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“MORE LIKE A FIRE, LIKE THE WIND”: JAMES BALDWIN AND THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ACTIVE LOVE.

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For George and Elanor, Minnie and Essie, and Charles.

"I'm not a believer in any sense which would make sense to any church … I believe in love … I don't mean anything passive. I mean something active, something more like a fire, like the wind, something which can change you. I mean energy. I mean a passionate belief, a passionate knowledge of what a human being can do, and become, what a human being can do to change the world in which he finds himself."

– James Baldwin, Interview with James Mossman (1965)

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Acknowledgements

"You are a sentimental fool." These words have been thrown at me in many ways over the past nine years. First levied by a friend in my cohort, somehow picked up by friends far away from Chicago, and then echoed in my brother Charles' refrain: "You're so dramatic." While at first my natural tendency to argue led to me dismissing the notion, within a year or two of first hearing Mat Messerschmidt's charge, I soon adopted "I'm so sentimental" as an excuse for my strange obsession with love. While my hero – the stubborn transatlantic commuter at the heart of this dissertation –took issue with the term, I find myself doing something rare: disagreeing with James Baldwin. As mentioned somewhere in the sea of jargon and overwriting that defines this dissertation, Harlem's prophet rebuked sentimentality of any form. To quote him directly: "Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel…and…the signal of secret and violent inhumanity" (Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel"). Eloquent though this may be, I can't help but suggest that the "Sentimentality" of which Baldwin writes stands apart from that oversharing of emotion I bring each day. Not because I am unique but because I cannot find another word to describe my deep love and appreciation for the people in my life. Sentimentality on my end – and I suspect Baldwin's – is my foremost means of honesty. As a result, these acknowledgments are less a register of credits due and more an expression of love.

I must start by thanking my family – both biological and chosen. Here, I think of my mother and father, Elanor and George Cato, who first modeled the "active love" outlined below and tolerated my fixation on deciphering it. It takes great patience to raise a son who asks, "How did you fall in love?" multiple times a year from ages 3 to 28. It requires even more strength to accompany that son on a journey far too similar to those of John Grimes, Fonny Hunt, and Rufus

Scott. At the same time appreciation goes to the best of all listeners – my brother Charles. I need not share the intricacies of our bond: it represents a Baldwinian sensuality that no one – us included – will ever understand. Who else could spend thirty years listening to a man only three years his elder outline the world's proper order and then serve as a test subject for that man's attempts to reorder the world (or at least their nightly TV schedule)? I think next of my grandmother, Minnie Marshall. While I speak often of the active lovers in my life, this woman stands out because she not only lives out the principles espoused by my hero but also seems to be a proponent of them. Whenever I had to situate Baldwin's ideas in the context of real life, I would only need to think of my grandmother or call her up. Her life is proof of active love's truth.

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I wrap up by returning to my family. I will spend the rest of my life trying to decipher what it means to love while Black, and when theorizing seems too much, I need only think of you. Thanks go to the Marshall family and those who forged "the life which had produced me and nourished me and paid for me" (Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*). This includes uncles John and Kevin; aunts Shirley, Julia Mae (R.I.P), and Karen (R.I.P); and the tribe of cousins – Ashley, Jamie, Tarika, Jonathan, Joshua, Jack, Matthew, Mark, John, Marcus, Jonathan, and Kiarra. Special appreciation to Jessica, Bernard (R.I.P.) and the Jarvises, as well. Thanks of a different sort is extended to the Geralds. These people first taught me the need "to be sensual...to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does" (Baldwin, *The*

Fire Next Time). I think especially of Lola, Melvin Jr., Monica, Paul, Paula, Cynthia, Iris, Sonja, and Ilani. Active love is a collective enterprise. You all prove it daily.

A final thanks goes to my hero, James Baldwin. I'll use your own words instead of mine:

"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was Dostoevsky and Dickens [and Baldwin] who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive. Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people."
— James Baldwin, "The Doom and Glory of Knowing Who You Are"

Introduction

"In any case, the world changes then, and it changes forever. Because you love one human being, you see everyone else very differently than you saw them before … and you are both stronger and more vulnerable, both free and bound. Free, paradoxically, because, now, you have a home – your lover's arms. And bound: to that mystery, precisely, a bondage which liberates you into something of the glory and suffering of the world."

