeth should grow up a good, Christian girl.”⁴⁶⁵ Baldwin clarifies, however, that the aunt’s relationship to religion is motivated by self-interest, rather than any universal notion of Christian love. “She sensed,” Baldwin writes, “that what her aunt spoke of as love was something else—a bribe, a threat, an indecent will to power.”⁴⁶⁶ Gabriel and Elizabeth’s aunt represent how American Christians fail in their duties as believers of an

⁴⁶³ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 147

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

intrinsic human value. Rather, they use the Bible to threaten people who do not conform to social norms.

In a 1967 op-ed for *Liberation*, Baldwin denounces how political necessity influences the value we give to human life: “The value of a human being is never indicated by the color of his skin,” Baldwin writes. “The value of a human being is all that I hold sacred; and I know that I do not become better by making another worse. One need not read the New Testament to discover that. One need only read history and look at the world—one need only, in fact, look into one’s own mirror.”⁴⁶⁷ Social transformation does not begin with attempts at changing the minds of Whites who refuse to relinquish their prison of color. Rather, the US must strive to create a culture which makes it difficult to rely on such handicaps. This transformation begins, however, with historical introspection to understand how we undermine social progress, today. Elizabeth accepts her past and attempts to overcome it, using the love for her children, her husband and God to grow emotionally and become more empathetic to the pain and suffering of other people.

In the wake of WWII, the newly formed Council of Europe’s drafted a charter for democracy and human dignity. Its purpose was to ensure that racially motivated massacres such as the Holocaust would never happen again. Integral to the council’s strategy is the importance it gives to honoring the dead by remembering them: “remembrance is more than merely just remembering: remembrance is about making ourselves [keep] a memory alive, or at least not allowing ourselves to overlook horrors that have happened in the past.”⁴⁶⁸ Without glorifying the past, remembrance pays homage to it and the trauma and horrors associated with certain events.⁴⁶⁹ Remembrance is a political act that, as Michelle M. Wright observes, begins

⁴⁶⁷ As quoted in Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Begin Again*, 149.

⁴⁶⁸ “Remembrance,” The Council of Europe, < <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/remembrance> > [Accessed: 18 October 2022].

⁴⁶⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Verso: New York, 1993).

“retroactively,” on the precipice of forgetting. “Baldwin’s moment of forgetting achieves meaning only retroactively for the simple reason that the moment in which one forgets is, by definition, unmemorable. It lacks significance; it remains empty of meaning until one remembers,”⁴⁷⁰ Wright argues. Tony Platt arrives at a similar conclusion in “Remembrance over Amnesia” (2007), in which he “deals with the politics of remembrance and its close partner, amnesia.”⁴⁷¹ In a short comparison of Northern Ireland and the US’s reactions to historical events, Platt argues that the US observes a long tradition of forgetting its human rights violations:

“It is recognised that victims have a right to remember,” stated the 1998 Belfast Agreement. I was shocked to read this principle enshrined in the cold print of an official document. Back in the United States, the government protects our right to forget. There is no public holiday to mark the emancipation of slaves, one of the most significant events in American history. Congress has still not acquired sufficient courage to even issue an apology for slavery. In California where I live, we can match Ireland’s tragic history sorrow for sorrow. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards we were responsible for genocidal policies waged against indigenous peoples, ethnic cleansing of Chinese immigrants, erasure of Mexican symbols and the Spanish language from public life, institutionalised racism in education and housing, and the internment without trial of Japanese-Americans. Yet it is almost impossible to find public memorials commemorating this long, bloody history or the main social movements that have resisted injustice.⁴⁷²

Remembrance creates a communal relationship between a historical moment of trauma and the present to inspire hope for the future, through a commitment to acknowledging and remembering the past. The burden of remembering is a heavy one, however, which I associate with the young Baldwin’s flight to Paris. Baldwin fled the US to release himself from his “role” as Black, a process which involved setting aside memories of trauma to accept the new, enriching experiences he hoped to have. Ironically, it was in Paris that Baldwin began to listen to Blues singer Bessie Smith who, Baldwin writes, “helped [him] to dig back to the way [he] must have spoken when [he] was a pickaninny, and to remember the things [he] had heard and

⁴⁷⁰ Michelle M. Wright, “‘Alas, Poor Richard’: Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity,” *James Baldwin Now*, 216.

⁴⁷¹ Tony Platt, “Remembrance over Amnesia,” *Fortnight*, no. 452 (May 2007), 14.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

seen and felt.”⁴⁷³ For many middle-class African Americans, the Blues and Smiths particularity chaotic lifestyle and provocative lyrics were viewed as a “racial cliché.”⁴⁷⁴ The young Baldwin was forced to face all the stereotypes that Smith seemingly represented. “She was the summation of all the stereotypes, all the prejudices, all the projected racial and sexual fantasies, all the watermelons and pickaninnies and dialect speech, and all the externally imposed self-hate,”⁴⁷⁵ Josh Kun observes. Eventually, Baldwin learned to confront such stereotypes, by acknowledging the *place* the US had designated for him, so that he could hone his craft (his role) as a writer which helped him loosen the hold race had on his personal and professional life.

Baldwin’s journey from “preferring to forget” to “choosing to remember” is a crucial journey towards the acceptance and celebration of experience, a reoccurring theme in his writings. Kun observes:

The only way Baldwin was able to come to terms with his status as a raced U.S. subject was by listening to these Bessie Smith records. In Bessie’s blues Baldwin literally heard a “record” of his past, an audible account of events and memories he had consciously and energetically repressed. Baldwin came to Paris to forget, and the records of Bessie Smith forced him to remember. In a moment of aural epiphany, two records saved Baldwin from forgetting himself. Two records restored something that he had lost. It was a truly remarkable moment of intersubjective listening: Baldwin listened to Bessie Smith, and he heard himself.⁴⁷⁶

Listening to Smith helped Baldwin remember the beautiful moments of his life and cultural heritage that he had previously associated with the racial trauma he had experienced the first twenty-four years of his life. It was during his self-exile—where he hoped to escape American racism—that he was able to come to terms with it. Not only that, but he also learned to use his traumatic experiences to reach others. Trauma is often the catalyst for forgetting and

⁴⁷³ James Baldwin, *No Body Knows My Name*, 138.

⁴⁷⁴ D. Quentin Miller, “Using the Blues: James Baldwin and Music,” *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*, ed. Douglas Field (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

⁴⁷⁵ Josh Kun, “Life According to the Beat,” *James Baldwin Now*, 312.

⁴⁷⁶ Josh Kun, “Life According to the Beat: James Baldwin, Bessie Smith, and the Perilous Sounds of Love,” *James Baldwin Now*, 311.

“transcode[s] other forms of yearning and mourning associated with histories of dispersal and exile and the remembrance of unspeakable terror.”⁴⁷⁷ Indeed, a certain type of forgetfulness can be a symptom or consequence of trauma. However, forgetting can also be a momentary reprieve from trauma and lead one on the path of healing. The second part of the healing process, however, is confronting the trauma head on, through remembrance. Baldwin’s insistence that he remember his life and experiences as Black, poor and queer in Harlem means that he must look back, as a survivor and “a witness,” to conjure up the memories he once attempted to repress. Smith’s particular “tone and her cadence” led Baldwin out of the darkness of repressed memory and helped him accept “his role [...] in the extraordinary drama which is America.”⁴⁷⁸ The artists’ communion articulates, in many ways, how Smith’s artistry reflects, in song and spirit, Baldwin’s own trauma.

Smith’s attitude towards her experience as an orphaned child allowed Baldwin to reappropriate the racial stereotypes that plagued his youth and begin his inquiries on American life. Baldwin was given freedom but belligerently reminds us, “[t]his freedom, like all freedom, has its dangers and its responsibilities.”⁴⁷⁹ Of course, Baldwin dedicates this freedom to his oeuvre: fiction, essays, poems and plays, articulating the trauma of what it means to be Black, queer and poor in America and revealing the beauty and ugliness of human existence. Baldwin takes these social categories to redescribe what it means to be American. Remembrance is a mode of witnessing in Baldwin’s literary aesthetic, which “comes from the church, from publicly testifying to experience.”⁴⁸⁰ “In the history of the temple,” Baldwin writes in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, “the Lord had raised up evangelists and teachers and prophets, and called them out into the field to do His work; to go up and down the land carrying the gospel.”⁴⁸¹ Here,

⁴⁷⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 201.

⁴⁷⁸ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 13.

⁴⁷⁹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 141.

⁴⁸⁰ Michele Elam, “Introduction: Baldwin’s art,” *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 8.

⁴⁸¹ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It*, 48.

Baldwin constructs remembrance beyond the private, rather it is “a social event in which artist and audience mutually recognize one another as members of a congregation of sorts.”⁴⁸²

Remembrance is an intimate investigation into the emotional impact of traumatic events and their effects on individuals and their communities and is, thus, a form of historical preservation through the public sharing of collective experiences. Gilroy designates Baldwin “as the progenitor of a strategy for black expression in which victims are first blessed and then required to play a special role in illuminating and transforming the world.”⁴⁸³ The writer exalts his characters to the level of prophets who experience struggle before they tend to their flock. And like prophets, Baldwin’s characters wage a spiritual and moral war in the hearts and minds of White Americans through the remembrance of racial trauma. Baldwin’s prophets are as much political figures as they are spiritual ones who use remembrance to resist White America’s urge to “forget the unforgettable”⁴⁸⁴ past which haunts the memories of the communities Baldwin describes. In this sense, Baldwin uses remembrance as a form of political resistance, which takes as its subject the emotional weight of trauma and hope, so that African Americans can develop the tools to empower themselves.

Being raced is a traumatic and self-alienating process which affects all of Baldwin’s characters. That said, how Americans are raced differs greatly. *Giovanni’s Room* gives consideration to the psychological effects of Whiteness. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resists White America’s urge to overlook the trauma of racism that informs much of our contemporary world. In *Another Country*, Baldwin analyzes how the demands of post-WWII Whiteness informs gender identity, sexual expression and impedes true understanding of others, even when in intimate relationships. I analyze the four different romantic pairings (interracial,

⁴⁸² Ibid., 9.

⁴⁸³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 216.

⁴⁸⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 217.

intra-racial, heteronormative and same-sex), to illustrate how the demands of post-WWII Whiteness inform gender identity, sexual expression and impedes understanding of others beyond social norms. Notwithstanding, Baldwin's first two novels present characters whose sense of agency is limited by family and romantic relationships which impact how they view sexuality and gender expression. However, I argue that *Another Country* merges his critiques on how Whiteness affects his White characters and haunts the lives of his Black characters, offering socially unintelligible relationships which hold the promise of revealing how the process of racing Whites limits expression of love, selfhood and sexuality and creates the impossibility to reach what Baldwin conceives as another person's country—a metaphor he uses for the private-self that goes beyond societal norms.

Chapter 3: Whitening Gender and Sexuality in *Another Country*

3.1 Ida and Vivaldo: The Racial Fantasy of Sex

In the penultimate chapter of *Another Country*, White liberal writer Vivaldo Moore and his Black jazz-singing girlfriend Ida Scott arrive towards the end of their romantic relationship. The moment encompasses the doubt, fear and uncertainty the interracial couple attempts to avoid throughout the novel. Though the moment is filled with anguish, their love for each other shatters the prejudices that have prevented the lovers from understanding each other beyond social terms. This transformative moment appears as a banal moment of tenderness and harsh honesty. Baldwin writes:

They stared at each other. Suddenly, he reached out and pulled her to him, trembling, with tears starting up behind his eyes, burning and blinding, and covered her face with kisses, which seemed to freeze as they fell. She clung to him; with a sigh she buried her face in his chest. There was nothing erotic in it; they were like two weary children. And it was she who was comforting him. Her long fingers stroked his back, and he began, slowly, with a horrible, strangling sound, to weep, for she was stroking his innocence out of him.⁴⁸⁵

Vivaldo and Ida's turbulent relationship begins just after the suicide of Ida's brother Rufus Scott. Rufus is a jazz musician and the central figure of the novel, whose death triggers chaos amongst his circle of White liberal friends. The certainty with which they approach their lives and their perceived roles in American society is replaced with the fear that the unknown brings. In the excerpt above, Vivaldo undergoes a transformation which brings him to tears. For the first time, he realizes that his identity as White has sheltered him from understanding what compelled Rufus, his best friend, to commit suicide. The "innocence" that was his pride is stripped away, from Ida's tough love that has pushed him over the threshold between innocence and a sense of responsibility.

⁴⁸⁵ James Baldwin, *Another Country* in *James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, 752.

Indeed, the ability to recognize another's suffering is an important lesson Vivaldo and the White characters learn throughout the novel. That the novel is the first appearance of interracial relationships in Baldwin's fiction is no coincidence. Baldwin continues his assessment of White innocence, by articulating how it affects intrapersonal dynamics. In other words, I continue my analysis of how Whiteness and White innocence limit one's sense of responsibility for others. Where David's rejection of Giovanni pushes the Italian bartender to commit murder, Rufus commits suicide, because his friends' racial blindness renders unintelligible his pleas for help. Because part of Rufus's suffering is racial and part of it is sexual, I pay attention to the various couplings Baldwin creates which, I argue, nuances discussions on how race, sexuality and gender inform the relationships of the characters.

In Fred L. Standley's argument on the structural, symbolic and thematic force of the novel, he notes that "[t]he plot—the rationally explicable sequence of events—is comprised of four principal narrative strands involving two main characters in each strand: (1) Rufus Scott and Leona (black man, white woman); (2) Ida Scott and Vivaldo Moore (black woman, white man); Richard and Cass Silenski (white couple); and Eric Jones and Yves (White homosexual, white male lover)."⁴⁸⁶ Marlon B. Ross defends Baldwin against accusations that same-sex love was reserved for his White characters. He attributes Baldwin's artistic choice not to include same-sex relationships amongst Black men, until *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), to "a prolegomenon for a revolution that is (homo)sexual and racial simultaneously."⁴⁸⁷ Nathan A. Scott's "Judgement Marked by a Cellar: The American Negro Writer and the Dialectic of Despair" (1967) and Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s "The Embattled Craftsman" (1988) support Standley's observation in his assessment that "Baldwin's engagement with this relationship between same-sexuality and race takes the form of a progressive, consistent

⁴⁸⁶ Fred L. Standley, "Another Country, Another Time," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall, 1972), 505.

⁴⁸⁷ Marlon B. Ross, "White Fantasies of Desire," 19.

thinking through, rather than something quixotic, sporadic, regressive, or exculpatory—an intentionally politicized engagement rather than a whimsical detour.”⁴⁸⁸ With these critiques in mind, I argue that the characters in *Another Country* perform social identities which intersect along intelligible norms surrounding race, sexuality and gender performativity. Baldwin’s third novel responds to *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni’s Room*, inviting readers to search to adopt unintelligible identities, ones that reject limiting norms, to reach the intimate space that is another’s country, a metaphor Baldwin uses to express a person’s inner world. Vivaldo attempts to understand Rufus and Ida from prescribed notions of Black sexuality, as expressed in what he views is the potential of jazz to liberate Whites from their mundane lives. I believe that his relationship with Ida challenges this misgiving, allowing both to release themselves from the pain and guilt that their interracial relationship provokes. As such, they succeed in going beyond interraciality to understand each other on a more human level.

Any discussion on race, sexuality and gender in Baldwin’s work is a difficult task, since Baldwin weaves, in nuanced forms, all three themes throughout his works. This reality becomes even more apparent when we consider the large body of scholarship that has already been dedicated to the subject. This section furthers my argument that Baldwin’s early novels offer critiques on post-WWII critiques on American Whiteness. I believe that *Another Country* not only critiques White Liberal ideologies surrounding race, sexuality and gender, but also articulates how innocence informs “White sexuality.” In the introduction to *James Baldwin Now*, Dwight A. McBride writes that “with the advent of cultural studies, it is finally possible to understand Baldwin’s vision of and for humanity in its complexity, locating him not as exclusively, gay, black, expatriate, activist, or the like but as an intricately negotiated amalgam of all of those things [...]”⁴⁸⁹ Like the writer, his characters must be understood as an

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Dwight A. McBride, “Introduction,” *James Baldwin Now*, 4.

“amalgam” of negotiating identities, which not only intersect at a nexus of social meaning but informs how each creates meaning for the other. By looking at the characters and their interconnected lives through the prism of Critical Whiteness Studies, I hope to show that Baldwin’s critiques on America’s moral stance on race, sexuality and gender articulate a racial fantasy of sex, intrinsically connected to the politics surrounding Whiteness.

Following Ross’s lead, I pay particular attention to Vivaldo and Ida’s relationship to highlight how White masculinities are “coded and enacted” based upon a “racial heritage [which] shapes attitudes toward sex, romance, love and friendship.”⁴⁹⁰ As such, I choose to focus on expressions of White masculinity⁴⁹¹ as “defining [...] the authority deriving from that identity.”⁴⁹² In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Deborah and Florence’s stifled futures articulate the power of White masculinities on black women. Both characters are denied futures, because of the cast of color and gender, before and during the Depression era. It is my hope that by paying due attention to Ida Scott and Vivaldo Moore’s relationship, I show how White sexuality necessitates the depredation of Black female subjectivity, which Ida resists while seeking vengeance for her brother’s death. Vivaldo and Ida’s relationship challenges Vivaldo’s racial blindness, which I define as a premature acceptance that society no longer functions along the lines of the racial ideologies that have helped create the country’s national identity. Vivaldo’s refusal *to see* race as a defining part in his friendship with Rufus marks how the ideology renders him incapable of recognizing his best friend’s suffering. Secondly, Vivaldo attempts to pass off his misogyny and penchant for Black women as a liberal form of romantic coupling.

⁴⁹⁰ Marlon Ross, “White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality,” *James Baldwin Now* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 26.

⁴⁹¹ Following Maya Eichler’s research on Militarized Masculinities, I discuss masculinities in the plural form, in acknowledgement of “their diversity and variability over time.”; Maya Eichler, “Militarized Masculinities in International Relations,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 21, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2014), 82.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 27.

In *Queering the Color Line* (2000), Siobhan B. Somerville notes the relationship between race and sexuality, arguing for a Queerness Studies approach to analyzing *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which in 1896 became the legal precedent for racial segregation. Somerville argues that queerness and Blackness are intrinsically connected. Her argument, therefore, leads to the understanding that Whiteness and heteronormativity are linked, by nature of their opposition to Blackness and queerness, respectively. Baldwin makes similar claims in *Giovanni Room* where queerness is defined as un-American and, thus, in direct opposition to Whiteness. In other words, these two social categories hold value judgements, defined by their relation to Whiteness and heteronormativity which are deemed American. Quoting Somerville, David Jones observes:

“[f]ar from being a mere historical coincidence, Somerville argues, ‘the simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were deeply entwined’ in the American imaginary, with ‘the formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality in the United States [...] saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies.’ In short, sexuality is overdetermined by race, while race is always already freighted with connotations of queer sexuality. The concomitant emphasis on African Americans being ‘separate’ entities enshrined in *Plessey versus Ferguson* and the designation of the homosexual as a distinct, un-American ‘species’ institutionalised a paradigm of American-ness that placed Blackness and queerness outside the purview of what it meant to be an American.⁴⁹³

Keeping in mind Somerville’s theoretical framework, I argue that David’s attempts to lead a heteronormative lifestyle is, in fact, a means to hold on to his Whiteness. Baldwin scholars have long recognized that gender and sexuality play an important role in the writer’s assessment of race in the US. In “Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity: James Baldwin and the Identity Politics of Race and Sexuality,” William J. Spurlin describes *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country* as cultural lens which reveal the false notion that “sexual identity is experienced in isolation from other axes of social positioning and provides a salient site of

⁴⁹³ David Jones, *Apart and a Part: Dissonance, Double Consciousness and the Politics of Black Identity in African American Literature, 1946-1964*, (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2015), 143; Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000)

investigation into the politics of identity, especially the ways in which patriarchal power is interarticulated [...]”⁴⁹⁴ In what concerns *Another Country*, Spurlin highlights how race and class contribute to an oppressive White masculinity. “When Baldwin speaks of the self-serving fantasies of whites that they are in possession of some self-evident, intrinsic value that Blacks desire, Spurlin observes,” the same could be said of heterosexual fantasies with regard to lesbians and gay men [...]”⁴⁹⁵ However, such fantasizing is not limited to sexuality, rather it informs the power dynamics of other social forms of hierarchy: “men’s fantasies with regard to women, of the fantasies of the middle class with regard to the working class, and of the fantasies of developed Western nations with regard to postcolonial nations and nations of the Third World.”⁴⁹⁶

By focusing on the relationship dynamics of each couple, my work follows the lead of Spurlin and Robert J. Corber who argue that “Baldwin’s use of multiple centers of intelligence [...] enabled him to stage the construction of subjectivity across several axes of difference and to critique the patterning of identity according to a single axis of difference that prevented African Americans, women, gay men and lesbians, and other disenfranchised groups from overcoming the racist, sexist, and homophobic structures of postwar American society.”⁴⁹⁷ Although Spurlin’s work highlights that “both Rufus and Vivaldo are affected by racial stereotypes and therefore remain divided along racial lines,” the researcher ignores Cass and Richard’s marriage and Ida and Vivaldo’s coupling, which leaves unanswered the question of how liberal ideologies interfere with the real world demands of human love.

⁴⁹⁴ William J. Spurlin, “Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer identity,” 104.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 111; Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

In “‘I’m not the Boy You Want’: Sexuality, ‘Race,’ and Thwarted Revelation in Baldwin’s *Another Country*” (1999), Kevin Ohi discusses what he calls Rufus’s “scandalous place in the narration of the novel.”⁴⁹⁸ Unlike critics like Terry Rowden who argue that Rufus is scapegoated for a White homosexual ideal and “reproduce[s] New Right strategies (for example, the chimeras of ‘political correctness’ or ‘reverse racism’) which invest minority discourse with a phantasmatic and oppressive power,”⁴⁹⁹ Ohi suggests that Rufus’s death is central to the readers understanding “the novel’s interrogation of the complex intertwining of homophobia and racism.”⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, sexuality is not a stand in for race. Rather, race and sexuality are “constitutive secrets that refuse to reveal themselves, secrets that maintain the characters’ and the novel’s consistency not through self-revelation but through their exorbitant, recalcitrant, and inscrutable weight.”⁵⁰¹

Admittedly, the novel presents characters “who are rarely successful in bringing about any kind of change,” Ernesto Javier Martinez argues in “Dying to know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin’s *Another Country*” (2009), describing “confusion and incoherence” as “thematically central to Baldwin’s vision...”⁵⁰² Defined as “epistemically significant states [which] need to read as an extended mediation on the peculiar difficulty of gaining self-knowledge in oppressive social contexts,” confusion and incoherence prevent the characters from achieving a “self-knowledge” and impacts “what they are willing to *do* in the social domain.”⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁸ Kevin Ohi, “‘I’m not the Boy You Want’: Sexuality, ‘Race,’ and Thwarted Revelation in Baldwin’s *Another Country*,” *African American Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), 264.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁰² Ernesto Javier Martinez, “Dying to know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin’s *Another Country*,” *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 3 (May, 2009), 782.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 783.

Trudier Harris's *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (1985) offers the most extensive exploration of gender, sexuality and race in Baldwin works. Harris's book explores *Go tell It on the Mountain*, *Going to Meet the Man*, *Another Country*, *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Just Above My Head* (1979) to highlight major themes such as guilt, rage and vulnerability which she argues are imbedded in race and sexual identity. Harris dedicates Chapter Three: "The exorcising Medium: Another Country" to analyzing the romantic relationship between Ida and Vivaldo. Harris argues that "Ida becomes the burden bearer for Baldwin's major theme in the novel, a function that allows her character to develop—within severely compressed space—but that also places her at the center of Baldwin's overall purpose for the novel,"⁵⁰⁴ which is to show how race, gender and sexuality are "conceptualized [...] as differences, rather than as variables, variations, or variances," creating forms of cultural knowledge that erect more borders than they do bridges of understanding. Harris continues:

In a world where numerous copulations and infidelities occur, and in which people are forever trying to commune with their bodies but are limited by them, Baldwin suggests that each individual is more than an island: he or she is a country apart from everyone else around him or her. This is true in love, and it is especially true when one experiences suffering and pain.⁵⁰⁵

In many ways, Vivaldo and David suffer from the limitations of their post-war masculinity and male heterosexuality. In "The Blues, Individuated Subjectivity, and James Baldwin's *Another Country*" (2012) W. Lawrence Hogue notes that to liberate oneself from the limitations of socially prescribed notions of race, sexuality and gender, "we have to liberate our desires." Hogue continues: "In characterizing his [white] American characters [...] Baldwin, to liberate them from naturalized forms of particularized white American power, reverses the gaze, forcing them to recognize and transcend their limited, white categories."⁵⁰⁶ Both characters use

⁵⁰⁴ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 97.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁰⁶ W. Lawrence Hogue, "The Blues, Individuated Subjectivity, and James Baldwin's *Another Country*," *CLA Journal*, vol. 56, no. 1 (September, 2012), 3.

sex with women to escape what American society expects of them as men. Undoubtedly, the extent of these expectations (and freedoms) vary according to their race and class. In *Giovanni's Room*, for example, David's father and aunt are constant reminders of what David believes are his moral duties: to marry a (White) woman and produce (White) children. In *Giovanni's Room*, (White) women are important only in relation to the status they offer the male characters. David uses Hella and Sue to codify his (hetero)sexuality, and Giovanni only thinks of women as an alternative. On the other hand, Vivaldo's bohemian lifestyle and his artistic pursuits offer him a temporary reprieve from the societal pressures David attempts to escape by going abroad. By seeking the company of women, however, Vivaldo leads an aimless existence which stifles his writing. In my analysis, I believe it necessary to begin with the appearance of Ida Scott who, along with her brother's death, links together the group of White liberals.

Vivaldo's revelation arrives at the end of the novel. David's own understanding of what he has done arrives at the beginning. Vivaldo never questions his relationship to Rufus. Rather, Vivaldo takes for granted that he may harbor racial ideologies that hurt his friend. Rather, he takes his relationship with Rufus as proof that he is not a racist, that he is above and beyond the influence of America's racial history. In doing so, Vivaldo lives in a constant state of denial. Part of this racial denial is his penchant for Black women, his love of jazz and his bohemian existence when rejects mainstream White American culture for what he believes is the freedom of Black culture. In doing so, he appropriates Black culture which of course differs from the experience of African Americans and how those experiences translate into their forms of cultural expression. One such form is Black English which Baldwin describes in political terms as "an instrument, means, and proof of power." He continues, "it is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: it reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the

larger, public, or communal identity.”⁵⁰⁷ Baldwin starkly criticized the Beat Generation’s practice of cultural appropriation: “the black’s most total and despairing image of poverty, was transformed into a thing called the Beat Generation, which phenomenon was, largely, composed of uptight, middle-class white people, imitating poverty, trying to get down, to get with it, doing their thing, doing their despairing best to be funky, which we, the blacks, never dreamed of doing—we were funky, baby, like funk was going out of style.”⁵⁰⁸

Ironically, Vivaldo resembles Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, central figures in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957). Sal narrates that Dean leaves “a New Mexico reform school”⁵⁰⁹ for New York to become an intellectual and speaks the way he thinks intellectuals speak. Kerouac writes: “In those days he really didn’t know what he was talking about, that is to say, he was a young jail kid all hung up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real intellectual, and he liked to talk in the tone and using the words, but in a jumbled way [...]”⁵¹⁰ The irony of Kerouac’s statement is that his perception of Black life and language is a “jumbled” romanticization. At one point Sal describes “an old Negro couple in the field [...] pick[ing] cotton with the same Gold-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in antebellum Alabama,”⁵¹¹ describing the backbreaking work as “beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth” where “birds sang an accompaniment.”⁵¹² While in Denver, and before heading off to San Francisco, the narrator experiences a sort of depression which makes him seek the fresh, freeing air of Black life:

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. I stopped at a little shack where a man sold hot red chili in paper containers; I bought some and ate it, strolling in the dark mysterious streets. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor

⁵⁰⁷ James Baldwin, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell me What is?” 781.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957 [1955]), 4.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions; that was why I’d abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley. I passed the dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there, occasionally the dusk knew of some mysterious sensual gal; and dark faces of the men behind rose arbors. Little children sat like sages in ancient rocking chairs. A gang of colored women came by, and one of the young ones detached herself from motherlike elders and came to me fast—“Hello Joe!”—and suddenly saw it wasn’t Joe, and ran back, blushing. I wished I were Joe. I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange world with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.⁵¹³

Sal’s perspective is informed by his perception of Black jazz musicians who perform with a vibrant enthusiasm which shatters the confining walls of America’s expectations. Like Dean, Saul misinterprets life, understanding what he sees on the most superficial and reductive level. Sal Paradise’s interest in jazz music and Black culture in general. “[T]here is little evidence in *On the Road* that Sal Paradise recognizes that the spirit of jazz with which he identifies derives in good measure from the African American history of slavery and racial prejudice,” Douglas Malcolm observes in “‘Jazz America’: Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*” (1999).⁵¹⁴ Rather, his perception of Black life is informed by his self-identification as a “French Canadian outsider,” a White man who rejects mainstream American culture. Malcolm notes, however, that this racial fascination is neither limited to the Beat Generation nor the 1950’s-60’s counterculture movements. Rather, the rise in popularity of jazz music in the 1920’s gained a quick following of “young [White] men who considered themselves outsiders [and] identified with jazz musicians’ marginal social status in hegemonic white culture.”⁵¹⁵ Indeed, our contemporary world has witnessed a long history of appropriation of African American music by Whites: Disco music, Rap, R&B, etc.

Therefore, Vivaldo and Sal Paradise are unique in their rebellion against mainstream White culture. The convenience with which they dismiss the relationship between the

⁵¹³ Ibid., 180.

⁵¹⁴ Douglas Malcolm, “‘Jazz America’: Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 40. no. 1 (Spring, 1999),98.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

“outsider” status of the Black people they emulate and the racism that has produced such a status is problematic, to say the least, and illustrates an almost obsessive display of narcissism that makes impossible any genuine understanding of the damaging effects of racism. Baldwin highlights this distance between Harris’s “personal country” when Rufus visits Vivaldo’s apartment, on the night of his death. Rufus asks Vivaldo if he hates him for abusing Leona to the point that she is committed to a mental asylum:

Rufus, if I wasn’t your friend, I think I’d blame you, sure. You acted like a bastard. But I understand that, I think I do, I’m trying to. But, anyway, since you are my friend [...] I don’t think I should put you down just because you acted like a bastard. We’re all bastards. That’s why we need our friends.”

“I wish I could tell you what it was like,” Rufus said, after a long silence. “I wish I could undo it.”

“Well, you can’t. So please start trying to forget it.”

Rufus thought, But it’s not possible to forget anybody you were that hung up on, who was that hung up on you. You can’t forget anything that hurt so badly, went so deep, and changed the world forever. It’s not possible to forget anybody you’ve destroyed.⁵¹⁶

This scene demonstrates how White innocence diminishes the impact of racial violence. When Vivaldo suggests that Rufus forget Leona to cope with his guilt, he is asking Rufus to reappropriate how Vivaldo (a White man) handles his responsibility towards Rufus. This scene defines the stakes Baldwin is attempting to describe. Healing cannot begin before one assesses the damage one has caused in the lives of others. Part of the reason Vivaldo is unable to access Rufus’s country is because he does not think of Rufus in racial terms, by which I do not mean to suggest that Rufus should be reduced to his racial categorization. Rather, Rufus’s social categorization as Black means that he is exposed to particular forms of discrimination which limit him. Vivaldo declares that he is “trying” to access Rufus’s country. However, how can he help Rufus when he cannot acknowledge that the space he places between himself and his best friend is killing him?

⁵¹⁶ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 410.

After Rufus and Leona have a fight one evening, Vivaldo suggests that Leona spend the night in his apartment, so the couple can cool off. As Vivaldo returns from putting Leona in a taxi, he remembers “something that had happened” when “he had been spending a lot of time in Harlem, running after the whores up there.”⁵¹⁷ Vivaldo enters an unknown bar where he meets a woman who brings him back to her room for sex. A man described as the woman’s “husband” abruptly enters the room to confront the two. “Where was you thinking of putting that, white boy?” Vivaldo responds, “You might at least have waited a couple of minutes...I never even got it in.”⁵¹⁸ Vivaldo and the husband stare at each other in an intense moment of silence, finally broken by the man’s warning to Vivaldo:

“You goddamn lucky you didn’t get it in, he said. “You’d be a mighty sorry white boy if you had. You wouldn’t be putting that white prick in no more black pussy, I can guarantee you that.”

[...]

“What I don’t understand,” he said, with a fearful laziness, “is why you white boys always come uptown, sniffing around our black girls. You don’t see none of us spooks downtown, sniffing around your white girls.” He looked up. “Do you?”⁵¹⁹

The husband ends their conversation with a warning: “Walk,” he said. “You lucky that you can. If I catch your ass up here again, I’ll show you what happened to a nigger I know when Mr. Charlie caught him with Miss Anne.”⁵²⁰ Baldwin writes this memory in the context of Vivaldo and Leona’s realization that “they both loved Rufus. And they were both white. Now that it stared them so hideously in the face, each could see how desperately the other had been trying to avoid this confrontation.”⁵²¹

After attending Rufus’s funeral in Harlem, Cass and Vivaldo take a taxi downtown. Cass accuses Vivaldo of being “juvenile [...] You know so little [...] about life. About women.” To this Vivaldo responds: “[...] I want something real to happen to me. I do. How do

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 419.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 420

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 422.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 423.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 418.

you find out about [...] life? About women?”⁵²² Vivaldo has met his relationships with a sense of irresponsibility, from Rufus to Leona and Jane, an older woman he dates. Vivaldo searches for pleasure without having to pay for it.

It is possible, as it were, to have one's pleasure without paying for it. But to have one's pleasure without paying for it is precisely the way to find oneself reduced to a search for pleasure which grows steadily more desperate and more grotesque. It does not take long, after all, to discover that sex is only sex, that there are few things on earth more futile or more deadening than a meaningless round of conquests.⁵²³

Ida is the first relationship that forces him to face his own personal country and how race and sexuality inform that world which is a galaxy apart. Ida wants Vivaldo to be responsible for the life he leads and pushes him to the brink of madness. She hopes to shake him out of the counter-cultural irresponsibility that Baldwin witnessed in in the era. “Vivaldo,” Ida proclaims, “I just want you to know that I wouldn’t have given you such a hard time, if [...] I didn’t love you. That’s why I had to tell you everything I’ve told you. I mean—I now I’m giving you a tough row to hoe.”⁵²⁴ After her brother’s death, Ida searches for answers. She meets Rufus’s circle of bohemian friends who are a cohort of White artists, save Cass who is a stay-at-home mother. Trudier Harris suggests that Ida “suffers in direct proportion to her ability to inflict suffering upon” Rufus’s friends.⁵²⁵ “Since a major premise of the novel is the need to experience other people’s suffering in order to know one’s own, and since Ida works so hard to make other people suffer,” Harris writes, “their suffering becomes a measure of her own.”⁵²⁶ What is missing from Harris’s assessment, however, is how the innocence of Rufus’s White friends hurts Ida more than it enrages her. Ida’s pain and determination are magnified by the inability of Rufus’s friends to reconcile with their guilt in the wake of her Rufus’s death.

⁵²² Ibid., 477.

⁵²³ James Baldwin, *No Body Knows My Name*, 234.

⁵²⁴ James Baldwin, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell me What is?” 751.

⁵²⁵ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (Knoxville : The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 96.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 97.

Ida Scott first appears in a fond memory Rufus has, as he walks the New York City streets, hungry and cold. He thinks of the times he has gone up to Harlem from his Downtown apartment to “the barbershop, then seeing his mother and his father and teasing his sister, Ida.”⁵²⁷ Then Rufus remembers his White Southern girlfriend, Leona, whom he repeatedly beats until she is sent to an insane asylum. Ida and Leona remind him of his growing-up in Harlem where “the boys [sat] on stoops, the girls behind the stairs and on the roofs, [and where] white police men [...] had taught him how to hate [...]”⁵²⁸ Baldwin dedicates a page and a half to describing Rufus’s memories of Ida:

While he had still been in the Navy, he had bought back from one of his voyages an Indian shawl for Ida. He had picked it up someplace in England. On the day that he gave it to her and she tied it on, something shook in him which had never been touched before. He had never seen the beauty of black people before. But, staring at Ida, who stood before the window of the Harlem kitchen, seeing that she was no longer merely his younger sister but a girl who would soon be a woman, she became associated with the colors of the shawl, the colors of the sun, and with a splendor incalculably older than the gray stone of the island on which they had been born. He thought that perhaps this splendor would come into the world again one day, into the world they knew. Ages and ages ago, Ida had not been merely the descendant of slaves. Watching her dark face in the sunlight, softened and shadowed by the glorious shawl, it could be seen that she had once been a monarch. Then he looked out of the window, at the air shaft, and thought of the whores on Seventh Avenue. He thought of the white policemen and the money they made on black flesh, the money the whole world made.

He looked back at his sister, who was smiling at him. On her long little finger she twisted the ruby-eyed snake ring which he had brought her from another voyage.

“You keep this up,” she said, “and you’ll make me the best-dressed girl on the block.”

He was glad Ida could not see him now. She would have said, My Lord, Rufus, you got no right to walk around like this. Don’t you know we’re counting on you?⁵²⁹

Once again, Baldwin uses the experience of being abroad as revelatory. Rufus is in England, when he buys Ida a scarf and realizes “the beauty of black people.” In effect, Rufus is physically and emotionally in another country, which offers him an alternative view on his relationship to himself as Black. Of course, this is only implied, in the excerpt, from the newfound beauty he sees in Ida. Rufus begins to see his sister as a woman who “had not been merely the descendant

⁵²⁷ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 369.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵²⁹ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 370-371.

of slaves,” but who “had once been a monarch,” suggesting that Rufus had only seen Ida, his family and himself in racial terms dictated by the post-war American politics. What being abroad gives him is another perspective on his Americanness, which is more complex. Secondly, the way Rufus remembers Ida and the memories of her he evokes are important to her development as a character. Rufus invests a restored sense of human value in Ida and expresses it by offering her material objects which make her “the best-dressed girl on the block.” This value later becomes a source of personal strength for her as she navigates Rufus’s bohemian world, after his passing. Harris observes that “Rufus is the most important male image in her life,” adding that “it could safely be advanced that Ida, unlike Florence, worships her brother.”⁵³⁰ In many ways, Ida is more of a central figure than Rufus. Indeed, Rufus represents “a godlike figure to Ida personally and symbolically,” as “he dies in order that she may live, grow, and blossom into her full potential.”⁵³¹ With this in mind, I believe it is Ida’s journey to healing and self-discovery that is core to the novel’s themes.

In “James Baldwin: Stereotype Versus Counterstereotype” (1977), Zsolt Virágos argues that the way Rufus views his sister, and later Leona, reflects “the hopeless and highly impractical *We-They* rhetoric, the single-minded attempt to concoct a new myth out of the old one, the maniacal assertion of Negro superiority versus white inferiority, the design “to assert the moral superiority of the oppressed, and to force the unoppressed to grovel in guilt and fear.”⁵³² Virágos supports his argument by suggesting that Black America has merely inverted the value judgements based on race: “[P]ractically all the values that have anything to do with Negro-white relations have been radically reinterpreted and neatly arranged in conflicting parallel patterns.”⁵³³ Virágos takes as his examples the “white is right” rhetoric which “has

⁵³⁰ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 100.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵³² Zsolt Virágos, “James Baldwin: Stereotype Versus Counterstereotype,” *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok / Hungarian Studies in English*, vol. 11 (1977), 135.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

found its polar opposite in black is beautiful”; or “the image of a cold, rational (and anti-sexual) America” which has given birth to an “omnipotent black vitality; mind in soul [...]”⁵³⁴ Admittedly, Virágos does find exception to this rule, however he quickly moves on to suggest that Baldwin depicts his Black characters as “superior human beings” and “the whites, with a few notable exceptions, are an uncertain, pathetic, bewildered lot.”⁵³⁵ His final argument is that “integration is a two-way affair: the idea of the American black man's full liberation seems impractical, if not impossible, without considering the possibility of white allies.”⁵³⁶ In *Another Country*, the novel’s two main Black characters are indeed characterized by their respective beauty, charm and musical talents. Morally speaking, however, they are far from perfect, reflecting the imperfect world they inhabit. Virágos’s observation reflects Baldwin’s observation that integration is “simply and more cruelly, the growing up of this dangerously adolescent country.”⁵³⁷ And as Baldwin advises his nephew James in *The Fire Next Time*, “if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”⁵³⁸ Ida bears witness to her brother’s downfall. However, her journey for vengeance leads her on a journey of self-discovery, alongside Vivaldo. Therefore, integration is a growing up, which can only be reached when “that as yet unwritten history of the Negro woman”⁵³⁹ is assessed, revealing the source of racial fantasies of sex. Ida Scott is more than a source of redemption for Vivaldo and her brother. Rather, she ambles through a life of uncertainty, trying to find meaning.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁵³⁷ James Baldwin, “The Dangerous Road before Martin Luther King,” 641.

⁵³⁸ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 294.

⁵³⁹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 208.

In many ways, Ida avoids the fates of Baldwin's other Black female characters in his early fiction. *Go Tell It on The Mountain's* Deborah is riddled with sadness and tragedy. Soberly said to have "contained only the shame that she had borne—shame, unless a miracle of human love delivered her, was all she had to give,"⁵⁴⁰ Deborah lives a life of solitude, self-sacrifice and service to others. Florence attempts to emancipate herself from the tradition of sacrificing her wants and desires for Gabriel. The common denominator is the Christian community's expectations of Black women which stifles them from growing as individuals, connecting them to a maternal figure who sacrifices her own wellbeing for others. Harris locates the guilt of Black women suffer in constricting notions of Christianity, womanhood and Blackness. Harris observes:

Setting [Black women] against such a backdrop, whether or not Baldwin ultimately approves of that church, is too restricting a model for complex development of characters [...] Through the church, women are very early taught to accept their places as wives, mothers, and sisters, and to feel guilty if they do not. They are taught to be other-centered, to be preoccupied with the things that form a part of their lives beyond themselves and too little occupied with their own hopes, dreams, and aspirations.⁵⁴¹

This shame, pointedly described as "[Deborah's] legend, her history"⁵⁴² is a reference to her gang rape. Until her marriage to Gabriel, Deborah is scorned by her peers who, in a scene, compare her rape to the drinking of milk: "She had been choked so early on white men's milk, and it remained so sour in her belly yet, that she would never be able, now, to find a nigger who would let her taste his richer, sweeter substance."⁵⁴³ Deborah is the first time Baldwin borrows the Black female figure in his inquiry on the interdependent relationship between race, sexuality and gender. In Deborah's story, Baldwin personifies the particular situation of Black women in American history.

⁵⁴⁰ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 93.

⁵⁴¹ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 12.

⁵⁴² James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 93.

⁵⁴³ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 102.

In “Postcolonial Backlash and Being Proper: Femininity, Blackness, Sexuality, and Transgender in the Public Eye,” Antje Schuhmann uses the example of Black women in South Africa in her argument that a woman’s body is indispensable to the project of nation building:

In colonial times foreign shores were described as “virgin lands” ready to be penetrated and conquered. In today’s conflicts, the rape of women “belonging” to the enemy is understood as symbolical penetration of his land, of emasculating him by bringing shame upon him for not being able to protect his “property.” We find the violent analogy whereby the female body equals territory/the collective in widespread verbal representations: the expression “the rape of South Africa’s economy” makes South Africa a vulnerable and helpless entity, “penetrated” by China or multinationals. We find it within legitimizations of xenophobic violence when women are referred to as collective property—“They steal our women”—reminding us that the word “rape” in fact originates from the Latin *raptus*, meaning theft or seizure. We find it in the experience of women, whose violation during conflict is understood on both sides rather as an insult to the other collective than as intimate trauma inflicted upon female individuals. The realities of historical subjects as well as the politics of representation speak to the racialized/ethnicized gendering of national discourses, of violence, and of the violence of national discourses.⁵⁴⁴

Deborah’s rape and, thus, her shame are seen as communal trauma. Deborah’s victimhood is set aside by her community to express the larger trauma that Black communities endure. In “Going to Meet the Man” (1965), Baldwin revisits the correlation between sex and racial dominance with his character Jesse, a white deputy sheriff, who fantasizes brutalizing black bodies in order to reach sexual gratification. The story begins in Jesse and Grace’s bedroom, where Jesse is unable to perform sexually:

Then he just lay there, silent, angry, and helpless. Excitement filled him like a toothache, but it refused to enter his flesh. He stroked her breast. This was his wife. He could not ask her to do just a little thing for him, just to help him out, just for a little while, they way he could ask a nigger girl to do it. He lay there, and he sighed. The image of a black girl caused a distant excitement in him, like a far-away light; but, again, the excitement was more like pain; instead of forcing him to act, it made action impossible.⁵⁴⁵

In order to sexually perform with his wife Grace, Jesse imagines inflicting physical violence on black bodies. In “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” Baldwin alludes that he began to understand the sexual dominance inherent in anti-Black racism during his childhood readings of *Uncle*

⁵⁴⁴ Antje Schuhmann, “Postcolonial Backlash and Being Proper: Femininity, Blackness, Sexuality, and Transgender in the Public Eye,” *Black Intersectionalities: A Critique for the 21st Century*, eds. Monica Michlin and Jean-Paul Rocchi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 38.

⁵⁴⁵ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 933.

Tom's Cabin and *A Tale of Two Cities* which he admits he read “over and over and over again.”⁵⁴⁶ It was also in *Notes of a Native Son* that Baldwin famously criticized Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) for its depictions of Black characters as asexual and devoid of self-recognition and agency. Although the degrees to which Whiteness affects Black lives differs if one is a stark racist or a White liberal, the fact remains that both founding cornerstones of racialization are sexualized and gendered.

Indeed, Ida is propelled into her late brother's friend circle, because of his suicide and her desire for vengeance. However, what sustains her as a character is her relationship with her brother and the strong sense of pride he instills. Baldwin flips the script on familial gender norms. Where Gabriel attempts to stifle Florence's ambitions, Rufus feeds—in his life and death—Ida's professional and personal aspirations. Indeed, as scholars have noted, Ida seeks revenge. However, what she reveals as a character is a reluctance to adhere to “racialized/ethnicized gendering of national discourses” that has led to “the violence” that Deborah, Florence and Florence's mother have suffered. Although Ida's motivations may not be noble, her refusal to adhere to the norms surrounding sex and gender is admirable, and her brutal honesty helps her reach Vivaldo, something Giovanni was unable to do for David. Harris observes:

To Baldwin, love relationships mean responsibility and, more important, exposing one's self: vulnerability. At the heart of vulnerability is a trust that the loved one will understand whatever is revealed to him or her and will not use that knowledge as a weapon. The lover, in turn, has the responsibility to keep the weapon of his or her knowledge sheathed. These are lessons that Ida and Vivaldo must learn. Because human beings instinctively seek their own survival and usually prefer pleasure to responsibility, the distance from one country to another is often too great a leap for them to undertake. Thus, they see each other as receptacles of their passion, or to advance careers, or to play the roles of wives and husbands—for marriage does not dissolve the distance between the countries.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 5.

⁵⁴⁷ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 98-99.

Ida's strife with Vivaldo is his refusal to be vulnerable with her. His insistence that he has played no part in Rufus's death is his way of avoiding discussing his deep seeded feelings about his best friend's death, and the guilt he feels for not having held him in his arms, when Rufus needed it the most. The way Vivaldo handles Rufus repeats itself with Ida. However, Ida does not allow herself to be a "receptacle[e] of passion" or desire. Rather, she chips away at the pride of Vivaldo's sexuality that limits acceptable forms of male intimacy to (heteronormative) sex.

3.2 Leona and Rufus: The (Un)intelligibility of Race

Another Country's Rufus Scott and David from *Giovanni's Room* share many similarities. The most obvious is the similar fashion their storylines begin. Both Rufus and David are at pivotal moments of their lives. Both find themselves isolated from loved ones and are existentially shaken by the alienation produced from their selfishness and mistreatment of their respective lovers. Both have experienced some sort of epiphany while abroad. Both characters accept limiting ideologies surrounding race and (hetero)sexuality which prevent them from accepting the transformative power of their romantic partners' love. Whereas David alienates Giovanni for an idyllic, white-picket-fence life with Hella, Rufus allows race to prevent him from reaching Leona's country through their mutual need to heal from their shared pain. Both characters are at the lowest point of their lives. David stands alone in the South of France, on "the night which is leading [him] to the most terrible morning of [his] life." We find Rufus in a dark cinema, warding off the unwanted sexual advances of unknown men and then, abruptly, leaving to walk the cold, winter streets. They are both from New York City and suffer from anxieties surrounding their identities as men. The most important commonality is arguably that both characters are men who have sex with both men and women. However, Rufus is a Black jazz musician, trying to make it in New York, and David flees to Paris in a vain effort to escape his same-sex desires. The most significant difference between the two characters is that David eventually "step[s] out into the morning,"⁵⁴⁸ which represents the presence of hope, and Rufus ends up "[feeling] himself going over, head down,"⁵⁴⁹ the George Washington Bridge.

The novel chronicles Rufus's slow spiritual death which precedes his suicide from what James Smalls articulates as an "existential unease about defining the 'self' and carried anxieties

⁵⁴⁸ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 360 ;

⁵⁴⁹ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 443.

over identity and alienation.”⁵⁵⁰ Admittedly, Smalls makes this assessment in the context of “expatriation” versus “exile,” a conceptual difference he observes Baldwin and Beauford Delaney wrestled with throughout their lives. “One must belong,” Delaney observes, “before one may not then belong.”⁵⁵¹ Yet, Smalls’ observation fittingly describes the source of Rufus’s suffering that leads him to commit suicide, his anxieties over belonging, which often go unnoticed by his White liberal group of friends. Baldwin begins his novel with these anxieties in mind:

He was facing Seventh Avenue, at Times Square. It was past midnight and he had been sitting in the movies, in the top row of the balcony, since two o’clock in the afternoon. Twice he had been awakened by the violent accents of the Italian film, once the usher had awakened him, and twice he had been awakened by caterpillar fingers between his thighs. He was so tired, he had fallen so low, that he scarcely had the energy to be angry; nothing of his belonged to him anymore—you took the best, so why not take the rest?—but he had growled in his sleep and bared the white teeth in his dark face and crossed his legs. Then the balcony was nearly empty, the Italian film was approaching a climax; he stumbled down the endless stairs into the street. He was hungry, his mouth felt filthy. He realized too late, as he passed through the doors, that he wanted to urinate. And he was broke. And he had nowhere to go.⁵⁵²

Rufus has no tangible way to understand his “role” in the world, beyond “the place” society has set for him, as a Black man. “They could deal with the Negro,” Baldwin writes, “as a symbol or victim but had no sense of him as a man.”⁵⁵³ The scene is followed by the watchful gaze of a policeman, fluttering memories of Rufus’s best friend Vivaldo Moore, memories of fun times past in jazz clubs and nights out of the town, sights of men and women walking up and down New York’s wide avenue. The words “filthy” and “broken” do not just describe how Rufus feels. They testify to an alienating value judgement he places on himself. He believes that “nothing belong[s] to him anymore,” a sentiment which reflects the lack of control that he feels he has over his life. Indeed, the city landscape reflects the anxieties of Baldwin’s

⁵⁵⁰ James Smalls, “Picturing Jimmy, Picturing Self: James Baldwin, Beauford Delaney, and the Color of Light,” *Of Latitudes Unknown*, 43.

⁵⁵¹ As quoted in James Smalls, “Picturing Jimmy, Picturing Self: James Baldwin, Beauford Delaney, and the Color of Light,” *Of Latitudes Unknown*, 43.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 367.

⁵⁵³ James Baldwin,

characters. Where David and Giovanni cross the narrow Parisian streets on warm summer nights, Rufus walks the large streets of New York, paradoxically described as both “quiet” and busy: “here and there a woman passed, here and there a man,” with the sight of “chattering people [who] 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.”⁵⁵⁴ Like in this paragraph, the rest of the novel is riddled with contradictory feels which Baldwin explores against the backdrop of the New York City sky.

In this section, I examine the tumultuous interracial relationship between Black Rufus Scott and his White girlfriend Leona. I focus on how Rufus and Leona understand their perspective roles through the prism of race, gender and sexuality. I integrate Judith Butler’s work on gender intelligibility, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990), to reveal how Rufus and Leona understand each other based on social norms surrounding race, a phenomenon I call “racial intelligibility.” I argue that “racial intelligibility” prevents the characters from reaching each other’s private countries, a metaphor Trudier Harris uses to define one’s inner world. Secondly, I argue that the intelligibility of race leaves Rufus’s White liberal friends ill-equipped to confront their friend’s self-harm and his abuse of Leona. Baldwin asks readers to consider unintelligible identities as sites of unlimited possibilities that create bridges to another’s country.

Since its publication, *Another Country* has been praised and condemned for its interracial and queer relationships, both platonic and sexual. In “Of Mimicry and (Little Man Little) Man,” Nicholas Boggs suggest that Rufus is the Black version of David: “Rufus represents the stereotype of the black homosexual, menaced by rigid definitions of masculinity and race. Repeating and revising the figure of Wright’s Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, Rufus

⁵⁵⁴ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 367.

acts out and perpetuates the stereotypes imposed on him.”⁵⁵⁵ Boggs’s assessment of Rufus’s sexuality is alarming. Indeed, Rufus is a callback to Richard Wright’s *Bigger* Thomas whom Baldwin describes in “Every Protest Novel,” as a “life [...] controlled [and] defined by his hatred and his fear.”⁵⁵⁶ Both *Bigger* and Rufus commit violence on White women to avenge their emasculation. Unlike Rufus, however, *Bigger* comes “through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood.”⁵⁵⁷ Thus where *Bigger* believes his violence redeems him, Rufus is completely destroyed, physically and spiritually. In terms of sexuality, Rufus resembles David more than *Bigger*. Rufus’s sexuality is left ambiguous, precisely because the ambiguity surrounding who he can love creates the condition to free himself from his sexual fears. Rufus rejects his friend Eric’s love. In *Giovanni’s Room*, David sacrifices Giovanni to the altar of his manhood. However, Eric escapes the fallout of Rufus’s self-hatred, by running to Paris where the freedom of expatriation liberates him from his own fears of never finding love. *Bigger*’s fear, anger and rage seems to offer no room for the possibility of being loved by either women or man, White or Black. Love is not a redemptive experience that can help him heal from the trauma of poverty and anti-Black racism, because love does not exist in the world Wright describes.

Whereas White liberalism and gender expression are alluded to in research on *Another Country*, there has not been any in-depth investigation on how Whiteness informs gender expression in the novel. In “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” Christopher Freeburg argues that love “is central to his [Baldwin’s] thinking about social change” and “the proliferation of criticism on sexuality and gender [...]”⁵⁵⁸ “The problem is not that Baldwin relinquished art for politics,” Bill Lyne writes in “God’s Black Revolutionary Mouth: James Baldwin’s Black

⁵⁵⁵ Nicholas Boggs, “Of Mimicry and (Little Man Little) Man,” 131.

⁵⁵⁶ James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 18.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Christopher Freeburg, “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” 180.

Radicalism,” “but that his politics moved from a stance that made him the darling of the white liberal establishment to one that pushed him beyond the boundaries of canonization.”⁵⁵⁹ Cass, Richard, Vivaldo and Eric sit back and watch Rufus spiral out of control. They fail to react when he beats Leona and displays self-destructive behavior, because they ignore that they are causing him harm. They refuse to acknowledge the racial dynamic in their relationship with the jazz player. Rufus is Black, and his world experience is heavily dictated on the social value Blackness infers. The group of friends is Whites, preferring to believe that they live the same experiences as Rufus. They must believe this because their colorblindness is part of their identity as non-racist Whites. Baldwinian love offers redemption from loving—an act the writer posits has revolutionary possibilities. However, the friends’ insistence that race plays no part in their friendship stifles them, leading them to underestimate Rufus’s pain.

In *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), Baldwin suggests that the problem of race also informs how Americans express gender and sexuality. He writes: “[i]t became a grave, a tragic matter, on the North American continent, where white power became indistinguishable from the question of sexual dominance.”⁵⁶⁰ The writer describes sexual dominance as the interplay between gender, sexuality and race, and how one informs the other. Baldwin focuses on these themes in *Another Country* to legitimize diverse forms of human love, selfhood and happiness. The novel catenates the relationship between race, gender and sexuality in the post-war context, following the interracial group of friends on their journey to be successful artists.

We encounter Rufus as he wanders the streets of New York City, aimlessly and without having eaten: “He was hungry [...] [a]nd he had nowhere to go.”⁵⁶¹ Rufus’s tumultuous affair with Leona, a white Southerner, results in self-isolation from his family and group of White

⁵⁵⁹ Bill Lyne, “God’s Black Revolutionary Mouth: James Baldwin’s Black Radicalism,” *Science and Society*, vol. 74, no. 1 (January 2010), 14.

⁵⁶⁰ James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 530.

⁵⁶¹ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 2.

bohemian friends. Just seven months after the couple begin their affair, Leona is committed to Bellevue, a New York City psychiatric hospital, and Rufus jumps off the George Washington Bridge. Rufus and Leona's interracial relationship begins while they are at the party "of a famous Negro singer who had just scored in his first movie."⁵⁶² Rufus notices Leona in a crowd, approaches her and engages in conversation. Leona's Southern accent evokes in Rufus a sexual awake:

She had said enough. She was from the South. And something leaped in Rufus as he stared at her damp, colourless face, the face of the Southern poor white, and her straight, pale hair. She was considerably older than he, over thirty probably, and her body was too thin. Just the same, it abruptly became the most exciting body he had gazed on in a long time.⁵⁶³

Rufus's initial interest in Leona is based on racial and cultural markers of identification, more specifically her White Southern womanhood. Rufus as a Black man and Leona as a White woman are predisposed by a shared history to understand one another in racial terms. Yet, Baldwin informs readers that such terms become the catalyst for limited conceptions of personhood and love, ultimately disrupting their search for love. Rufus's gaze, as he stands before Leona, suggests a historical connection, described as Leona being a White woman from the American South. Leona embodies the shared history they reproduce daily and a potential source of power through male dominance. Baldwin articulates in racial terms what Judith Butler calls gender intelligibility.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, Butler unpins the presumed naturalness and neutrality of sex and gender identity. In her chapter, "Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance," Butler questions the materiality and historicity of identity: "What can be meant by 'identity' [...] and what grounds the presumption that identities are self-

⁵⁶² James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 5.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent?”⁵⁶⁴ Butler points out here that sex and gender do not align naturally but are social constructs necessary to maintain social hierarchies and power based on intelligible binaries. It would appear that the question of gender identity must, therefore, precede the question of identity as a signifier, because “‘persons’ only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.”⁵⁶⁵ If culturally intelligible notions of gender describe and, thus, prescribe how we conceive, understand and perform our assigned genders within the binary gender construct, does that also mean that we can only understand a person through the racial binary? If so, how does Baldwin articulate this racial intelligibility in *Another Country*?

For Baldwin, there is a clear and present connection between race and gender as it pertains to personhood and intelligible identities. In “On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler,” Vikki Bell questions Butler on her increasing interest in racialization and racism since the publications of *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Bell asks Butler to chime in on critics who use her work in intersectional terms to express racialization and gendering as “double oppression.” If Butler rejects “racism and sexism as “structures that confer oppression,” Bell ponders, then how “[...] does she see those processes interacting or working together?”⁵⁶⁶ Butler responds:

I think that I’m less interested in theories of intersectionality, or in versions of multiculturalism that try to keep processes of gendering and racing radically distinct. I’m much more interested in how one becomes the condition of the other, or how one becomes the unmarked background for the action of the other so that, for instance, in the Anita Hill event, it became very interesting how the various analyses could either focus on the gendered aspects or focus on the racialized aspects of that public spectacle, but they could not quite see, most of them, how they worked together.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender trouble, feminism and the politics of subversion* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990), 16.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ Vikki Bell and Judith Butler, “On Speech, Race and Melancholia: Interview with Judith Butler,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol 16. no. 2 (1999), 167.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

In this assessment, I take care not to write “gender” and “race” as analogous, as Butler warns against. Rather, I follow Bridget Byrne’s lead, on race and White feminist theory, and “translate”⁵⁶⁸ racing and gendering to express, in Butler’s words, their “interarticulation,” which means how “the unmarked character of the one very often becomes the condition of the articulation of the other.”⁵⁶⁹ Therefore, I avoid expressing race and gender “as two axes, as if they’re determined only in relation to one another.”⁵⁷⁰ Just as important, my assessment of Baldwin’s call for racial unintelligibility considers “the temporality of the structure [of racialization], the fact that the structure must be reiterated again and again,” and acknowledges that racing and gendering have “a kind of ritual dimension and [their] very temporal dimension is the condition of [their] subversion.”⁵⁷¹ For racing to be socially recognized, it must be uttered as a spoken ideology which is repeated “about the accumulation of speech acts.”

Following Butler, the term “racial intelligibility” describes “what [...] it means to appropriate the terms by which one is hailed or the discourse in which one is constituted [...]”⁵⁷² She continues: “the subject in speech is always both more than itself and less than itself in any given speech act, that what it speaks is not simply its own speech but it speaks a life of discourse and it is installed [...] in a life of discourse that exceeds the subject’s own temporality.”⁵⁷³ When discussing racial intelligibility, therefore, I refrain from an analysis of their nexus. Rather, I believe that Rufus and Leona’s relationship demonstrates how racing and gendering feed each other, creating social meaning. In her introduction to *Race-ing, Justice*,

⁵⁶⁸ Bridget Byrne, “Troubling Race. Using Judith Butler’s Work to Think about Racialised Bodies and Selves,” IDS Seminar Series, 23 June 2000: < <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/dmfile/byrne.pdf> > [Accessed: 7 April 2023].

⁵⁶⁹ Vikki Bell and Judith Butler, “On Speech, Race and Melancholia,” 167.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Vikki Bell and Judith Butler, “On Speech, Race and Melancholia,” 164.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality (1992), Toni Morrison discusses the Anita Hill and Thomas Clarence scandal. Hill accused Clarence of sexual misconduct on the eve of his nomination as the second Black Supreme Court Justice. Hill's testimony was heard in October of 1991 in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Morrison observes:

Expectedly, the nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked repeatedly on its divisive nature, its costliness, its undeniable degradation of principles of freedom [...] Unexpectedly...race surfaced on the very site of its interment. And it was hard not to murmur 'Freddy's back' as the specter of this living corpse broke free of its hastily dug grave. But this resurrection was buoyed and winged by the fact of its gender component. If the forward face of the not-dead was racism, its backward face was sexism. The confirmation procedure held my attention partly because the shape it took, in an effort to hold its explosive contents, was unique—the twists and turns of the public debate and its manipulation, the responses of the senators on the committee. Yet what riveted my attention most during the hearings was not its strangeness but rather its familiarity. The sense that underneath the acrylic in which the political discourse was painted were the outlines of figures so old and so stable as to appear natural, not drawn or man-made at all.⁵⁷⁴

As I believe Butler suggests, Morrison does not take an intersectional approach to understanding how race and gender inform the handling and reception of Thomas's judiciary hearing in the court and media. Rather, she is describing something else. What I believe Butler refers to in Morrison's work is how this familiar "sense" helps the writer "penetrate the brilliant, distracting color in which the political argument was painted in order to locate the outlines that informed the argument [...]"⁵⁷⁵ This political discourse is constructed from how Thomas and Hill respond to inquiry and accusation, which Morrison calls salient themes. On one hand, we have Anita Hill's inability to remain silent." On the other hand, there is "Thomas's claims to being victimized." Therefore, we have "silence and victimization [...]" broken silence and built victimization [...] Speech and Bondage [...] Disobedient speech and the chosen association of bondage."⁵⁷⁶ With these themes in mind, I focus on how broken

⁵⁷⁴ Toni Morrison, "Introduction: Friday on the Potomac," *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), xxii.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., xxii-xxiii

silence and constructed victimization articulate Rufus and Leona's emotional and abusive relationship. I argue that Rufus's friends cannot intervene in Rufus's mistreatment of Leona, because their pity for Rufus as a Black man renders them incapable of confrontation, because the only confrontation they know is the White violence enacted on Black bodies. In this case, the group's liberal stance does not offer them the tools to approach Rufus as dangerous to Leona and himself. Therefore, the only way that the group can save Rufus is to search for unintelligible identities. I do not mean to suggest that unintelligible identities *allow* the characters to understand each other better. Rather, I posit that they *offer* unknown possibilities by introducing novel forms of human interaction.

Butler advocates for "a politics that question is how is that person [...] renewing and reinvigorating racist rituals of speech, and how do we think about those particular rituals and how do we exploit their ritual function in order to undermine it in a more thorough-going way, rather than just stopping it as it's spoken."⁵⁷⁷ How do Rufus and Leona perceive and understand one another if they can only conceive each other's personhood as socially circumscribed imaginings based on race, class and gender? If our personhood, which is the measurement of self-perception and self-worth as an individual and human being, is dictated, predominantly, by sex and gender—infused with sociocultural meanings – is it, then, possible to consider race as the third segment of a ternary to this effect?

During Baldwin's trips to the American South, he not only sought to reveal the hidden aspects of Southern racism, he wanted to connect the "dangerous movement" taking place there to the larger conundrum that is racialization. He sought to corroborate what Baldwin biographer David Leeming describes as "the widespread sexual aspect of racism, a paradoxical hatred and fascination with the black man's sex that had its origins in the violation of black women by

⁵⁷⁷ Vikki Bell and Judith Butler, "On Speech, Race and Melancholia," 166.

white slave masters who [...] mythologized and when possible removed the would-be instruments of revenge.”⁵⁷⁸ Black Americans’ connection to the South lies in the history that produced them and gave rise to their flight to the North. Therefore, Northern Blacks owe their identity and “place” in American society to the South. In “No Name in the South: James Baldwin and the Monuments of Identity” (2011), Kevin Birmingham notes that “the South was not a canonical monument because it was an ancestral realm of memory. Rather, it was a realm of memory because it was a monument. In the end, it was [Baldwin’s] critique of the region’s formalism that shaped his critique of ethnic identity.”⁵⁷⁹ The South becomes, thus, the apotheosis of racialization. Like Thomas, Rufus bears witness to how the racial legacy of the South has affected and continues to affect the American psyche.

Rufus is attracted to Leona, because she is a White woman from the South. Leona’s ethno-racial identity is the origin of what Baldwin calls “the complex of conflicting terrors which the black-white connection engenders” or what he deems “white paranoia.”⁵⁸⁰ Baldwin alludes, here, to the stereotype that Black males are overly sexed and, thus, dangerous to White women. This, in turn, creates justification for White male dominance, mainly to protect the purity of White women from the barbarism of Black male sexuality. Through Leona and Rufus, Baldwin highlights the continuity of the stereotype and transforms it to show the maddening effects of American racialization on individuals and their pursuit of love. The terms for Leona’s appeal are, thus, bound and limited to her racial and gender identity as a White woman and, by extension, her importance in the White (heterosexual) patriarchy.

Baldwin highlights Leona as a source of power for the White, heteronormative male through Rufus and Leona’s relationship. As Rufus and Leona stand on a balcony, “staring up

⁵⁷⁸ David Lemming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, 128.

⁵⁷⁹ Kevin Birmingham, “No Name in the South: James Baldwin and the Monuments of Identity.” *African American Review* (St. Louis: St. Louis University Press, 2011), 221.

⁵⁸⁰ James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 529.

the river, toward the George Washington Bridge,”⁵⁸¹ we learn that Leona was previously married to a White man who “took away [her] kid”⁵⁸² and severely beat her to the extent that she would never be able to produce another child. Rufus attempts to feel empathy for Leona’s situation: “Something touched his imagination for a moment, suggesting that Leona was a person and had her story.”⁵⁸³ Again, Baldwin reminds us that love produced through empathy can release us from the prison of color. However, the moment of genuine connection quickly passes as the sexual excitement Leona provokes in him reduces her a historical artifact, rather than a human being who seeks intimacy. Leona’s backstory presents a potential moment for true human connection through suffering and empathy. Interestingly, Leona’s life is affected and defined by the same racially driven forces which haunt Rufus. However, Rufus chooses to use Leona as a site of revenge for the anti-Black racism he and his family have suffered. Indeed, Rufus’s endeavor is futile and only ends in destroying the two lovers and any possibility for growth.

Still at the party, Rufus and Leona look out on to the Hudson River, gazing into each other’s eyes. It is at this moment that the pair first have sex, which for Baldwin is a potential source of happiness through racial healing and love. Rufus steers farther from the redemption that Leona’s love can bring, choosing in its stead self-delusional revenge. Baldwin writes,

[Rufus] wanted her to remember him the longest day she lived. And, shortly, nothing could have stopped him, not the white God himself nor a lynch mob arriving on wings. Under his breath he cursed the milk-white bitch and groaned and rode his weapon between her thighs. She began to cry. I told you, he moaned, I’d give you something to cry about, and, at once, he felt himself strangling, about to explode or die. A moan and a curse tore through him while he beat her with all the strength he had and felt the venom shoot out of him, enough for a hundred black-white babies.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 380.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 384.

Revenge is a recurring theme in Baldwinian thought, as he refers to its prevalence in – for example – “The Harlem Ghetto” (1948) and in Karen Thorsen’s 1989 documentary, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*. Baldwin suggests that the rhetoric of black churches in mid-20th century Harlem assure the Negro of his place in heaven and whites’ place in hell, thus explicating the religious fervor of its congregants. In “The Harlem Ghetto,” Baldwin observes:

[T]he end [the Negro’s faith] serves is often sinister [...] religion operates here as a complete and exquisite fantasy revenge: white people own the earth and commit all manner of abomination and injustice on it; the bad will be punished and the good rewarded, for God is not sleeping, the judgement is not far off.⁵⁸⁵

Sexual intercourse with Leona is, in part, the revenge Rufus seeks to exact on the white world. Although Rufus’s actions do not concur with the images of moral piety often attributed to the church, which Baldwin criticizes in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and “Down at the Cross” (1963), the foundation for this conjecture lies in the illusion that such revenge can exist. Rufus seeks to exact on American society, in general, and on white patriarchal power, in specific the revenge he believes will reinstate his own masculine power. In *Another Country*, heteronormative, white male power is reflected in and by the seeming omnipresence of the White, male figure that threatens Rufus’s life, safety and manhood. Rufus’s sense of self, self-worth and manhood are uninterruptedly unbalanced by the White policemen who “[give] him a look”⁵⁸⁶ and “taught him how to hate”⁵⁸⁷ throughout the novel and the older White man who propositions him for sex.

Since the publication of *Another Country*, Rufus has often been associated with and, thus, compared to Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* (1940). Like Bigger, Rufus attempts to regain his power and sense of self through violence enacted on the white female body. Butler observes that the “process of meaning-constitution requires that women reflect

⁵⁸⁵ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 48.

⁵⁸⁶ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 367.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 370.

[...] masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy.”⁵⁸⁸ The female body becomes, thus, a source for and sustaining agent in the propagation of masculine power. “He’s always beating me,” Leona declares, “for nothing, for nothing!”⁵⁸⁹ Although Rufus’s search for revenge requires Leona’s participation as a conduit for such power, Leona is neither the object nor the source of his frustration or hatred. Rufus’s resentment becomes intensified, in fact, by his inability to love Leona. In “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America” (2011), Joel Alden Schlosser observes that Rufus searches for happiness through love with Leona, “but he cannot accept and struggle against the social condemnation of a love affair between a black man and a white woman even while he struggles with the heteronormative image of a black man foisted on him.”⁵⁹⁰ Rufus and Leona’s interraciality is, indeed, the catalyst for their mutual suffering and prospective destruction. The chaos that lies within their tumultuous relationship symbolizes the measure of hope engendered by the racially driven era.

Unlike Bigger Thomas, Rufus has agency over his life and actions. Rufus’s “life is [not] controlled by his hatred or his fear,”⁵⁹¹ as Baldwin suggests about Bigger. He is aware of his actions and the torment he imposes on Leona. His self-awareness becomes assured by the guilt he feels when faced with his group of white friends. While in a bar, his friend Cass asks about Leona. Baldwin narrates: “[Rufus] did not want to answer. He did not want to talk about Leona – and yet there was nothing else that he could possibly talk about. For a moment he almost hated Cass.”⁵⁹² Indeed, Rufus sees the world around him through the suffering and rage it has produced. “How I hate them,” Rufus declares, “all those white sons of bitches out there. They’re trying to kill me, you think I don’t know? They got the world on a string, man, and

⁵⁸⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Reminism and the Subversion of Identitiy* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 45.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹⁰ Joel Alden Schlosser, “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America,” 492.

⁵⁹¹ James Bladwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 18.

⁵⁹² James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 435.

they tying that string around my neck, killing *me*.”⁵⁹³ Although his sentiments may be warranted, as Civil Rights era, New York City was as segregated and racially plagued as the South, Rufus’s actions towards Leona – callous and gratuitous – map his and Leona’s destruction. The abuse Leona sustains at the hands of Rufus highlights the violence that ensues when society presents restrictive forms of selfhood, love and, thus, happiness.

Baldwin begins his investigation on the destruction limited forms of love engender in *Giovanni’s Room* (1956). In the novel, American David is unable to accept the love his Italian lover, Giovanni, offers because David is afraid to lose power and identity as a white, heteronormative male. Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman observes that “David seeks absolution and acceptance, as it is revealed over time to him and to the reader that David’s identity – his Whiteness, his masculinity, his homosexuality, his nationality – was secured at the expense of the love and the life of Giovanni.”⁵⁹⁴ David cannot love that part of himself which society does not accept, his non-heteronormativity. Rufus’s sexuality also plays a role in his self-rejection and inevitable destruction. Like David, Rufus walks through N.Y.C. contemplating the tragedy of his life. As he stares into a diner window – with no money – a “big, rough-looking man, well dressed, white, with black-and-grey hair”⁵⁹⁵ approaches and propositions for sex. Rufus accepts the man’s offer for food, but swiftly escapes. His fragility and loneliness lead him to recollect the dysfunctional, sexual relationship he had with his friend Eric, a White Southern man:

[Rufus] thought of Eric for the first time in years, and wondered if he were prowling foreign streets tonight. He glimpsed for the first time, the extent, the nature, of Eric’s loneliness, and the danger in which this placed him; and wished that he had been nicer to him. Eric had always been very nice to Rufus. He had had a pair of cufflinks made for Rufus, for Rufus’ birthday, with the money which was to have bought his wedding rings: and this gift, this confession, delivered him into Rufus’ hands. Rufus had despised him because he came from Alabama; perhaps he had allowed Eric to make love to him in order to despise him more completely.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 425.

⁵⁹⁴ Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, “As Though a Metaphor Were Tangible”: Baldwin’s Identities, 166.

⁵⁹⁵ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 402.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 404.

Baldwin informs us that, as with Leona, Rufus is unable to love Eric. Rufus seems unable to see past Eric's Whiteness, his gender and their shared history, electing to "[despise] Eric's manhood by treating him as a woman, by telling him how inferior he was to a woman, by treating him as nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity."⁵⁹⁷ Baldwin demonstrates here the interplay between race and gender to illustrate the protean forms of sexual domination in an American context. First, Rufus beats Leona to regain his masculine power. He emasculates Eric to punish him for Rufus's own emasculation through American racialization. Second, Rufus cannot accept Eric, because he is white and a man. He cannot accept Leona, because she is white and a woman. The limitations placed on identity through race and gender leave him incapable of love, for his lovers or for himself. Like Rufus, the pressure of Whiteness, masculinity and heteronormativity does not allow David in *Giovanni* to flourish in or through love.

David is unable to love Giovanni, because David suffers from self-hatred, believing in the heteronormative limitations society has given him. In the end, David finds himself alone and waiting to return to the US, while Giovanni awaits his execution. The parallel drawn here partially explicates both Rufus's and Leona's demise. Like David with Giovanni, Rufus is unable to love Leona, because he is unable to love himself. He has become imprisoned in his own hatred towards white people, much as David abhors nonheteronormative expressions of love. In *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines and August Wilson* (2002), Keith Clark supports the argument that Rufus is not a mere victim of racialism and racism, but an accomplice to his own demise.⁵⁹⁸ "Experience," Baldwin declares, "[...] seems clearly to indicate that it is not possible to banish or to falsify any human need without ourselves

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 406.

⁵⁹⁸ Keith Clark, *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines and August Wilson*, (Urbana: University of Illinois press, 2002).

undergoing falsification and loss.”⁵⁹⁹ In subjugating Leona, Rufus jeopardizes his own sanity and humanity. Baldwin informs us that the search for vengeance for the history and experience produced by racialism and white supremacy can only lead to madness, and, effectively, Rufus – like Leona – goes mad. Yet Rufus’s madness leads him to commit suicide, unable to free himself from his racial limitations, the history that produced them and his own rage. Later in the novel, Baldwin’s investigation into the damaging effects of racialism, American history and vengeance comes full circle through Ida, Rufus’s sister, who attempts, one can argue, to destroy Vivaldo, Rufus’s white bohemian best friend, both psychologically and emotionally for his Whiteness and for not having recognized her brother’s suffering.

In *Another Country*, Baldwin presents his vision of a Civil Rights Movement that goes beyond the integrationist aims of Martin Luther King and boldly rejects the “eye for an eye” ideology of Malcolm X, showing us that in order for the US to survive as a nation, it must learn to accept the reality of its complex history and the present conditions it has produced. “[W]e,” Baldwin declares, “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 identity, our maturity, as men and women.”⁶⁰⁰ Through Rufus and Leona’s troubled relationship – one that is not devoid of hope, but suffers from American forms of racial intelligibility – Baldwin urges us to reimagine the world through what he concedes is love. Baldwin writes, “Love takes off the mask 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 grace – not in the infantile American sense of being made happy, but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.”⁶⁰¹ Let us, thus,

⁵⁹⁹ James Baldwin, “Preservation of Innocence,” *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1949]), 596.

⁶⁰⁰ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 342.

⁶⁰¹ James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 527.

dare to contemplate Baldwin's vision for a less divided nation and a more expansive, humane, vision of our humanity that includes true respect for one's life, liberty and search for happiness.

3.3 Cass and Richard: (Un)Knowing Whiteness

To date, little attention has been given to Cass and Richard Silenski's relationship. Trudier Harris offers the most comprehensive excavation of their symbolic meaning in the novel. However, where Harris focuses on their narrative importance to Ida in her claim that Ida is "subordinate to other characters, sacrificing for them [and is] 'sandwiched' in between them,"⁶⁰² I believe that the White liberal heterosexual couple offers readers an apocalyptic vision of what David and Hella's relationship might have looked like if Hella had decided to remain with David. Cass and Richard appear in the novel at separate times, which continues Baldwin's mediation on the separate lives people lead. Cass first appears on what is described as "a terrible night, with rain pouring down like great tin buckets, filling the air with a roaring, whining clatter [...]"⁶⁰³ While in a "fetid, poor-man's bar"⁶⁰⁴ with Rufus, Vivaldo gets into a heated argument with Jane, an older woman he has been sleeping with. Jane yells, "Are you threatening me."⁶⁰⁵ This phrase is important, because the three friends are in a bar predominately patronized by White men of Irish descent, described as "pale, untidy, sullen men, who worked on the docks, and resented seeing him [Rufus] there."⁶⁰⁶ Rufus and Vivaldo get into a physical altercation, while attempting to exit the bar. And while both men are wounded, they decide that Vivaldo's injuries need medical attention. Therefore, they head to the hospital. This memory serves several functions. First, it develops the overarching theme of the novel, that is the White characters' strong reluctance to acknowledge how race prevents them from knowing each other on an intimate level. When Vivaldo suggests that he and Rufus go to the hospital alone, the jazz player "[becomes] frightened,"⁶⁰⁷ later explained as Rufus's

⁶⁰² Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 98.

⁶⁰³ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 392.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 195

fear of going to the hospital with two injured White people: “he knew what would happen at the hospital if two fays and a spade came bleeding in. For the doctors and nurses were [...] upright clean-living white citizens [...] but [...] Vivaldo [...] knew so little about his countrymen.”⁶⁰⁸ Rufus attempts to explain the danger his presence would cause, however Vivaldo innocently replies, “I really don’t want to hear all that shit, Rufus.”⁶⁰⁹

Secondly, the scene highlights the prevalence of misogynistic tropes, used often to characterize the human value the male characters assign to the female characters. On one side we have Jane and Leona who are connected in how the males they sleep with talk to/about them. Rufus describes Leona as “very plainly dressed,”⁶¹⁰ with a “damp, colorless face” that reminded him of “the Southern poor white.”⁶¹¹ He describes her as “considerably older than he”⁶¹² which suggests a connection between youth and female beauty standards. Likewise, Jane is described as “too old for [Vivaldo], and combative and dirty; her gray hair was never combed, her sweaters [...] were all equally raveled and shapeless and her blue jeans were baggy and covered with paint” In passing, Rufus describes her as “dressing like a goddamn bull dagger.”⁶¹³ And at one point, Vivaldo scolds Jane for responding to Rufus’s racially charged insults with racial inferences, calling her a “filthy bitch.”⁶¹⁴ That Jane is “a monstrous slut [who] kept Rufus and Vivaldo equal to one another,”⁶¹⁵ speaks to an intersectional assessment that Baldwin makes between race, class and gender. Jane and Leona represent chaos. Their mediocre looks and lower-class status mean that as women they have very little social value. They are relegated to bargaining chips, used at Rufus and Vivaldo’s will. Rufus uses Leona as

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 396.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 372.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 372.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 392.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 393.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 396.

a target, a metaphorical punching bag to avenge his emasculation. Vivaldo uses Jane and Ida (and women, in general) to compensate for his failing career as a writer and, later, vindicate himself of any complicity in the death of his best friend. As previously mentioned, however, Ida refuses to shoulder the weight of Vivaldo's failures or wash away his sins. Rufus and Vivaldo's use of female characters mirrors David and Giovanni's relationship to women; they are given value based on the male characters' sexual and emotional needs.