– James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (1972)

1. Argument

Alongside race, death, and identity, love is among the most frequently discussed topics in James Baldwin's oeuvre. In Baldwin's writings, the term "love" refers to more than the personal relationships between people. According to Baldwin, love sits at the core of human existence, serving as "a state of being … [and] a state of grace" (Baldwin 1993b, 95). Baldwin believes so strongly in love and its ability to bring meaning to life that he describes himself as a religious disciple of the emotion. When asked if he believed in a Christian God during a 1965 interview with British authors Colin MacInnes and James Mossman, Baldwin deified the emotion, responding: "I'm not a believer in any sense which would make sense to any church … I believe in love … I mean something active … something which can change you" (Baldwin 1989, 48). As demonstrated in the conversation with MacInnes and Mossman, one of the most challenging elements of James Baldwin's philosophy of love is the varying way he characterizes the notion. At times, Baldwin argues that love is a non-anthropomorphic God. At others, he describes love as a tool of social change. And yet, at others, Baldwin frames love as a source of immediate pleasure and sensuality.

While it is well-understood that the English term "love" possesses many meanings and connotations, Western conceptions of love and intimacy have tended to follow the distinction between unconditional, reciprocal, and intimate-desirous love first reflected in the Greek differentiation between *agape*, *philia*, and *eros* (Schäfer 2012; Lewis 1991). For Baldwin, this "standard" distinction does not apply – the love of which he speaks is simultaneously unconditional, marked by a need for reciprocity, and wholly desirous, even if many philosophers of love would argue that those qualities are largely incompatible and prevent theoretical overlap. As a result, many scholarly considerations of Baldwin's philosophy of love have focused on love's function within specific contexts – either in his literary works or in his nonfiction. Most of the former analyses tend to emphasize examples of erotic or sexually intimate love. In contrast, many of the latter comments present Baldwinian love as a political concept unconcerned with intimacy and sensuality. Defining love is a perennial topic in the philosophy of love. It has become even more relevant as philosophers of love engage nonwhite conceptions of intimacy, such as Baldwin's. Yet it is precisely this inconsistency – as reflected both in Baldwin's reflections on love and the scholarship on it – that makes Baldwin's ideas on human connection so interesting. Well-known for his dismissal of categories and labels, Baldwin considers love among the most transcendent of human phenomena, and he makes no effort to reduce it to distinctions of romantic versus platonic or personal versus political. To fully appreciate Baldwin's singular approach to love, one must wrestle with this inconsistency and unpack how Baldwin speaks of love without relying on restrictive labels.

In July 1961, Baldwin published "The New Lost Generation" in *Esquire* magazine, wherein he insisted that an individual cannot grow as a lover unless they gain a better understanding of themselves. The essay begins by discussing Baldwin's ambiguous relationship

with Eugene Worth, a young Black man Baldwin met during his years in Greenwich Village in his early 20s. In 1946, three years after beginning his connection with Baldwin, Worth committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge after confessing love for Baldwin and while involved with a white woman in their circle of friends. Worth's suicide would resurface throughout Baldwin's nonfiction, interviews, and in his novel Another Country. Baldwin's biographer David Leeming writes:

> The two men were never lovers. Worth was evidently heterosexual, and Baldwin, for fear of losing him, made no attempt to consummate the relationship sexually – even when Worth wondered aloud "if I might be in love with you." Later Baldwin considered this to have been an "oblique confession" that was really a "plea," but at the time, he loved Eugene too much and had too little self-esteem to imagine that Eugene could love him in return. And for the rest of his life, especially when he had been hurt by a relationship, he tended to see in the image of Eugene Worth preserved in his memory the model of the perfect love he never found (Leeming 2015, 56)

Following Leeming's account of the events, I argue that this memory of unfulfilled love, hindered by a fear of rejection, would anchor Baldwin's philosophy of love. Regardless of whether the love that Baldwin wrote of was romantic, friendly, or political, it meant nothing without action and an attempt to fulfill it. And with this conviction, Baldwin sought to prevent situations like Worth's death.