Another Country's narrative abruptly jumps from Vivaldo having to spend ten days in the hospital to Rufus, Vivaldo and Leona walking down the street, where they bump into Cass whom Rufus describes her as "sitting alone on the rim of the circle, frail and fair."⁶¹⁶ We learn that Cass has a husband named Richard. Fred L. Standley observes that Cass rebels against her "upper-class New England background" by marrying Richard, "an ex-Polish teacher and a writer of successful but inferior novels."⁶¹⁷ To her friends and husband, she is calm and poised, and as Harris writes, "the mothering center of the certified middle-class white American family,"⁶¹⁸ who uses her marriage as a shelter. "Cass readily admits that she has been sheltered," Harris writes, "while we will later learn from Ida that she has slept with many men [...] Cass thinks Ida can marry Vivaldo just because she loves him, but Ida recognizes that love can be 'a goddamn pain in the ass.' The Romantic vision of shelter gives way to the reality of life."⁶¹⁹ Her private life differs from how she presents herself in her public and private life, a theme Baldwin revisits throughout his writings. However, Cass's initial rejection of class difference eventually falls short, as her marriage becomes loveless, mirroring the novel's New

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 397.

⁶¹⁷ Fred L. Standley, "'Another Country, Another Time,'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1972), 506.

⁶¹⁸ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the fiction of James Baldwin*, 109.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

York City setting. “[T]he sexual life of married couples,” Christopher Freeburg observes, is prime place to observe “the racist and sexist conditions”⁶²⁰ that make up American life.

Richard’s narrative importance is exactly what Baldwin was investigating in *Giovanni’s Room*; the ocean between the bliss of White liberal ideology, against the internal conflict, violence and alienation that attempting to adhere to this racialized persona engenders. Richard is mostly mentioned in passing conversation. He first appears at Benno’s Bar, celebrating after “Richard just sold his novel.”⁶²¹ He is described as “never [having] liked Rufus as much as the others had and now, he was blaming him for Leona.”⁶²² Interestingly he is less close to Rufus than the other characters and is the only one who blames him for Leona’s fate, although he never vocalizes it.

In this section, I demonstrate how gender dynamics cripple Cass and Richard, both as individuals and as a married couple, because prescribed norms surrounding class, race and gender do not afford them the room to know each other on a sensual level. These limiting roles disturb their connection to each other, furthering the divide between their “personal countries.” In “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” Christopher Freeburg writes, “Baldwin invokes love or its explicit absence in many varieties.” He continues, “Baldwin repeatedly comes back to a singular emphasis: if one faces up to the most challenging truths that shape their lives, instead of keeping up a façade, one can maintain deep personal and political connections that define the basis for love.”⁶²³ With Cass and Richard, Baldwin further investigates the ocean between David and Hella. If Standley is correct that “the physical climate [of New York City] mirrors the spiritual condition of the people,” then the internal lives of Cass and Richard suggest a “nightmarish Dantesque hell of entrapment and isolation” which even the act of marriage is

⁶²⁰ Christopher Freeburg, “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” 181.

⁶²¹ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 431.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 432.

⁶²³ Christopher Freeburg, “Baldwin and the Occasion of Love,” 180.

not enough to subdue.⁶²⁴ Part of their discord is their inability to receive and give a form of love that is not bound in the material reality of American life, which inevitably involves tightly conscripted norms surrounding how they should move through the world. For this, I follow Freeburg's assessment of Baldwin's depiction of love to highlight the thematic importance Cass and Richard hold in the novel.

Cass and Richard's marriage reaches the breaking point after Cass returns home from a night out dancing with Ida and Mr. Ellis. Cass decides to tell Richard that she has been having an affair with Eric. She makes this decision, on the one hand, because Richard believes that she has been sleeping with Vivaldo, of whom he is jealous. Richard knows that Cass admires Vivaldo for his artistic integrity: "[Cass] discovers one day that Richard has compromised his writing and published a second-rate novel," Harris writes. Because of this Cass "no longer believes in his ability or respect what he has accomplished."⁶²⁵ On the other hand, Ida knows about Cass and Eric's affair and has been using this knowledge to coerce Cass into being her alibi when the jazz singer sleeps with Mr. Ellis.⁶²⁶ Therefore, Cass's decision to tell Richard about her infidelity comes from the "fear and despair" that Ida's power wields over her produces, and which makes her "[sink] slowly into her seat."⁶²⁷ Returning home at two A.M., Richard confronts Cass in the living room and asks if she has been sleeping with Vivaldo. Cass confesses to having slept with Eric. Baldwin writes,

⁶²⁴ Fred L. Standley, "Another Country, and Another Time," 507.

⁶²⁵ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 110.

⁶²⁶ Harris suggest Cass uses her time with Ida and Vivaldo to hide her relationship with Eric, suggesting a duplicity which goes beyond gender, but a mutually shared experiences as women. In doing so, Harris positions being *female* in opposition of *womanhood*, which suggests that latter is an expression of lived experiences and the former an abstraction of political ideology: "A closed chapter of female history is now opening up to Cass as she is forced to see a black woman in a specific, more than superficial way. Her descent from her middle-class pedestal opens her eyes to what women experience who have never had the pedestal available to the. As the moment of enlightenment continues, Ida and Cass respond to each other more as women, not as females connected through their men, and Cass begins to see into another country."; Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*, 110-111.

⁶²⁷ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 689.

“Let’s get this straight. We’ve been married almost thirteen years, and I’ve been in love with you all that time, and I’ve trusted you, and, except for a couple of times in the army, I haven’t had anything to do with any other woman. Even though I’ve thought about it. But it never seemed worth it. And I’ve worked, I’ve worked very hard, Cass, for you and our children, so we could be happy and so our marriage would work. Maybe you think that’s old fashioned, maybe you think I’m dumb, I don’t know, you’re so much more-sensitive than I am. And now—and then—” He walked over to the bar and set his glass down. “Suddenly, for no reason, just when I begin to seem that things are really going to work out for us, all of a sudden—you begin to make me feel that I’m something that stinks, that I ought to be out of doors. I didn’t know what had happened, I didn’t know where you’d gone—all of a sudden. I’ve listened to you come into this house and go and look at the boys, and then crawl into bed—I swear, I could hear every move you made—and I’d stay on in the office like a little boy, because I didn’t know how, how, to come close to you again. I kept thinking, She’ll get over it, it’s just some strange kind of feminine shift that I can’t understand. I even thought, my God, that maybe you were going to have another baby and didn’t want to tell me yet.” He bowed his head on the bar. “And, Jesus, Jesus—Eric! You walk in and tell me you’ve been sleeping with Eric.”⁶²⁸

Interestingly, Cass’s admission does not come from any real sense of guilt. Rather, her decision to confess her infidelity suggests that her waning respect for her husband’s artistic “betrayal” means that she has given up any true sense of herself, in vain. As Harris suggests, Cass chooses the safety of a middle-class life, in hopes that it will shelter her from the “poverty” and “ugliness” of life. However, Harris ultimately concludes that “there is no shelter, no safety.”⁶²⁹ This means that Cass’s rebellious marriage leads her back to the position of social “advantage”⁶³⁰ from which she ran and hopes she will not have to confront. Even more interesting, Harris posits that this moment of matrimonial conflict (“that vulnerable baring can only bring suffering”) allows Cass to come closer to understanding Ida’s country.⁶³¹ Although the novel gives no answer as to whether or not their marriage weathers the storm of infidelity, readers are offered a speckle of hope. Still in their apartment, Cass goes to the bathroom where she wonders if there is any hope for them, if there was anything left between them which they could use. This last question made “her rise [...] and take off her bloody dress. She wanted to burn it, but she put it in the dirty-clothes hamper.”⁶³² Baldwin transforms Cass’s “hiding place”

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 702.

⁶²⁹ Trudier Harris, *Black Women in James Baldwin’s Fiction*, 112.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 704.

into a dominating force, which wields its power at will. For the first time in the novel, Richard is no longer an abstract figure. He becomes a violent force which reverses his role from protector to a man who beats his wife.

Cass's infidelity emotionally destabilizes Richard, and that it was with Eric humiliates him. In an attempt to shame Cass, he admits that he has cheated, also. However, he justifies his infidelity as part of the culturally masculine space he calls the "army." Baldwin's allusion to Richard's army years describes what Maya Eichler calls "[m]ilitarized masculinity," which she defines as "the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat in particular."⁶³³ Here, the relevance is militarized masculinity's relationship to "gendered relations of power."⁶³⁴ Richard's service in the military justifies his cheating on Cass, because misogyny is an accepted component in the formation of the type of hyper masculinity that militaries promote. Eichler writes, "[c]haracteristics associated with militarized masculinity have historically included toughness, violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination."⁶³⁵ Richard considers himself a good husband, because he can financially provide for his wife and children. As the breadwinner, Richard bears the weight of financial responsibility, but also holds financial control over his family. He believes that "things are really going to work out for [Cass and him]," because the success of his novels means financial stability. Richard equates the verb "to stink" with weakness, which he interprets as financial failure. In *Giovanni's Room*, David's father associates "a Sunday schoolteacher" with weakness, because the image diverges from the "violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination" Eichler attributes to forms of hyper masculinity. Cass's infidelity is a transgression, because she takes on a masculine role when it comes to sex. This explains Richard's use of sexist language to denigrate his wife: "Did he

⁶³³ Maya Eichler, "Militarized Masculinities in International Relations," 81.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

fuck you in the ass, did he make you suck his cock? Answer me, you bitch, you slut, you cunt!”⁶³⁶ This verbal attack is followed by a physical one in which Richard hits Cass, and “she [feels] her thick blood on her lips [...]”⁶³⁷

Even as Richard “listened to [her] come into this house and go and look at the boys,” he is unable to face the fact that he has failed his wife, somehow. Even worse, Cass searches for solace from Eric, a man Richard does not consider a threat, because his (homo)sexuality makes him less of a threat to Richard’s own masculinity. Fred Standley acknowledges that Cass and Richard’s “marriage is failing [...] because [Cass] realizes she has adapted to all of Richard’s desires and needs; and as his literary success increases, she realizes he is more of a stranger. The result is her love affair with Eric because she believes him to have ‘a sense of himself’ lacking in her husband.”⁶³⁸ Cass’s despair shows a form of humiliation that is only bearable, because she must feed her children. As Baldwin observes, “the male cannot bear very much humiliation; and he really *cannot* bear it, it obliterates him.”⁶³⁹ This is because “men are neither so supple nor so subtle [as women]. A man fights for his manhood: that’s the bottom line. A man does not have, simply, the weapons of a woman. Mama must feed her children—that’s another bottom line; and there is a level on which it can be said that she cannot afford to care how she does it.”⁶⁴⁰

Richard’s anger and disappointment come from his identity as a heterosexual male, husband and father, identities Kevin Ohi calls “mere obstructions littering the path of a surpassing transcendence, usually cast in terms of art.”⁶⁴¹ Therefore, art is a stand in for how

⁶³⁶ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 703.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ Fred L. Standley, “*Another Country*, Another Time” 506.

⁶³⁹ James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Owl Booksy, 1995 [1985]), 20.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁴¹ Kevin Ohi, “‘I’m not the Boy You Want’: Sexuality, ‘Race,’ and Thwarted Revelation in Baldwin’s *Another Country*,” *African American Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), 261.

the characters deals with themselves. As Richard's professional life soars, his family life and artistic integrity decline. Baldwin divorces professional success from personal growth to resist the temptation to interpret economic success as personal fulfillment. Cass and Richard cannot love each other, because they simply do not possess the resources to do so. Like in *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin demonstrates how Whiteness affects his White characters. Cass and Richard are stock representatives of the loveless lives Baldwin discusses in his second book. If *Giovanni's Room* is an articulation of the dangers of not knowing how to love, then *Another Country* offers a hopeful glimpse into how the fight and search for love can lead to self-redemption and endless possibilities.

In his Coda to *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, D. Quentin Miller writes that "[he] was drawn back to 'Notes of a Native Son' (the title essay) because it is an origin story, the genesis of Baldwin's journey as a writer, out of the Eden of innocence and into the world of experience."⁶⁴² Where *Giovanni's Room* announces the end of a relationship, *Another Country* offers a hopeful future. Both Vivaldo and Richard have been living in a dream world, while Cass endures Richard's emotional absence and Ida fights to keep alive the memory of her brother.

Whether or not Richard is aware, he expects Cass to forego her emotional and sexual needs to fulfill her duties as a mother and wife. This is evident when Cass consistently refers to her children, when contemplating whether or not she should tell Richard about her affair: "the terror was that her children would despise her."⁶⁴³ Again, Cass's motives to hide her affair are less fueled by guilt than by a polarizing desire to act the part of dutiful wife which is connected to her role as a mother. However, Cass is aware that the myth of a good wife is unattainable. Therefore, she searches for affection, emotional and physical, in Eric to bear the

⁶⁴² D. Quentin Miller, "Coda: The Heart of Baldwin," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 288.

⁶⁴³ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 692.

weight of the safety that has become her prison, and her cheating on Richard is a drastic, albeit misplaced, attempt to save her family. Women find strategies to bear the dreams of men.

Baldwin writes:

One is confronted [...] with the universal mystery of men—as we are, of a man, as he is; with the legend and the reality of the masculine force and the masculine role—though these last two realities are not always the same. Men would seem to dream more than women do—always have, it would seem, and, very probably, always will. They must, since they assume that their role is to alter and conquer reality. If women dream less than men—for men know very little about a woman’s dreams—it is certainly because they are so swiftly confronted with the reality of men. They must accommodate this indispensable creature, who is, in so many ways, more fragile than a woman. Women know much more about men than men will ever know about women—which may, at bottom, be the only reason that the race has managed to survive so long.⁶⁴⁴

Marriage itself does not hold a couple together. Rather, it is a deeper understanding of oneself that the other forces his/her partner to face that constitutes the gift that one lover can offer the other. If they can get through this stage, then there are no limits to the storms their relationship can weather.

In more ways than one, Baldwin condemns Cass and Richard’s marriage as he does David’s affairs. As in *Giovanni’s Room*, Baldwin believes that to connect oneself with another, sexually or romantically, means to share a sensual experience that goes beyond mere pleasure. That said, the characters’ situations are starkly different. However, the common denominator is that they seek refuge in socially constructed identities that are meant to protect them from the demands of life.

Richard is one of the least developed characters in the novel. Baldwin defines him in relation to Cass, his wife, and Vivaldo with whom he shares a not-so-secret rivalry. Vivaldo despises Richard for having received a publishing deal for a book he’s not passionate about. Richard despises Vivaldo, because he believes that Cass “[has] always admired Vivaldo”⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁴ James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 20.

⁶⁴⁵ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 699.

more than she had admired her husband. We know that he is a writer who has “sold out,” by writing detective fiction in which he has no emotional or artistic investment. Richard believes that Cass’s admiration for Vivaldo comes from the lack of respect she has for him: “I’m sorry we’ve got so far apart—I really don’t even know how it happened, but I guess I got made at you [...] because you seemed to have so little respect for [...] my success. Maybe you’re right, I don’t know [...] but how are we going to eat, baby, what else can I do?”⁶⁴⁶ Rather, he uses writing to support his family, instead of as a form of artistic expression. As a character, Richard has no voice, because he is defined by how others see him. Cass sees Richard as “her protection, not only against the evil in the world, but also against the wilderness of herself,”⁶⁴⁷ which refers to her sexual and emotional needs.

Vivaldo believes that he does not deserve his success, because his heart is not in his work. What Cass and Richard’s marriage demonstrates is the staleness that gender norms can bring. Cass does not seem to have any true connection to Richard, beyond the material comfort and economic stability he offers and the child they raise together. Rather, Richard is often absent from the lives of his two boys Michael and Paul, because he is always locked up in his office working. His duties lead him to ignore Cass’s emotional needs and pushed her to seek those needs in Eric.

Cass and Eric’s affair is a curveball, since we understand that Eric is attracted to men than women. We learn that Eric even had a brief affair with Rufus who ultimately rejects him, because Rufus sees homosexuality as a weakness which he cannot afford. Like David and Vivaldo, Rufus equates heterosexuality with male strength. Therefore, in Rufus’s eyes, he cannot respect Eric, because he is a weak man. Eventually, Rufus is unable to bear the weight of being strong. When he commits suicide, Ida survives and finds a renewed sense of self-

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 691.

worth. Cass and Eric's affair "forbids the intrusion of the future, or too vivid an exhibition of need."⁶⁴⁸ Part of the reason Cass is attracted to Eric is because he gives her the intimacy she needs without the responsibility and accountability that comes with a deeper relationship. Cass keeps Richard at a certain physical and emotional distance, because she is afraid that she will have to pay for her materially comfortable life with Richard, by reaching a level of intimacy that goes beyond their prescribed roles as husband and wife. Eric is described as "too proud to use [Cass], or anyone, as a haven, too proud to accept any resolution of his sorrow not forged by his own hands."⁶⁴⁹ Cass and Richard use each other as vessels within which they pour their sorrow and fears, instead of viewing each other as sources of strength to face their personal demons head on.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 691.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

3.4 Eric and Yves: Away and A Way to *Another Country*

Back in the taxi with her Puerto Rican driver, Cass thinks about her relationship with Eric, wondering why it could not grow into more than friendship. Indeed, their relationship is as much about their intimate connection as it was sex. However, their emotional and sexual connection is limiting, because it does not offer them any sense of responsibility for each other. Cass observes: “Eric [...] was marking time, waiting—waiting for something to be resolved. And when it was resolved—by the arrival of Yves, the signing of a contract, or the acceptance, in Eric, of a sorrow neither of them could name—she would be locked out of his bed.”⁶⁵⁰ Cass and Eric’s relationship is doomed from its beginning because, like the other romantic couplings, their relationship is founded on their desire to hide from their fears. In this short section, I explore the heuristic importance Baldwin gives to Eric and Yves’s relationship. I argue that Eric is the only White character in Baldwin’s early fiction who overcomes his innocence. Eric accepts the tragedy of his failed romance with Rufus, instead of ignoring it. He reappropriates the pain that Rufus caused him, as a bridge to understanding the limits that race, gender and (hetero)sexuality have imposed on his friend and lover. Because Eric chooses not to forget the painful experiences he undergoes, he is able to obtain self-knowledge. This makes Eric’s relationship with Yves the most promising of the romantic couples and suggests that Eric has reached a level of personal growth and maturity that will allow him to confront the challenges of a same-sex couple in the 1960’s.

Towards the end of the novel, readers find Eric in Paris, about to leave for New York. Eric and Yves decide to spend their last two days together in a hotel room. Eric remembers meeting Yves in front of Gare Montparnasse. He remembers following the sound of Yves portable radio, playing classical music in the street. Just before the two meet Eric regrets his

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 691.

failed attempts to love Rufus. Baldwin writes: “And, on that spring evening, walking up the long, dark, murmuring street toward the Boulevard, Eric was in despair. He knew that he had a life to make, but he did not seem to have the tools.”⁶⁵¹ A page after this revelation, Baldwin hints that although Eric feels broken from Rufus’s abuse and subsequent rejection, he has made it through to the other side—he has learned how strong he must be to love someone, and must ask that the people who love him surmount their own fears; Baldwin describes the day Eric leaves for New York as the moment the character has made it through the darkness and has reached Yves private country:

On the last day in Paris, at the last moment, they both suffered from terrible hangovers, having both been up all night, drinking, at a friend’s house; their faces were gray and damp; they stank with weariness. There was great shouting and confusion all around them, and the train breathed over them like some unimaginably malevolent beetle. They were almost too tired for sorrow, but not too tired for fear. It steamed out of them both, like the miasma rising from the Gare St. Lazare. In the deep black shadow of this shed, while their friends stood at a discreet distance from them; and the station attendant moved up and down the platform, shouting, “*En voiture, s’il vous plait! En voiture! En voiture!*”; and the great hand of the great clock approached the zero hour; they stared into each other’s faces like comrades who have been through a war.⁶⁵²

What makes this scene beautiful is how Baldwin describes the moment, using “gray,” “damp,” “stank” and weariness to describe the joyous gathering that took place the night before. That Baldwin uses words which are usually negatively connotated suggests that he wants readers to see reality beyond the beauty associated when we think of human life. Eric and Yves are far from perfect. More importantly, they do not pretend to be so. For one thing, Yves is a prostitute.⁶⁵³ Although Eric is relatively wealthy, he views his economic standing as a handicap which makes it difficult to find meaningful connections. The line, “They were almost too tired for sorrow, but not too tired for fear,” suggests that the lovers understand the dangers that await them not just as a same-sex couple but as two people who are willing to release themselves from

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 558.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 569.

⁶⁵³ I elect to use the word “prostitute” instead of “sex worker,” because the former term more accurately describes how Yves earns money.

their respective prisons—hiding places—, allowing themselves stand vulnerable in front of the one they love.

Eric and Yves's relationship is in stark contrast to Cass and Richard's marriage or Vivaldo and Ida's relationship. Where Cass and Richard fit societal norms, Eric and Yves are far from it. Although Vivaldo and Ida's relationship is not seen as conventional as Cass and Richard's, they are not able to reach each other's country, experience each other beyond their social categories. After Ida and Rufus, Eric is the most nuanced character in *Another Country*. He is difficult to fault for Rufus's death and, unlike Rufus's other White friends, manages to escape Ida's judgement. This is due to the emotional maturity he demonstrates that the other characters lack. Like Baldwin's other characters, Eric suffers. However, he makes his suffering a constructive tool for self-improvement and a bridge to access the countries of the other characters. His relationship with Yves, a young Frenchman appears fruitless, but reads as the most honest, albeit fragile, relationship in the novel. This may be because Eric accepts that life is tragic. This tragedy, I believe, comes from how he deals with his desires in the repressive space that is the US. It is no accident that he lives in Paris, which repeats the importance Baldwin gives to expatriation as a potentially liberating experience in *Giovanni's Room*. Where David falters in reconciling his American identity with his sexuality, Eric manages to escape the male prison Baldwin discusses in "The Male Prison." Therefore, Eric and Yves's relationship offers a glimpse into what David might have become if he had accepted Giovanni's love. However, Eric goes beyond accepting alternative forms of love. He embraces a life with Yves, as demonstrated in Yves's immigration to New York at the novel's end.

Eric and Yves's relationship is a thematic call-back to David and Giovanni's failed relationship. It highlights, furthermore, the doomed romance Eric had with Rufus. Their short-lived love affair appears as fond memory Rufus recalls, as he sits on the cold New York streets, the night of his suicide. Rufus is propositions for sex by a White suiter at his lowest moment,

asking “Maybe we can comfort each other for a night” to which Rufus responds, “I’m not the boy you want, mister.”⁶⁵⁴ The man’s solicitation and Rufus’s response to it, reminds him of when Eric declared his requited love for Rufus. The importance of the scene is sex as just one form of intimacy. Rufus rejects Eric’s affection, because he is male: “He had despised Eric’s manhood by treating him as a woman, by treating him as nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity.”⁶⁵⁵ Again, Baldwin visits the theme of vengeance he treats in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, where Gabriel Grimes uses religion and faith as a fantom vengeance. In *Another Country*, however, vengeance takes the form of Leona’s physical abuse and Eric’s emotional downturn: “[W]ith his hands on Eric’s shoulders, affection, power, and curiosity all knotted together in him—with a hidden, unforeseen violence which frightened him a little; the hands that were meant to hold Eric at arm’s length seemed to draw Eric to him; the current that had begun flowing he did not know how to stop.”⁶⁵⁶ Like Gabriel, Rufus is emotionally stunted from the self-alienation that antiblack racism has caused him. Although these experiences are rare in the novel, the man soliciting Rufus for sex as “tears filled his [Rufus’s] eyes and began trickling down his nose,” is a violent scene. Rufus begs the man for food and “the man took his arm,” insisting him to pay for the food with sex: “Come on—come on to my place.”⁶⁵⁷

Violence becomes one of the rare forms of acceptable affection between males in the novel. Rufus escapes the older man’s sexual harassment and manages to make his way to Vivaldo’s apartment. However, the friends are unable to connect. Rufus is “weakened” by Vivaldo’s worrying about him, so much that he felt that “he had been struck in the belly.”⁶⁵⁸ Yet as quickly the moment arrives is as quickly Rufus “pulled away”⁶⁵⁹ from Vivaldo’s

⁶⁵⁴ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 404.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

affection. Part of Rufus's problem is that he handles intimacy with violence, reproducing the same behavior towards Eric and Leona. Rufus's final act of violence is his suicide. His self-destruction does not only hurt him. Rather, it hurts his family and downtown community. Therefore, Rufus's destruction embodies the destruction of America—New York acting as a microcosm for the larger US.

Like David, Eric self-exiles to escape American politics surrounding sexuality. David escapes to Paris because he fears the social implications of his same-sex desires. Eric runs away to put as much distance as he can between Rufus and himself. Rufus's rejection and abuse almost destroys Eric. However, where Eric succeeds in overcoming his trauma, David repeats his self-deceptive behavior which ultimately costs the life of Giovanni. Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic prioritizes the American experience abroad as a potential site for growth. However, David's failure to make useful his fears means that the American abroad does not necessarily result in the type of self-knowledge that Baldwin believes is necessary to rescue Whites from their prison of color. Abroad, the American abroad faces depictions of home and country without the safety of national myths created to render invisible social mechanism of dominance and power. I believe that to combat racial inequality, Americans must understand themselves in relation to Europe and the global influence of White power.

In the final chapter of this thesis is dedicated to exploring how Baldwin's transatlantic perspective helps unpin the naturalness of Whiteness, by connecting American Whiteness to what Paul Gilroy calls "the project of Western modernity." Specifically, I offer an analysis of Baldwin's short story "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon," which I believe works twofold to resist the insolvability of racism. Furthermore, I argue that Baldwin's work offers guidance to the emerging young activists of the Black Power Movement. An ensemble piece in *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), Baldwin's novella has received little attention in scholarly works. My analysis underlines Baldwin's message that to understand the US, Americans must look to

Europe as an integral part to understanding what it means to be American. Therefore, “This Moring, This Evening, So Soon” continues Baldwin exploration of American Whiteness that characterizes his early fiction, by contextualizing it against the background of Paris, a stand-in for larger Western relations. Finally, I believe that Baldwin’s novella offers the rising civil rights leaders of the late 1960s and 1970s insight into how to combat the salience of global Whiteness.

Chapter 4: White Racism or World Community in “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon”

4.1 Transatlanticism and the Project of Western Modernity

The beginning of the 21st century ushered in increasing intellectual interest in transatlanticism, a term I take to refer to the trilateral transfer of peoples, cultures and knowledges—by way of the Atlantic Ocean—between Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Critical analysis of political geographies and historical events, in specific time periods, through the prism of a transatlantic perspective allows for a richly complex and more complete vision of how the politics surrounding Whiteness have created a network of resourcefulness “in reordering and remaking”⁶⁶⁰ the world. The 2014 Baldwin conference held at Université de Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3 focused on the importance transatlanticism plays in Baldwin’s writings. Entitled *James Baldwin: Transatlantic Commuter*, the three-day event focused on the influence Baldwin’s transatlantic travels had on his literary thought and highlighted the importance of a cross-Atlantic reading of the writer’s work. In attendance were such prominent Baldwin scholars as Jean-Paul Rocchi who discussed “spatiotextual relocations” in the context of Baldwin’s transatlantic aesthetic. Douglas Field explored the FBI’s surveillance of Baldwin’s activities, domestically and abroad. In “The House Is Not a Home: Engendering James Baldwin’s Last Decade,” Magdalena Zaborowska observes that Baldwin’s interest in certain female figures and icons increased toward the end of his life, and how in his clothing and mannerisms he began to play more openly with gender.”⁶⁶¹ David Lemming shared an intimate anecdote about a road trip that involved picking up Baldwin’s friend and mentor

⁶⁶⁰ J.R. Oldfield, “Transatlanticism, Slavery and Race, *American Literary History*, 131.

⁶⁶¹ John Keene, “Exploring Baldwin in Montpellier: The 2014 ‘James Baldwin: Transatlantic Commuter’ Conference” *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 1 (2015), 200.

Beauford Delaney from Paris to drive him to Baldwin's home in Turkey.⁶⁶² More importantly, however, the event revealed that to understand Baldwin's writings and life, scholars must recognize that he produced many of his critiques beyond America's borders. Baldwin's intellectual contributions to the Civil Rights Movement demand, therefore, that inquiries into the racial dynamics of the US offer a transatlantic approach to shedding light on the global impact of Whiteness.

Any inquiry into American Whiteness demands that we look beyond the borders of the US to show how Whiteness operates as a transatlantic network of power and influence. In the following, I discuss Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic, which I define as the way the writer reestablishes the transatlantic relationship between American Whiteness and European heritages. I argue that Baldwin's novella "This Morning, this Evening, So Soon" (1965) offers a transnational dimension of American Whiteness by geographically situating the story in Paris, France. As my research offers a Critical Whiteness Studies approach to Baldwin's writings, I discuss Baldwin's novella against the backdrop of "White Racism or World Community" (1968) in conjunction with Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, as a point of departure to discussing the global reach of Whiteness and the transatlantic networks which have arisen to resist the White supremacist ideologies that Gilroy calls "the project of Western modernity." I describe American Whiteness as a project of Western modernity, which to be unpinned must be understood within a transatlantic perspective. The Civil Rights Movement is particularly interesting as its influence stretched far beyond national borders, rallying artists and intellectuals from other regions of the world. I pay particular attention to Baldwin's essay mentioned above, which demonstrate an uncanny view on the transatlantic potentiality of the Civil Rights Movement but more particularly Baldwin's unique vision of how to approach the post-war struggle against domestic and global racism. Later in this chapter, I discuss the power

⁶⁶² Ibid.

dynamics between the West and non-White peoples through the lens of the White Power and Black Power paradigm Baldwin lays out.

The connection between American race politics and the larger world as a driving force in Baldwin's work is not novel. In "'Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting and the Project of Modernity" (1999), Michelle M. Wright's research on African American subjectivity suggests that a transatlantic approach offers another dimension to domestic race politics and allows for a more faithful formulation of Black alterity. Wright argues:

[This statement] highlights Baldwin's representation of himself in two important ways; first, to his status as an African American and an only gay man—in short, his multiple identity—was far from welcome in the United States, even in a metropolis as large, impersonal, and diverse as New York City; and second, on a more abstract, theoretical level, how his arrival in Paris is framed by a life left in New York.⁶⁶³

Wright includes Baldwin in her assessment that African Americans and other peoples of African descent "are primary contributors to modernity" who despite their social status as spectral figures—present, but not present—"make[s] the [Black] Subject a significant and visible force in the transatlantic."⁶⁶⁴ One such project is the international cooperation of proclaimed Western nation-states who claim to share a cultural, political and economic heritage, which after WWII and during the Cold War became the driving force for diplomatic and military cooperation in the West.

Michael Denning's *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004) articulates this dimension, understanding that after the dust of WWII had settled, the US and the USSR became engulfed in an ideological battle and sought alliances, based on—in part—the assumption of shared Western sensibilities. Racialized subjectivity is described in economic terms and reveals

⁶⁶³ Michelle M. Wright, "'Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity," *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 208

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

how the 1950's world scene was divided into "[t]he rhetoric of the three worlds." Denning observes: "the capitalist First, the Communist Second, and the decolonizing Third – emerged in the early 1950s, and, though it was challenged on all sides, it dominated the period."⁶⁶⁵ Denning's observation highlights that even though there was no clear ideological consensus on how to order world politics, there was, nonetheless, a return to the familiar, in the form of power alliances based on European vs. non-European heritage.⁶⁶⁶

Where Wright and Denning's research focuses on Black subjectivity in the building of Western Modernity, I discuss Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic in the context of White identity formation. Of course, White subjectivity is contingent upon the presence of the Other. Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic furthers my analysis in Chapter One, where I focus on *Giovanni's Room* to illustrate how domestic Whiteness is rendered observable in David's attitudes towards social responsibility and personal accountability, which I describe as a fundamental element to White innocence. David's presence in Paris, France establishes a transatlantic genealogy of power, by which the cultural forms of American Whiteness leave David, the quintessential White American male of the 20th Century, unable to grapple with the realization that he shares a power relationship with the French. In response, David attempts to distance himself from his transatlantic heritage, suggesting that Europe and the US have little connection other than the superficial. "The ocean is very wide," David narrates. "We have led different lives than you [...] things have happened to us [in America] which have never happened here."⁶⁶⁷

Going to Meet the Man (1965) is a collection of eight short stories, which deals with race, nationality, sexuality and sex. "Sonny's Blues" and "Going to Meet the Man" have

⁶⁶⁵ Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004), 26.

⁶⁶⁶ See: David Jones, *Apart and a Part: Dissonance, Double Consciousness, and the Politics of Black Identity in African American Literature, 1946-1964*

⁶⁶⁷ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 247.

received the most attention from scholars. First published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1960, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” is the only narrative which takes place abroad (Paris, France) and, unfortunately, has received little attention; or at least there are very few works dedicated to the richness of the text which follows the story of an African American singer and actor who has spent the past decade, living in Paris. In twenty-four hours, he, his White Swedish wife, Harriet, and their mixed-race son Paul, will return to the US. The story follows the unnamed narrator as he worries about his family’s return to the States and the racial violence that his interracial family will face.

In “James Baldwin: the Black and the Red-White-and-Blue” (1963), John V. Hagopian argues that Baldwin’s short story demonstrates how the writer “has gained enormously in skill since *Giovanni’s Room*” and should “[...] take its place as one of the most important short stories written since the war [...]”⁶⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the article reads as a summary of the novella, rather than a critical analysis of Baldwin’s work. Hagopian does offer, however, at least one poignant observation: “[...] the story moves in wider and wider orbits around the central character, we see that his original feelings that everything was divided into his oppressed self and the hostile world was false, that he is part of a history and a humanity that is far more complex than that. The narrator cannot identify himself simply as an oppressed person, for much of the world does *not* oppress him.”⁶⁶⁹ This comes from the narrator’s realization that “he finds love [...] from a Swedish woman who marries him and gives him a son and from a French film director who teaches him some hard truths about life.”⁶⁷⁰ An eloquent interpretation of the narrator and Boona, a Tunisian acquaintance suspected of stealing money, follows this analysis and rounds up the article and saves it from its anemic beginning.

⁶⁶⁸ John V. Hagopian, “James Baldwin: the Black and the Rd-White-and-Blue,” *CLA Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (December 1963), 133.

⁶⁶⁹ John V. Hagopian, “James Baldwin: The Black and the Red-White-and-Blue,” 138.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

In “No Hiding Place: Exile ‘Underground’ in James Baldwin’s ‘This Morning, This Evening, So Soon’” (1999), David Wright offers a thrilling and rich analysis on space and place in Richard Wright’s “The Man Who Lived Underground,” Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Baldwin’s “this Morning, this Evening, So Soon.” “I want to look more closely at the ‘underground’ space which [they] have imagined in their work and how these places speak to and differ from one another,”⁶⁷¹ Wright observes. Wright’s main focus is Baldwin’s short story, with Paris, France “serving as [Baldwin’s] metaphorical ‘underground.’”⁶⁷² David Wright remarks that unlike Wright and Ellison’s protagonists, “Baldwin’s narrator does not so much create a new world for himself by an act of imagination. Rather, he willfully flees the US for another country, one with social rules different from those which formed him.”⁶⁷³ This new surrounding allows the unnamed character—described by Wright as a “conscious not do Ellison”⁶⁷⁴—to accept his racial trauma and use his experiences to “becom[e] the man that he could never have been in the US.”⁶⁷⁵ In “Flying Away: Voluntary Diaspora and the Spaces of Trauma in the African-American Short Story” (2008), Patricia San José Rico adds to Wright’s project on space and place in her discussion on home as “intimate” and “private,” two terms which are “invested with symbolic meaning, geography turns from a mere physical location into a site of memory, from a spatial setting to a mystical site of communal identity.”⁶⁷⁶ San José Rico looks to Richard Wright, Ellison, Arna Bontemps and Baldwin’s “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” to show how the writers’ characters “cope with traumatic memories through somewhat ambivalent reactions to their sites of memory.”⁶⁷⁷ Many of San José Rico’s

⁶⁷¹ David Wright, “No Hiding Place: Exile ‘Underground’ in James Baldwin’s “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” *CLA Journal*, vol. 42., No 4 (June 199), 446.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁶⁷⁶ Patricia San José Rico, “Flying Away: Voluntary Diaspora and the Spaces of Trauma in the African-American Short Story,” *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 13 (2008), 63.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

conclusions echo the assessment David Wright makes, especially those connected to Boona and the narrator's diverging relationships to France. However, the essay's conclusion is novel: "These four stories [...] portray characters for whom home is not a safe 'haven' but a dangerous and oppressive prison—or madhouse. When those connections are negative, 'home' loses its positive connotations and is therefore no longer valid as a way to construct a positive sense of identity. 'Flying away' can be one solution to this problem."⁶⁷⁸

Adrienne Akins' "'I love America more than any other country': National and Racial Identity in Baldwin's 'This Morning, This Evening, So Soon'" (2010) discusses the "complex interaction between racial and national identity" which is "explore[d] in more depth and nuance" than in any of Baldwin's other fiction.⁶⁷⁹ Like Hagopian, Akins' essay focuses on the theme of family, recognizing that Paris's foreign sky allots the interracial couple social distancing from America's anti-miscegenation stance, which at the time of the short story's initial publication, was illegal until the *Loving v. Virginia* decision of 1967. Paul's inability to understand his African American aunt demonstrates the cultural remove the boy has from the Black experience in America, having grown up in France. Ultimately, Akins recognizes that the narrator's experience in America gives him a different perspective on the French for whom his Arab acquaintance holds contempt, contextualizing this assessment as "the relative privilege of African Americans in Paris when compared to the living conditions of North Africans in the city, as well as the implications of this divide for any concept of racial community and ethnic identity."⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁷⁹ Adrienne Akins, "'I love America more than any other country': National and Racial identity in Baldwin's 'This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], vol 54 (Spring 2010), [Accessed: 26 October 2022] < <http://journals.openedition.org/jisse/1052> >.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

“This Morning, this Evening, So Soon” offers readers a transatlantic perspective on how race affects its African American protagonist. Baldwin’s unnamed character reflects on his complex relationship with the US and his adoptive country, France, through the worry he has about his interracial family’s imminent return home. Although *Another Country* offers a multinational perspective on America’s race problem in Eric and Yves’s storyline, I agree with Hagopian and Atkins that Baldwin exercises an unprecedented command of writing, which compared to his other writings offers the most complete assessment of transatlanticism in his fiction. Embedded in the fears and incomprehension articulated in the narrator’s relationship with his sister Louisa, Harriet and their French biracial son Paul, Baldwin critiques American Whiteness from a transatlantic perspective which resists “the Negro problem” as a uniquely American phenomenon. In the first page of the novella, Baldwin highlights the interconnectivity of the antiracist work Baldwin, the Civil Rights Movement and activists abroad championed during the era:

Whenever I become upset Harriet becomes very cheerful and composed. I think she began to learn how to do this over eight years ago, when I returned from my only visit to America. Now, perhaps, it has become something she could not control if she wished to. This morning, at breakfast, when I yelled at Paul, she averted Paul’s tears and my own guilt by looking up and saying, “My God, your father is cranky this morning, isn’t he?”

Paul’s attention was immediately distracted from his wounds, and the unjust inflicter of those wounds, to his mother’s laughter. He watched her.

“It is because he is afraid they will not like his songs in New York. Your father is an *artiste, mon chou*, and they are very mysterious people, *les artistes*. Millions of people are waiting for him in New York, they are begging him to come, and they will give him a lot of money, but he is afraid they will not like him. Tell him he is wrong.”⁶⁸¹

At the beginning of the scene, the narrator informs readers that his wife, Harriet, hails “from orderly and progressive Sweden and has reacted against all the advanced doctrines to which she has been exposed by becoming steadily and beautifully old-fashioned.”⁶⁸² I take this assessment to indicate a particular way the narrator, as an American, views Sweden. In “White

⁶⁸¹ James Baldwin, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” 865.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

Power or World Community,” Baldwin describes the country as “progressive” and “old-fashioned,” a comparison which presents a polarizing dichotomy that simplifies a large group of people. It is serendipitous that Baldwin spoke of racism in Harriet’s home country of Sweden just three years after *Going to Meet the Man*’s publication. However, Baldwin does not give a pass to Swedes, like Harriet, acknowledging that Sweden, like many European countries, used Christianity to spread racial regimes of power. Therefore, “progressive” and “old-fashioned” describes the difference between how Sweden, Europe and Harriet perceive themselves and the historical reality of empire building. Hagopian rightly interprets the above scene as a mother’s attempt to protect her biracial son from learning how Whites in America will receive his existence.⁶⁸³ However, Harriet is just as ill-equipped as her son to understand the nightmare that is racism. The underlining connection Baldwin makes to the narrator’s American perspective on his Swedish wife’s Whiteness transforms the scene into a microcosm for global race relations by giving the narrator’s (African) American perspective on Sweden. This transatlantic perspective is further illustrated when Paul describes his father as “the greatest *American* singer [...]”⁶⁸⁴ The italicization of “American” gives emphasis to the narrator’s Americanness and places this unique perspective at the heart of the many observations the narrator makes throughout the story.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Harriet is not attempting to save Paul from racism. Rather, she wants him to have a strong sense of *self* before he *becomes* American.⁶⁸⁵ Baldwin makes this clear when Louisa uses an expression that Paul does not quite comprehend. As the family have breakfast in the kitchen of their Paris apartment, Louisa says, “He’s going to knock them dead in New York,”⁶⁸⁶ in reference to her brother’s imminent return and predicted success

⁶⁸³ John V. Hagopian, “James Baldwin: The Black and the Red-White-and-Blue,” 133-140.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 866.

⁶⁸⁵ John V. Hagopian, “James Baldwin: the Black and the Rd-White-and-Blue,” *CLA Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (December 1963), 133-140.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 866.

in the US. Paul misinterprets the expression, and Harriet chimes in, explaining that "[it] means *d'avoir un succès fou*. But you will soon pick up all the American expressions."⁶⁸⁷ Although Hogopian interprets this conversation as Louisa insisting that America *has* culture, I believe that Baldwin is emphasizing that race and racism are *part* of American culture and are expressed in American English.

The process of *becoming* American includes the integration of language will force Paul to integrate a sense of himself which involves America's cultural norms surrounding race. Harriet and Paul will soon be introduced to the American lexicon of racism, of which Paul is ignorant and Harriet has a vague understanding. Louisa's response, ("That's what he's [the narrator] afraid of [...] ⁶⁸⁸) expresses her and the narrator's fears of a weaponized language (*nigger* or *nigger-lover*) that their family members will confront. Paul will meet the same fate as police officer Jesse's Black, childhood friend Otis in "Going to Meet the Man," with whom Jesse "wrestled [...] in the dirt. Now the thought of Otis made him sick"⁶⁸⁹ In Alabama, teenage Eric Jones' "fantasies" for his friend LeRoy (described as a courthouse porter who is a year older than him) "began as fantasies of love and soured imperceptibly into fantasies of violence and humiliation,"⁶⁹⁰ upon the realization that he (Eric) was *White* and the men for whom he feels affection are *Black*. Then, there is Peter, the narrator in "Previous Condition," who recounts being called a "nigger" at seven years old. Peter narrates:

It was a little white girl with long black curls. I used to leave the front of my house and go wandering by myself through town. This little girl was playing ball alone and as I passed her, the ball rolled out of her hands into the gutter.
I threw it back to her.
"Let's play catch," I said.
But she held the ball and made a face at me.
"My mother don't let me play with niggers," she told me.
I did not know what the word meant. But my skin grew warm. I stuck my tongue out at her.
"I don't care. Keep your old ball." I started down the street.
She screamed after me: "Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 867.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 867.

⁶⁸⁹ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 942.

⁶⁹⁰ James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 541.

I screamed back: "Your mother was a nigger!"
I asked my mother what a nigger was.
"Who called you that?"
"I heard somebody say it."⁶⁹¹

In this scene, Peter's mother does not explain what "nigger" means. Rather, she simply changes the subject and tells him to wash for dinner. Upon returning to the kitchen his mother chastises him, appropriating the derogatory language the little White girl had used:

"You call that clean?" my mother cried. "Come here, boy!"
She dragged me back to the bathroom and began to soap my face and neck.
"You run around dirty like you do all the time, everybody'll call you a little nigger, you hear?"
She rinsed my face and looked at my hands and dried me."⁶⁹²

This scene offers an intimate look at the mechanism Baldwin believed Blacks used to bear racism. Religion is one way. Cleanliness is another, which includes a moral dimension that informs the politics of respectability. Psychotherapist and public performance artist Sheldon Scott calls the ritualistic cleansing of the body a part of *respectability performance* he attempts to unpin by wearing a black suit and tie while doing performative tasks "you would [not] normally do in a suit."⁶⁹³ His art "challenges the idea of black male exceptionality through the politics of respectability. The performances take on these tasks that are completely insane, like moving earth or dragging rocks."⁶⁹⁴ King and Malcolm X's well-tailored suits reflect the respectability politics of the era and give evidence of a morality: "So if you look at the references to this idea, this concept of black men at their best, in our minds, you know we think of these historical figures and the way that they present [...] I think about the most common thing between them--it is that presentation and there was a certain thing [...] psychologically that we project onto those bodies based on the way that they're wrapped."⁶⁹⁵ Whether or not Harriet understands the cultural nuance of Louisa's remark and the implications it will have on

⁶⁹¹ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, found in *James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, 817.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 818.

⁶⁹³ Sheldon Scott and Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, "Respectability Performance," *Transition*, no.120 (2016), 81.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

their family once in America, their conversation communicates that race is entrenched in American culture and racial indoctrination begins at an earlier age than Paul is.

At one point, Harriet and Louisa prepare themselves for a girl's night out on the town. The narrator recognizes a kinship between the two women born from Louisa's ability to speak frankly about race: "[...] Louisa has never been able to talk like this to any white person. All the white people she has ever met needed, in one way or another, to be assured, consoled, to have their consciences pricked but not blasted."⁶⁹⁶ Harriet's openness is necessary, because she is learning "how best to protect her husband and her son. This is why they are going out alone tonight."⁶⁹⁷

Ultimately, San José Rico's conclusion that the narrator's "flying away" from home offers him the best possibility to heal from racial trauma and use that trauma to become successful in his career and family life is spot on. Of course, expatriation and self-exile are predominant themes in Baldwinian scholarship. Yet, what expatriation, self-exile and transatlanticism have in common is displacement and longing. In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin notes that Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas suffers from "any revelatory apprehension of Bigger as one of the Negro's realities or as one of the Negro's roles."

This failure is part of the previously noted failure to convey any sense of Negro life as a continuing and complex group reality. Bigger, who cannot function therefore as a reflection of the social illness, having, as it were, no society to reflect, likewise refuses to function on the loftier level of the Christ-symbol. His kinsmen are quite right to weep and be frightened, even to be appalled: for it is not his love for them or for himself which causes him to die, but his hatred and his self-hatred; he does not redeem the pains of a despised people, but reveals, on the contrary, nothing more than his own fierce bitterness at having been born one of them.⁶⁹⁸

The transatlantic displacement of Baldwin's narrator is not motivated by hatred of Whites or himself but from a need for space (or distance) to be able to express himself as an artist in

⁶⁹⁶ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 870-871.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 871.

⁶⁹⁸ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 30-31.

whatever form his art takes. He does not want to be limited to his *place* which reinforces America's attitudes towards race. Rather, he hopes to shine light on them and use his experience as a Black man from Alabama "to last," as Baldwin writes in *Notes of a Native Son*. The unnamed narrator's return to the US, to *home*, is as much motivated by love as it is monetary incentive. He loves the US and wants to share his cultural heritage with Paul and Harriet. That cultural heritage is stained, however, by the presence of anti-Blackness, which his wife and son will have to confront for the first time. The narrator's longing is dual. He longs for freedom and success. However, he longs also for home and acceptance from his countrymen, not as a Black man but as an artist. This love of family and country (African American culture) creates internal conflict which, I believe, bears witness to White subjectivity.

"This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" is not just about the narrator's anxieties about returning home. Rather, the novella builds upon Baldwin's earlier critiques on Whiteness, made in such works as "The Harlem Ghetto." Therefore, the short story bridges the transatlantic gap between American Whiteness and French imperialism by comparing White domination in America and France's project of empire which was founded upon France's belief that its racial and cultural superiority gave it the right to *civilize* the world. Therefore, Baldwin connects transatlanticism to the European and Anglo-American project of global racing and Black subjectivity. Paul Gilroy's research on the Black Atlantic, defined as "the intercultural and transnational formation" of nationalist discourse offers valuable insight on what he calls "project of Western modernity," a term which gives substance to "the attempts to differentiate the true, the good, and the beautiful, [to establish] the junction point of capitalism, industrialization, and political democracy."⁶⁹⁹ *The Black Atlantic* was conceived while Gilroy taught at South Bank Polytechnic in London, as he attempted to impress on his students the need to critically question Western philosophies "to punctuate the flow of the Europe-centered

⁶⁹⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 8.

material with observations drawn from the dissonant contributions of black writers to Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment concerns.”⁷⁰⁰

The Black Atlantic developed from my uneven attempts to show these students the experiences of black people were part of the abstract modernity they found so puzzling and to produce as evidence some of the things that black intellectuals had said—sometimes as defenders of the West, sometimes as its sharpest critics—about their sense of embeddedness in the modern world.⁷⁰¹

The Black Atlantic shatters absolute discourses on mutually exclusive racial and ethnic identities as concerns the creation of White identities and investigates the many ways the Black diaspora has informed transatlantic exchanges and furthered the project of Western modernity. Gilroy’s research project recontextualizes the aesthetic concerns of the West, during the Enlightenment, to include the Black presence as indivisible from Western modernity. Gilroy articulates the frustrations of teachers and scholars who seek to enlarge the intellectual landscape of the Enlightenment period and its grip on our contemporary world.

Gilroy privileges a heuristic interpretation of the triadic network between Africa, Britain and America that considers Du Bois’s “blessing/curse”⁷⁰² view of being Black and Western to be a site for African-diasporic “oppositional exchanges”⁷⁰³ and a form of transatlantic cooperation. Gilroy’s project of Western modernity includes the formulation of intellectual and scientific enquiries that were disfigured by Eurocentrism and are indivisible from Western identities and ideologies. Surely, Du Bois’s “second sight” derives from the historical, transatlantic lens the historian offers to Western narratives and the marginal position the West reserves to the African continent, a phenomenon Du Bois rejects by infusing the

⁷⁰⁰ Paul Gilroy, “Preface,” *The Black Atlantic*, IX.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷⁰² Louis Chud-Sokei, “The Black Atlantic Paradigm: Paul Gilroy and the Fractured Landscape of “Race” Reviewed Work(s): *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* by Paul Gilroy,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 4 (December 1996), 741.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*

history of Black Subjectivity into the story of the West.⁷⁰⁴ Gilroy dedicates Chapter Four of his book to how Du Bois's work encapsulates the rise of Pan-Africanism and anti-imperialism and places Du Bois within a tradition of cultural scientists who witnessed a transition towards "black Atlantic political culture" from "early phases that had been dominated by the need to escape slavery and various attempts to acquire meaningful citizenship in post-emancipation societies."⁷⁰⁵ Louis Chud-Sokei suggests that the Black Atlantic paradigm operates as a system of checks and balances to widely accepted Western knowledges:

In [Gilroy's] reading of modern intellectual history, such gestures actually offer us a liberating alternative to absolutist doctrines of knowledge, history, and power. They map out a past and a present that is constituted by cultural and textual exchange and which can barely be captured by way of a narrow focus on any specific discipline. What Gilroy's "black Atlantic" explicitly offers is a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure" of a "transcultural, international formation" that exists as a "counterculture of modernity."⁷⁰⁶

Transatlanticism within the Black context constitutes a cooperative production of Black solidarity, not as footnotes but rather as a fundamental building block and a menace to more popular conceptions of Western modernity built on White supremacy. Oldfield stands in defense of Gilroy's project on *The Black Atlantic's* contribution to Western modernity, by suggesting that race consciousness is synonymous with Western thought: "[w]hether as slaves,

⁷⁰⁴ Admittedly, Gilroy acknowledges certain theoretical traps that even the best proponents of Black transatlantic thought. Gilroy rejects what he claims are the reductivism and nationalist impulses of Du Bois's observation which he presents as "[Black] English and African-American visions of cultural studies." "His fragmentary use of African history to bolster his critiques of America and the West as well as to mark those moments in his own discourse where transcendence of western, racialized truths seemed necessary to be traced back to *The Souls of Black Folk*, the book made him a leader of black Americans." Gilroy's critique of Du Bois highlights, what I believe, represents the materializing issues of Black transatlanticism: the power dynamic between African Americans and other peoples of color, especially within political and artistic networks which reject White supremacist ideologies and continue the project of Black emancipation. Although this is not the subject at hand, I acknowledge that Gilroy offers a well-thought out mediation of the socio-political stakes that haunt 21st transatlantic networks of antiracist, antimisogynistic and antiimperialist projects. See: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 114.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., X.

⁷⁰⁶ Louis Chud-Sokei, "The Black Atlantic Paradigm," 741; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 4.

sailors, or abolitionists, [Blacks] shaped and transformed the dominant [W]hite culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often in unforeseen ways.”⁷⁰⁷

In “This Morning, this Evening, So Soon,” Baldwin superimposes the structures of American identity formation on the political landscape of Europe to articulate forms of global racism. First, the narrator stars in a film, where he plays a Martinican character named Chico who is angry about mainland France’s narrow view of him as a biracial man. Baldwin’s narrator must deal with his connection to America and his character’s relationship to France as Black. Baldwin pushes the reader to connect the narrator and his character Chico’s relationships to the West, not just America or France. The metatextuality of Baldwin’s Black American character playing the role of a Black French subject connects the Old World to the New World and defines one as a power continuation of the other. Second, the Arab presence in France articulates a historical relationship that is riddled with paradoxes and complexities.

Admittedly, the Arab presence in the novel is brief. The first mention is after Harriet and Louisa have left for their night out, the narrator stands in his apartment full of luggage and boxes. He thinks of his twelve years in Paris, walking along the Seine River. He remembers seeing “a paratrooper walking toward Ecole Militaire. He is also walking, almost certainly, and rather sooner than later, toward Algeria.”⁷⁰⁸ The narrator thinks of the “Arab cafés [which] are closed,”⁷⁰⁹ during the month of August. However, Boona is the most prominent Arab presence in the novel. Boona is described as “a North African prize fighter, who is no longer in the ring.”⁷¹⁰ He joins the narrator and “a group of American Negro students,”⁷¹¹ who are excited to speak with the actor. Boona’s storyline towards the end of the novella depicts the narrator’s

⁷⁰⁷ J.R. Oldfield, “Transatlanticism, Slavery, and Race,” *American Literary History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 131.

⁷⁰⁸ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 874.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 875.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 898

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 893.

relationship to France as an American. Akins and San José Rico confirm Hagopian's observation that there exists "[a] contrast between the Arab from Tunis and the Negro from America [...] but their situations are not quite the same [...]"⁷¹² Although post-war France became a safe haven for the narrator, Baldwin acknowledges the historical circumstances which have brought both characters to their present points. Although Boona and the narrator share the experience of race and racism, their lives in Paris are starkly different. As the narrator acknowledges, "Their rage, the only note in all their music which I could not fail to recognize, to which I responded." This is because Arabs in post-war Paris were repressed by the French. "They were perfectly prepared to drive all the Frenchmen into the sea, and to level the city of Paris. But I could not hate the French, because they left me alone."⁷¹³ Although brief, the Arab presence resonates throughout the novella and shows that the narrator's presence in France is a privileged one and thus shows an unequal power dynamic between Arabs and African Americans in France.

This transatlantic power relationship is primordial to any discussions on race, sexuality, nationality in an American context, mainly because one is a continuation of the other. Michelle H. Wright suggests that Baldwin's transatlantic perspective is born from his self-imposed exile to Paris, a move which like his narrator enlarges and renders even more complex the racial problem at home:

By emphasizing his move to Paris as a move from New York, and by splitting with [Richard] Wright publicly, Baldwin suggests that his own understanding of the African American Subject moves beyond national borders. This is not to say his understanding of this Subject transcends geographical boundaries but rather that it is at least partially located in the link between transit; that is one sense at least, the African American Subject is a transatlantic Subject.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² John V. Hagopian, "James Baldwin: The Black and the Red-White-and-Blue," 139.

⁷¹³ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 875.

⁷¹⁴ Michelle M. Wright, "'Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity," *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 213.

The importance Wright gives to the African American Subject being essentially of multiple worlds is an intellectual nod to the Western project Baldwin discusses in “Princes and Powers,” in which he describes the African American as a uniquely Western invention, mixing Africa, the Americas and Europe to create a uniquely Western creation. Implicit in Wright’s observation are the transatlantic networks which were involved in creating Black subjectivity, which Baldwin uses as inspiration to critique American Whiteness. Wright frames Baldwin’s transatlantic perspective in relation to Baldwin’s self-exile from New York as critical to understanding his life in Paris. “One must simultaneously reference the Baldwin who had lived in and fled from New York,”⁷¹⁵ Wright writes. This transatlantic lens, through Baldwin’s transnational experiences, privileges an analysis of what it means to be American through the experiences of Wright’s Black Subject, observing that the minority perspective has the power to reveal a unique experience that can uncover a more complete picture of what it means to be American. Wright observes:

Just as the moment of forgetting entails a sense of loss and confusion, so this prolonged minority experience hinges on a moment of confusion—a confusion that is largely informed by the experience of being a minority, inverting, as it were, the gigantic, impersonal power attached to an American passport. To understand where s/he comes from, the transatlantic Subject must first return, figuratively speaking, from where s/he arose: the Old World. Once there, s/he must look back to American shores from vantage point of an individual.⁷¹⁶

Far too often, the minority experience is buried under myths, founded to justify the minority group’s subjugation. As stated earlier, how the White majority experiences reality is informed by the myths created to justify its domination. The minority Subject’s experience possesses, by its existence—and as epitomized in the Civil Rights Movement—the power to shatter this illusionary world the White majority has created, revealing, in its wake, a more complex reality. For Baldwin, the minority Subject’s experience remains vital to revealing the complex

⁷¹⁵ Michelle M. Wright, “Alas, Poor Richard!': Transatlantic Baldwin, the Politics of Forgetting, and the Project of Modernity,” *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University, 1999), 208.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

experiences that make up the US and, thus, to understanding what it means to be an (White) American. “[L]oss and confusion” describe the moment where the American Subject is confronted with the terms of his existence as an American, as illustrated in *Giovanni’s Room* with David and Hella; Eric in *Another Country*; and the narrator in “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon.”

4.2 The Transatlantic Power of Whiteness

On July 7th, 1968, Baldwin addressed the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the serene town of Uppsala, Sweden. In attendance were Protestant church leaders from around the globe. King was scheduled to attend but was assassinated just three months beforehand. In the wake of King's death, the Civil Rights Movement's waning non-violent ideology and the rising influence of Black Nationalism, Baldwin stood in front of a large crowd of Christian congregants and questioned why Whites were afraid of *Black power*. In Baldwinian fashion, the writer begins with a personal anecdote of his life in the Christian Church, pinpointing the origin of White power in his experience as a boy preacher in a Black church:

Now it would seem to me that the nature of the confrontation, the actual historical confrontation between the non-white peoples of the world and the white peoples of the world, between the Christian Church and those people outside the Christian Church who are unable to conceive themselves as being equally the sons of God, the nature of that confrontation is involved with the nature of the experience which a black person represents vis-à-vis the Cross of Christ, and vis-à-vis that enormous structure which is called the Church. Because I was born in a Christian culture, I never considered myself to be totally a free human being. In my own mind, and in fact, I was told by Christians what I could do and what I could become and what my life was worth. Now, this means that one's concept of human freedom is in a sense frozen or strangled at the root.⁷¹⁷

Baldwin situates himself as part of the Christian tradition, which he equates with Western power. Although he grew up a Christian in the West, his status as Black means that he is "outside" the institutional structure which guaranteed his freedom and democratic rights. The Christian church is a metaphorical founding father of the West and, thus, White power which is Western power. However, what does *White power* mean? In public discourse, the term is often employed in relation to White extremist activities and organizations. Indeed, the growth of White extremism, in the wake of the American Civil War and World War II, needs to be recognized and given serious attention in political discourse and policy making, both domestically and abroad. Nonetheless, the term's limited usage lacks nuance and has the effect

⁷¹⁷ James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community," 749.

of dissolving the intrinsic relationship between *moderate* forms of Whiteness and White power. In this section, I describe White power as the *ability* of peoples of European descent to alter, shape and mold the world as they *wish* to perceive that world. In this section, I contextualize White power within a transatlantic framework and connect it to Gilroy's project of Western modernity. I believe that "This Morning, this Evening, So Soon" prepares Americans and peoples of other nations for a post-racial world. Baldwin's speeches, interviews and public appearances demonstrate his commitment to describing the intrinsic value of human life. Likewise, Baldwin's humanist rhetoric often clashed with the ideologies of Civil Rights leaders. In exploring how and why Baldwin's message was often silenced, I articulate what Baldwin means when he says White power. I believe that Baldwin's works define the power of Whiteness in nuanced ways that help create more nuanced understandings of Whiteness and White supremacy.

Baldwin's meditation on Western Christianity associates the attitudes *moderate* Whites hold regarding race with the extremist ideologies of the Ku Klux Klan, Nazism, Neo-Nazism and White Nationalist movements. White liberalism highlights the need to reconceptualize the consideration moderates give to their relationship with White extremist ideologies and acknowledge that the term informs even the most *moderate* Whites on the role of race. Rebecca Aanerud suggest that this ideological remove is intensified by the question of class:

[White liberalism] relies on an oversimplified and dualistic notion of racism—either one is racist or one is not. In accordance with this binary, to be racist is to advocate an unambiguous white supremacist ideology. This configuration, by failing to recognize the ways in which racism is embedded in the very structure of our society, assumes that one can position him- or herself "outside" racism. Second, the designation of "good whites" with its implied "bad whites," is articulated most readily through class affiliation. In dominant discourse, terms such as poor whites, white trash, crackers, and rednecks signal, among other things, sites of blatant racism [...] White liberalism is born not only out of the desire to distance oneself from other white U.S. Americans on the issue of race but out of the means by which to do so.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁸ Rebecca Aanerud, "Now More than Ever: James Baldwin and the Critique of White Liberalism," 60-61.

For White liberals, White power translates into “a bizarre species of guilty eroticism without which [...] most White Americans of the more or less liberal persuasion cannot draw a single breath.”⁷¹⁹ Class affiliation is decisive in how White power is articulated in public discourse. Poor Whites are associated with the “bad Whites” from whom liberals wish to distance themselves. The “good Whites” are affluent, and their socio-economic standing dictates the etiquette with which they express their power. In Chapter One, I take note of the “missionary complex” Baldwin observes in White liberalism which Aanerud argues “situates [it] in the disciplinary and rhetorical practice of colonialist discourse—particularly that of paternalism.”⁷²⁰ The common denominator appears to be White power’s ability to control how non-Whites perceive themselves whether through segregation or integrationist ideologies. As Baldwin observes, however, “[...] white power remains white. And what it appears to surrender with one hand it obsessively clutches in the other.”⁷²¹

In *Going to Meet the Man*, the West is largely represented by the United States and France, the two countries in which the body of short stories take place. Certainly, Baldwin’s residencies in both countries impacted his choice of settings. Before the narrator sets sail to visit Alabama upon the death of his mother, he contemplates his relationship with Harriet, which for the first time, he believes, is free from the intrusion of the White gaze: “No matter what I was doing or saying or feeling, one eye had always been on the world—that world which I had learned to distrust almost as soon as I learned my name, that world on which I knew one could never turn one’s back, the white man’s world.”⁷²² For the narrator, France holds the promise of safety and opportunity. However, Paris’s anti-Arab environment means that Boona does not receive the same freedom as the narrator. Boona reminds readers of France’s role in the project of Western

⁷¹⁹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 412.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷²¹ James Baldwin, “The Price of the Ticket,” 839.

⁷²² James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 876.

modernity, as the narrator notes: “I had seen the French flag drive the French into the most unspeakable frenzies, I had seen the flag which was nominally mine used to dignify the vilest purposes [...] now I would never, as long as I live, know what others saw when they saw a flag.”⁷²³

Although Boona’s storyline is short, it is nonetheless an important addition to the narrator’s own sense of Americanness and craft as an actor. After Harriet and Louise leave the apartment, the narrator takes a shower for a convivial night with Jean Luc Vidal, a French film director who casts him as the protagonist Chico. *Les Fauves* is about the mixed-race main character, “the son of a Martinique woman and a French *colon* who hates both his mother and his father.” Readers learn that Chico “flees from the island to the capital, carrying his hatred with him. This hatred has now grown, naturally, to include all dark women and all white men, in a word, everyone.”⁷²⁴ While Vidal and the narrator have a drink in a bar on the left bank of Paris, they meet a group of Black college students. As the group discuss music and the narrator’s success and his imminent return to the States and race in America, the narrator spots Boona in the crowd. Upon Boona’s arrival at the group’s table, there is silence and tension. This is partly because Boona lacks Western codes of etiquette, described as his attempts to find a female companion: “There are virtually no North African women in Paris, and not even the dirty, rat-faced girls who live, apparently, in cafés are willing to go with an Arab. So Boona is always looking for a girl, and because he is so deprived and because he is not Western, his techniques can be very unsettling.”⁷²⁵ As an Arab in France, Boona’s status as a colonial Subject relegates him to the social margins, and his search for physical intimacy is denied because of his racialized heritage. The narrator begins to feel uncomfortable, because he realizes that he only knows Boona on the most superficial level: “I realize that I do not know what he is doing now,

⁷²³ Ibid., 880.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 885.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 899.

or how he will get along with any of these people [...]”⁷²⁶ This worries the narrator, because he does not know how Boona and Vidal will get along, as the director is “relieved that [the narrator] will now be forced to speak to Boona”⁷²⁷ while he talks to one of the African American girls.

The tension of this moment intensifies when Boona steals ten dollars from Ada’s purse. Ada feels a mix of guilt and shame, not wishing to pursue the matter further: “I hate to cause all this trouble, it’s not worth it, not for ten lousy dollars.”⁷²⁸ Furthermore, the narrator doubts whether or not Boona stole the money. However, one of the young Americans assures the narrator that Boona was seen taking the money. “I do not ask him who this person is,” the narrator thinks, “for fear that he will say it is Vidal.”⁷²⁹ The narrator’s inability to handle Vidal and Boona’s presence is the real tension of the scene. The scene perfectly juxtaposes Western powers and the narrator’s inability to easily locate himself within the Western world. He admits, “I do not know how I can possibly face Boona and accuse him of stealing money from my friends. I would rather give him the benefit of even the faintest doubt.”⁷³⁰ When the group learns that Boona may have stolen the money, they are unsure if they should confront him, making the situation even more complicated for the group of American tourists. They realize that their status as Americans abroad means that they benefit from advantages inferred by their American passports. The African Americans feel uneasy, because they do not know how to handle the newly discovered sense of privilege (or power) as Americans in France. They understand that they would easily find themselves in Boona’s situation at home, acknowledging their ambiguous relationship to Western power.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 899.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 902.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

The nightclub scene is important, because it contextualizes the earlier conversation Vidal and the narrator have on the best practices to handling racialized experiences. Before leaving for the club, Vidal arrives at the narrator's apartment where the two men have drinks and reminisce about their first film together. "When I agreed to do the role," the Narrator admits, "I felt that I could probably achieve it by bearing in mind the North Africans I had watched in Paris for so long."⁷³¹ However, Vidal accuses the narrator of "playing Chico untruthfully" and suggests that the actor is "playing this boy as though [he] thought of him as the noble savage."

So, you are not playing Chico truthfully, you are lying about him, and I will not let you do it [...] You brought your past into this room. That is what Chico does when he walks into the dance hall. The Frenchman whom he begs for a job is not merely a Frenchman—he is the father who disowned and betrayed him and all the Frenchmen whom he hates.⁷³²

Although the narrator's experience is the source of his compassion and empathy for Chico as the Other, different marginalized groups cannot be handled the same way. The suffering of people and groups is not comparable. The importance of recognizing other's suffering is to be able to free ourselves from our need to exoticize pain. Vidal questions if the actor might understand Chico's pain as a man rather than as a *Black* man or a victim of the West. "Oh please," the narrator replies, "please don't give me any of this equality-in-anguish business."⁷³³ Vidal's film is born from the tragedy he lived during WWII. Described as "a man who has learned to live on what is left of an enormous fortune,"⁷³⁴ which I understand as a reference to his French identity, Vidal lost "his wife and his son, and [...] was in prison in Germany."⁷³⁵

In the personal sense, Vidal uses cinematography to come to terms with the death of his wife and son. His status as an artist enables him to recognize the narrator's pain, helping him channel his racial trauma into his acting. However, when Vidal meets Boona in the club, he

⁷³¹ Ibid., 885.

⁷³² Ibid., 887.

⁷³³ Ibid., 886.

⁷³⁴ Ibid. 890.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

feels a sense of unease derived from a mix of pain, guilt and not knowing what to say. Vidal's reaction differs from how he welcomes the African American students. The history and cultural connection and their present circumstances in the French metropole seems to leave Vidal lost for words. Baldwin writes extensively about France's own "Algerian Problem" in his essays "Equal In Paris," "The Discovery of What It Means to Be American" and "Take Me to the Water" in which the effects of France's project of empire building through slavery and colonization appears on the streets and prisons of Paris.⁷³⁶ That *Going to Meet the Man* was published just three years after Algeria's independence from France suggests that Baldwin includes Boona to nuance the American myth of France as an artistic haven. Like Baldwin, the narrator views Paris as a sanctuary where he can escape and heal from American racism. Boona is from Tunisia, which means that there is an inherent historical and experiential difference in the narrator and his experiences in France. From 1881, Tunisia became a French protectorate to ensure France's access to its ports along the Mediterranean Sea. However, France is not the first foreign power to take military control of the region. Rather, it has been subject to conquering since Antiquity. Tunisia has been an important hub between the East and West since the fall of Carthage. S.E.C. writes in the 1948 edition of *World Today*:

It was the fall of Carthage in A.D. 146 that paved the way for the rise of the Roman Empire, into which Tunisia was absorbed for four and a half centuries. After the Romans came the Vandals in the fifth century and the Byzantine Greeks in the sixth-seventh century. With the coming of the Arabs in the seventh century Tunisia was swung back once more into the orbit of eastern civilization, in which she has remained ever since [...] and it was not until 1881, with the inauguration of the French Protectorate, that extensive contacts with the West were resumed.⁷³⁷

The irony is after France regained its independence from Nazi Germany, it fought to limit Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco's right to self-govern. Although Algeria was the only one of the

⁷³⁶ For more information on Baldwin's critiques on France and the West's relationship with the Arab world, see: Bill V. Mullen, "Baldwin, the 'Arab', and the End of the West," *Of Latitudes Unknown: James Baldwin's Radical Imagination*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2019), 211-225.

⁷³⁷ S.E.C., "Tunisia—A Convalescent Protectorate, *The World Today*," vol. 4, no. 6 (June 1948), 261-262.

three territories to officially become part of France, France's overall economic, political and military influence in the region as a whole is undeniable. Any reason given for Baldwin's choice to describe Boona as Tunisian would be pure speculation. However, Baldwin's essay "Equal in Paris" offers evidence for why Baldwin chose to include Boona in the Franco-American conversation the novel offers:

And I did not think any longer of the city of Paris but my mind flew back to that home from which I had fled. I was sure that I would never see it any more. And it must have seemed to me that my flight from home was the cruelest trick I had ever played on myself, since it had led me here? Down to a lower point than any I could ever in my life have imagined—lower, far, than anything I had seen in that Harlem which I had so hated and so loved, the escape from which had soon become the greatest direction of my life.⁷³⁸

There is no comparing the African American's situation to the Algerian's situation in Algeria or metropolitan France. Adrienne Akins acknowledges that "Boona's question receives no answer but serves to highlight the complicated relationship between Black and American identity in 'This Morning, This Evening, So Soon.'"⁷³⁹ This does not prevent Baldwin from recognizing the weight of not being able to stay in one's own country and not being accepted in one's adoptive home: "I will not say that I envied them, for I didn't, and the directness of their hunger, or hungers, intimidated me; but I respected them, and as I began to discern what their history had made of them, I began to suspect [...] what my history had made of me."⁷⁴⁰ The point is that France represents freedom for the narrator and repression for Boona. The Tunisian cannot go home and will never be fully accepted, in France. He is stuck in a kind of limbo which the narrator ignores. Baldwin writes the situation to resemble how White America cannot recognize its relationship to race, identity and power.

⁷³⁸ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, found in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 109-110.

⁷³⁹ Adrienne Akins, "I love America more than any other country": National and Racial Identity in Baldwin's "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon," 157.

⁷⁴⁰ James Baldwin, *No Names in the Street*, in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 367.

Transatlanticism argues for a more nuanced interpretation of American discourses on race, so that we can better comprehend the invisible mechanisms which motivated Baldwin to seek refuge in Paris, France. Although France has been an intellectual and artistic haven for generations of African Americans, Baldwin is quick to recognize that the White American and the White Frenchman share a racial legacy which attempts to pass off racial exceptionalism as justification for conquest. Baldwin's eight-day stint in a Parisian jail revealed a world oftentimes ignored in artistic representations of Paris. In "Equal in Paris," Baldwin admits that he arrived in France with a romanticized idea of the capital city, which quickly changed once he had to deal with poverty and France's bureaucratic system:

It came as the last of series of disasters which had perhaps been made inevitable by the fact that I had come to Paris originally with a little over forty dollars in my pockets, nothing in the bank, and no grasp whatever of the French language. It developed, shortly, that I had no grasp of the French character either. I considered the French an ancient, intelligent, and cultured race, which indeed they are. I did not know, however, that ancient glories imply, at least in the middle of the present century, present fatigue and, quite probably, paranoia; that there is a limit to the role of the intelligence in human affairs; and that no people come into possession of a culture without having paid a heavy price for it. This price they cannot, of course, asses, but it is revealed in their personalities and in their institutions.⁷⁴¹

By "institution," Baldwin alludes to the French prison system which the writer quickly realized is just as brutal, violent and crushing as the American institution. Baldwin became intimately familiar with the French prison system when he was arrested for borrowing stolen bedsheets from an American acquaintance. Living in a small, rented room in a Parisian hotel, Baldwin went to his acquaintance's room to invite him for drinks and dinner. Upon arrival, he was met by two French police officers who asked if they could see his room. Baldwin's room revealed a set of bed sheets his friend had given him. Baldwin was unaware that the sheets had been stolen and even more unaware that he would spend eight nights in prison without eating. Of course, this incident provided Baldwin with a clearer connection between the Old World and the new one, which would further shape his transatlantic approach to American identity

⁷⁴¹ James Baldwin, "Equal in Paris," 102.

formation included in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*.

Baldwin narrates:

I was quite clear to me that the Frenchmen in whose hands I found myself were no better or worse than their American counterparts. Certainly, their uniforms frightened me quite as much, and their impersonality, and the threat, always very keenly felt by the poor, of violence, was as present in that commissariat as it had ever been for me in any police station. And I had seen, for example, what Paris policemen could do to Arab peanut vendors. The only difference here was that I did not understand these people, did not know what techniques their cruelty took, did not know enough about their personalities to see danger coming, to ward it off, did not know on what ground to meet it.⁷⁴²

The political interest of the West is largely fueled by its belief that it has an intrinsic right to spread its project of Western modernity through Christianity. The Christ is often depicted with blond hair and blue eyes, although he is of middle eastern origins. Baldwin writes: “all the virtues to which [the] black man, was expected to aspire had, by definition, to be white.”⁷⁴³ By “aspire” Baldwin does not suggest that non-Whites are encouraged to reimagine themselves as leaders of Western modernity. Rather, non-Whites should *accept* their limited roles in the global power structure that is the West. How the West views its global role is largely fueled by a sense of divine purpose to which Christianity has given rise. This dichotomy of power influences the potential of African Americans and other peoples of color who grow up and participate in a cultural system which inherently privileges philosophies of selfhood. “White power can destroy black minds,” Baldwin declares in his address to the WCC, “and what black people are now fighting against is precisely that. We watched too many of us being destroyed for too long and destroyed where it really matters, not only in chain gangs, and in prisons and on needles, not only do I know, and every black person knows, hundreds of people, thousands of people, perishing in the streets of my nation as we stand her, perishing, for whom there is no hope, perishing in the jails of my country, and not only my country.”⁷⁴⁴ By describing

⁷⁴² James Baldwin, “Equal in Paris,” 106.

⁷⁴³ James Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community?”, 749-750.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 753.

Christianity as a sort of White mysticism, Baldwin emphasizes the absurdity of Western modernity and the cruelty of the West which sacrifices Black lives.

Baldwin's address reframes the American conversation on race as a global one which involves countries which appear at the periphery of racism and racial exchanges. The fact that the WCC took place in Sweden echoes Baldwin's narrator in "This Morning, this Evening, So Soon," who describes his wife's country as "progressive." "The case of Sweden is interesting," Wekker observes, "because characteristics comparable to the Dutch case come to the fore, that is, the widespread and foundational claim to innocence, Swedish exceptionalism, and the 'white laughter.'" ⁷⁴⁵ It is not accidental that the narrator is a jazz musician who has a Swedish wife. In the Western imagination Sweden is seen as historically innocent from the crimes against humanity that such European nations as France, Germany, England, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands committed to expand their empires. Yet what is the connection between Harriet's Swedish heritage and the narrator's connection to jazz music? In Olle Edström's "Ellington in Sweden" (2013), the ethnomusicologist attributes the Swedes' introduction to race consciousness to Duke Ellington who in the 1930's toured—with a full orchestra—throughout the country and, with promotion from domestic, music-centered magazines, gained a following amongst the young. Edström references the magazine *Karavan* for interpreting the cultural significance of hot jazz:

They characterized early jazz as an expression of the "two sides of the Negro race: ecstasy and melancholia," the former including not just "rapture but also revolt and race of destruction," and the latter being "full of lyrical dreaming, archaic feelings of race, religious reminiscences, and the individual's mediations concerning his situations in life." ⁷⁴⁶

Yet despite this awareness of the cultural politics surrounding race and jazz in the United States, "across the 1930s, and for many decades to come, Swedes had no real understanding of what

⁷⁴⁵ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, 17.

⁷⁴⁶ Olle Edström "Ellington in Sweden," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 96, no. 3/4, (Fall-Winter 2013), 486.

it meant to be an African American (or a ‘Negro,’ to use period phraseology) living in the United States.”⁷⁴⁷ Edström’s observation leads to the conclusion that because Swedes had no real interaction with people of color, Harriet would most likely have been ignorant of her country’s contributions to the project of Western modernity. Nonetheless, the Swedes, as White people, move through the world with a historical power, which Baldwin discusses in “Stranger in the Village,” where he confronts a Swiss village’s image of him as a Black man. Although Baldwin’s appearance at the WCC in Sweden takes place over a decade after his initial visit to the Swiss village of Lööche-les-Bains, the two countries Baldwin discusses have in common the innocence with which they perceive their contributions to Western modernity.

“There is a custom in the village,” Baldwin recollects “of ‘buying’ African natives for the purpose of converting them to Christianity.”⁷⁴⁸ Baldwin describes the “custom” as one shared by neighboring Swiss villages which celebrate Lent, yearly, selecting two children “[to] have their faces blackened—out of which bloodless darkness their blue eyes shine like ice—and fantastic horsehair wigs are placed on their blond heads.”⁷⁴⁹ The point of the spectacle is twofold. For the villagers, it is a gesture of Christian charity, a way “[to] solicit [...] money for the missionaries in Africa.”⁷⁵⁰ However, the custom reifies the power dynamic between Europe and Africa (the West and the rest of the world). The Swiss villagers frame themselves as divested of the Black presence as shown in the children who point and stare at Baldwin as a novelty. However, their charity towards Africans is part of their tradition and frames them as “good Whites,” who, because of their good intentions, claim an innocence which shields them from the knowledge of their role in the social, political and cultural machine that is Western modernity.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 480.

⁷⁴⁸ James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” 119-120.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

The villagers' "good will" originates from the devaluation of the Africans they want *to save*, which creates a system of codependency where the Black presence acts as a fixed star that guides Whites away from darkness towards their destiny as the leaders of modernity. Baldwin's assertion connects the assignation of King as relational to the political aims of the Christian Church, which is to maintain social order, in a thinly veiled plea for peace. King's own "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail," serves as a timely anecdote to the hypocrisy which, unfortunately, characterizes Christianity's legacy to power. King's letter is an articulately constructed response to a public statement by eight Southern clergymen who called the protests "unwise and untimely."⁷⁵¹ The eight signatories referred to the protests as inciting public violence, asking Black Southerners to seek change through a court system that disenfranchises them:

Just as we formerly pointed out that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions," we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.⁷⁵²

What King and Baldwin point out is that the Christian Church is a metaphor for Western institutions. As such, they further the political interests of the West, despite their *good intentions*. Secondly, Baldwin makes it clear that the Church reinforces Africa's dependence on the West, by dictating the political, social and economic conditions, and ensconcing the Black as a Christian creation. Yet the Black is "not [...] a creation of the Christian conscience [and] not [...] a fantasy in the Christian mind, nor an object of missionary charity, not as something to be manipulated or define by others, but as a man himself, on this earth, under the sky, on the same lonely journey we all must make, alone."⁷⁵³ Rather, this dependence has

⁷⁵¹ Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

⁷⁵² Martin Luther King, Jr., "Public Statement By Eight Alabama Clergymen, April 12, 1963," < [ACallforUnityTextandBackground.pdf \(dbu.edu\)](#) > [Accessed: 7 July 2022]

⁷⁵³ James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community?", 753.

evolved, since the offset of colonialism, from missionary to dependence on humanitarian aid.⁷⁵⁴ As such, Blacks are reduced to political pawns who seemingly have agency but ultimately rely on Western systems.