Although Baldwin refrains from offering a systematic theory of love, the plethora of reflections on the topic provides a consistent philosophy. "'More Like a Fire, Like the Wind'" examines the political philosophy of "active love" that unfolded through James Baldwin's conversations with other 20th-century Black creative intellectuals – namely Ralph Ellison and Audre Lorde. The project joins Black and religious studies' growing conversations about love by outlining Baldwin's singular understanding of the phenomenon. I read Baldwin's treatments of love as and through the language of testimony – a form of discourse that asserts universal truths by drawing upon the ambiguities of concrete, contextual experience. As I show, the poetics of

testimony allowed Baldwin to use critical reflections on Black people's struggles with racism to demonstrate love's transformative potential in all racial contexts. In doing so, Baldwin simultaneously defined love as a radical political act, highlighted its antiracist functions, and addressed love's operation in all human lives. Drawing from Baldwin's interview with MacInnes and Mossman, I label this form of love "active love" (Baldwin 1989, 48). Baldwin framed this active love as an emancipatory force, as he attested to love's ability to help people transcend the limits of their racist society and see the world and their existence anew. By emphasizing willfulness and action, Baldwin set active love against forms of intimacy defined by ostentatiousness, dispassion, or superficiality. Baldwin lacked patience for shallow forms of love, which he believed distracted citizens from their public commitments and limited their ability to attend to the needs of their countrypersons. Thus, rather than indulging in shallow sentiments or false appeals to superficial love, the Baldwinian lover must *prove* their faith in love by actively embracing the vulnerability, risks, and responsibility of loving. To do so, Baldwin insisted that active lovers must tailor their care to the needs of each person they encounter rather than subscribing to societal prescriptions on how to relate to one another.

Despite the frequency of Baldwin's discussions of love, there are several difficulties in understanding James Baldwin's definition of love because of the embrace of the ambiguities of life that anchor the logic of the practice of witnessing. Among these is the fact that Baldwin describes love in universal terms while also outlining its highly racial operation amidst America's racial politics. In addition, several intellectuals have identified a great deal of sentimentality in Baldwin's discussions of love, even though Baldwin rebuked sentimental preoccupation with and demonstrating emotions. Lastly, given their autobiographical nature, Baldwin's discussions of love are offered from a highly masculine perspective. As a result,

Baldwin's tendency to draw universal claims about love's nature from his experience runs the risk of excluding women's experience of love.

We can resolve these unclarities if we look at the intersection of Baldwin's beliefs about human beings' fundamental purpose and the nature of his artistic practice. In the first case, Baldwin argued that human beings were defined by a spiritual responsibility to do their utmost to live authentic, real lives and support others in their efforts to do the same so that society could become all the more real. Regarding his artistic practice, Baldwin believed that true art required the artist to use mining and processing their own experiences to convey ideas about human nature to their audience. Baldwin thought that he was his most authentic self when producing art, and, as a result, Baldwin's approach to life was marked by an effort to use his experiences to encourage others to embrace and live authentic lives. Drawing from Baldwin's parlance, I label this term "witnessing" given his repeated self-designation as a "spiritual witness." Baldwin defined a witness as a figure who conveyed social truths and encouraged self-growth through various forms of rhetoric, including testimony, prophecy, invitation, and confession – all of which arise in his discussions of love and are examined in this dissertation. Baldwin explored the concept of witnessing throughout his career, particularly in essays such as "The Creative Process" (1962) and "Mass Culture and the Creative Artist: Some Personal Notes" (1960) and in interviews with figures such as academic Julius Lester (1984) and journalist Ida Lewis (1970). In his interview with Lester, Baldwin reflected upon the nature of artistry, telling the scholar that he understood himself to be a "Witness to whence I came, where I am. Witness to what I've seen and the possibilities that I think I see" and that he found himself duty bound to "[bear] witness to the truth" (Baldwin 1989, 225). Shared only three years before his death, Baldwin's words on witnessing summarize his career. As he told it, his artistry was more so a means of conveying

truth and subverting falsehoods than the production of art for art's sake, and the ideas that he conveyed, while subjective, bore relevance beyond his personal opinions. The most central of the truths he bore witness were those involving love.