Baldwin anticipates claims of Whites who explain away Europe's crimes against humanity during the colonization of the Americas and the scramble for Africa as good faith efforts to create a better society. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin embodies such claims, using the White liberal who ignores the anti-Black racism in their blind faith in America's promise of freedom and democracy: "I hear the chorus of the innocents screaming," Baldwin writes in *Notes of a Native Son*, "No! This is not true! How bitter you are!"⁷⁵⁵ Baldwin writes these words to ensure that his teenage nephew James understands that the Harlem ghetto in which he was born "does not testify to [his] inferiority but to [Whites'] inhumanity and fear."⁷⁵⁶ The heart of Baldwin's argument at the WCC hinges on the intergenerational destruction that the West has caused non-Whites. He juxtaposes the innocence of a Black child with the audience's innocence in his discussion on Black children who face the project of Western modernity to highlight the absurdity in White innocence:

I think everyone knows that all children are sacred, and yet the Christian world, until today, victimizes all black children and destroys them because they are not White. One of the most important ways in which it is done is the way in which the history of black people, which means then the history of the Christian world, is taught to Christians, in order to justify the means by which they rose to power, have had to convince themselves, and have had to try to convince me, that when Africa was "discovered," as Christians so quaintly put it, and when I was discovered and brought away to be used like an animal, we have had to agree, the Christian Church had to conspire with itself to say that I preferred slavery to my own condition and that I really liked the role I played in Western culture.⁷⁵⁷

In "This Morning, this Evening, So Soon," the narrator's anxiety is not necessarily from fears of what will happen to him when he returns to America. Rather, the novella is about Paul. The

⁷⁵⁴ For information, see: G. Pascal Zachary, "Humanitarian Dilemmas," *The Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 32. No. 3 (Summer 2008), 44-51.

⁷⁵⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 292.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 751.

narrator is afraid that his son will be “destroyed,” which I take in the literal sense. The narrator navigates the psychological trauma of almost being destroyed by American racism and goes as far as to imagine that he had stayed in America and married “another woman and had another son.”⁷⁵⁸ If we accept that this hypothetical wife and child are Black (American), the narrator is reshaping his life to fit the anti-miscegenation ideologies the White world feels comfortable with. Ultimately, the narrator accepts the futility in reimagining his family along racial norms. “But no, I am what I have become,” he admits, “and this woman beside me is my wife, and I love her. All the sons I might have had mean nothing, since I *have* a son, I named him, Paul, for my father, and I love him.”⁷⁵⁹

Baldwin’s trip to Sweden recontextualizes the national conversation on race. The project of Western modernity is the source of American imperial power, and this power is primordial to the preservation of the US’s domestic and foreign influence. Of course, White power is not just a question of Christianity. Rather, Christianity is a part of the Western project which racialized institutions to legitimize its own power and influence. Unfortunately, the atrocities committed during the European project of Western modernity go largely ignored. If we hope, however, to understand the racial dynamics in the United States, a self-declared Christian country, we must adopt a transatlantic approach to understanding the far-reaching influence of White power. The Civil Rights Movement was intimately connected to anticolonial movements which shook many regions around the world.⁷⁶⁰ Baldwin’s transatlantic thought articulates the long reach and detrimental influence Europe and Anglo-America have had around the globe and how these events continue to shape how we envision the world today.

⁷⁵⁸ James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 869.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 869.

⁷⁶⁰ David Lemming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, 187.

The transnational influence of the Civil Rights Movement is often depicted in its antiwar ideologies during the war in Vietnam. On the war's offset, however, many civil rights activists were hesitant to combine the two causes. On August 6th, 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act during a ceremony at the Capitol. Many of the Civil Rights Movement's figureheads were in attendance. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer, Bayard Rustin and others were invited to attend the event. By that time, the Vietnam War had become "an American war"⁷⁶¹ which many Civil Rights activists believed pulled attention from domestic issues. For example, Bayard Rustin fell out with longtime associate David Dellinger, because Rustin believed that "the war [...] was deflecting much of the fervor from the struggle for racial justice and further fraying the civil rights coalition," which was already competing with "the rising tide of Black Power."⁷⁶² However King was inspired by the January 1967 article "The Children of Vietnam" in *Ramparts* magazine which depicted "photographs of Vietnamese babies who had been mutilated by American napalm bombs."⁷⁶³ The *Rampart* article and the impassioned appeals of SNCC activist James Bevel persuaded King's decision to "mark[e] time in the battle of the ghetto with the war in Vietnam."⁷⁶⁴ Although historians debate the official start of the war, Isserman and Kazin conclude that "the real start of the conflict, or at least the point of no return, dates anytime from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s,"⁷⁶⁵ with the US's involvement dating back to WWII. From the late 19th century, France colonized Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, which were baptized Indochina and became France's "richest and most important colony in the French empire."⁷⁶⁶ Indochina remained a solid part of colonial France, until WWII when, "in 1940,

⁷⁶¹ Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 75.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷⁶⁴ Michael Friedly and David Gallen, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The FBI File*, (Carroll and Graf, 1993), 553.

⁷⁶⁵ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided*, 67-68.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

France was itself conquered by Nazi Germany.”⁷⁶⁷ By the early 1940’s Japan began a campaign of propaganda, targeting England and the US as threats to its own imperialist ambitions in the Far East. In “Japanese Race Propaganda” (1944), Saul K. Padover argues that Japan adopted a “master race” theory which gave them the biological right to rule East Asia. Like Nazi Germany, the Japanese believed that they were superior to Americans and the English who were inferior and, thus, an existential threat to their destiny. Although Japan’s racist propaganda is not central to my argument, I offer a glimpse at the historical reality of how Japan used Western ideologies surrounding race to create a strong sense of nationalism and “pure bloodedness” which persists, today. What is interesting is how the Japanese likened itself to a “superior race” whose right it was to guide the rest of the world, essentially appropriating Western rhetoric:

[T]he “yellow Aryans” of Nippon, watching the European dance of death, learned quickly. If Hitler could seize Germany and disrupt Europe on the basis of a racial dogma and racist propaganda, the Japanese saw no reason why they could not do exactly the same thing in Asia. Wherefore they took over the Nazi race technique lock, stock and barrel—with a few significant differences. They changed “Nordic” to “Asiatic” and “white” to “yellow.” That still left them without a specific scapegoat—there being no Jews of any consequence in Japan—and so they chose “Briton” and, to a lesser degree, “American;” It was as easy as that, particularly since there are deep psychological similarities between the Germans and the Japanese, who are the Prussians of Asia.⁷⁶⁸

The US became involved in the region when intelligence officers crossed enemy lines, to make a pact with Ho Chi Minh, a communist leader who “formed a national resistance movement, opposing both the Japanese occupation and French colonialism.”⁷⁶⁹ In March 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson entered the Vietnam War, described by Baldwin as “a racist folly.”⁷⁷⁰ This

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Saul K. Padover, “Japanese Race Propaganda,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Summer 1943), 193-194. For further information on Japan adopting European ideologies surrounding racial purity and superiority to fuel their imperial ambitions, see: Gerald Horne, *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Yukiko Koshiro, *Imperial Eclipse: Japan’s Strategic Thinking about Continental Asia before August 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided*, 67; James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 362

decision differed from the US's reasons for entering, for example, the Civil War and WWII, which demonstrated "clearly defined strategic or territorial goals."⁷⁷¹ Although there is no consensus, we can assume that "[t]he most consistent explanation for why Americans needed to fight in Vietnam was the defense of the 'credibility' of the United States—in itself a murky, ambiguous goal."⁷⁷² Just a few months later, Baldwin wrote in *Ebony* that America's ambition was "[a] menac[e] to the entire world."⁷⁷³ Baldwin saw that the US's participation in the Vietnam War was a product of White America's nationalistic high from WWII and the historical rise of the White Middle Class, which instilled the idea of America's cultural and military exceptionalism.

This White chauvinism mixed with nationalism to create an ideological drug, with a steep cost: "You cannot endure the things you acquire—the only reason you continually acquire them, like junkies on hundred dollar a day habits—and your money exists mainly on paper."⁷⁷⁴ It was this mix of American exceptionalism and White chauvinism which led the nation into a losing war that almost tore the country apart during a time of already heightened national tension. I believe that US's choice to enter the war was heavily informed its ongoing imperialist ambitions. In the mid-20th century, the US championed itself as the defender of freedom and democracy. However, the country weaponized the slogan to solidify its own political and economic influence, abroad. Baldwin's transatlantic aesthetic is an ontological study of the heritage shared by White identities—in North America and European—, self-representational identifiers which in present contemporarily as isolated and self-sustaining but are in fact congruous and cooperative. In this sense, American Whiteness represents a transatlantic project, sharing common political, military and economic interests with Europe. At present, I

⁷⁷¹ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided*, *Ibid.*

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷⁷³ James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt," 722.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 726.

give attention to Gloria Wekker's *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* which discusses The Netherlands' penchant for historical revisionism. Wekker suggests that Dutch reject that "[their] culture developed in many respects as a colonial culture and that the traces of this are discernible in [their] contemporary society."⁷⁷⁵ White Dutch identity functions similarly to American politics surrounding Whiteness in that it is wholly self-representational and "encapsulates a dominant way in which the Dutch think of themselves, as being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, thus free of racism; as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations."⁷⁷⁶ I evoke what Wekker calls the "White innocence of the Dutch variety," because juxtaposing her work with Baldwin's supports the existence of White innocence as a global phenomenon. I acknowledge that the perception of racial categories depends on a myriad of cultural beliefs that often differ from one country to another. That said, Wekker's work deserves attention as its similarities to Baldwin's own observations on the US, France and Switzerland suggest that White innocence is more pervasive than previously thought.

White innocence is not confined to America's national borders. Rather, it is a transatlantic phenomenon which preserves an abridged outlook on Whiteness, ignoring that the innocents, whom Baldwin denounces, continue the West's tradition of imperialism.⁷⁷⁷ The mythologies surrounding American Whiteness are cultural, political and philosophical vestiges of Europe's conquest project, an enterprise which stretched from the Americas and Africa to Asia. I focus on the transatlantic dimension of White power to reestablish the link between conquest and the West's influence on non-White populations.

⁷⁷⁵ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence*, 84.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁷⁷ For more on Western imperialism, see: Edward Said, "Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element, and the Methodology of Imperialism," *After Colonialism*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton University Press, 1995).

To speak of a transatlantic aesthetic in Baldwin's work acknowledges how the writer emphasizes the power dynamic between domestic politics surrounding race and globalized forms of White racism, with White innocence as a pervasive response to contemporary critiques on the state of racial progress. Admittedly, Wecker does not mention Baldwin in *White Innocence*. However, Wecker's anthropological work supports the observations Baldwin makes in his writings. Furthermore, Wecker's work has the added benefit of validating the connection I have made on White innocence being connected with post-racial attitudes which serve to covertly maintain racial hierarchies.

4.2.1 White Relationality

"The cathedral at Chartres," Baldwin writes in "Stranger," "says something to the people of this village which it cannot say to me; but it is important to understand that this cathedral says something to me which it cannot say to them."⁷⁷⁸ In his pronouncement, Baldwin suggests that the symbols which make Europe great are the same symbols which have justified the subjugation of non-white peoples. It is for this reason Baldwin believes that whites, no matter where they are in the world, "move with an authority which I shall never have; and they regard me, quite rightly, not only as a stranger in their village but as a suspect latecomer, bearing no credentials, to everything they [...] have inherited." In his comment, Baldwin refers to the confidence with which the descendants of the conquerors move about the world. Baldwin recognizes that the villagers "can scarcely be held responsible for European culture,"⁷⁷⁹ yet also understands that "the culture of these people controls [him]." Baldwin's village is both physical and metaphoric.

⁷⁷⁸ James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," 128.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

In his 1965 debate with William Buckley at Cambridge University, Baldwin defended the position that the American dream is realized at the expense of African Americans, a belief which requires that Whites internalize a sense of reality which reifies racial norms. In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin counterargues this anisotropic reality by reframing David within the project of Western modernity:

A white South African, or a Mississippi sheriff, or a Frenchmen driven out of Algeria all have, at bottom, a system of reality which compels—for example in the case of the French exile from Algeria—to defend French reasons for having ruled Algeria. The Mississippi or the Alabama Sheriff who really does believe when they face the Negro that this woman, this man, this child must be insane to attack the system to which he owes his entire identity.⁷⁸⁰

The “West” encompasses a system of beliefs, born out of Europe, necessitating that Whites view the past, present and future through the reinterpretations of Western historiographies—as they relate to nonwhite groups—from a monoscopic lens which legitimizes racial practices. Baldwin’s reconsiders the practice of Whiteness within the praxis of Western domination to highlight the inherent relationship between these groups. “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” demands that White readers understand themselves within the larger framework of Western influence. In other words, American Whiteness must be considered as part of a larger project of Western influence. Baldwin associates America’s relationship to race with other Western countries which also have problematic histories with non-Whites.

For Baldwin, France’s defeat in the Indochina War, “when Dien Bien Phu fell”⁷⁸¹ announced the fall of the French empire to Algerians living in Paris. Baldwin admits, however, that working class Algerians “had [...] not the remotest connection with this most crucial of the French reverses; and yet the attitude of the police [...] began to be yet more snide and vindictive [in Paris].” Baldwin attests the increase in French police harassment to “the loss of empire—for the loss of an empire also implies a radical of the individual identity.”⁷⁸² Back in

⁷⁸⁰ James Baldwin, “The American Dream and the American Negro,” 714.

⁷⁸¹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 367.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 367.

the US, the issue of anti-Black racism was compounded by Nazi Germany's campaign of White (Aryan) supremacy and the genocides that ensued. It became harder for America to ignore its many racially biased policies which disenfranchised communities of color throughout the country. The racial supremacist attitudes that fueled the German war machine hit too close to home for many Americans. As Adolf Hitler implemented his "Final Solution" in Germany and such neighboring countries as Poland, Austria and Hungary, "eyewitness accounts from the Polish underground were reporting gas chambers in the concentration camps for Jews."⁷⁸³ These reports spread throughout Jewish communities in America. In response, some "twenty-thousand people gathered at Madison Square Garden [on] July 21st, 1942, to demonstrate against Hitler's racist atrocities."⁷⁸⁴ "On the eve of World War II, Asian immigrants were still excluded from citizenship; in many states, they were not allowed to own land," Ronald Takaki observes in *A Different Mirror*. He continues, "Mexican immigrants found themselves being pushed from welfare rolls and targeted for deportation. Indians were confined to reservations where they were governed by federal regulations and bureaucrats. In the North, African Americans were restricted to reservations called ghettos, and in the South, they were trapped in a system of peonage, euphemistically called sharecropping."⁷⁸⁵

Japanese American men left their families in American internment camps "to prove their loyalty by serving in the US Army."⁷⁸⁶ The irony is that they left one internment camp to arrive at another. Takaki offers an enlightening testimony from Ichiro Imamura, a young Japanese American soldier, whose diary describes arriving at the Dachau internment camp. "Surveying the gruesome scene, the Japanese-American soldiers were stunned by the demonic

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 375.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 374.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 376.

dimension of racism that had been unshrouded in the Nazi death camps.”⁷⁸⁷ Imamura’s diary

reads:

When the gates swung open, we got our first good look at the prisoners. Many of them were Jews. They were wearing black and white striped prison suits and round caps. A few had shredded blanket rags draped over their shoulders [...] The prisoners struggled to their feet [and] shuffled weakly out of the compound. They were like skeletons—all skin and bones [...]⁷⁸⁸

Takaki details how the soldiers ignored explicit orders not to share their rations and gave the Jewish prisoners “food, clothing and medical supplies anyway.”⁷⁸⁹ This moment demonstrates the complications of race, because many of the American soldiers had Japanese ancestry. Many of the prisoners thought that the soldiers were Japanese imperial soldiers who were there to erase traces of the Nazi concentration camps. “For these American soldiers of Japanese ancestry,” Takaki observes, “Dachau served as a ghastly lesson of how an ideology of racial superiority could ultimately lead to genocide.”⁷⁹⁰ This soldier’s testimony demonstrates the complexity of the “West” as a critical concept to global power relations. That Baldwin and the soldier share the common experience of being Americans of non-Western ancestry highlights how the West’s attempt to control its hold and image of the world is unraveled by their expansionist ambitions. The Civil Rights Movement and similar movements demonstrate how the validity of a homogeneous nation-state is resisted by the mere existence of those people who do not neatly fit into the post-war model of a White, middle-class American family. That Baldwin’s novella details the anxieties of an “unconventional” family about to move to the US suggests that Baldwin highlights this differentiation to discuss race but also to challenge what it means to be American.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 376-377.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 377; Chester Tanaka, *Go for Broke: A Pictorial History of the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442d Regimental Combat Team* (Richmond, California, 1982), 117.

Albeit for different reasons, the narrator of “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” and David in *Giovanni’s Room* hesitate to return home. Their fears concern, however, the racial nightmare they wish to escape. While David fears that his same-sex desires mean that he will no longer have access to the privilege of Whiteness, the unnamed narrator in “This Morning” fears having to confront American Whiteness. Whereas David ignores the racial question, his fellow countryman Jesse is obsessed with it. Both David and Jesse’s sense of reality is connected to questions of national identity and race. David and Jesse emanate from a Euro-American heritage which promotes positive attitudes associated with White aggression. These attitudes reconstruct historical narratives to frame Whiteness in a positive light and deflect attention from the pervasive presence of its consequence on peoples of color. David shares this Eurocentric vantagepoint—which informs how he sees himself in relation to the other characters—with the White Sheriff in Alabama and the Frenchman ousted from Algeria. David’s sense of reality—or the real—is dependent, therefore, upon this myopic tradition.

“This moment,” Wright declares, “needs to be unpacked, for at this moment Baldwin is stating there are two ways to be an American: complex and simple.” Wright continues:

The simple American is the one produced through a binary: in rejecting all that is “not French,” the transatlantic Subject is never fully achieved, in that s/he becomes utterly self-referential, determining what is and is not French and American through a meaningless “either-or” process. It is a process based on rejection rather than on exploration and discovery. It bears resemblance to the Negro of Richard Wright and Harriet Beecher Stowe in that both nationalities, French and American, are underdetermined, empty of a sense of time or place. The “simple American” is underdetermined by time because s/he fails to understand the Old World, the war, what is past, and what lies ahead. S/he fails to understand that as an American, one is necessarily transatlantic and bound to two continents; it is non-sensical to submit oneself to a self-referential either-or process when, in both time and place, America and Paris overlap many times over.⁷⁹¹

In order for transatlantic Subjects to understand their identity, and therefore their place in the world, they must strive to become Wright’s “complex American.” The first step entails the

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 222.

recognition of the internal forces that drive them. In Baldwinian thought, this is referred to as history. In acknowledging the past and their connection to it, transatlantic Subjects become better equipped to process the complexity of their present and, by extension, themselves. Those who cannot accept the complex nature of the world in which they live cannot begin to grasp their own complexity, let alone that of their humanity. They risk being the “simple American” who sees the world through a colorless prism, made of Black and White. They simplify the world to fit their understanding of it and forego any opportunity for true understanding of either their role in the world or their human potential.

Further, the simplistic nature of the Black/White binary has produced the racial ideologies that have come to define the first half of the twentieth century, ideologies which necessitate emotional, moral and intellectual distance from Wright’s minority Subject, conceptualizing him or her, in effect, as a one-dimensional entity. It is only with this psychological remove that a human being can be reduced—in the eyes of a civilization and its laws—to property. The cost for simplicity, therefore, are the bodies upon which the minority subject’s identity as Other is carved, a body sacrificed at the altar of White power.

Conversely, to embrace the complexity of American history—its beauty and anguish—means to acknowledge the crimes that were committed to create American civilization, chattel slavery, the genocide of indigenous peoples, etc. “The complex citizen,” Wright notes, “cannot [...] leave these crimes behind—dismiss them, ironically, as ‘history’ and as therefore forfeiting any claim to relevance.”⁷⁹² What Wright refers to as “history” is the systematic marginalization of minority experiences which have in their grasp the ability to mitigate the perceived viability of the status-quo. Admittedly, Wright’s usage of “history” is ironic in nature. This irony serves to acknowledge that history is all too often synonymous with

⁷⁹² Ibid., 223.

antiquation, that the past has no didactic value by nature of its irrelevance to the present. However, once the complex American has acknowledged the non-binary nature of his history, the possibility for reconciliation between the past and the present—the ability to recognize the past within the present and thus one’s connection to the past—becomes a viable reality.

In the same vein, the transatlantic Subject must acknowledge the two worlds to which they belong: The Old World and the New World. The Old World is part of that history which has given them access to the power that is the “American passport” which, in essence, is an unparalleled power to control how the world perceives them. The Subject’s acknowledgement of the historically relevant forces that have contributed to their existence offers the possibility for them to choose their role in the world. It is at this moment that complex American Subjects have the possibility to acquire a transatlantic perspective, thereafter, allowing them to grasp the urgency in the salience of self-determination.

4.3 Black Power

One of the dominant themes in “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” is uncertainty. Of course, the narrator’s fear of returning to the US is a consequence of his not knowing how his interracial family will confront America’s culture surrounding race, especially in the American South. However, the accusation that Boona has stolen money leaves the narrator, Vidal and the group of Black students in an awkward position. The narrator stands before the Tunisian, deciding whether he should demand that Boona return the money or forget the whole ordeal. Boona pleads for the narrator to believe him: “You know me, you know me almost twelve years, you think I do such a thing?”⁷⁹³ The narrator handles the situation with increasing skepticism, not knowing how to handle the man he describes, ambiguously as “a face I know.”⁷⁹⁴ Yet, he also recognizes that “[he does] not know what to say or what to do, and so [he] temporize[s] with questions.”⁷⁹⁵ The narrator’s relationship to Boona is a conundrum, because he holds power over his friend whom he realizes he does not really know: “[...] I cannot believe it, but neither can I doubt it. I do not know anything about Boona’s life [...] I do not really know much about Boona.”⁷⁹⁶ Racial solidarity concedes to the muddled waters of the narrator’s American identity and Boona’s Tunisian passport. The narrator believes he knew the man he invited to sit with his new acquaintances, but soon realizes that he has never *needed* to know Boona. Where the narrator’s American passport emancipates him in France, Boona steals “to eat tomorrow, in order not to be thrown into the streets [...] in order to stay out of jail.”⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹³ James Baldwin, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” 903.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 898.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 901.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 901-902.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 904.

“This Morning, This Evening So Soon” demonstrates Baldwin’s steady integration of Black Power ideologies, which he defines as “the self-determination of people.”⁷⁹⁸ Indeed, the novel *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968) signals an abrupt shift in his writing style—or what Jacqueline Goldsby calls the novel’s “formless shape”⁷⁹⁹—and is often cited as a literary milestone in Baldwin’s Black Power rumblings. By contextualizing the novella’s theme of “uncertainty” against its discourse on interracial relationships, I argue that Baldwin acknowledges King’s waning integrationist rhetoric, offering a novel approach to Black Power which responds to the new generation’s dwindling hope that White America can be convinced to change. As the narrator learns to embrace his African American heritage, not just as an artifact of capitalist bourgeois interest but as a legitimate site of knowledge which he visits as a source of personal emancipation, Baldwin’s novel ushers in “a sort of farewell to the first wave of Civil Rights activists—whilst heralding the next generation of African American militants.”⁸⁰⁰ I derive my argument from Baldwin’s defense of Stokely Carmichael, in “White Power or World Community,” whom he believes “the public press” characterizes as “a very dangerous, radical, black fanatic racist.”⁸⁰¹ Baldwin’s inclusion and defense of Carmichael articulates what James Miller agrees is a transatlantic discourse of Black power, “a skeptical consciousness able to question and challenge white ideologies of identity and history,”⁸⁰² which include how the West views the role of Christianity. Lastly, I interpret Paul’s mixed-race identity as a stand in for sexuality. Following Courtney Thorsson’s observation that “the Black Power Movement was empowering as well as limiting,” because “the urgent need for political

⁷⁹⁸ James Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community,” 753.

⁷⁹⁹ Jacqueline Goldsby, ‘Closer to Something Unnamable’: Baldwin’s Novel Form,” 28.

⁸⁰⁰ James Miller, “No Name, Fanon, Camus, and the Black Panthers,” 179.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 752.

⁸⁰² James Miller, “No Name, Fanon, Camus, and the Black Panthers,” *Of Latitudes Unknown*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019) 190.

action often elides differences within unity,”⁸⁰³ I argue that Baldwin uses the difficult conversation of mixed-race relationships, to respond to Black masculinities which rejects non-heteronormativity.

In “James Baldwin’s Black Power: No Name in the Street, Fanon, Camus, and the Black Panthers” (2019), for example, James Miller argues that Baldwin “articulates his own version of Black Power, an ideology which, by this point, had largely replaced the integrationist ethic of the first state of Civil Rights.”⁸⁰⁴ Included in the volume *Of Latitudes Unknown*, Miller’s essay reckons with Baldwin’s earlier and more nuanced interpretation of postcolonial identities in “Stranger in the Village” and *No Name in the Street*’s more “radical imagination, part of a wider call for ‘resistance, intervention, compassion and struggle.’”⁸⁰⁵ Ed Pavlic’s “Nonviolence, Black Power, and ‘the Citizens of Pompeii’: James Baldwin’s 1968” (2022) locates the origins of Baldwin’s Black Power conversion in the September 1963 Alabama attacks, which killed six Black children, and King’s assassination in 1968. Quoting a letter Baldwin wrote to actor and friend Engin Cezzar (who played Giovanni in a stage adaptation of *Giovanni’s Room* and in later-years published in Cezzar’s *Letter from a Friend*, 2007), Pavlic observes:

“I repudiate despair,” he [Baldwin] wrote, “but the daily necessity for this repudiation contains its own despairing comment. Medgar, Malcolm, Martin—murdered. I really cannot talk. And yet, I must.” King’s murder made Baldwin feel singled out, dangerously exposed, and complexly astraddle generations and ideological divides separating the leaders of his generation and those who had emerged since the summer of 1966. He wrote Cezzar: “I am the only mobile black American left: and, as the black elder statesman—so soon!—and as Stokley’s [*sic*] older brother, I simply had to cool it. And calculate.”⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰³ Courtney Thorsson, “James Baldwin and Black Women’s Fiction, *African American Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 618.

⁸⁰⁴ James Miller, “No Name, Fanon, Camus, and the Black Panthers,”

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 178; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 148.

⁸⁰⁶ Ed Pavlic, “Nonviolence, Black Power and ‘the Citizens of Pompeii’: James Baldwin’s 1968,” *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 8 (2022), 25.

Baldwin's strategy was to remain fervent in his position as an artist, to show how the private anguish of the individual is the workings of public affairs. Baldwin declares in a televised panel that: "I'm a writer who is part of the revolution [...]" but his role as an artist means that he has "another obligation [...] another responsibility."⁸⁰⁷ Baldwin clarifies:

To argue with you, for example. To argue with Malcolm, as I did. I had to take the position that I'm, um, I had to take the position that you produced me. I'm the poet that you produced. And I'm responsible for something which I may not always be able to name, which has to be there for the people who produced me when I'm gone and when this particular aspect when this particular battle is over [...]⁸⁰⁸

Black Panthers leader Eldridge Cleaver's harsh criticism and rejection of Baldwin's sexuality articulates a shifting loyalty, or at least, a waning tolerance of seeming *middle of the road* public figures. *Soul on Ice* chronicles Cleaver's turbulent relationship with Baldwin, proving accurate the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) organizer Richard Gibson's comment that Baldwin "always avoided aligning himself politically."⁸⁰⁹ Baldwin is introduced as a "fascinating, brilliant talent on the scene, a talent capable of penetrating so profoundly into one's own little world that one knows oneself to have been unalterably changed and liberated" who, Cleaver admits, "was able to plac[e] so much of [his] own experience, which [he] thought [he] had understood, into new perspective."⁸¹⁰ Then Cleaver flips the scrip to describe Baldwin as having a "grueling, agonizing, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the whites [...]"⁸¹¹ a conclusion he reaches from his interpretation of Baldwin's criticism of Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957).

⁸⁰⁷ As quoted in Ed Pavlic, "Nonviolence, Black Power and 'the Citizens of Pompeii': James Baldwin's 1968," 30; James Baldwin, "About Malcolm X," panel discussion moderated by Hakim Jamal, radio broadcast, KPFK, May 19, 1968, Pacifica Radio Archives.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A life of James Baldwin* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 167.

⁸¹⁰ Eldridge Cleaver, *Souls on Ice*, 101.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

Baldwin's political dexterity illustrates his preference for moral change, rather than simple faith in ideologies.⁸¹² Baldwin is often unfairly considered incongruous to the evolving aims of Civil Rights efforts in the form of the Black Power Movement of the 1960-1970's. I began my analysis with a brief discussion of Baldwin's relationship, as an artist and Black activist, to the Black Power Movement. I pull inspiration from Douglas Field's *All Those Strangers* (2015), which uses Baldwin's FBI file to paint a biographical picture of Baldwin's shifting ideologies on how to confront White America's slow acceptance of Black civil rights. Baldwin's interest in the Black Power movement demonstrates what Field describes as "the extent of Baldwin's political activity." In his discussion on Baldwin's FBI files in the context of Baldwin's move from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Power, Field observes: "[w]hile biographers have previously noted the author's involvement with Civil Rights organizations, the files add considerable detail to these accounts, shedding light on the extent of Baldwin's energy and commitment to a wide range of political activity [...]"⁸¹³ Of course, Baldwin's relationship with the Black Power movement is a turbulent one, which further alienating him from his role as a Black leader. Many Civil Rights leaders were wary of Baldwin's purported (homo)sexuality, which, as Field reminds us: "King's righthand man Stanley Levison expressed his view that Baldwin and Bayard Rustin (a King aide later dismissed for his homosexuality) were 'better qualified to lead a homo-sexual movement than a civil rights movement.'" ⁸¹⁴ Indeed, the May 1963 *Time*'s piece made Baldwin a household name but it also portrayed him as emasculate. Field and Erica R. Edwards suggests: "Not only does the article emphatically state that Baldwin is 'not, by any stretch of the imagination, a Negro leader,' but

⁸¹² James Miller, "No Name, Fanon, Camus, and the Black Panthers," *Of Latitudes Unknown*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

⁸¹³ Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 46-47.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68; James Campbell, "'I Heard It through the Grapevine': James Baldwin and the FBI," in *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 92.

it also tacitly emphasizes Baldwin's effeminacy as a euphemism for homosexuality [...]"⁸¹⁵ These public critiques on Baldwin's sexuality and the recurring theme of homosexuality in his writings often left the writer sidelined by Black activists. "Although the knowledge of Baldwin's sexuality directly hindered his involvement with the SCLC," Field observes, "by 1964 King's own message of nonviolence and Christian love was increasingly viewed as weak and ineffective."⁸¹⁶ Baldwin's mediatized collaboration with the non-violent movement further relegated him to an "Uncle Tom" figure who, as Stanley Crouch suggests, was accepted by White America for his "lack of 'masculine aggressiveness.'"⁸¹⁷

In "White Racism or World Community," Baldwin tracks the political trajectory of activist Stokely Carmichael as representing his analogy of the "petitioner" who is reduced to "a beggar." Baldwin writes:

"[W]e gather from the public press that Stokely's a very dangerous, radical, black fanatic racist [...] But everyone overlooks the fact that Stokely Carmichael began his life as a Christian and for many, many years, unnoticed by the world's press, was marching up and down highways in my country in the deep south, spent many, many years being beaten over the head and thrown in jail, singing 'we shall overcome,' and meaning it and believing it, doing day by day and hour by hour precisely what the Christian Church is supposed to do, to walk from door to door, to feed the hungry, to speak to those who are oppressed, to try to open the gates of prisons for all those who are imprisoned. And a day came [...] when this young man grew weary of petitioning a headless population and said [...] I petitioned you and petitioned you, and you can petition for a long, long time, but the moment comes when the petitioner is no longer a petitioner but has become a beggar."⁸¹⁸

The "petitioner" as an analogy for Civil Rights groups and activists responds to the "go slow" attitude that many White liberals and moderates advocated. While Black men and women "walk from door to door," in good faith efforts to improve the living conditions, Baldwin observed that they would soon resent the "headless population" who, by and by, took for

⁸¹⁵ Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers*, 67; "Races: Freedom—Now," *Time* 81, 20 (May 17, 1963), 26; Erica R. Edwards, "Baldwin and Black Leadership," *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, 150-163.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸¹⁷ Stanley Crouch, "Chitlins at the Waldorf: The Work of Albert Murray," in *Notes of a Hanging Judge: Essays and Reviews, 1979-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 113.

⁸¹⁸ James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community," 752.

granted the patience activists displayed in the face of White vigilante groups and public institutions who ignored the Christian principles of selflessness and charity by which the country claimed to be governed. Freedom and democracy become privileged principles which seduce those minority groups who live at the periphery of the US's project of nationhood. Equality is consistently at arm's length yet remains an unattainable dream. Therefore, "[w]hen Stokely talks about black power," Baldwin declares, "he is simply translating into the black idiom what the English said hundreds of years ago and have always proclaimed as their guiding principle, black power translated means the self-determination of people."⁸¹⁹ Baldwin depicts Carmichael as a modern-day Black Robin Hood, demanding to be liberated from racial tyranny, and although Carmichael does not neatly fit into Baldwin's analogy, the young leader's rise as a figurehead of the Black Power movement deserves consideration, because Baldwin predicted their rise and the FBI's 1968 assault on the Oakland Black Panther's headquarters.

The summer of 1964 brought a regional victory for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Freedom Summer, a voter registration drive in Mississippi, was a success, largely because the nonviolent organization was to attract a large number of White volunteers to promote voting in Southern Black communities. "But the very success of the strategy" observes Isserman and Kazin, "prompted some SNCC leaders to ask why it required placing middle-class whites in harm's way to prick the national conscience."⁸²⁰ Stokely Carmichael and other members began to believe that "depending on sympathetic whites for political cover was, in itself, a concession to racism."⁸²¹ The division between White liberals and Black activists, who were being wooed by the rhetoric of Malcolm X, was further cemented when during the 1964 Democratic convention in Atlantic City where "SNCC activists had helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Parties to challenge the

⁸¹⁹ James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community," 752-753.

⁸²⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided*, 173

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*

credentials of the regular Mississippi Democrats who had been chosen in the customary all-white state primary election.”⁸²² The refusal of liberal Democrat to desegregate political power led many in the SNCC to suspect the sincerity of White liberal politicians and began to consider more aggressive strategies to assure political representation for Black communities. “We want more than ‘token’ positions,” SNCC activist Charles Sherrod declared. “We want power for our people.”⁸²³

Malcolm X’s February 1964 speech at an SNCC rally in Selma, Mississippi persuaded the student group to reassess the feasibility of the nonviolent ideologies that earlier leaders advocated. That Malcom X welcomed more aggressive strategies to defend protesters, which included “armed self-defense, and his Pan-Africanism (the belief that all Africans shared a common destiny and should be linked politically) greatly appealed to SNCC’s young black activists.”⁸²⁴ As the newly elected chairman of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael along with activist Willie Ricks signaled a break from King’s “we shall overcome” ideology when Carmichael, alongside King and SCLC, “pledged to carry out [James Meredith’s] mission” to walk across Mississippi, after the Black Air Force veteran’s attempt to register to “the University of Mississippi in 1962 had provoked a violent white riot on the campus [...]”⁸²⁵ Carmichael stole the show from King at an evening rally and “electrified a crowd of hundreds of black supporters by announcing ‘What we are gonna start saying now is Black Power.’”⁸²⁶ By the end of the march, the charismatic Carmichael would yell “What do you want?,” as SNCC activists

⁸²² Ibid., 174

⁸²³ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 127.

⁸²⁴ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided*, 174.

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 175.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

responded, “Black Power!”⁸²⁷ Carmichael’s ascent to the spotlight signals, likewise, the secularization of antiracist work.

Field suggests that “[b]y the late 1960’s, Baldwin’s declaration from a decade earlier that ‘[n]o one in the world [...] knows Americans better, or, odd as this may sound, loves them more than the American Negro, enraged black militants, even though Baldwin had amended his message of love in [...] *The Fire Next time*, to include consciousness raising.”⁸²⁸ In *No Name In the Street* (1972), Baldwin articulates the weaning hope he has in his White countrymen to change:

One tries to treat them as the miracles they are, while trying to protect oneself against the disaster they’ve become [...] One could scarcely be deluded by Americans anymore, one scarcely dared expect anything from the great, vast, blank generality; and yet one was compelled to demand of Americans—and for their sakes, after all—a generosity, a clarity, and a nobility which they did not dream of demanding of themselves. Part of the error was irreducible, in that the marchers and petitioners were forced to supposed the existence of an entity which, when the chips were down, could not be located—i.e., there are no American people yet [...].⁸²⁹

For the older Baldwin and young activists, White Americans were not up to the challenge of living up to their own ideologies. Disillusioned activists began to reject the integrationist aims of the Civil Rights Movement, instead calling for movement of Black independence. White power signifies the power to create a world based upon the role Whites believe they have in the world. However, Baldwin and other activists were there to reassure White America that African Americans are “not a fantasy in the Christian mind not as an object of missionary charity, not as something to be manipulated or defined by others but as a man himself, on this earth, under the sky, on the same lonely journey we all must make, alone.”⁸³⁰

⁸²⁷ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 204-211.

⁸²⁸ Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 6.

⁸²⁹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 357-358.

⁸³⁰ James Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community,” 753.

“This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” articulates the internal struggle the narrator deals with, which comes from the racial trauma he experienced in the American South. I suggest that the novella responds to the arrival of the Black Power movement as a novel attempt to combat the rising White resistance to racial equality. I discuss Paul’s mixed-race heritage as congruous with the (homo)sexuality question Baldwin faced. I suggest that the narrator provides his son with vital insight that the next generation of Black activists must adopt to avoid the shortcomings of more conventional alliances. That Paul is mixed raced and was born in Europe muddies the waters of the movement’s growing communitarianism and challenges prevailing notions of “race” and nationality. I believe that Paul’s transatlantic background offers valuable commentary on race which does not mirror Anglo-American traditions and creates the possibility for unconventional alliances and solutions to fixed relations.

In one scene, the narrator suggests that the US is “a place which very few people have ever seen” but assures the reader that Paul’s “aunt is one of them” who *knows* the country.⁸³¹ The narrator wonders if his success comes from his “wrest[ing] these things from the world by cunning” or “by treason,” a word he defines as his “refusing to be identified with the misery of [his] people.” Furthermore, he suggests that such success may originate from his unconscious integration of the racial ideologies which led him towards self-exile: “Perhaps I identified myself with those who were responsible for this misery.”⁸³² “It is true,” Baldwin writes *in No Name in the Street*, “that political freedom is a matter of power and has nothing to do with morality.”⁸³³ The fact that the narrator self-identifies with American power explains, ironically, his tendency to self-identify with Boona and other Arabs in Paris. He projects on them a neatly framed narrative of power which denies the underlined truth that they share the same intimate

⁸³¹ James Baldwin, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” 866.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, 875.

⁸³³ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 407.

space with their oppressors and that the lines of these categories are not perennial, but rather mutable, since structures of power perpetually evolve to resist opposition.

The narrator's relationship to Boona is important to the storyline's progression. How the narrator self-identifies with French Arabs suggests that he has a limited understanding of France's relationship to race. However, the narrator's conversation with Vidal and the subsequent incident with Boona forces him to face that although he is a victim of American Whiteness, he benefits from the power his American passport yields. The French, he suggests, "leave [him] alone" because he holds an American passport which "allowe[s] [him] to find out who [he is]."⁸³⁴ The narrator's revelation mirrors Baldwin's own experience in France, that he was freer in Paris than in New York. Baldwin's presence in Paris was "dictated by [his] hope that [he] would find [himself] in a place where [he] would be treated more humanely," which the city did "by leaving [him] completely alone."⁸³⁵ That Baldwin discusses the narrator's dubious relationship to American power suggest that the problem of race is more nuanced than previously thought. The fact that Baldwin wrote "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "The Preservation of Innocence" as companion pieces speaks volumes.⁸³⁶ Where the former essay "discusses the image of the African Americans in American literature," the latter work "analyzes representations of the homosexual in American literature."⁸³⁷ Roderick A. Ferguson suggests that "Baldwin's companion pieces symbolized the social contradictions in and reconstructed by the post-World War II era."⁸³⁸ Ferguson's critique involves what he calls "the state's efforts to universalize heterosexual culture and thereby to construct the liberal citizen-subject of the United States as implicitly masculine and heterosexual."⁸³⁹ The Black Power

⁸³⁴ James Baldwin, "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon," 875.