To prevent these tragedies from taking place, Baldwin's efforts to "bear witness" involved unmasking life's hidden realities and identifying people's relationship with the world's fundamental nature. In "Down at the Cross," he argues that this unmasking is best achieved through love, noting that "love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (Baldwin 1993b, 95). He couples this assertion about love's role in revealing reality with the claim that life is shaped by "sensuality" – the embodied experience of several emotions at once (Baldwin 1993b, 92). Baldwin argues that the phenomenon allows a person to feel life at its fullest, writing: "To be sensual … is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does" (Baldwin 1993b, 43). When describing moments in which he and other Black Americans he knew were at their most sensual, Baldwin argues that they experienced a freedom in which they had no "need to pretend to be what [they] were not" (Baldwin 1993b, 41). He equates this freedom to the intonations of Black musical genres such as gospel, jazz, and the blues. This affective quality mediates the harsh and mellow elements of the music, freeing the songs from being classified as entirely sad or wholly joyous. Baldwin describes this quality as "tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged," and he suggests that white Americans are fearful of it given that their music fits either one category or another, but not both. Like these "tart and ironic" musical genres, sensuality, as the core of life, is neither entirely good nor bad.

Yet, as Baldwin reminds his readers time and time again, humans are liable to avoid life's realities and – by implication – the sensuality that shapes life itself, and he cites this rejection of

sensuality as the source of many social issues. In several essays before "Down at the Cross," including "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1948) and "The Creative Process (1962), Baldwin argues that modern-day individuals turn away from life's sensual reality by searching for truth in socially constructed categories rather than in the complexities of sensual life. As a result, his discussions of reality include both the reflections on social categories such as race that are discussed in Farred's work, and the calls for a category-less understanding of the world identified by Kilpeläinen. Unfortunately, because the world's sensual nature transcends definition, these categories ultimately prove incapable of reflecting reality. Categories held a significant place throughout Baldwin's oeuvre. He reflected on modernity's over-emphasis on them as early as 1948 in his classic essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel":

> Our passion for categorization, life neatly fitted into pegs, has led to an unforeseen, paradoxical distress; confusion, a breakdown of meaning. Those categories which were meant to define and control the world for us have boomeranged us into chaos; in which limbo we whirl, clutching the straws of our definitions …. We find ourselves bound, first without, then within, by the nature of our categorization (Baldwin 2012, 19).

Here, Baldwin argues that a lifestyle dependent on such labels is misguided, and the more a society depends on these false labels, the further its citizens stand from understanding life in its truest form and the closer they stand to "chaos." Ultimately, this distance from reality dampens individuals' ability to acknowledge the humanity of people who occupy social categories other than their own. As a result, the category-invested individual is liable to hate, rather than love, those who are different and to adopt bigoted politics. Although categories seem valid and secure, Baldwin argues that eventually, they function more like "straws" than firm poles of support and prove that they cannot keep people from being overcome by chaos. Unfortunately, according to Baldwin, individuals in these situations struggle to fight these beliefs because looking outside such a categorical framework would require facing the painful irony of sensual existence. In his 1962 essay, "The Creative Process," he describes this end: "We become social creatures because

we cannot live any other way. But…we are frightened…of these forces within us that perpetually menace our precarious security" (Baldwin 1998, 671).

This fear of reality that Baldwin describes is intense, and, in his eyes, it often leads people to develop institutions and ideologies that, though *seemingly* reflective of the world's realities, are ultimately misguided because they are grounded in false categories such as race. To quote Baldwin's exasperated reflection on people's tendency to avoid the painfulness of reality in "Mass Culture and the Creative Artist: Some Personal Notes" (1959): "Someone once said to me that the people in general cannot bear very much reality. He meant by this that they prefer fantasy to a truthful re-creation of their experience" (Baldwin 2010, 3). Institutions often promote "formulaic" lifestyles, wherein one's behavior is determined not by the particularities of their sensual experience but rather by the constructed dictates of their institutions. When the categories hold social implications – such as nationality or race – they can onset a cycle of false perception, structural slander, and entrenched social divides as people fail to recognize the realities of other people's lives. Baldwin was highly critical of such an approach to life. As he stated adamantly in "The New Lost Generation" (1961): "There are no formulas for the improvement of the private, or any other, life" (Baldwin 1998, 662-663). In Baldwin's eyes, individuals who adopt formulaic lifestyles have rejected sensuality and invested in social divides. As such, these divides only invite sentiments of fear and hate, which then onset the very same cycle that distances individuals from the world's sensual reality in the first place. Baldwin argues that people are averse to reality. Still, he finds power in testimony because, as a social discourse, testimony's articulation forces listeners – especially those with aversions to reality, such as white Americans – to confront the painful realities shared by the testifiers. At the same time, it helps

reduce the loneliness that comes with understanding life's painful reality in the way marginalized people such as Black Americans do.[1]