⁸³⁵ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 377.

⁸³⁶ See: Roderick A. Ferguson, "The Parvenu Baldwin and the Other Side of Redemption," *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride.

⁸³⁷ Roderick A. Ferguson, "The Parvenu Baldwin and the Other Side of Redemption," *James Baldwin Now*, 233.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, 234

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*

movement adopted many of the post-WWII norms surrounding gender and sexuality, ultimately reducing homosexuality to a phenomenon of the White bourgeoisie. That homosexuality and miscegenation became synonymous with Black self-hatred demonstrates the movement's regression to familiar racial tropes. Admittedly, sexuality is not mentioned in Baldwin's defense of Stokely, nor does it appear in "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon." However, Baldwin's insistence that "colour and sex are the defining preoccupations of the American mind and [...] of American history"⁸⁴⁰ and that Baldwin chose to include a Black narrator who is married to a White woman suggests that the narrator's anxiety surrounding race is intrinsically connected to sexuality. I posit, therefore, that the narrator's interracial relationship complicates conversations about how his interracial family will be received in the US and challenges the ideological framework of Cleaver's homophobic and anti-miscegenation stance.⁸⁴¹

Cleaver's brand of masculinity embodies the anxiety in his harsh treatment of Baldwin, King and Bayard Rustin as the Uncle Tom figure who acquiesced to a history of miscegenation "that the white man, through his access to black women, has been pumping his blood and genes

⁸⁴⁰ As quoted in Roderick A. Ferguson, "The Parvenu Baldwin and the Other Side of Redemption," *James Baldwin Now*, 234; James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 72.

⁸⁴¹ The appearance of Huey P. Newton's 1970 letter in *The Black Panther* advocates for a coalition between the Black Panther Party, the Women's Liberation Movement and the emerging Gay Liberation Movement, condemning what he observes was the rampant homophobia in revolutionary circles and suggests that homosexuals "might be the most oppressed people in society." Newton advocates for a total rejection of a "revolutionary value system" which oppressed people who identify as "gay" or "homosexual," because their oppression ensured Black subjugation. Huey's letter is groundbreaking, because it was a black civil rights organization's first Black explicit support for homosexuals which likened their oppression to the Black experience. Whether intentional or not, Huey responds to Cleaver's 1968 attack on Black homosexuals, in general, and Baldwin, specifically when he urges BBP members to "remov[e] derogatory terms against homosexuals from their vocabulary." Of further interest, is Newton's support of the Women's Liberation Movement, which displays the activist's intersectional understanding of social oppression; see: Huey P. Newton, "A Letter from Huey to the revolutionary brothers and sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," *The Black Panther*, (August 21, 1970), 5; Ronald K. Porter, "A Rainbow in Black: The Gay Politics of the Black Panther Party, Counter points: Sexualities in Education, a Reader, vol. 367 (2012), 364-375.

into the blacks [...]”⁸⁴² Baldwin’s rejection of Mailer’s *The White Negro* and his criticisms of Black African and Black Caribbean artists in “Princes and Powers” appear to support Cleaver’s assessment of an agonizing self-hatred, which Cleaver likens to a “sycophantic love of the whites.”⁸⁴³ Cleaver suggests that Baldwin’s love of Whites comes from a heritage of Blacks’ rejecting the physical traits of their African heritage:

Quite simply, many Negroes believe, as the principle of assimilation into white America implies, that the race problem in America cannot be settled until all traces of the black race are eliminated. Toward this end, many Negroes loathe the very idea of two very dark Negroes mating. The children, they say, will come out ugly. What they mean is that the children are sure to be black, and this is not desirable.⁸⁴⁴

Admittedly, Cleaver’s argument on the rampant presence of colorism in the Black community is warranted. For example, Rosa Parks was handpicked by the NAACP to be the figurehead of the movement, in large part because of her light skin and age, which Civil Rights Movement strategists hoped would make White audiences sympathize with her more. That Parks was chosen over Claudette Colvin, 15 years old and dark skinned, who originally refused to give up her seat on a crowded bus on March 2nd, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, seems to lend credence to Cleaver’s assertion. In *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) Baldwin furthers his analysis of ideological trappings such as Christianity, class and masculinity to include colorism as represented in Mrs. Hunt’s (Fonny’s mother) mistreatment of her darker skinned son, her husband Joe and Tish, Fonny’s dark-skinned girlfriend. Baldwin demonstrates that including colorism to form an ideological consciousness creates a slippery slope. “And yet Baldwin knew,” Eddie S. Glaude writes, “that the ideological focus on Blackness and separatism by some within the Black Power movement represented its own kind of trap.” Glaude continues, “The Panthers may have escaped this particular problem with their commitment to cross-racial

⁸⁴² Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, 101; For more information on Baldwin and the Black Power Movement, see: Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., “The Reckoning,” *Begin Again* (New York: Random House, 2020) 84-106.

⁸⁴³ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, 101.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

politics, but Baldwin worried that their rejection of the moral underpinnings of the fight set them up for failure as well.”⁸⁴⁵

Glaude’s observation comes from his assessment that “[p]ower was at the heart of the matter, the Panthers maintained, and power should be pursued, morality be damned. Who controlled government, who controlled the economy, who controlled and dictated the prospects of our futures—that was all that mattered. Moral appeals like Dr. King’s only distracted from that fact and from the need for the wretched of the earth, with the Black Panther Party as the vanguard, to overthrow it all.”⁸⁴⁶ The Panthers—as well as the wider Black Power movement—adopted a Black nationalist stance, rooted in the White patriarchal system from which they fought to free themselves. In Cleaver’s world, Glaude notes, “the villains were clear and distinct, and its heroes looked a lot like themselves [Black].” Therefore, “Baldwin’s inclusion among the image of ‘bootlickers’ reflected [...] their refusal—or, more specifically [...] Cleaver’s refusal—to see the complexity of Baldwin’s view of race and the true nature of his quarrel with America.”⁸⁴⁷ Paradoxically, Baldwin and Cleaver’s conceptions of Black Power are strikingly similar, given Cleaver’s clear rejection of Baldwin’s artistic and journalistic methods. Already in May 1966, Baldwin envisioned “a lecture tour [of the US] translating between the generations and [...] pointing out options for action that were less self-defeating and delusional” than the Civil Rights Movement.⁸⁴⁸ Baldwin wonders “how the justification of blatant and mindless tyranny [...] could operate in the interests of liberty, and [...] what interior, unspoken urgencies of these people made necessary so thoroughly unattractive a delusion.”⁸⁴⁹ The narrator, like the young Baldwin, lived amongst a group of American

⁸⁴⁵ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Begin Again*, 86.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁴⁸ Ed Pavlic, “Nonviolence, Black Power, and ‘the Citizens of Pompeii’: James Baldwin’s 1968,” 33.

⁸⁴⁹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 372-373.

expatriates—or what he calls the “American colony”—who were sheltered from “what was going on around [them].”⁸⁵⁰

“This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” continue[s] to examine questions of American identity and history, railed against the traps of categories that narrowed our frames of reference, insisted that we reject the comfort and illusion of safety that the country’s myths offered, and struggled mightily with the delicate balance between his advocacy and his art.”⁸⁵¹ The narrator’s anxiety about returning to the US exemplifies the nuanced approaches with which Baldwin treats the subject of identity categorization. Rather, the narrator’s family does not fit neatly within the American frame of reference. Paul is neither Black nor White. He is American but his Frenchness makes him utterly un-American, as shown in his inability to understand American expressions. Harriet is a White woman, which will offer her the same treacherous freedom as Hella in *Giovanni’s Room* and Case in *Another Country* who “are so swiftly confronted with the reality of men” and “must accommodate this indispensable creature, who is, in so many ways, more fragile than a woman.”⁸⁵² Although Harriet is White, she is not American and, therefore, does not yet *know* America, “[does] not know what techniques their cruelty [takes], [does] not know enough about their personalities to see danger coming, to ward it off, [does] not know on what ground to meet it.”⁸⁵³ Therefore, where do Paul and Harriet fit in America’s obsession with racial categorization?

Baldwin offers a sober reminder to the new generations of Black militants that the immorality of racism must not be sidestepped for the pursuit of power. Indeed, the narrator mirrors Baldwin’s own hesitation to return to the US in the 1950’s. Baldwin approaches Carmichael as a surrogate son, worrying about the trajectory of his life, safety and the principles

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 375.

⁸⁵¹ Eddie S. Glaude, *Begin Again*, 91.

⁸⁵² James Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*,

⁸⁵³ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 106.

he must adopt to avoid being destroyed by the “heedless population.” He must reject the temptation of retreating into identities that alienate him from himself more than it liberates him from the source of his oppression. This phenomenon of articulating Black as superior or equal to White serves only to reinforce racism’s original sin, that one person *can be* inherently superior to another. In such a case, Black Nationalism demands what Baldwin calls, “‘black’ capitalism—a concept demanding yet more faith and infinitely more in schizophrenia than the concept of the Virgin Birth.”⁸⁵⁴ In other words, Carmichael and other activists must not search for freedom from the same racial ideologies that imprison them. “I am very much concerned,” Baldwin writes, “that American Negroes achieve their freedom here in the United States. But I am also concerned for their dignity, for the health of their souls, and must oppose any attempt that Negroes may make to do to others what has been done to them.”⁸⁵⁵ Baldwin’s short story approaches the narrator’s opportunity to star in an American film as a moral question, revealing that “[t]he habits of public rage and power would have also been [his] private compulsions, and would have blinded [his] eyes”⁸⁵⁶ had he stayed in the US.

Whether accepting the movie role betrays his reasons for leaving the US is as much a moral question as a question of physical safety. The Statue of Liberty, which encompasses the beauty and pain of American history, “had always been an ugly joke for [him]”⁸⁵⁷ Like his father, he had been despised, a fact which alienated him from his father. However, his father’s love for his son gave him the strength to bear the weight of racial prejudice. The narrator observes:

[...] I did not want my son ever to feel toward me as I had felt toward my own father. He had died when I was eleven, but I had watched the humiliations he had to bear, and I had pitied him. But was there not, in that pity, however painfully and unwillingly, also some contempt? For how could I know what he had borne? I knew only that I was his son. However he had loved me, whatever he had borne, I, his son, was despised. Even had he lived, he could have done

⁸⁵⁴ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 382.

⁸⁵⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 334.

⁸⁵⁶ James Baldwin, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” 869.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 880.

nothing to fervent it, nothing to protect me. The best that he could hope to do was to prepare me for it; and even at that he had failed.⁸⁵⁸

Once again, Baldwin uses biblical references to provide insight on White racism's impact on Black family relations. Isaiah 53:3 reads: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."⁸⁵⁹ The biblical reference warns against the ostracization of those who suffer in life, who grieve or who experience hardships. Furthermore, the narrator's father is a metaphor for Baldwin and the Civil Rights leaders whose sacrifices were paid with humiliation, despite the concessions they made in the name of brotherly love. Like the narrator, the sons and daughters of the Movement—whom Baldwin calls the "unforgiving children"⁸⁶⁰—held contempt for having given so much and having received little in return. Although the narrator's offer of a movie role propels his return home, his acceptance of the offer articulates an evolution in how his perception of the Civil Rights Movement moves from a "failing [...] possibility of a general overturn"⁸⁶¹ to liberatory. Paul is the inheritor of his parents' experiences and will have to look to the teachings they offer, to avoid the trappings of racial ideology. Carmichael, Eldridge and the other leaders of newly forming movements must face, like Paul, that to be true to themselves, they must reject the temptation to overlook that "people are one mystery and that the person is another."⁸⁶² We must endeavor to articulate the value of a human life out of the social sphere. In doing so, we come closer to understanding how far we have come and how far we still must go. Revolutions are mute if they do not recognize the conundrum, beauty and terror that is human life. Baldwin frames this as a global concern and the first step to creating a "world community."

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 888.

⁸⁵⁹ *The Holy Bible*, Isaiah 53: 3.

⁸⁶⁰ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 457.

⁸⁶¹ James Baldwin, "The Negro at Home and Abroad," 603.

⁸⁶² James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 459.

How might we interpret what Baldwin calls, “World community”? In his address to the World Christian Council, Baldwin defines the concept in religious terms. In his definition, Baldwin subverts how the Christian audience thinks of itself in relation to the religious beliefs that govern how they perceive their role in the world. Baldwin observes:

[...] If it is possible, if there is enough leaven in the loaf, to cause us to discard our actual and historical habits, to cause us to take our places with that criminal Jew, for He was a criminal, who was put to death by Rome between two thieves, because He claimed to be the Son of God. That claim was a revelation and a revolution because it means that we are all the sons of God. That is a challenge, that’s the hope. It is only by attempting to face that challenge that one can begin to expand and transform God’s nature which has to be forever an act of creation on the part of every human.⁸⁶³

“World community” signifies a political and spiritual engagement to what Baldwin defines as the truth in “Everybody’s Protest Novel”: “Let us say, then, that the truth [...] is a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment.” That the story of the Christ spurred two of the world’s largest religions (Christianity and Islam) explains Baldwin’s use of Jesus as a metaphor for the existential commitment he describes as “criminal.” Baldwin articulates that Christianity as a prominent network of power and influence should have a shared transatlantic engagement to fighting for the self-determination that the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power movement advocated. Baldwin once said that “[Carmichael] is only insisting that he is present only once on this earth as a man, not as a creation.”⁸⁶⁴ Baldwin supported transnational cooperation, which Field reminds us “Baldwin repeatedly questions [...]”⁸⁶⁵ Field writes: “If Baldwin’s essays about black internationalism articulated what we might call a political aesthetic of difference, his fictional writing about Paris seems on the surface to be unconcerned about black transnational culture.”⁸⁶⁶ Baldwin’s novella describes how the narrator sees himself as a transatlantic Subject who learns to grow beyond his minority status, to accept his

⁸⁶³ James Baldwin,

⁸⁶⁴ James Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community,” 753.

⁸⁶⁵ Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers*, 118.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

status as “criminal” to revolutionize the West and the rest of the world. As transatlantic Subjects, Paul and the narrator offer insight into the global impact of White racism. Baldwin writes them as bridges between the US and the rest of the world. We can imagine that in adulthood Paul will teach his children about his experience in Paris and the culture of his Swedish mother. African American activists must see themselves in similar terms, as an amalgamation of cultures. It is in this complexity of a more nuanced history that claims of hegemony can be resisted. Therefore, Baldwin, the narrator and Paul are the key to freeing the US by their mere existence. The next step is to organize and say yes to the endless possibilities of human existence. “This is why one must say Yes to life and embrace it,” Baldwin observes, “wherever it is found-and it is found in terrible places; nevertheless, there it is: and if the father can say, Yes, Lord, the child can learn that most difficult of words, *Amen*.”⁸⁶⁷ In the last section of this thesis, I discuss Baldwin’s “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” alongside Nabile Farès’s *Un Passager de l’Occident* (1971), suggesting that the two works articulate how the transatlantic commuter must conjure experiences of trauma to build revolutionary networks to improve the world.

⁸⁶⁷ James Baldwin, 705.

4.4 Transatlantic Commuters

Few Baldwinian scholars have given to Algerian writer Nabile Farès's (1940-2016) *Un passage de L'Occident*⁸⁶⁸ (1971), in which the writer reimagines his 1970 interview with James Baldwin for *Jeune Afrique* magazine. Farès transforms his conversation with Baldwin into an account that compares his own self-exile from Algeria to Baldwin's escape to Paris. Farès's novel begins with journalist Brady Fax interviewing an American writer named "Caldwin." Indeed, the writer in question is the older Baldwin, whom Farès's main character admits deserves to be named: "on n'a pas le droit de transformer des Baldwin en Caldwell, surtout lorsque les Baldwin n'ont, pour eux-mêmes, jamais su d'où venait leur nom."⁸⁶⁹ After receiving the news that he will be interviewing Baldwin, Fax searches for his copy of *The Fire Next Time*: "Des couvertures de livres bougeaient devant mes yeux. Mais, je m'aperçus très vite que La prochaine fois, le feu n'était pas une étagère mais dans une caisse Hoi Sin Sauce en provenance du Viêt-Nam via les Etats-Unis et l'épicerie qui se trouve en bas des quatre étages de l'immeuble où je loge n'est la destination finale."⁸⁷⁰ The spatial displacement of Baldwin's book, going from the US to Vietnam to Brady's room in Paris is a metaphor Farès uses to explore Baldwin's philosophy of "world community," which I understand to mean a global commitment to supporting "the self-determination of a people."⁸⁷¹

I discuss Baldwin's appearance in Farès's *Un Passager de L'Occident*, because I believe that the authors complement each other, as both describe the experience of expatriation

⁸⁶⁸ *A Passenger from the West*; There is a 2010 English translation of the book. See: Nabile Farès, *A Passenger from the West*, trans. Peter Thompson (New Orleans: Uno Press, 2010 [1971]).

⁸⁶⁹ All translation of Farès's novel are my own: "we have no right to transform Baldwins into Caldwell, especially when the Baldwins themselves never knew where their name came from."; Nabile Farès, *Un passager de L'Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 12.

⁸⁷⁰ "Book covers moved before my eyes. But, I realized very quickly that *The Fire Next Time* was not on a shelf but in a case of Hoi Sin Sauce from Vietnam via the United States and the grocery store, at the bottom of the four floors building where I live, is not the final destination."; *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁷¹ James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community," *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998 [1955]), 753.

of their protagonists to nuance discussions on African Americans building the ideological bridge between the West and the postcolonial world. Admittedly, this section is short, and Farès's treatment of Baldwin deserves further consideration. That said, I believe that an assessment of how the authors' respective stories articulate a global sensibility to the effects of White dominance on their characters offers a suitable conclusion to this project. Like their protagonists, Baldwin and Farès's experiences as expatriates in Paris differ, because their historical relationship to France (and the West) and the French means that they are raced in distinct ways. However, the writers' expatriate sensibilities suggest a kinship that I argue supports Baldwin's "world community" as an alternative to White power. Concurrently, Farès's novel illustrates a shared understanding of the artist as a witness to how national myths create apathy towards human suffering. Presently, I offer an overview of recent scholarship which discusses transatlantic cooperation between African Americans and other peoples of color to combat what Magdalena J. Zaborowska calls "global racism"⁸⁷² during the Civil Rights and Black Power era. Admittedly, the research I present is not exhaustive. However, I believe that an overview of recent scholarship supports my argument that Baldwin and Farès's writing articulates a mutual commitment to the liberatory project of the writers.

Below I highlight two texts which I believe discuss genuine attempts at creating a global community which rejects epistemic privilege and racial inequality. Rychetta Watkins's *Black Power, Yellow Power* (2012) and Nico Slate's *Black Power Beyond Borders: the Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (2012) stand out for their exceptional analyses of domestic movements against the power of White determinism. The past decade has seen increased interest in the interethnic partnerships between the different social, political and

⁸⁷² Magdalena J. Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), 17.

artistic movements which worked in conjunction with Civil Rights efforts to obtain the political, economic, social emancipation of peoples of color.

In *Black Power, Yellow Power*, Rychetta Watkins focuses on African Americans and Asian Americans during the Civil Rights era, suggesting that research on the groups often focuses on a “presumed longstanding antagonism.”⁸⁷³ However, Watkins searches to create “an indigenous American comparative ethnic cultural studies,”⁸⁷⁴ which contributes to our understanding of cross-Atlantic, anti-imperialism and anticolonization collaborations these groups contributed to. Her book investigates “how the ‘internal colony’ critique linked Black Power to contemporaneous anti-imperialist struggles, to a prior history of anticolonial struggle, and to the struggles of other ethnic groups against oppression and repression within the United States.”⁸⁷⁵ Watkins looks to “Black Cultural Studies, AfroAsian Studies, and New Black Power Studies,” offering a comparative approach to “how African Americans and Asian Americans adapted the concept of the ‘internal colony’ to explain the sociocultural legacies of American-style colonialism in their communities and how the ‘internal colony’ informs [...] analyses of black and Asian subjectivity in America.”⁸⁷⁶

In the collection *Black Power Beyond Borders*, Nico Slate argues that when analyzing the appearance of Black Power rhetoric abroad, it is far too easy to reduce it to “an overseas diffusion of an American Movement.”⁸⁷⁷ Rather, in order to understand the Black Power Movement as fundamentally a fight against White Power, we must recognize that the story is “interwoven, at times fraught,” with diverging ideologies which take into consideration a

⁸⁷³ Rychetta Watkins, *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities* (Jacksonville: The University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 7.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁷ Nico Slate, “Introduction: The Borders of Black Power,” *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Nico Slate (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

multitude of perspectives that go beyond American borders.⁸⁷⁸ The collection includes sections which range from rethinking the origins of Black Power to the international influence and presence of the Black Panthers. Furthermore, it offers enriching essays that highlight how thinkers, activists and movements outside the US helped contribute to domestic efforts. Of particular interest is Oz Frankel's "The Black Panthers of Israel and the Politics of the Radical Analogy" discuss the not-so-well-known history of the Israeli Black Panthers, mostly Sephardic Jews (of North African or Middle Eastern descent) to highlight "the imperial dynamics of American commerce and culture" to contextualize "the late 1960s moment of world-encompassing oppositional outbreaks"⁸⁷⁹ against Western interests. These texts highlight the domestic and international cooperation between political activists who shared the mutual philosophy of self-determination. However, similar networks of artist-activists developed in conjunction with the political activism that has defined the period. One such network was *Le Congrès des écrivains et artistes Noirs* (The Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists) that Baldwin discusses in *Nobody Knows My Name*.

During the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin was still in Paris. On September 19th, 1956, the writer attended *Le Congrès des écrivains et artistes Noirs*, which assembled some of the African diaspora's most well-known writers and thinkers at the University of la Sorbonne. The main purpose of the conference was "to define and accept their responsibilities, to assess the riches and the promise of their cultures, and to open, in effect, a dialogue with Europe."⁸⁸⁰ Among the many speakers and attendees was poet Léopold Senghor from Senegal; poet Aimé Césaire from Martinique; poet and novelist Jacques Alexi from Haiti; American writer Richard Wright; Alioune Diop, the conference organizer and editor of

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁹ Oz Frankel, "The Black Panthers of Israel and the Politics of the Radical Analogy," *Black Power Beyond Borders*, 82.

⁸⁸⁰ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers," 145.

Présence Africaine. In its spirit and ideology, the Paris conference was a continuation of the 1955 conference of nonaligned nations in Bandung, Indonesia, which was designed to promote Asian-African relations, through political and economic cooperation. If the Bandung conference focused on the political implications Asian-African cooperation could have on the emerging, newly liberated continents, the Paris conference questioned the role and responsibility of artists and intellectuals from the African diaspora to uplift their marginalized peoples who could now define their destinies. Baldwin writes:

As at Bandung, people gathered together [at *Le Congrès des écrivains et artistes Noirs*] held in common the fact of their subjugation to Europe, or, at the very least, to the European vision of the world. Out of the fact that European well-being had been, for centuries, so crucially dependent on this subjugation had come that *racisme* from which all black men suffered.⁸⁸¹

Like the Civil Rights Movement, the people represented at both the Bandung conference and the *Congrès* at the Sorbonne, wanted the freedom and democracy that European countries, and their colonial subjects, fought for during WWII. However, the Civil Rights Movement and the rising revolutions in former colonized territories in Africa and Asia were interrelated by the nature of their fairly similar, political aims and ideological and tactical influences that many of the territories mutually adopted:

[...] inspired in part by the historic 1955 meeting of nonaligned nations in Bandung, Indonesia—mostly former colonies that set out on a path independent of American or Soviet influence—African-American radicals were genuinely excited by the possibility of allies in the Third World who might support their own local movements. Some heard the idea of a black American alliance with the nonaligned world in young Malcolm X, who gave a speech as early as 1954 comparing the situation in Vietnam with that of the Mau Mau rebellion in colonial Kenya.⁸⁸²

These international movements and rebellions are an intricate part in Baldwin's oeuvre, as the writer incorporates not only a cross-cultural understanding of Whiteness but also invests in the global fight for self-determination and against the seemingly impenetrable force of European and Anglo-American power. For example, the Mau Mau uprising (1952-1960) in Kenya

⁸⁸¹ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers," 144.

⁸⁸² Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 63.

against British rule was accompanied by artistic representations of sovereignty, reclaiming the cultural identities and humanity of peoples reduced to what Joseph Conrad refers to as the “dark beasts” in *The Heart of Darkness* (1899). Over fifty years later, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) challenges the hegemonic vision of Conrad’s ominous, dark figures, shining a needed light on the intricate lives of the Igo people in Nigeria. The writer sets the novel in the pre-colonial village of Umuofia, highlighting the richness, diversity, but also the pitfalls of the clan’s culture and traditions. During the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), the writings of such artists as Mouloud Feraoun and Nabile Farès offered nuanced description of being a colonized Subject and treated such themes as the cultural alienation of self-exile and nomadism.

During Brady Fax’s Baldwin interview in *Un Passager de l’Occident*, the protagonist gives Baldwin his first novel, writing a personal inscription. Baldwin realizes that Brady is a writer and Algerian. He asks about Algeria. This moment singles the spark of their relationship as fellow artists who have left their homes, self-exiles who search, as Fax says, “le moindre petite flamme.”⁸⁸³ Brady’s note reads: “A James Baldwin dont la sincérité d’écriture provoque des réconforts.”⁸⁸⁴ The revelation that Brandy is a fellow writer sparks a dialectic inquiry into the importance of exile and remembrance. Baldwin discusses his initial departure from New York and the difficulty he faced returning to the US to partake in the Civil Rights Movement. Baldwin expresses a certain bitterness, having spent thirteen years in the US, just to witness the death of his friends. As Baldwin speaks, Farès remembers his own trauma during the Algerian War:

La dernière phrase s’arrêta sur les lèvres de Baldwin, évolua vers moi, m’assomma, me ballotta, m’emplit d’une douleur indescriptible, comme si brusquement, je revoyais A’moura (c’était son

⁸⁸³ Nabile Farès, *Un Passager de L’Occident*, 24.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

nom) mourir devant la porte du gourbi où nous vivions, en forêt, pendant cette putain de guerre d'Algérie.⁸⁸⁵

To suggest that Farès includes Baldwin in his novel to make a simple comparison of their similar situations would be reductive. Baldwin is (African) American, a status which offers him more freedom in France. Farès is Kabyle from a war-torn Algeria, who lives in Paris and travels between the US, France, Spain and Algeria, searching for something. He does not know what it is and does not know how to find it. Indeed, it would be reductive to suggest that a simple comparison of their situations as minority Subjects would suffice to understand their roles as artists. Rather, Farès and Baldwin's respective works seek to describe the essence of life: "The artistic image is not intended to represent the thing itself, but, rather, the reality of the force the thing contains."⁸⁸⁶

As an example, I offer an excerpt from Farès's novel where Brady interviews Baldwin. Brady discusses his interest in *Another Country*, wondering why Baldwin did not make the novel a short story. The question surprises Baldwin. However, the two writers engage in a discussion:

"Vous êtes certainement un grand écrivain, et c'est pour cela que je vous demande, et que je me demande, si *le Voyageur insouciant* n'aurait pas gagné à être écrit en nouvelle.

Oui. Je vois ce que tu veux dire. Mais, tout d'abord on se tutoie."

Trois cigarettes s'allument sur trois whiskies eau plate et une poignée d'olives. Certaines fois, comme en ce moment, il y a des sourires qui valent bien la Méditerranée sur les oursins. "On se tutoie."

"Je vois ce que tu veux dire. Mais j'ai voulu aller plus loin qu'une nouvelle, écrire un roman. La mort de Rufus, de Rufus Scott, c'est celle de l'homme noir aux Etats-Unis. Toute la société américaine est construite sur la mort de l'homme noir [...] C'est cela que j'ai voulu dire [...] Et montrer [...] Le suicide de Rufus est le meurtre américain [...] mais personne n'a rien compris, sauf Ida, et mes frères...La rivière où se suicide Rufus est l'eau sale de toute la société américaine [...] C'est sa nature de marécage [...] Et ce marécage est le mort noir."

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 29; "The last sentence stopped on Baldwin's lips, shifted toward me, hit me, tossed me around, filled me with an indescribable pain, as if suddenly, I saw A'moura (that was her name) die in front of the cabin door where we lived, in the forest, during that damn Algerian War."

⁸⁸⁶ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 150.

[...]

“La vie américaine est empoisonnée par la mort d’un enfant noir [...] et cette mort est un poison, parce qu’elle n’est pas reconnue comme telle par les Etats-Unis.”⁸⁸⁷

“You are certainly a great writer, and that’s why I’m asking you, and wondering myself, if *Another Country* wouldn’t have benefited from being written as a short story.

Yes, I see what you mean. But first, let’s use the informal ‘tu.’

Three cigarettes light up, along with three whiskies on the rocks and a handful of olives. Sometimes, like right now, there are smiles worth more than the Mediterranean filled with sea urchins. “Let’s use ‘tu.’”

“I see what you mean. But I wanted to go further than a short story, to write a novel. Rufus’s death, Rufus Scott’s death, is that of the black man in the United States. The entire American society is built on the death of the black man [...] That’s what I wanted to say [...] and show [...] Rufus’s suicide is the American murder [...] but nobody understood except Ida and my brothers [...] The river where Rufus commits suicide is the filthy water of the entire American society [...] It’s its marshy nature [...] And this marsh is the black man’s death.”

[...]

“American life is poisoned by the death of a black child [...] and this death is a poison because it is not recognized as such by the United States.”

In response to Baldwin’s poignant answer, Brady insists that *Another Country* would have been more powerful and better received by critics if it had been what Brady calls less “romanesque”⁸⁸⁸ Brady views Baldwin’s novel as a manifesto of Black solidarity that Brady shares and relates to, because Baldwin refuses to describe his characters in social terms. He writes them as human beings who are in a sort of machine, trying to make it out alive. This scene sets the stage for most of Farès’s novel.

Farès sees Baldwin twice for the interview. They discuss Baldwin’s *Tell me how Long the Train Has Been Gone*, what led the writer to come to France and his relationship with his mother. However, the chapters Farès dedicates to Brady’s relationship with Conchita, a Spanish woman he meets in Paris, describes the force of life Baldwin illustrates in his work. In an interesting scene, Brady and Conchita travel to Cangas, Spain. The two lovers go to a bar for

⁸⁸⁷ Nabile Farès, *Un passager de l’Occident*, 24

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

dinner. As they sit, Conchita hears music playing from the street and runs to partake in the festivities. Brady decides to stay. When she returns, the two get into a fight, because Brady suggests that she stays outside to have fun. Conchita responds: “Mais je suis avec toi.” The Spaniard takes Brady’s question negatively, thinking that he is rejecting her. Brady attempts to comfort her but only worsens the situation:

“Vraiment Conchita, c’est trop facile de rester avec moi, parce que tu es avec moi. Tu peux faire ce que tu veux, et je comprends parfaitement que tu veuilles faire ce que tu veux.” “Mais non, je ne comprends pas. En Espagne, cela se fait. Le soir, tout le monde se rencontre.” Je regardai le bar où buvaient et mangeaient les pêcheurs, pensai aux rues du village de Cangas, oubliai que je ne parlais que depuis peu (si peu) “espagnole” et me servis, à même la carafe de deux pêcheurs qui dégustaient sure le comptoir des poisons gris-frais, un verre de blanc. “Conchita, c’est ton pays. Amuse-Toi comme tu veux, moi, je m’en fous, je regarde. Mais, si tu me dis que tu restes avec moi, parce que tu es avec moi, non, ça n’existe pas. On reste parce qu’on reste, sinon, on s’en va.” Et je payai 34 pesetas (poisons, verre de vin, et Bouteille de blanc qui ne souffrait aucune hésitation.”⁸⁸⁹

Really, Conchita, it’s too easy for you to stay with me just because you’re with me. You can do whatever you want, and I perfectly understand that you want to do what you want.” “But no, I don’t understand. In Spain, that’s how it’s done. In the evening, everyone meets up.” I looked at the bar where the fishermen were drinking and eating, thought about the streets of the village of Cangas, forgot that I only spoke a little (very little) “Spanish” and helped myself, straight from the water pitcher of two fishermen who were savoring fresh gray fish and a glass of white wine at the counter.” Conchita, it’s your country. Have fun as you wish, I don’t care, I’m just watching. But if you tell me you’re staying with me just because you’re with me, no, that doesn’t exist. You stay because you want to stay; otherwise, you leave.” And I paid 34 pesetas (fish, glass of wine, and a bottle of white that left no room for hesitation).

Baldwin’s narrator in “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” and Farès’s protagonist Brady Fax fear the love of their respective partners, because they believe they will lose it. Baldwin’s narrator is afraid of returning to the US, because he thinks American racism will destroy his family. Brady is afraid that Conchita will one day leave him, so he protects himself from being hurt. However, the moment he begins to protect himself from experience, he starts pushing away the woman he loves. Brady regrets having made Conchita feel that her feelings were not mutual. The two eventually part was, and Brady travels through Spain, France and the US still with Conchita on his mind. Where Brady allows fear to influence his decisions, Baldwin’s narrator accepts the possibility of being hurt. He is able to do so, because he has learned to

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 97.

make useful his pain. He has used pain to succeed in his career and makes stronger his family relationships.

Farès's character prefers to observe life around him, instead of partaking in it. He watches the people around him laugh and dance, but hesitates to laugh and dance, himself. One reason might be the death of his friend A'moura which traumatizes him. Readers can imagine that, like Baldwin's narrator, he is afraid to return to familiarity. In Baldwin's novella, the familiar is described as the US. However, for Brady it appears that traveling, self-exiling himself repeatedly, helps him deal with the memory of home. Displacement perpetuates the unfamiliar and allows the character to avoid personal attachment, as illustrated in his harsh words to his girlfriend. In "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon," Baldwin's narrator eventually faces his fears. He stops running away from the past and learns to improve the life of Louise, Harriet and Paul.

It is the potential of experience that Farès and Baldwin make central to their work. The dialogue between the two writers describes an equal partnership between two artists who attempt to describe the force of life in their works. That Baldwin asks Brady to speak to him as a peer—or a friend—who has traveled the difficult road that many artists must face is a metaphor for the transatlantic aesthetic Baldwin articulates in his work. Baldwin does not ask readers to compare peoples' oppression. Rather, he asks that we not be afraid of experience or hide from it. He asks that we learn from our pain and figure out how that pain helps us better understand the Other. In *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin describes the peril of the writer and the revolutionary as forgetting the people they work in service to protect:

It is a pity that we won't, probably ever have the time to attempt to define once more the relationship of the old and disreputable artist to the odd and disreputable revolutionary; for the revolutionary, however odd, is rarely disreputable in the same way that an artist can be. These two seem doomed to stand forever at an odd and rather uncomfortable angle to each other, and they both stand at a sharp and not always comfortable angle to the people they both, in their different fashions, hope to serve. But I think that it is just as well to remember that the people are one mystery and that the person is another. Though I know what a very bitter and delicate and dangerous conundrum this is, it yet seems to me that a failure to respect the person so

dangerously limits one's perception of the people that one risks betraying them and oneself, either by sinking to the apathy of cynical disappointment, or rising to the rage of knowing, better than the people do, what the people want.⁸⁹⁰

I wonder what Farès needed to know about Algeria and Algerians and himself that led him to Baldwin's *Another Country*, what fears he wished to face. That Farès acknowledges the cultural sensibilities surrounding (homo)sexuality might make inaccessible Baldwin's words to many of his countrywomen and countrymen, speaks to a fundamental understanding of Baldwin as an artist-revolutionary whose musings on the White World have something to offer him, on the other side of the Atlantic. Farès does not speak for his people, but on their behalf, an important distinction the authors make to avoid "betraying" those for whom they fight and, thus, avoid "sinking to the apathy of cynical disappointment" artists risk when their vision of a people is divorced from lived experience. Like Baldwin, Farès envisions his status as a minority in terms of political power, suggesting that power and dominance are not just part of the minority/majority experience, but a human condition which needs to be assessed to understand our need for them..⁸⁹¹

⁸⁹⁰ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 459-460.

⁸⁹¹ Réda Bensmaïa and Jennifer Curtiss Gage, "The Exiles of Nabile Farès : Or, How to Become a Minority," *Yale French Studies*, no. 83 (1993), 44-70.

Conclusion

James Baldwin's legacy is riddled with many of the issues he discusses in his writing. His brilliance is either evoked in times of racial unrest, or he is viewed as an LGBTQ+ activist. However, Baldwin's reluctance to actively participate in the political movement that took place after the Stonewall riots makes difficult any claims to political affiliation. Baldwin once said that White homosexuals were fighting for their rights as White and not as human beings. Those who are closest to power, without benefiting from it, are those who fight to obtain it the most. The temptation of power is seductive. Take the film *Stonewall* (2015), for example, which offers a dramatized reinterpretation of the events surrounding the riot. The film introduces Danny Winters as the protagonist. The audience learns that Danny is from the Midwest and hopes to find sexual freedom in New York City. Danny is present the night Marsh P. Johnson is purported to have begun the riot. However, Johnson does not figure in the film. Rather, Danny is the central figure, and the few people of color present revolve around his innocent existence. His love interest in the film is Ray a young Puerto Rican who tests the boundaries of gender norms, by wearing makeup and women's clothing. The audience is told that Ray is Puerto Rican, however, because, if not, it would be easy to mistake him for (American) White. *Stonewall* is riddled with many problems. However, the most obvious one is the Western tradition of White washing. If only some director Roland Emmerich had read *The Devil Finds Work!*

Baldwin's writings often present the same themes: how his characters deal with their existence and how their actions either promote moral growth or provoke stagnation. Baldwin's largest contribution to Critical Whiteness Studies is his recognition of humanity. Humanity describes the beauty and ugliness that lives in every human being, and no social category, no religion or political stance can change this simple fact. There are no monsters. There are only

animals and humans. Thus, Baldwin's early fiction demonstrates his refusal to abandon his fellow countrymen to the delusion of safety categorization offers. Far from condescension or infantilization, he urges White America to wake up to the self-destructive cultural practices that have made their way into the American way of life. It is only by assessing how one practices these traditions in public and private spaces that the US will achieve becoming an advocate of freedom and democracy.

In the art world, Baldwin's writings have inspired such works as *A la Place du Coeur* (1998), a French adaptation of *If Beale Street Could Talk*; Algerian writer Nabile Farès's *Un Passager de L'Occident* (1971), in which Farès dramatizes his 1970 interview with Baldwin for magazine *Jeune Afrique*; Alain Mabanckou's memoir *Lettre à Jimmy* (2007) in which the writer muses over the personal significance Baldwin's childhood and adult life has had on his own; Canadian writer Mélikeah Abdelmoumen's *Baldwin, Styrone et Moi* (2022) discusses how Baldwin and William Styron's friendship helped mend her own competing feelings of isolation, belonging and self-exile. Of course, Raoul Peck's 2016 documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* renewed worldwide attention to Baldwin as a figurehead of the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrated the writer's continued value to contemporary issues surrounding our human complexity, and Barry Jenkins' film *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2018) has arguably paved the way for a rumored biopic starring Billy Porter.

In *Begin Again*, Eddie S. Glaude Jr. is inspired by Baldwin to advise the US on how to confront supporters of Trumpism in the 21st century:

Baldwin came to understand that there were some white people in America who refused to give up their commitment to the value gap. For him, we could not predicate our politics on changing their minds and souls. They had to do that for themselves. In our after times, our task, then, is not to save Trump voters—it isn't to convince them to give up their views that white people ought to matter more than others. Our task is to build a world where such a view has no place or quarter to breathe.⁸⁹²

⁸⁹² Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Begin Again*, 147.

Baldwin does not attempt to change the minds of people. Rather, he hopes to open a discussion on the political possibilities that America rejects for limiting social categories. When Baldwin says that people must embrace their humanity, he means that they must cease believing that the human being is essentially good, or good-willed, or naturally moving towards a more equitable future. Humanity is a myriad of riddles and complexities which hurt people and make people hurt others. However, empathy stems from our ability to recognize one's own pain in another. In this sense, pain has the potential to create bridges of understanding and meaning across cultures, because all people experience birth, pain, suffering and death. Therefore, Baldwin suggests "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 our country, and change the history of the world."⁸⁹³ Therefore, the US must forego trying to change minds. Instead, it must reimagine a society where there is no place for those who ignore the suffering of others.

Baldwin asks White America to cease indulging in anti-racist rhetoric. Instead, it must engage in anti-racist action. Empathy *must* be followed by action. As the common expression goes: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." It is important that those relatively conscious Americans do not lull themselves into a false sense of comfort, unable to react from fear that they will lose the material things that prove their social status. There is no simple answer to how to combat Trumpism. A society reflects its peoples' hopes, dreams and fears. Fear and hesitation are part of our humanity and are part of what has kept us alive so long. However, we cannot allow fear to distract us from our task which is to make the world livable for every human being. Where those who are afraid lead, the country goes. When African Americans perish, the country perishes. Therefore, the US

⁸⁹³ James Baldwin, 346-347.

must give up the temptation to create stark characters like Danny who are supposed to represent the American dream. Those who are at the margins have paved the way and led the charge through the creation of a new dream which offers new possibilities and even greater riches.

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Le Résumé de thèse

Projet de thèse

Le paradoxe de l'innocence blanche dans les premiers récits de James Baldwin répond à ce que l'écrivain afro-américain James Baldwin (1924-1987) a publiquement désigné comme l'apathie morale et la mort du cœur de l'Amérique blanche lors du mouvement des droits civiques (1955-1968). L'arrestation de Rosa Parks, secrétaire et militante de la NAACP (*National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*), en décembre 1955, a déclenché le boycott des bus de Montgomery, qui a remis en question la légalité des pratiques de ségrégation raciale dans les systèmes de bus publics de la ville de l'Alabama. Le succès du boycott a encouragé la NAACP et d'autres organisations de défense des droits civiques telles que le *Congress of Racial Equality* (1942-1970) et le *Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee* (1960-1971) à mener des campagnes de protestation à l'échelle nationale. Les premiers écrits de Baldwin comprennent des observations sur la blancheur, que Baldwin espérait permettre aux Blancs socialement libéraux de réfléchir à comment leur inaction contribue à la suprématie blanche, bien que de manière nuancée et à des degrés variables. Je crois que la lecture de *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962) et « This Morning, This Evening, So Soon » dans le recueil *Going to Meet the Man* (1965) met en évidence dans le contexte du mouvement des droits civiques la manière dont les premiers romans de Baldwin répondent aux évolutions des discours sur la manière dont l'identité raciale influence l'identité individuelle, la sexualité et l'identité nationale. J'offre qu'une approche de *Critical Whiteness Studies* (CWS) pour mieux comprendre comment la blancheur impacte négativement les personnages blancs de Baldwin révèle de nouveaux discours sur la manière d'aborder la relation de l'Amérique aux idéologies raciales et répond favorablement aux problèmes d'« accessibilité blanche ». Les premiers romans de Baldwin sont une négociation littéraire, décrivant la résilience de la famille et de la communauté Noires

et l'aliénation de soi que les idéologies sociales de la blancheur provoquent chez ses personnages blancs. Alors que les lecteurs Noirs voient des représentations de vies et d'expériences Noires qui contredisent l'image du pays de ce que signifie être américain, les lecteurs Blancs sont contraints de remettre en question les mythes sur la race, le sexe et la nation qui gouvernent la vie américaine. Baldwin offre des personnages multidimensionnels et faillibles qui témoignent de la marginalisation politique et économique de l'Amérique Noire dans les zones urbaines et rurales, assurant aux lecteurs que les victimes ne sont pas la source du problème racial de l'Amérique. En tant que tels, les lecteurs Blancs comprennent que le « problème Noir » est un mythe pour dissimuler la réalité du « problème Blanc » de l'Amérique, que seuls les Blancs peuvent atténuer. Ma décision de me concentrer sur les premiers romans de Baldwin est informée par la publication de *James Baldwin : Early Novels and Short Stories* (1998) de Toni Morrison et de *James Baldwin's Later Fiction* (2002) de Lynn Orilla Scott, deux titres suggérant une rupture entre ce que je considère comme ses premières œuvres et ce que les critiques ont qualifié de sa fiction ultérieure. Bien sûr, la distinction entre ces corpus de textes est connotée négativement, car sa fiction ultérieure est critiquée pour démontrer un degré moindre d'art littéraire que *Go Tell It on the Mountain* et *Giovanni's Room*. Cependant, j'attribue toute évolution reconnaissable à une évolution thématique, plutôt qu'à un échec de Baldwin à honorer les déclarations qu'il a faites dans « Everybody's Protest Novel ». Je crois que les assassinats des militants des droits civiques Medgar Evers, Malcolm X et Martin Luther King Jr. ont fortement influencé Baldwin à repenser la focalisation de son art. Les premiers romans de Baldwin exposent comment la blancheur et le racisme Blanc impactent négativement la vie des Noirs et des Blancs en révélant des stratégies qui maintiennent les Blancs aveugles aux effets aliénants de la blancheur sur le sujet Blanc. L'objectif principal de cette thèse est d'explorer de telles stratégies qui nient, justifient et rendent invisible de manière paradoxale la souffrance humaine. J'analyse les écrits de Baldwin pour montrer comment la

Blanchité—un marqueur d'appartenance sociale—et le racisme Blanc affectent négativement les personnages Blancs de Baldwin. La Blanchité offre une sécurité en rejetant la connaissance expérientielle conférée par des expériences telles que la naissance, la douleur, la souffrance, l'amour et la mort. Cette dissociation limite la capacité d'empathie et rend inintelligible l'histoire qui explique les problèmes contemporains liés à la race et à la violence anti-Noire, rendant paradoxalement l'Amérique Blanche ce que Baldwin appelle « des monstres moraux ».

L'Innocence de la blanchité dans *Giovanni's Room*

L'Innocence blanche

Dans les termes de Baldwin, l'innocence blanche « protège contre la réalité, l'expérience ou l'épanouissement personnel, et réussit à mettre à l'abri des valeurs qu'on préfère ne pas examiner ». Pour être clair, l'innocence n'est pas une construction de la blanchité, mais plutôt un effet qui transcende les modes de « conditionnalité prépubère ou prélapsarienne », agissant plutôt comme un refuge où l'on « ne sera pas blessé, où l'on n'aura pas à réfléchir à soi-même et où l'on n'aura pas à changer ou à être responsable de son prochain ». L'innocence selon Baldwin atteste de la fragilité de la blanchité et de la conscience blanche, expliquant le refus de l'Amérique de reconnaître d'où elle vient ou de confronter ses crimes contre l'humanité, passés et présents, en « protégeant les croyances sur la nature de la société américaine des preuves contraires de l'histoire américaine ». En fin de compte, l'innocence blanche crée une réalité spécifiquement blanche, dissociant davantage la blanchité des histoires historiques non blanches pour protéger de fausses narrations historiques qui ont construit l'identité blanche.

Un récit contradictoire de mondes polarisés, le statut particulier de Baldwin en tant qu'écrivain noir lui a permis de voir au-delà des revendications creuses de l'innocence que l'Amérique blanche a formulées après la guerre, face aux expériences des peuples marginalisés. En ce sens, l'innocence agit comme un masque derrière lequel l'attention est détournée de

l'absence d'action ou de responsabilité. L'innocence blanche devient ainsi un signe d'autoidentification, forgé dans l'ignorance volontaire des réalités historiques qui expliquent l'origine de la blancheur et du pouvoir blanc. Cependant, l'innocence selon Baldwin va au-delà de l'ignorance, décrivant une prise de conscience limitée qui façonne le soi et la vision du monde, réifiée par le voile qui soutient la perception de la réalité.

Dans une telle situation, la résilience noire a nécessité depuis la guerre civile américaine la lucidité face à une cognition blanche qui a nécessité la création du « problème noir » pour détourner l'attention de ce que Baldwin appelle le « problème blanc ». Dans *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin reprend la *colorline* de W.E.B Du Bois pour affirmer que l'histoire des expériences noires en Amérique peut être réappropriée pour briser la fausse conscience de l'Amérique et la guider moralement vers sa promesse de liberté et de démocratie. Les Afro-Américains possèdent une perspective unique sur la blancheur que Du Bois appelle la « double conscience » un terme que l'historien utilise pour répondre à la question inarticulée: « *How does it feel to be a problem* » ? La « double conscience » de Du Bois a été à la fois un outil fondamental et décisif pour la recherche universitaire dans des domaines tels que les études noires, les études queer et les études de genre. Elle a contribué à aborder et à formuler en mots le conflit interne, provoqué par la politique identitaire, qu'un groupe minoritaire éprouve dans une société oppressive. Le terme décrit comment les Noirs se comprennent à travers une identité socialement construite conçue à partir du regard de la majorité blanche. L'utilisation de la philosophie de Du Bois par Baldwin articule cette perspective unique que les Noirs ont sur la blancheur. En résumé, la manière dont les Blancs perçoivent la vie des Noirs en dit plus sur les Blancs eux-mêmes que sur les Noirs. En tant que tel, la « double conscience de Du Bois permet aux Noirs de mieux comprendre la blancheur que les Blancs ne la comprennent eux-mêmes. Par conséquent, la « double conscience » de Du Bois explique et soutient l'observation de Baldwin sur l'innocence blanche, à savoir que le « problème noir » est un problème blanc.

Ainsi, la « double conscience » et l'« innocence blanche » représentent deux côtés de la même métaphore symbolique. Le « manque de véritable auto-conscience » de Du Bois est en accord avec l'innocence blanche de Baldwin. Bien que les deux écrivains se réfèrent à des côtés apparemment antithétiques de la « ligne de couleur », les deux termes travaillent en harmonie pour décrire l'interrelation des identités raciales en Amérique. Ils articulent une fausse conscience dont souffrent les identités de tous les Américains. Ces forces sont les mécanismes psychologiques, les modes spécifiques d'articulation utilisés pour rendre intelligible la « ligne de couleur » raciale de Du Bois, et pour effectuer un changement significatif, ces forces doivent être traitées à la fois en interne et en externe, avec un effort sincère. Même si les contextes sociaux, politiques et économiques dans lesquels Baldwin et Du Bois sont nés diffèrent de nombreuses manières - Du Bois a vécu à l'époque de la ségrégation raciale et le premier roman de Baldwin est paru seulement deux ans avant la décision de la Cour suprême dans l'affaire *Brown v. Board of Education* contre le conseil d'éducation -, leurs expériences centrées sur la race ont évoqué les remous intérieurs des émotions, le catalyseur, qui ont façonné leurs vocations à vie en tant qu'écrivains, activistes et intellectuels.

***Giovanni's Room* comme critique de la blancheur américaine**

Giovanni's Room est une trame littéraire qui reconstruit les opérations latentes de la blancheur (américaine) et déconstruit la praxis de l'innocence blanche, montrant comment l'innocence influence la boussole morale de David, le protagoniste blanc du roman. Cependant, malgré les critiques avant-gardistes que Baldwin présente, *Giovanni's Room* a traditionnellement été caractérisé comme apolitique, ou au mieux, ayant des connotations raciales. Cette confusion, je crois, découle de la présence des personnages entièrement blancs du roman et du cadre européen : Paris, France. Il convient de noter que des recherches récentes ont revisité la question de la race dans le roman. Dans son article intitulé « James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*: Expatriation, Racial Drag and Homosexual Panic » (2005), Mae G.

Henderson explore l'importance de la race dans *Giovanni's Room*, offrant des nouvelles critiques sur le lien entre le roman et la blancheur, ou ce qu'elle appelle le « racial drag » : « [dans le roman], l'expatriation géographique se combine avec l'acte littéraire d'expatriation raciale, ou ce que j'appelle « le racial drag », pour créer un espace d'exploration du dilemme homosexuel au sein et au-delà des contours sociaux et géographiques de l'Amérique d'après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. » Henderson décrit le roman comme une expatriation géographique et raciale, ou une « mascarade littéraire ». L'observation de Henderson suggère toutefois que la question de la race dans le roman est secondaire par rapport au dilemme homosexuel, que la notion de noir est une « présence absente » déguisée en « racial drag » ou « whiteface ». Comme le souligne Henderson, Baldwin « se replace à un endroit qui interroge les frontières de la nation, du genre et de la sexualité ». Cependant, je suis d'accord avec Aliyyah I. Abur-Rahma lorsqu'elle affirme qu'il est plus judicieux de « ne pas écarter la blancheur des personnages pour accéder à leur prétendue cotée Noir ». Il est préférable de se concentrer sur la manière dont Baldwin considère « le rendu compliqué des hiérarchies de pouvoir qui incluent et dépassent à la fois la différence raciale ». Je suggère que l'absence de personnages noirs dans le roman attire une attention désespérément nécessaire sur le « problème blanc » de l'Amérique.

Décrire le roman comme ayant des connotations raciales est problématique : premièrement, cette hypothèse place la question de la race au second plan par rapport à la sexualité. Deuxièmement, cela diminue l'importance que Baldwin accorde à l'exploration du « problème blanc » de l'Amérique, à une époque où les normes littéraires et culturelles signifiaient que les écrivains (noirs et blancs) se tournaient vers la notion du Noir comme sujet d'investigation littéraire lorsqu'ils abordaient les effets prédominants de la racialisation. Cependant, *Giovanni's Room* est une critique littéraire dont la préoccupation centrale concerne le processus interne d'aliénation de soi provoqué par les demandes culturelles de l'après-guerre

et les normes sociales entourant la blancheur. Bien que tout aussi importants, les sujets de (homo)sexualité et d'expatriation sont présents pour pousser le protagoniste blanc de Baldwin à remettre en question la manière dont la société américaine limite ses possibilités en présentant comme naturelles des formes limitées de masculinité et de sexualité.

Les représentations positives des relations homosexuelles dans le roman ont amené certains à éloigner ses thèmes majeurs de l'expérience noire, réduisant l'homosexualité à une question blanche. Au début des années 1950, Baldwin était encore porté par le succès de son premier roman *Go Tell It on the Mountain* et de *Notes of a Native Son* le deuxième recueil d'essais de l'écrivain. Lorsque Baldwin a soumis *Giovanni's Room*, son éditeur hésitait à accepter le roman pour publication en raison de ses représentations positives de l'amour homosexuel, à une époque où l'attirance pour les personnes du même sexe n'était pas socialement acceptée. Comme le reconnaît Josep M. Armengol, les critiques négatives à l'égard de *Giovanni's Room* étaient dues, au moins en partie, à la connexion implicite entre l'homosexualité et la blancheur ; les personnages explicitement queer de Baldwin sont blancs, et « un lecteur déjà mal à l'aise avec la variance sexuelle peut éviter au moins une partie de la gêne en séparant le désir Noir pour des personnes du même sexe ».

Si le groupe démographique auquel Armengol fait référence est la communauté noire qui a salué "Va, raconte-le sur la montagne", qui se concentre sur la relation de la communauté de Harlem avec le christianisme et l'église, les représentations de même sexe, en effet, s'éloignent des représentations plus courantes de la vie des Noirs. De plus, Baldwin n'a pas explicitement représenté l'amour homosexuel entre des personnages noirs avant "Dis-moi depuis combien de temps le train est parti" (1968) et "Juste au-dessus de ma tête" (1979), le premier publié plus de dix ans après que Baldwin ait présenté aux lecteurs le personnage sexuellement ambigu David dans "Giovanni's Room". Pourtant, la connexion supposée entre l'homosexualité et la blancheur renforce l'illusion que le roman manque de l'engagement conscient de la race que

Baldwin a montré dans ses écrits antérieurs, un engagement qui a conduit à son succès dans le paysage politique et littéraire de l'ère des droits civiques.

Parce que les critiques du roman sur la race (la blancheur) ont largement été éclipsées par la question de l'homosexualité, la critique de la sexualité de David représente les critiques de longue date sur le roman de l'ère des droits civiques qui cherchaient à imprégner la noirceur de masculinité et de désirs hétéronormatifs en se concentrant sur la subjectivité hétéronormative-noire masculine. Dans cette optique, j'explore les critiques de l'activiste politique et écrivain Eldridge Cleaver, plus particulièrement, car son rejet de la vision humaniste de Baldwin et des représentations d'expressions nuancées de l'identité raciale et sexuelle illustre ces malentendus qui ont limité les puissantes critiques sur la race que le roman offre. J'affirme, en outre, que l'absence de personnages noirs attire non seulement l'attention sur le "problème blanc", mais aussi sur la manière dont la blancheur opère au sein d'espaces principalement blancs pour souligner davantage comment la race affecte négativement les Blancs autant que les Noirs (bien que de différentes manières et à différents degrés). Deuxièmement, je soutiens que la performance par David de son identité hétéronormative démontre comment il intègre et incarne l'expérience nationale de la blancheur. Enfin, je montre que en plaçant le roman en dehors du contexte social et politique des États-Unis, Baldwin rend visible une forme omniprésente de blancheur américaine, rendant ainsi possible la description des effets omniprésents de la race sur David et les autres personnages blancs du roman.

La Réalité

David tente d'échapper à la réalité, à l'expérience et au changement en plaçant entre lui-même et ses désirs homosexuels une moralité puritaine que Baldwin condamne. En suivant le chemin de destruction de David, Baldwin met en lumière comment l'innocence blanche piège les Blancs dans une moralité stagnante qui ne laisse place ni à la croissance ni au changement. Le déni de son humanité par David est un paradigme qui montre comment l'innocence blanche

opère et limite la compréhension des Blancs d'eux-mêmes au-delà de leur blancheur. L'innocence blanche isole David dans une réalité fallacieuse qui le protège des conséquences de ses actes sur Giovanni, Hella et une jeune Américaine nommée Sue. En refusant à lui-même et à ceux qui l'entourent des expressions authentiques de soi, ou ce que Baldwin appelle le sensuel, David devient incapable d'accepter comment ses actions appauvrissent la vie de ceux qui l'entourent. J'affirme, en outre, que la quête de David d'une vie hétéronormative révèle le racisme, la misogynie et l'homophobie internalisés qui dominent la scène américaine. À la fin du roman, David démontre le caractère bancal de la morale américaine en se réclamant d'une identité hétéronormative pour préserver les récompenses sociales qu'il reçoit de sa blancheur. En plaçant le lecteur dans le rôle de témoin de la destruction de David, Baldwin force les lecteurs blancs à confronter les effets omniprésents de la race dans leur propre vie.

La réalité est une entreprise collective, un état d'être plutôt qu'une entité détachée, qui articule comment nous nous rapportons et interagissons avec le monde qui nous entoure. L'innocence blanche entrave l'acquisition personnelle et collective de la connaissance expérientielle en niant l'alliance appelée notre humanité. Cette vérité non reconnue découle du désir de forger une identité d'après-guerre qui nie ce que Baldwin concède être l'état de notre condition humaine. « L'état de naissance, de souffrance, d'amour et de mort sont des états extrêmes », examine Baldwin, « extrêmes, universels et inévitables. Nous le savons tous, mais nous préférons ne pas le savoir. L'artiste est là pour corriger l'illusion à laquelle nous succombons dans nos tentatives pour éviter cette connaissance ». Même l'acte d'amour doit faire face à l'expérience de la souffrance et de la mort. Choisir de rejeter cette vérité brutale signifie que nous ne pouvons ni apprendre ni grandir en aimant, ni apprendre de la douleur et de la souffrance que nous infligeons aux autres. C'est donc le pouvoir de la littérature et le devoir moral de l'écrivain de diffuser cette vérité humaine en décrivant ce que James articule

comme « les expériences les plus modestes et les plus personnelles », si nous espérons un jour « dépasser » (selon le langage de Baldwin) le préjudice que ces états infligent à la vie humaine.

Alors que l'Amérique d'après la Seconde Guerre mondiale célébrait une nouvelle forme d'hyper-individualisme qui mettait l'accent sur la famille nucléaire et la prospérité économique, les références publiques à la douleur, à la souffrance et à la mort sont devenues rares dans les représentations de la vie américaine. La « classe moyenne » est devenue synonyme d'un niveau de vie élevé, tel que représenté dans un mode de vie suburbain en plein essor, mais, plus important encore, d'un ensemble de croyances et de valeurs morales qui, selon Charles L. Ponce de Leon, ont fini par « transcender les catégories socio-économiques » et inclure des groupes sociaux moins évidents. Néanmoins, la conformité raciale et idéologique constituait l'épine dorsale de cette nouvelle façon de vivre à l'américaine. Cela incluait le dogme sur les façons d'être Américain qui effaçait le poids de la souffrance humaine dans les représentations de la vie publique. En tant que position morale, l'innocence ignore que la vie humaine implique la mort, la douleur et la souffrance. L'ignorance de ces états humains est censée absoudre les Blancs de la responsabilité de reconnaître comment ces états influencent leur vie et comment ils - en tant qu'agents individuels - provoquent ces états dans la vie de ceux qui lui entourent. Baldwin conclut enfin, cependant, que ce processus d'aliénation par rapport à la condition humaine est un mécanisme d'adaptation que toutes les sociétés doivent surmonter pour évoluer.

« Si vous pouvez le décrire, vous pouvez le dépasser » fait allusion au potentiel révolutionnaire de la littérature à élargir notre connaissance de la manière dont la mort, l'amour et la douleur continuent d'influencer la réalité perçue. Dans l'effort de l'écrivain pour contourner les mensonges qui définissent l'existence humaine, la littérature offre la possibilité de remédier aux maux sociaux, comme le racisme, en décrivant sa réalité de manière à rendre tangible et donc intelligible la conditionnalité humaine. C'est donc l'espoir de l'écrivain de décrire le fonctionnement interne d'une société donnée, afin que les personnes qui l'habitent puissent se

défaire des masques « dont [elles] craignent de ne pas pouvoir se passer et dont [elles] savent qu'[elles] ne peuvent pas vivre en elles ». Baldwin confronte la fausse réalité que crée l'innocence blanche en la contrebalançant avec ce qu'il appelle « le sensuel », un projet ontologique qui tente de redécrire comment les Blancs interagissent avec la réalité. La relation entre la blancheur et la sexualité, je l'affirme, explique les relations amoureuses de David et lui permet de s'échapper, sans aucun sens de la responsabilité, des conséquences de ses actions. Cependant, pour atteindre une croissance individuelle, David doit apprendre à accepter qu'il mourra et sentira la douleur, ceux-ci étant deux forces qui gouvernent la signification existentielle qu'il donne à la vie et, par conséquent, la manière dont il choisit de la vivre.

L'Experience

Le comportement autodestructeur de David est encadré comme l'héritage de sa blancheur. Sa blancheur se manifeste à travers sa fierté américaine, le rêve américain. Dans « The Discovery of What It Means to be American » (1959), Baldwin dissèque le dilemme américain qu'est l'identité sous la forme de l'artiste américain à l'étranger. Baldwin écrit que « chaque société est vraiment gouvernée par des lois cachées, par des hypothèses non dites mais profondes de la part des gens. » David se bat si fort pour atteindre une fausse promesse des notions d'après-guerre de la blancheur, mais ne réussit, comme je le démontre ci-dessous, qu'à détruire sa propre vie et les vies de Giovanni et Hella.

Dans *Giovanni's Room*, le traumatisme est pris comme point de départ pour naviguer dans la tragédie du roman, qui est « la sensation accrue du 'aurait pu être' du héros et du potentiel perdu tout en montrant que les actions du héros sont de sa responsabilité ». Au milieu du rôle de l'Amérique d'après-guerre en tant que leader mondial et des tensions de la guerre froide avec l'URSS, la blancheur américaine représentait le summum de la potentialité humaine. Afin de protéger l'autorité des valeurs conservatrices de la classe moyenne, toute expérience qui menace la légitimité de la blancheur et, par conséquent, l'autorité des institutions qui en

prescrivent les frontières, est considérée comme déviante et dangereuse. Cependant, Baldwin comprend que les idéologies d'après-guerre entourant les expressions de la personne limitaient la croissance émotionnelle, morale et intellectuelle des Blancs en rejetant les connaissances qui ne s'inséraient pas parfaitement dans le modèle social conservateur d'après-guerre. L'expérience baldwinienne implique donc une confrontation entre ce que nous pensons savoir et les preuves contradictoires qui nous sont présentées. Le processus d'expérience est donc de nature conflictuelle et favorise la pratique plutôt que le principe. « [La capacité de Baldwin] à discerner et à décrire les résonances des principes politiques dans la vie quotidienne », écrit Lawrie Balfour, « éclaire les significations des principes et évoque ce que Stuart Hampshire appelle la tension des possibilités non réalisées. » Les « potentiels » et « possibilités » perdus, que représente la vie de David, expriment l'inadéquation de la blancheur bourgeoise d'après-guerre en tant que théorie de l'être.

Alors que David regarde son reflet dans lequel il voit un archétype américain pendant et après la Seconde Guerre mondiale (un homme grand, blanc et blond), il se souvient de l'expérience sexuelle qu'il a vécue pendant son adolescence avec Joey. Un été, David et Joey se retrouvent seuls, les parents de Joey étant absents, et David décide de passer le week-end chez Joey. Les deux adolescents parcourent les rues de New York à la recherche d'aventures et de filles. Alors que le soleil se couche et que leurs tentatives pour obtenir l'un ou l'autre échouent, le couple décide de retourner à l'appartement de Joey. Dans ce qui suit, Baldwin propose une scène d'amour éloquente et passionnée entre deux amis, rendant d'autant plus déchirant le rejet ultime et la cruauté de David envers Joey. Alors qu'il dort dans le lit de Joey, David se réveille et trouve Joey examinant les draps à la recherche de punaises de lit. David harcèle Joey pour son manque d'hygiène, et quelque chose bouge en eux, et leur relation se transforme en quelque chose de plus profond et de plus mature.

David et Joey « découvrent » leur sexualité qui, avant ce moment, était devenue inaudible, méconnaissable à cause de l'inexpérience souvent associée à la jeunesse. Mais le moment va au-delà de la maturation sexuelle, pétillante, exprimée comme une « douleur intolérable » qui amène inévitablement la « joie » de la connaissance de soi. « La vision de la vie exprimée dans les œuvres de Baldwin », reconnaît Robert Tomlinson, « est essentiellement une vision tragique, la même contenue dans deux éléments clés de la définition aristotélicienne du genre, l'*ananké* et le *pathos* », ce dernier n'étant pas une souffrance animale brutale, mais la souffrance est consciemment payée comme prix de la connaissance de soi. Les « battements [du cœur] d'une manière horrible » et les « tremblements » du corps sont donc des manifestations physiques de l'« [...] terrible agitation » interne, de cette « grande chaleur assoiffée, et des tremblements et une tendresse si douloureuse » qui engloutit les sens et repousse les limites de la conscience et de la perception d'eux-mêmes des personnages. Les nouvelles expériences commencent souvent par une hésitation provoquée par la peur de l'inconnu et l'inconfort qui accompagne la croissance. La déclaration de David selon laquelle « une vie ne serait pas assez longue pour que je puisse accomplir un acte d'amour avec Joey » ne fait pas tant référence au sexe qu'à l'engagement qu'il prend à affronter les défis sociétaux d'une relation homosexuelle. Les deux adolescents découvrent et prennent ainsi conscience d'une part inconnue d'eux-mêmes à travers ce lien nouvellement établi que Baldwin appelle « l'acte d'amour ». Dans l'espace intime de la chambre de Joey, David commence à comprendre son ami dans ce que Baldwin appelle le sensuel, ce qui est une différence flagrante par rapport à la façon dont David comprend les filles qu'il poursuit, admettant que si l'une d'entre elles avait reconnu ses avances, « l'océan aurait n'ont pas été assez profonds pour noyer notre honte et notre terreur.

La rupture de l'amitié entre David et Joey révèle l'inévitable tragédie qui survient lorsqu'une société nie la vérité sur la complexité humaine. Dans le roman, le déni insistant de

David sur sa sexualité complexe entrave le processus amoureux lorsqu'il rejette les possibilités que l'amour peut apporter. Coincé « au milieu » de ses désirs et de ses attentes sociales, David s'enfuit, physiquement et émotionnellement. Plus David fuit son expérience avec Joey, plus il lui devient difficile de tenir « le bouledogue » à distance. Ainsi, plus le « bouledogue » grandit, plus le mensonge échappe au contrôle de David. Avec le temps, « le bouledogue » devient inévitablement connecté à son sens de soi et déforme son sens de la réalité. *Giovanni's Room* raconte donc le chaos qui découle du comportement trompeur que David adopte dans la poursuite des possibilités limitées qu'offre l'hétéronormativité.

L'Epanouissement personnel

Dans *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin écrit que « les Américains, qui échappent, autant que possible, à toute expérience authentique, n'ont donc aucun moyen d'évaluer l'expérience des autres et aucun moyen de s'établir par rapport à un mode de vie quelconque pas le leur. Le processus d'« évaluation » et d'« établissement » de notre perception de la réalité est primordial pour définir les termes de notre relation au monde en général et aux autres. Baldwin affirme que la promesse de cette relation réside dans sa capacité à révéler notre *positionnalité* dans l'espoir de changer le monde et de nous guider vers un lieu plus moral. Dans la pensée baldwinienne, l'épanouissement personnel est donc un processus de transformation lié à la croissance morale, à travers le type de connaissance de soi que seule l'expérience apporte. Ce n'est qu'en acceptant tel qu'est le monde et en reconnaissant notre place dans son tissu social que nous pourrions apprendre à changer les circonstances qui nous ont amenés à notre situation actuelle. Le véritable changement ne vient donc que de la force d'âme acquise grâce à l'expérience de l'acquisition de connaissances. À l'heure actuelle, je souligne comment Baldwin comprend le changement comme un processus entrepris pour atteindre une croissance morale à travers la remise en question de la boussole morale qui nous guide tout au long de la vie. Fondé sur la réalité de la condition humaine, par opposition aux mythes qui régissent la

vie américaine, l'épanouissement personnel baldwinien s'oppose à l'innocence des Blancs, ce qui provoque une stagnation morale et sociale. Dans le roman, David est incapable de changer et donc d'atteindre la moralité parce que l'innocence lui refuse le courage moral de passer par le processus de transformation provoqué par son amour pour Giovanni. En fin de compte, David sacrifie Giovanni, métaphoriquement et littéralement, pour rester dans un état d'innocence qui, selon lui, protégera les conséquences sociales d'une vie avec Giovanni. Cette croyance offre une analogie avec les relations raciales en Amérique.

L'Italien Giovanni est dépeint comme un personnage défectueux qui commet de nombreuses erreurs mais essaie d'en tirer des leçons. Il comprend, par exemple, qu'il peut rechercher un mode de vie hétéronormatif, mais il est conscient qu'épouser une femme serait un acte d'égoïsme. Il prend plutôt en compte la femme qu'il pourrait épouser, son bien-être et ce qu'il peut lui offrir, matériellement et émotionnellement. Dans le roman, Jacques et Guillaume sont incapables du type de changement qui suscite la croissance. Vers la fin du roman, David se trouve à la croisée des chemins où il peut choisir d'apprendre de l'exécution imminente de Giovanni, ce qui lui permettra de se libérer de ce qu'Abdur-Rahman appelle les « idéologies américaines de différence sur les relations sociales », comme en témoigne la moralité américaine. La moralité, cependant, est une action performative subconsciente, liée à l'identité raciale américaine de David. Comme la blancheur, l'hétérosexualité agit comme une barrière entre ce que David souhaite croire et la réalité de la vie qu'il mène.

Les liaisons que David entretient avec les différents hommes et femmes de sa vie ne permettent pas la promesse de croissance de l'amour, car les liaisons, selon Baldwin, sont effervescentes. Ils traitent de l'immédiat, l'amour étant quelque chose qui se déplace dans le temps et dans l'espace. Dans l'essai « The Male Prison », Baldwin nous informe que « [...] le déviant malchanceux d'aujourd'hui ne peut se sauver que par l'effort le plus formidable de toutes ses forces de tomber dans un monde souterrain dans lequel il ne rencontre jamais ni

hommes ni femmes, où il est impossible d'avoir un amant ou un ami là où la possibilité d'une véritable implication humaine a complètement disparu. Lorsque cette possibilité disparaît, la possibilité de croissance disparaît également. Baldwin postule cependant que la génération d'après-guerre sera celle qui réalisera la promesse américaine et renouvellera la moralité américaine. « Sans cet effort, affirme Baldwin, nous périrons. Aussi immoral ou subversif que cela puisse paraître à certains, c'est l'écrivain qui doit toujours se rappeler que la moralité, si elle veut rester ou devenir morale, doit être perpétuellement examinée, craquelée, modifiée, renouvelée.

Le Paradoxe de l'innocence blanche

Dans cette section, je montre comment le sens moral de David est faussé par son désir de rester dans la sécurité de son identité blanche américaine. Mon argument s'appuie sur l'abandon de Giovanni par David, sur le fait qu'il a trompé Hella dans une relation émotionnellement malhonnête et sur son utilisation insensée de Sue, une Américaine avec qui il a une aventure d'un soir. David se retrouve dans un labyrinthe d'ambiguïté morale, créé par les normes entourant la blancheur américaine. De plus, je montre comment l'innocence crée ce que Baldwin appelle « un monstre moral ». Grâce au sacrifice rituel de Giovanni, Hella et Sue, David devient un monstre moral face à un abîme immoral. Enfin, je suggère que la cachette des Blancs est la banlieue américaine que Baldwin décrit, dans le roman, comme un jardin d'Eden, un lieu où l'innocence est sans limites et où les limites de la moralité ne sont pas remises en question. La cachette des Blancs est une fontaine d'autorité morale, même face aux preuves qui contredisent cette autorité.

Baldwin construit cette scène comme le moment où David prend la décision consciente de ne pas agir sur ce qu'il a appris grâce à l'amour de Giovanni, de ne pas accepter le pouvoir transformateur de l'honnêteté face à une illusion. La décision de David de ne pas agir sur la base de ce qu'il sait reflète le moment où les Blancs doivent décider d'assumer la responsabilité

de la vie qu'ils vivent. Dans le cas contraire, ils risquent de se retrouver piégés dans la fausse sécurité des bonnes intentions. « Car, de manière générale, en tant qu'entités sociales, morales, politiques et sexuelles », observe Baldwin, « les Américains blancs sont probablement les personnes les plus malades et certainement les plus dangereuses, toutes couleurs confondues, que l'on trouve dans le monde aujourd'hui. » Les mots de Baldwin viennent du rôle de l'Amérique noire dans le projet de construction de la nation américaine, en tant que sacrifices humains qui soutiennent la prospérité économique du pays, mais qui ont également pour effet de définir les contours de l'identité blanche du pays. Dans le rejet de Giovanni par David, Baldwin démontre comment David rationalise, étape par étape, en sacrifiant non seulement sa relation ou son amour, mais aussi le bien-être et la vie de Giovanni pour des idéaux inaccessibles. Pourtant, lorsque David informe Giovanni, quelque temps plus tard, qu'il le quitte, Giovanni ne se bat pas mais dit au revoir à David, lui disant qu'il scelle sa propre perte : « Les Américains n'ont aucun sens du malheur, du tout. Ils ne reconnaissent pas le malheur quand ils le voient. Certes, Giovanni fait peut-être référence à son propre avenir, sans le sou et sans abri. Cependant, je crois que Giovanni décrit le destin moral auquel David devra faire face à cause du sacrifice physique et spirituel de Giovanni et Hella.

Un monstre moral

David est le monstre moral décrit par Baldwin dans « A Conversation with James Baldwin », une discussion de 1963 avec Kenneth Clarke sur la race en Amérique. « Je suis terrifié par l'apathie morale », déclare Baldwin, « par la mort du cœur qui se produit dans mon pays. Ces gens se font des illusions depuis si longtemps qu'ils ne pensent vraiment pas que je suis humain. Je base [cela] sur leur conduite et non sur ce qu'ils disent, et cela signifie qu'ils sont devenus eux-mêmes des monstres moraux. La déclaration de Baldwin décrit la brutalité à laquelle les manifestants noirs ont été confrontés lors d'une récente manifestation à Birmingham. Il reconnaît l'absurdité de la situation ; selon l'Amérique blanche, les États-Unis sont « un pays

libre ». Cependant, Baldwin met en avant la tradition américaine de violence anti-Noirs, que les Blancs considèrent comme une exception à leur engagement en faveur de la liberté et de la démocratie. Les corps noirs des manifestants sont sacrifiés pour maintenir la loi et l'ordre du pays. La loi est cependant ordonnée d'incriminer le bouc émissaire victime plutôt que le coupable, ou ce que Baldwin appelle en termes chrétiens « le pécheur ».

Baldwin décrit les désirs de David pour cette vie fictive comme vulgaires et comme un affront à la morale par laquelle l'Amérique prétend être guidée. Hamilton conclut que David cherche, chez les femmes, à retourner au jardin d'Eden dans lequel il sera à l'abri de la chambre de Giovanni. Finalement, David admet que « cela m'aiderait si je pouvais me sentir coupable. Mais la fin de l'innocence est aussi la fin de la culpabilité. » David choisit de rester dans le jardin d'Eden où l'innocence s'épanouit et où la souffrance et la douleur sont des abstractions morales.

Le Jardin d'Eden

Dans cette section, je compare les banlieues américaines à la mythologie du Jardin d'Eden, ou à ce que Lester R. Kurtz appelle « une réponse sociale aux crises » qui contribue à atténuer les troubles sociaux et économiques en fournissant « des systèmes de croyances, de mythes, de légendes, d'idéologies [...] invoqué par les gens dans un effort pour répondre à la crise. Dans « Freedom and Domination: The Garden of Eden and the Social Order » (1979), Kurtz précise que l'atténuation implique « l'élimination du conflit, tout comme la gestion d'une entreprise ou d'une équipe de baseball n'exige pas la diminution ou l'élimination de l'entreprise ou de l'équipe. La gestion des conflits fait référence aux tentatives des différentes parties de maximiser leur contrôle sur le conflit, en tentant de diminuer, de maintenir ou d'augmenter le niveau du conflit, ou d'en affecter la direction ou le contenu dans l'intérêt d'un groupe. Les banlieues américaines, en remplacement de l'Éden biblique, sont devenues un moyen pour la classe moyenne blanche de détourner l'attention des systèmes racialisés de contrôle social en

faisant des questions raciales telles que le « problème nègre » une vague abstraction. Les banlieues constituent donc un système de croyances qui contribue à maintenir la subjectivité noire comme abstraite plutôt que comme réalité vécue.

L'évangile proposé par Baldwin dans *Giovanni's Room* s'étend aux Blancs qui cherchent à retourner à l'Eden, à l'innocence qui nécessite que la souffrance de l'Autre racialisé soit ignorée au nom de ce rêve intangible qu'incarnent les banlieues américaines. Baldwin rappelle aux lecteurs que le prix de l'Eden est le sacrifice rituel de la vie humaine. Le roman transporte ce sacrifice humain à Paris, où Giovanni meurt pour la sécurité de David. Beauford Delaney a dit un jour à Baldwin que « ce que l'on voit et ce que l'on ne peut pas voir dit tout sur vous ». Baldwin intègre ce message dans le roman, où David représente le jugement auquel les Blancs doivent faire face pour trouver le sens de la vie au-delà de l'identité raciale. La blancheur est tout ce que David possède et il s'y accroche en vain. À la fin du roman, cependant, il doit choisir de rester innocent ou d'accepter la réalité selon laquelle la vie est plus compliquée et plus compliquée que dans le jardin d'Eden.

Sur le doute

Dans cette courte section, je décris le doute baldwinien comme un processus de changement transformateur, juxtaposant la foi aveugle et le scepticisme pour améliorer les relations sociales. Baldwin invoque l'expérience des Noirs en Amérique comme un moyen rhétorique pour forcer les Blancs à remettre en question leur foi aveugle dans les récits nationaux sur l'identité blanche et à faire un pas en avant honnête vers la guérison raciale. Dans cet esprit, j'évoque *On Doubt* (1966) de Vilém Flusser pour éclairer les processus philosophiques et les possibilités infinies que possède le doute pour engendrer un changement révolutionnaire. Plus tard, j'illustre comment la télévision, en tant que nouveau média, a contribué à semer le doute dans l'esprit de nombreux Blancs qui, issus d'un mélange de

ségrégation, de maccarthysme et de politique de la guerre froide, ont démontré une foi presque aveugle dans le rêve américain « qui a appris aux Américains à louer leur pays, travaillez dur et consommez avec joie » Flusser discute du doute dans le contexte d'une foi aveugle, d'une idéologie et d'un dogme que j'associe au rêve américain en tant que rhétorique politique.

Dans le roman, David se transforme en un participant actif à la trajectoire de sa vie, rendu possible en voyant Giovanni sacrifié à la guillotine. Si l'innocence encourage la stagnation de l'esprit et de l'esprit, alors le doute favorise la curiosité morale. Le doute baldwinien suscite des questions sur la validité morale d'une identité qui nécessite la destruction de l'Autre. La vie, l'amour et l'honnêteté de Giovanni font douter David de sa croyance dans les structures sociales qui dictent les termes de sa sexualité et de son identité blanche. Comme l'apparition de Baldwin à la télévision avec Clarke, Giovanni offre un autre regard sur le monde, invitant David à chercher des réponses à l'intérieur. Cette approche heuristique du doute donne accès au type de croissance personnelle et de changement prophétisé par Baldwin. L'auteur privilégie l'observation interne de la manière dont les forces sociales et historiques construisent les identités et produisent une perspective typiquement américaine sur le monde. David commence à percevoir le monde et à comprendre différemment sa relation avec lui. La dissonance rejetée par la collision de croyances opposées crée une opportunité pour David de se libérer de la sécurité de sa cachette et de commencer le long voyage vers la connaissance de soi et la responsabilité.

Le Rencontre Baldwin-Kennedy

Dans cette section, je soutiens que Robert Kennedy a souffert de l'innocence blanche décrite par Baldwin dans *Giovanni's Room*. Je crois que l'incapacité du procureur général à comprendre les demandes de ses invités noirs peut être interprétée comme l'échec de ses idéologies libérales que je définis, à la suite de Rebecca Aanerud, comme une « formation sociale destinée à désigner ces individus blancs qui veulent se distancier de racisme – qui

veulent être considérés comme non racistes. Les idéologies blanches et libérales d'après-guerre hésitent à répondre aux « exigences de la vie » de Baldwin, précisément parce qu'elles tentent de reconceptualiser la blancheur comme non raciste au lieu de l'affronter comme une question blanche. La gauche politique de l'époque soutenait le libéralisme social comme remède au racisme, au classisme et au sexisme. Cependant, Baldwin réfute cette hypothèse, en arguant que le libéralisme blanc est une « affliction » qui perpétue la domination blanche. Le fait de situer l'échec immédiat de la réunion Baldwin-Kennedy dans le contexte de la salle de Giovanni permet une interprétation qui identifie le complexe missionnaire de Robert Kennedy comme la raison de l'échec de la réunion. À travers la relation complexe entre David et Giovanni, Baldwin met en lumière la manière dont le procureur général et le président sont devenus des alliés de premier plan en faveur des droits civiques. La relation entre David et Giovanni illustre à quel point le libéralisme blanc ne parvient pas à prendre en compte la complexité des relations humaines lorsqu'il est mis en pratique. Je compare la dynamique du Noir et du Blanc à deux amants (pensez à Giovanni et David), l'un tentant d'échapper à la réalité et l'autre le forçant à affronter une catastrophe imminente, afin de l'éviter.

Baldwin emploie souvent des relations apparemment inintelligibles pour briser l'intelligibilité apparente des relations normatives et utilise l'amour « [pour] créer la conscience de l'autre [...] les blancs relativement conscients et les noirs relativement conscients », deux amants qui ne doivent pas « [...] échouer dans [leur] devoir [...] de mettre fin au cauchemar racial, de réaliser [leur] pays et de changer l'histoire du monde. La relation entre David et Giovanni remet en question la ligne de couleur en résistant au marqueur d'appartenance à une hégémonie blanche. Leur histoire d'amour révèle comment les décisions de David sont motivées par des questions de race, de sexualité et de nationalité, que Giovanni défie avec une honnêteté brutale qui ne peut être rendue possible que lorsqu'un amant force l'autre « à se voir tel qu'il est, à cesser de fuir la réalité et commencez à la changer. Si la rencontre Baldwin-

Kennedy fut un premier échec en raison de l'inexpérience de Robert Kennedy en matière raciale, elle porta néanmoins ses fruits lorsque, le 11 juin 1963, JFK prononça un discours télévisé dans lequel il proposa une législation qui devint le *Civil Rights Act* de 1964. Plus important encore, le président a emprunté les mots de Baldwin et de l'autre militant selon lesquels les droits civiques étaient importants pour la trajectoire morale de la nation. Par conséquent, la rhétorique de Baldwin semble avoir influencé le procureur général et le président de ce que David M. Lubin qualifie de « passivité ou d'indifférence à l'égard d'une manifestation de préoccupation pour l'égalité raciale en Amérique ». Comme un amant pour l'autre, Baldwin – et les autres artistes activistes – ont forcé Robert Kennedy à se débarrasser de son innocence et à accepter le pays tel qu'il est, afin de le changer pour le mieux.

La Signifiante de l'histoire et la mémoire dans *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

L'histoire, la mémoire et le sens sont sans doute les forces motrices de l'esthétique chrétienne de Baldwin dans son premier roman, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Écrit dans le contexte de la Grande Dépression (1929-1934) et de la Grande Migration (1899-1964), le roman bouleverse les interprétations bien structurées de la race, de la pauvreté et de la foi religieuse en Amérique. Le roman suit la conversion religieuse et la sexualité naissante de John Grimes, le protagoniste du roman âgé de 14 ans, alors qu'il traite de la famille, de la race et de la politique de l'identité sexuelle dans le Harlem des années 1930, à New York. John est destiné à suivre les traces de son père pour devenir un jeune prédicateur. Alors qu'il se lance dans son voyage spirituel, l'expérience des communautés noires décrite par Baldwin se transforme en artefacts révélateurs de la vérité, et la mémoire devient un concurrent idéologique contre les mythes nationaux qui prétendent que le passé est « mort [et] le Noir lui-même l'a oublié ». Dès le début du roman, Baldwin élève la mémoire au niveau de la prophétie et fait de Jean le point

central de la révélation familiale, de l'orgueil pécheur, du pardon et du pouvoir transformateur de la mémoire.

Dans cette section, je soutiens que Baldwin articule une conceptualisation de l'histoire qui rejette les historiographies politiquement investies qui soutiennent de faux récits sur la relation de l'Amérique à la race et à la pauvreté. Dans « Vérité et Pouvoir », Michel Foucault observe que le pouvoir anticipe les récits de vérité pour se soutenir et se prolonger. Baldwin arrive à une conclusion similaire lorsqu'il se qualifie de « sorte de bâtard de l'Occident ». Baldwin reconnaît qu'il fait partie intégrante de l'Occident et de son histoire. Il est un pont entre l'Occident et l'Afrique. Il se réapproprie sa position unique d'homme noir en Occident pour proposer de nouvelles façons de comprendre ce que l'on entend par histoire. Baldwin différencie conceptuellement le « passé » de « l'histoire » pour aborder les régimes de vérité qui articulent la violence anti-Noirs comme le « problème nègre », éloignant ainsi l'histoire de la blancheur en tant que régime de pouvoir. Dans *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin utilise la mémoire comme une forme de vérité pour perturber les abstractions historiques – par opposition aux expériences concrètes – afin de créer de nouveaux régimes de vérité. « Dans le contexte du problème des Noirs, ni les Blancs ni les Noirs [...] n'ont le moindre désir de regarder en arrière », écrit Baldwin. Il poursuit : « mais je pense que le passé est tout ce qui rend le présent cohérent ». Dans l'histoire de Gabriel Grimes, Baldwin montre qu'« il ne serait plus possible de faire abstraction de l'homme ou de la femme noire ». Les nécessités politiques et économiques obligent l'histoire à faire ce qu'elle veut en tant que régime de vérité, la race et le sexe dessinant les contours sociaux de la vie américaine. Dans le premier chapitre, j'explore comment la race, le sexe et la classe sociale construisent des réalités tangibles qui guident la fuite motivée par la peur de David vers le choix de la sécurité au détriment d'une vie vécue honnêtement. Dans *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, l'histoire de Gabriel Grimes fait partie intégrante de l'histoire américaine, car sa déception, sa colère et sa haine envers les Blancs

expriment une expérience unique dans l’histoire de l’Amérique. Je commence par une analyse de ce que Baldwin entend par « passé » et « histoire », pour explorer le fonctionnement de ces termes dans le roman et analyser l’histoire de Gabriel Grimes dans le contexte de la Grande Migration. En décrivant le déplacement de Gabriel vers le Nord comme une évasion de sa responsabilité personnelle, je soutiens que *Go Tell It on the Mountain* de Baldwin résiste aux récits historiques simplifiés qui décrivent, dans le cas du roman, la Grande Migration comme déclenchée par l’espoir et l’opportunité, plaçant soigneusement les récits personnels dans le mythe du rêve américain.

La Spéctralité de la blancheur

Dans cette section, je soutiens que l’anonymat transforme la blancheur en une présence fantomatique, un spectre informe, qui persiste dans la mémoire de la communauté noire à travers les rumeurs de violence fondées sur la race. Je fonde mon argument sur les personnages blancs qui apparaissent à la périphérie des communautés noires décrites par Baldwin, associant la blancheur à la peur, à la terreur et au traumatisme qui « [traquent] les frontières de la jeune vie de [John] ». Le travail fantomatique vise à réduire « la distance de l’Américain blanc par rapport à sa conscience – à lui-même – en observant la distance entre l’Amérique blanche et l’Amérique noire », obligeant les Blancs à voir ce que les Noirs savent être vrai et ce qu’ils souhaitent croire à propos de leur histoire. Là où *Giovanni's Room* place la blancheur au premier plan du roman, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* se concentre sur la façon dont la blancheur apparaît à l’arrière-plan des communautés noires décrites par Baldwin, au Nord et au Sud. La blancheur n’est cependant pas secondaire par rapport au projet ontologique de Baldwin. Il déplace plutôt le regard racial pour montrer comment ce que j’appelle *la spéctralité blanche* – absente et présente – décrit la blancheur de l’expérience afro-américaine. Dans l’essai « Sweet Lorraine », Baldwin écrit : « J’ai très souvent réfléchi à ce que [Lorraine Hansberry] a alors essayé de transmettre : qu’un holocauste ne respecte aucune personne ; que ce qui, aujourd’hui, semble

simplement une humiliation et une injustice pour quelques-uns, peut, sans contrôle, devenir une terreur pour le plus grand nombre [...] » Une allusion à la pièce de Hansberry *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, l'observation de Baldwin exige que les lecteurs voient l'histoire à travers des expériences individuelles, plutôt que des récits généraux, qui tendent à déshumaniser les personnes dont ils parlent, parce que de telles historiographies ne parviennent pas à communiquer la peur, la douleur et la terreur qu'un être humain provoque chez un autre. Décrivant comment la présence blanche persiste à la périphérie du roman, j'utilise le terme *la spectralité blanche* pour exprimer comment la blanchité hante la vie des Noirs et évoque la peur et la terreur dans la mémoire culturelle.

Go Tell It on the Mountain révèle également l'importance que Baldwin accorde à une mémoire fiable. Le récit permet aux lecteurs de suivre John alors qu'il reconstitue les expériences de sa famille dans le Sud. Les lecteurs s'appuient sur la mémoire familiale pour conceptualiser les descriptions de personnes, de lieux et d'événements. Le roman décrit donc la blanchité comme « un phénomène réalisé, mis en œuvre et maintenu non seulement par les structures et les institutions sociales, mais aussi à travers les actions et interactions quotidiennes souvent invisiblement informées par celles-ci ». Baldwin consacre la « Partie I : Le Septième Jour » à la dynamique de la famille Grimes, aux problèmes économiques et à l'ambiance sociale qui pèse sur eux et nourrit leur spiritualité. Cette partie du roman est un espace entièrement noir où les lecteurs découvrent les personnages au-delà de la catégorisation raciale. En d'autres termes, la confrontation raciale à travers la présence blanche est presque totalement absente. La présence blanche persiste à la périphérie, apparaissant une seule fois pour mettre en valeur les réalisations académiques. Baldwin réimagine la présence des Blancs comme « un tournant, un moment kairotique, dans l'expérience de [John] dans l'aire de battage. John voit que les ténèbres ne sont plus simplement assimilées à la noirceur mais à la blanchité – les « armées des ténèbres » suprémacistes blanches responsables de cette violence contre les Afro-Américains.

L'Hypocrisie du nord

Giovanni's Room remet en question l'hypothèse selon laquelle la blancheur est conforme au progrès social et identifie les libéraux blancs du Nord comme les principaux acteurs de cette croyance. Baldwin a reconnu cette hypocrisie qui perpétue l'innocence des Blancs autour des façons secrètes dont le racisme hante la communauté de Harlem dans *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Le fait que Baldwin situe le roman dans deux espaces géographiques distincts – Harlem, New York et le Sud profond – suggère que l'écrivain invite les lecteurs à adopter une approche comparative de ce qui constitue le racisme, offrant une compréhension nuancée des nombreuses façons dont il affecte la famille Grimes. La *spéctralité blanche* est un outil discursif qui expose l'hypocrisie du Nord sur la race qui menace le bien-être et la sécurité de la famille Grimes. Je soutiens que la *spéctralité blanche* aide à recadrer le racisme comme un problème national et résiste aux discours qui le réduisent à un phénomène unique au Sud. En retraçant les spécificités culturelles de la blancheur dans les deux régions, Baldwin démontre que le racisme existe dans un spectre de comportements prédéterminés par le lieu, la race, la classe et le sexe d'une personne. Par conséquent, le viol de Deborah et l'attention que les enseignants blancs de John lui accordent se situent sur le même spectre de racisme que les investissements dans la blancheur. Là où la ville du Sud, décrite par Baldwin, recourt à des formes extrêmes de violence, le Nord utilise la charité pour perpétuer la subordination raciale et la division communautaire. Baldwin juxtapose la « bonne volonté » du Nord et la pauvreté de Harlem pour souligner l'insuffisance et la fausse qualité qu'il associe au libéralisme blanc. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* rejette ce que P.J. Brendese appelle « une ségrégation de la mémoire » qui polarise la politique américaine et fonctionne « selon des critères de couleur, de classe et de génération ». Cette mémoire ségréguée obscurcit notre compréhension des relations raciales contemporaines, dans la mesure où le passé d'événements racistes devient inintelligible pour

la mémoire blanche, qui évolue selon les lignes politiques de l'évolution du discours racial et fonctionne comme un outil malléable qui imprègne la blancheur de connotations positives.

La Matérialité de l'histoire

Baldwin considère le récit de l'histoire comme une expérience communautaire qui devrait être au service des générations à venir et offrir un aperçu précieux du sens de l'existence humaine. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* y parvient en humanisant l'histoire. Je soutiens que le roman résiste à la tradition américaine de narration de l'histoire, en mettant en lumière les vérités de l'existence humaine plutôt que de se concentrer sur les faits. Je juxtapose la forme du roman aux critiques sur la narration proposée par Baldwin dans « Notes pour un roman hypothétique », afin de souligner comment la construction de récits historiques cède la place aux exigences politiques et de développer une approche heuristique de la narration de l'histoire en tant qu'effort de recherche de la vérité. Cette section s'inspire de deux ouvrages fondateurs qui discutent de l'érosion des militants des droits civiques dans la mémoire nationale : « *History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy* » de Denise M. Bostdorff et Steven R. Goldzweig. (2005) et « *The Limits of Master Narratives in History Textbooks: An Analysis of Representations of Martin Luther King, Jr.* » de Derrick P. Alridge. (2006). En gardant ces œuvres à l'esprit, je positionne le roman de Baldwin dans une tradition noire de narration de l'histoire qui résiste aux mythes racialisés qui ont privé les Afro-Américains de leurs droits. Enfin, j'évalue l'attitude de Baldwin envers la narration comme une tentative de dire la vérité qui doit être appropriée par les historiens pour donner un sens aux récits du passé.

Sur les photos et les reflets de la commémoration

Dans cette dernière section du chapitre deux, je soutiens que le souvenir à travers des réflexions personnelles et des images fait partie de l'esthétique littéraire de Baldwin. Je crois

que Baldwin présente Elizabeth comme un modèle pour surmonter et rendre utiles les difficultés de la vie. Je soutiens que les photographies et les réflexions contenues dans le roman sont des artefacts historiques qui offrent des références perspicaces au passé d'Elizabeth Grimes. « Elizabeth's Prayer » exprime le pouvoir heuristique du souvenir, à travers lequel des photographies et des surfaces réfléchissantes témoignent des difficultés, du traumatisme et de l'amour qu'elle a subi. Contrairement à Gabriel et Florence, Elizabeth se libère de la terreur et du traumatisme de l'abandon et de la mort.

L'utilisation par Baldwin de photographies et de surfaces réfléchissantes, comme les miroirs et les vitres, a été reconnue comme permettant aux personnages de se comprendre en termes historiques. « Time is Now : Photography and Social Change in James Baldwin's America » (2019) de Makeda Best offre une perspective historique de l'intérêt de Baldwin pour les images photographiques qui recèlent des « possibilités de transformation » et « prennent à témoin » ce que Baldwin concède comme « une vision alternative de la vie et la culture américaines – révélant les fissures de la société américaine et les fissures émergentes dans les mythes [américains] de l'être et de l'appartenance. » Bien entendu, la collaboration de Baldwin avec un autre ancien élève du lycée Dewitt Clinton et le célèbre photographe Richard Avedon, dans *Nothing Personal* (1963), témoigne du potentiel que Baldwin voyait dans la photographie pour offrir un nouveau regard sur des sujets familiers.

La mémoire est une enquête intime sur l'impact émotionnel des événements traumatisants et leurs effets sur les individus et leurs communautés et constitue donc une forme de préservation historique à travers le partage public d'expériences collectives. Gilroy désigne Baldwin « comme l'ancêtre d'une stratégie d'expression noire dans laquelle les victimes sont d'abord bénies puis tenues de jouer un rôle spécial pour éclairer et transformer le monde ». L'écrivain exalte ses personnages au niveau de prophètes qui connaissent la lutte avant de s'occuper de leur troupeau. Et comme les prophètes, les personnages de Baldwin mènent une

guerre spirituelle et morale dans le cœur et l'esprit des Américains blancs à travers le souvenir des traumatismes raciaux. Les prophètes de Baldwin sont autant des personnalités politiques que spirituelles qui utilisent la mémoire pour résister à l'envie de l'Amérique blanche d'« oublier le passé inoubliable » qui hante la mémoire des communautés décrites par Baldwin. En ce sens, Baldwin utilise la mémoire comme une forme de résistance politique, qui prend pour sujet le poids émotionnel du traumatisme et de l'espoir, afin que les Afro-Américains puissent développer les outils nécessaires pour s'autonomiser.

Chapitre 3 : Blanchir le genre et la sexualité dans *Another*

Country

Ida et Vivaldo : La Fantaisie raciale du sexe

Être racisé est un processus traumatisant et aliénant qui affecte tous les personnages de Baldwin. Cela dit, la manière dont les Américains sont représentés diffère grandement. *Giovanni's Room* prend en compte les effets psychologiques de la blancheur. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* résiste à la tentation de l'Amérique blanche de négliger le traumatisme du racisme qui influence une grande partie de notre monde contemporain. Dans *Another Country*, Baldwin analyse comment les exigences de la blancheur de l'après-Guerre façonnent l'identité de genre, l'expression sexuelle, empêchant une véritable compréhension des autres, même dans les relations intimes. J'analyse les quatre couples romantiques différents (interracial, intraracial, hétéronormatif et homosexuel), pour illustrer comment les exigences de la blancheur de l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale influencent l'identité de genre, l'expression sexuelle et empêchent la compréhension des autres au-delà des normes sociales. Néanmoins, les deux premiers romans de Baldwin présentent des personnages dont le sens de l'action est limité par les relations familiales et amoureuses qui ont un impact sur leur perception de la sexualité et de l'expression de genre. Cependant, je soutiens qu'*Another Country* fusionne ses critiques sur la façon dont la blancheur affecte ses personnages blancs et hante la vie de ses personnages noirs, offrant des relations socialement inintelligibles qui promettent de révéler comment le processus de racisation aux Blancs limite l'expression de l'amour, de l'individualité et de la sexualité. et crée l'impossibilité d'atteindre ce que Baldwin conçoit comme le pays d'autrui – une métaphore qu'il utilise pour le moi privé qui va au-delà des normes sociétales.

Que ce roman soit la première apparition de relations interraciales dans la fiction de Baldwin n'est pas une coïncidence. Baldwin poursuit son évaluation de l'innocence des Blancs,

en expliquant comment elle affecte la dynamique intrapersonnelle. En d'autres termes, je poursuis mon analyse de la manière dont la blancheur et l'innocence blanche limitent le sentiment de responsabilité d'une personne envers les autres. Là où le rejet de Giovanni par David pousse le barman italien au meurtre, Rufus se suicide, car l'aveuglement racial de ses amis rend inintelligibles ses appels à l'aide. Parce qu'une partie de la souffrance de Rufus est raciale et une autre partie sexuelle, je prête attention aux différents couplages créés par Baldwin qui, selon moi, nuancent les discussions sur la façon dont la race, la sexualité et le genre influencent les relations entre les personnages.

Cette section renforce mon argument selon lequel les premiers romans de Baldwin proposent des critiques sur les critiques de l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale sur la blancheur américaine. Je crois qu'*Another Country* critique non seulement les idéologies libérales blanches concernant la race, la sexualité et le genre, mais explique également comment l'innocence façonne la « sexualité blanche ». Dans l'introduction de *James Baldwin Now*, Dwight A. McBride écrit qu'« avec l'avènement des études culturelles, il est enfin possible de comprendre la vision de Baldwin de et pour l'humanité dans sa complexité, en le situant moins exclusivement, gay, noir, expatrié, activiste, ou similaire, mais comme un amalgame complexe de toutes ces choses [...] » Comme l'écrivain, ses personnages doivent être compris comme un « amalgame » d'identités en négociation, qui non seulement se croisent à un lien de signification sociale, mais informent comment chacun crée du sens pour l'autre. En examinant les personnages et leurs vies interconnectées à travers le prisme des *Critical Whiteness Studies*, j'espère montrer que les critiques de Baldwin sur la position morale américaine sur la race, la sexualité et le genre articulent un fantasme racial du sexe, intrinsèquement lié à la politique entourant la blancheur.

Leona and Rufus: The (Un)intelligibility of Race

Dans cette section, j'examine la relation interracial tumultueuse entre Black Rufus Scott et sa petite amie blanche Leona. Je me concentre sur la façon dont Rufus et Leona comprennent leurs rôles potentiels à travers le prisme de la race, du genre et de la sexualité. J'intègre le travail de Judith Butler sur l'intelligibilité du genre, dans *Gender Trouble : Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990), pour révéler comment Rufus et Leona se comprennent en fonction des normes sociales entourant la race, un phénomène que j'appelle « l'intelligibilité raciale ». Je soutiens que « l'intelligibilité raciale » empêche les personnages d'atteindre le pays privé de chacun, une métaphore que Trudier Harris utilise pour définir le monde intérieur de chacun. Deuxièmement, je soutiens que l'intelligibilité de la race laisse les amis libéraux blancs de Rufus mal équipés pour affronter l'automutilation de leur ami et ses abus envers Leona. Baldwin demande aux lecteurs de considérer les identités inintelligibles comme des sites de possibilités illimitées qui créent des ponts vers le pays d'un autre.

Dans *Another Country*, Baldwin présente sa vision d'un mouvement pour les droits civiques qui va au-delà des objectifs intégrationnistes de Martin Luther King et rejette avec audace l'idéologie « œil pour œil » de Malcolm X, nous montrant que pour que les États-Unis survivent en tant que pays nation, elle doit apprendre à accepter la réalité de son histoire complexe et les conditions concrètes qu'elle a produites. « Nous, déclare Baldwin, les Noirs et les Blancs ont profondément besoin les uns des autres ici si nous voulons vraiment devenir une nation – si nous voulons vraiment, c'est-à-dire atteindre notre identité, notre maturité, en tant qu'hommes et femmes." À travers la relation troublée entre Rufus et Leona – une relation qui n'est pas dénuée d'espoir, mais qui souffre des formes américaines d'intelligibilité raciale – Baldwin nous pousse à réimaginer le monde à travers ce qu'il admet être l'amour. Baldwin écrit : « L'amour enlève le masque sans lequel nous craignons de ne pouvoir vivre et savons que nous ne pouvons pas vivre avec. J'utilise ici le mot « amour » non seulement dans le sens personnel, mais aussi comme un état de grâce – non pas dans le sens infantile américain d'être

rendu heureux, mais dans le sens dur et universel de quête, d'audace et de croissance. » Osons donc contempler la vision de Baldwin pour une nation moins divisée et une vision plus large et plus humaine de notre humanité qui inclut un véritable respect de la vie, de la liberté et de la recherche du bonheur.

Cass et Richard : (Mé)Connaître la blancheur

Dans cette section, je démontre comment les dynamiques de genre paralysent Cass et Richard, à la fois en tant qu'individus et en tant que couple marié, parce que les normes prescrites concernant la classe, la race et le sexe ne leur donnent pas la possibilité de se connaître à un niveau sensuel. Ces rôles limitatifs perturbent leurs liens les uns avec les autres, creusant le fossé entre leurs « pays personnels ». Dans « Baldwin and the Occasion of Love », Christopher Freeburg écrit : « Baldwin invoque l'amour ou son absence explicite sous de nombreuses formes. » Il poursuit : « Baldwin revient à plusieurs reprises sur un point singulier : si l'on fait face aux vérités les plus difficiles qui façonnent sa vie, au lieu de maintenir une façade, on peut entretenir des liens personnels et politiques profonds qui définissent les bases de l'amour. » Avec Cass et Richard, Baldwin approfondit son enquête sur l'océan entre David et Hella. Si Standley a raison de dire que « le climat physique [de la ville de New York] reflète la condition spirituelle des gens », alors la vie intérieure de Cass et Richard suggère un « enfer dantesque cauchemardesque de piègeage et d'isolement » que même l'acte de mariage ne suffit pas pour maîtriser. Une partie de leur discordance réside dans leur incapacité à recevoir et à donner un amour qui n'est pas lié à la réalité matérielle de la vie américaine, ce qui implique inévitablement des normes étroitement imposées concernant la manière dont ils devraient se déplacer ensemble à travers le monde. Pour cela, je suis l'évaluation de Freeburg sur la représentation de l'amour par Baldwin pour souligner l'importance thématique que Cass et Richard occupent dans le roman.

L'affaire Cass et Éric est une courbe, puisque l'on comprend qu'Éric est attiré par les hommes plutôt que par les femmes. On apprend qu'Éric a même eu une brève liaison avec Rufus qui finit par le rejeter, car Rufus considère l'homosexualité comme une faiblesse qu'il ne peut se permettre. Comme David et Vivaldo, Rufus assimile l'hétérosexualité à la force masculine. Par conséquent, aux yeux de Rufus, il ne peut pas respecter Éric, car c'est un homme faible. Finalement, Rufus est incapable de supporter le poids d'être fort. Lorsqu'il se suicide, Ida survit et retrouve une nouvelle estime de soi. La liaison entre Cass et Éric « interdit l'intrusion du futur, ou une démonstration trop vive d'un besoin ». Une partie de la raison pour laquelle Cass est attiré par Éric est parce qu'il lui donne l'intimité dont elle a besoin sans la responsabilité et l'imputabilité qui accompagnent une relation plus profonde. Cass maintient Richard à une certaine distance physique et émotionnelle, car elle a peur de devoir payer pour sa vie matériellement confortable avec Richard, en atteignant un niveau d'intimité qui va au-delà de leurs rôles prescrits de mari et d'épouse. Éric est décrit comme « trop fier pour utiliser [Cass], ou qui que ce soit, comme refuge, pour être fier d'accepter une résolution de son chagrin qui n'est pas forgée de ses propres mains. » Cass et Richard s'utilisent mutuellement comme des récipients dans lesquels ils déversent leur chagrin et leurs peurs, au lieu de se considérer comme une source de force pour affronter de front leurs démons personnels.

Éric et Yves : une voie vers *Another Country*

Cass pense à sa relation avec Éric, se demandant pourquoi elle ne pourrait pas devenir plus qu'une simple amitié. En effet, leur relation concerne autant leur lien intime que le sexe. Cependant, leur lien émotionnel et sexuel est limitant, car il ne leur donne aucun sentiment de responsabilité les uns envers les autres. Cass observe : « Éric [...] marquait le pas, attendait, attendait que quelque chose soit résolu. Et quand le problème serait résolu – par l'arrivée

d'Yves, la signature d'un contrat ou l'acceptation, chez Éric, d'un chagrin qu'aucun d'eux ne pouvait nommer –, elle serait exclue de son lit ». La relation entre Cass et Éric est vouée à l'échec dès le début car, comme les autres couples amoureux, leur relation est fondée sur leur désir de se cacher de leurs peurs. Dans cette courte section, j'explore l'importance heuristique que Baldwin accorde à la relation entre Éric et Yves. Je soutiens qu'Éric est le seul personnage blanc des premiers romans de Baldwin qui surmonte son innocence. Éric accepte la tragédie de sa romance ratée avec Rufus, au lieu de l'ignorer. Il se réapproprie la douleur que Rufus lui a causée, comme un pont vers la compréhension des limites que la race, le genre et l'(hétéro)sexualité ont imposées à son ami et amant. Parce qu'Éric choisit de ne pas oublier les expériences douloureuses qu'il vit, il parvient à se connaître. Cela fait de la relation d'Éric avec Yves le plus prometteur des couples romantiques et suggère qu'Éric a atteint un niveau de croissance personnelle et de maturité qui lui permettra d'affronter les défis d'un couple de même sexe dans les années 1960.

Chapitre 4 : Le Racisme blanc ou la communauté Mondial dans « This Morning, This Evening, So Soon »

Transatlanticisme et le projet de la modernité occidentale

Le dernier chapitre de cette thèse est consacré à l'exploration de la façon dont la perspective transatlantique de Baldwin contribue à libérer le caractère naturel de la blancheur,

en reliant la blancheur américaine à ce que Paul Gilroy appelle « le projet de modernité occidentale ». Plus précisément, je propose une analyse de la nouvelle de Baldwin « Ce matin, ce soir, si tôt », qui, je crois, fonctionne doublement pour résister à l'insolubilité du racisme. En outre, je soutiens que le travail de Baldwin offre des conseils aux jeunes activistes émergents du *Black Power Movement*. Pièce d'ensemble de *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), la nouvelle de Baldwin a reçu peu d'attention dans les travaux scientifiques. Mon analyse souligne le message de Baldwin selon lequel les Américains ne peuvent se comprendre eux-mêmes qu'en considérant l'Europe comme une partie intégrante de toute réflexion sur ce que signifie être américain. Par conséquent, « This Morning, This Evening, So Soon » poursuit l'exploration de Baldwin sur la blancheur américaine qui caractérise ses premières fictions, en la situant dans le contexte de Paris, offrant un aperçu des relations occidentales plus larges de la blancheur. Enfin, je crois que la nouvelle de Baldwin offre aux leaders émergents des droits civiques de la fin des années 1960 et des années 1970 un aperçu de la manière de lutter contre l'importance de la blancheur mondiale.

Toute enquête sur la blancheur américaine exige que nous regardions au-delà des frontières des États-Unis pour montrer comment la blancheur fonctionne comme un réseau transatlantique de pouvoir et d'influence. Dans ce qui suit, je réfléchis à propos de l'esthétique transatlantique de Baldwin, que je définis comme la manière dont l'écrivain rétablit la relation transatlantique entre la blancheur américaine et les héritages européens. Je soutiens que la nouvelle de Baldwin « This Morning, this Evening, So Soon » (1965) offre une dimension transnationale de la blancheur américaine en situant géographiquement l'histoire à Paris, en France. Comme mes recherches proposent une approche des écrits de Baldwin dans le cadre des *Critical Whiteness Studies*, je discute de la nouvelle de Baldwin dans le contexte de « White Racism or World Community » (1968) en conjonction avec *The Black Atlantic* de Paul Gilroy, comme point de départ pour discuter de la portée mondiale de la blancheur et des réseaux

transatlantiques qui ont surgi pour résister aux idéologies suprémacistes blanches que Gilroy appelle « le projet de modernité occidentale ». Je décris la blanchité américaine comme un projet de la modernité occidentale, qui, pour être déconstruit, doit être compris dans une perspective transatlantique. Le mouvement des droits civiques est particulièrement intéressant car son influence s'étend bien au-delà des frontières nationales, ralliant des artistes et des intellectuels d'autres régions du monde. J'accorde une attention particulière à l'essai de Baldwin mentionné ci-dessus, qui démontre le potentiel transatlantique du mouvement des droits civiques, mais plus particulièrement la vision unique de Baldwin sur la manière d'aborder la lutte d'après-guerre contre le racisme national et mondial. Plus loin dans ce chapitre, j'aborde la dynamique du pouvoir entre l'Occident et les peuples non blancs à travers le prisme du paradigme du pouvoir blanc et du pouvoir noir exposé par Baldwin.

Le Pouvoir transatlantique de la blanchité

Le 7 juillet 1968, Baldwin s'adressa au *World Council of Churches* (WCC) dans la paisible ville d'Uppsala, en Suède. Étaient présents des dirigeants d'églises protestantes du monde entier. King devait y assister mais avait été assassiné trois mois seulement avant. À la suite de la mort de King, du déclin de l'idéologie non-violente du mouvement des droits civiques et de l'influence croissante du nationalisme noir, Baldwin s'est tenu devant une grande foule de fidèles chrétiens et s'est demandé pourquoi les Blancs avaient peur du pouvoir noir. À la manière baldwinienne, l'écrivain commence par une anecdote personnelle sur sa vie dans l'Église chrétienne, identifiant l'origine du pouvoir blanc dans son expérience de jeune prédicateur dans une église afro-américaine.

Baldwin se situe dans la tradition chrétienne, qu'il assimile à la puissance occidentale. Bien qu'il ait grandi en Occident en tant que chrétien, son statut de Noir signifie qu'il se trouve « en dehors » de la structure institutionnelle qui garantissait sa liberté et ses droits

démocratiques. L'Église chrétienne est métaphoriquement un père fondateur de l'Occident et, par conséquent, du pouvoir blanc qui est le pouvoir occidental. Mais que signifie le pouvoir blanc ? Dans le discours public, le terme est souvent employé en relation avec les activités et organisations extrémistes blanches. En effet, la croissance de l'extrémisme blanc, au lendemain de la guerre civile américaine et de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, doit être reconnue et accorder une attention particulière dans le discours politique et l'élaboration des politiques, tant au niveau national qu'à l'étranger. Néanmoins, l'usage limité du terme manque de nuance et a pour effet de dissoudre la relation intrinsèque entre les formes modérées de blancheur et le pouvoir blanc. Dans cette section, je décris le pouvoir blanc comme la capacité des peuples d'origine européenne à modifier, façonner et modeler le monde tel qu'ils souhaitent le percevoir. Dans cette section, je contextualise le pouvoir blanc dans un cadre transatlantique et je le relie au projet de modernité occidentale de Gilroy. Je crois que « *This Morning, This Evening, So Soon* » prépare les Américains et les peuples d'autres nations à un monde post-racial. Les discours, interviews et apparitions publiques de Baldwin démontrent son engagement à décrire la valeur intrinsèque de la vie humaine. De même, la rhétorique humaniste de Baldwin se heurtait souvent aux idéologies des leaders des droits civiques. En explorant comment et pourquoi le message de Baldwin a souvent été réduit au silence, j'explique ce que Baldwin veut dire lorsqu'il parle de pouvoir blanc. Je crois que les œuvres de Baldwin définissent le pouvoir de la blancheur de manière nuancée qui contribue à créer une compréhension plus nuancée de la blancheur et de la suprématie blanche.

L'innocence des Blancs ne se limite pas aux frontières nationales américaines. Il s'agit plutôt d'un phénomène transatlantique qui préserve une vision abrégée de la blancheur, ignorant que les innocents, que Baldwin dénonce, perpétuent la tradition impérialiste occidentale. Les mythologies entourant la blancheur américaine sont des vestiges culturels, politiques et philosophiques du projet de conquête de l'Europe, une entreprise qui s'est étendue des

Amériques et de l’Afrique jusqu’à l’Asie. Je me concentre sur la dimension transatlantique du pouvoir blanc pour rétablir le lien entre conquête et influence occidentale sur les populations non blanches.

Parler d’une esthétique transatlantique dans l’œuvre de Baldwin reconnaît à quel point l’écrivain met l’accent sur la dynamique de pouvoir entre les politiques nationales entourant la race et les formes mondialisées de racisme blanc, l’innocence blanche étant une réponse omniprésente aux critiques contemporaines sur l’état du progrès racial. Certes, Wecker ne mentionne pas Baldwin dans *White Innocence*. Cependant, le travail anthropologique de Wekker conforte les observations que Baldwin fait dans ses écrits. En outre, le travail de Wekker présente l’avantage supplémentaire de soutenir le lien que j’ai établi selon lequel l’innocence des Blancs est liée aux attitudes post-raciales qui servent à maintenir secrètement les hiérarchies raciales.

Le Pouvoir Noir

La nouvelle « *This Morning, This Evening So Soon* » démontre l’intégration constante par Baldwin des idéologies du Black Power, qu’il définit comme « l’autodétermination du peuple ». En effet, le roman *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968) signale un changement brusque dans son style d’écriture – ou ce que Jacqueline Goldsby appelle la « forme informelle » du roman – et est souvent cité comme une étape littéraire dans l’intérêt de Baldwin pour le Black Power. En contextualisant le thème de « l’incertitude » du roman par rapport à son discours sur les relations interraciales, je soutiens que Baldwin reconnaît le déclin de la rhétorique intégrationniste de King, proposant une nouvelle approche du *Black Power* qui répond à l’espoir décroissant que la nouvelle génération de l’Amérique blanche puisse être convaincue de changer. Alors que le narrateur apprend à accepter son héritage afro-américain, non seulement comme un artefact d’intérêt bourgeois capitaliste mais comme un site légitime

de connaissance et une source d'émancipation personnelle, le roman de Baldwin inaugure « une sorte d'adieu à la première vague » des militants des droits civiques, tout en annonçant la prochaine génération de militants afro-américains. Je tire mon argument de la défense par Baldwin de Stokely Carmichael, dans « White Power or World Community », personnage que « la presse publique » qualifie de « raciste fanatique noir très dangereux, radical ». L'inclusion et la défense de Carmichael par Baldwin expriment ce que James Miller considère comme un discours transatlantique du pouvoir noir, « une conscience sceptique capable de remettre en question et de défier les idéologies blanches de l'identité et de l'histoire », qui inclut la façon dont l'Occident perçoit le rôle du christianisme. Enfin, j'interprète l'identité métisse de Paul comme un substitut à la sexualité. Suivant l'observation de Courtney Thorsson selon laquelle « le mouvement Black Power était à la fois responsabilisant et limitant », parce que « le besoin urgent d'une action politique élude souvent les différences au sein de l'unité », je soutiens que Baldwin utilise la conversation difficile sur les relations mixtes pour répondre aux masculinités noires qui rejettent la non-hétéronormativité.

Des voyageurs transatlantiques

Trop peu de chercheurs baldwiniens ont parlé d'*Un passage de l'Occident* (1971) de l'écrivain algérien Nabile Farès (1940-2016), dans lequel l'écrivain réinvente son entretien de 1970 avec James Baldwin pour le magazine *Jeune Afrique*. Farès transforme sa conversation avec Baldwin en un récit qui compare son propre exil d'Algérie à la fuite de Baldwin à Paris. Le roman de Farès commence avec le journaliste Brady Fax interviewant un écrivain américain nommé « Caldwell ». En effet, l'écrivain en question est Baldwin aîné, dont le personnage principal de Farès admet qu'il mérite d'être nommé : « on n'a pas le droit de transformer des Baldwin en Caldwell, surtout lorsque les Baldwin n'ont, pour eux-mêmes, jamais su d'où venait leur nom. Après avoir appris qu'il allait interviewer Baldwin, Fax cherche son exemplaire de *The Fire Next Time* : « Des couvertures de livres bougeaient devant mes yeux. Mais, je

m'aperçus très vite que La prochaine fois, le feu n'était pas dans une étagère mais dans une caisse Hoi Sin Sauce en provenance du Viêt-Nam via les Etats-Unis et l'épicerie qui se trouve en bas des quatre étages de l'immeuble où je loge est la destination finale ». Le déplacement spatial du livre de Baldwin, allant des États-Unis au Vietnam jusqu'à la chambre de Brady à Paris, est une métaphore que Farès utilise pour explorer la philosophie de Baldwin de la « communauté mondiale », qui, selon moi, signifie un engagement mondial à soutenir « l'autodétermination d'un pays »

Je discute de l'apparition de Baldwin dans *Un Passager de l'Occident* de Farès, car je crois que les auteurs se complètent, car tous deux décrivent l'expérience d'expatriation de leurs protagonistes pour nuancer les discussions sur les Afro-Américains construisant le pont idéologique entre l'Occident et le monde postcolonial. Certes, cette section est courte et le traitement de Baldwin par Farès mérite un examen plus approfondi. Cela dit, je crois qu'une évaluation de la manière dont les histoires respectives des auteurs articulent une sensibilité globale aux effets de la domination blanche sur leurs personnages offre une conclusion appropriée à ce projet. Comme leurs protagonistes, les expériences de Baldwin et Farès en tant qu'expatriés à Paris diffèrent, car leur relation historique avec la France (et l'Occident) et avec les Français signifie qu'ils sont confrontés à des racismes distinctes. Cependant, la sensibilité expatriée des écrivains suggère une parenté qui, selon moi, soutient la « communauté mondiale » de Baldwin comme alternative au pouvoir blanc. Parallèlement, le roman de Farès illustre une compréhension commune de l'artiste comme témoin de la manière dont les mythes nationaux créent une apathie à l'égard de la souffrance humaine.