Many of Baldwin's most substantive examples of categorical living involve white Americans. According to Baldwin, white Americans' categorical identity is dependent on the false belief that they are more human than Black people. Having convinced themselves of their superiority, white people develop institutions, laws, and social norms to affirm and sustain that false supremacy. These might take the form of segregated and unequally funded schools, the societal dismissal of African American vernacular English, or the over-policing of predominantly Black neighborhoods. Ironically, Baldwin takes this behavior as a sign of white people's fear of reality. He reasons that if white Americans are willing to oppress fellow citizens simply to prove a false sense of superiority, then they must be afraid of the reality that they ordinary human beings and thus fallible and mortal. Baldwin writes of this fear towards the end of *The Fire Next Time* – a book length discussion of love and America's racial politics: "what white Americans do not face when they regard a Negro: reality – the fact that life is tragic …and one day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the…last time" (Baldwin 1993b, 91). At the same time, because their categorical identity is dependent on the oppression of Black people, Baldwin reasons that – at least structurally – white people's sense of self is intricately linked to Black people's existence, binding the two groups like two siblings.[2] Yet despite this existential proximity, white people's efforts to avoid the tragic reality of human life includes denying the racial injustice

[1] Cora Diamond addresses this phenomenon from the perspective an intellectual historian, labeling it "the difficulty of reality" of which she writes these are "experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability" (Diamond 2006, 3).

[2] Chapter 1: Racial and Nonracial Love Testimonies in "Down at the Cross: Letter From a Region in My Mind"

caused by their efforts. Baldwin ironically characterizes this disposition "innocence" – a claim of no wrongdoing despite the widespread evidence of the nation's racial inequities. As he writes in *The Fire Next Time*:

> These innocent and well-meaning [white] people…have caused [Black Americans] to be born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago. (I hear the chorus of the innocents screaming, "No! This is not true! How bitter you are!" (Baldwin 1993b, 42).

White people's innocence is just as false as their racial category and the power that accompanies it. As a result, Baldwin argues that it is their responsibility to recognize this falsehood and end the very real harm that their self-deception has caused.

Given the religious elements of Baldwin's witnessing, I argue that his philosophy of love is a religious philosophy in form, content, and origins. This religiosity and the ambiguity that comes with it allows Baldwin to resolve many of the inconsistencies that cultivate debates about love and politics. We can unpack this by examining his discursive content, form, and audience. I argue that Baldwin employed religious rhetoric, concepts, and forms of expression to emphasize love's potential as an emancipatory political force. The most noteworthy example is "testimony" – a form of religious discourse whereby individuals assert universal truth claims by bearing witness to their own lived experiences or those of others. By attesting to Black experiences with racism – whether imaginatively or through nonfiction – Baldwin offered moral insights concerning love's capacity to overcome a host of oppressions. At the same time, because testimony is a form of religious discourse, these moral insights carry a degree of religiosity even despite the seeming secularity of the politics of anti-Black racism.

Literary scholar Joshua L. Miller discusses the role of witnessing in African American culture, noting that bearing witness is an act deeply entrenched in Black American experience extending back to the time of slavery, with figures such as Frederick Douglass bearing witness

and asserting truth claims derived from time spent witnessing of the Black life in America (Miller 1999, 334). In a notable text on the patterns of Black American speech, Geneva Smitherman speaks to the role narrative plays within all forms of Black discourse. Citing Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Stephanie Renee Toliver notes:

> Storytelling is a rhetorical strategy in which Black people condense broad, theoretical observations about life, love, and people into concrete narratives. These narratives include ghost stories, general human interest stories, origin stories, and folk tales, and each retelling "recreates the spiritual reality for others who at the moment vicariously experience what the testifier has gone through" (p. 150). Thus, stories are more than just basic commentary, for they are a means to reaffirm the humanity of the storyteller because they share their lives with those willing to listen. They are more than just fiction, for the stories act as testimony, "a dramatic narration and a communal reenactment of one's feelings and experiences" (p. 150). Ultimately, the Black narrative tradition imbues truth in the tale, as Black storytellers draw from history, real-life experience, personal feeling, and imagination to create intricate testimonies for their listeners to witness. (Toliver 2020, 507-508)

Baldwin is clearly a member of this Black American tradition, given the strong presence of storytelling, theoretical observations, and concrete narratives in his writings.

2. Methodology

An exercise in exegetical, genealogical, and constructive inquiry, my project has four main aims. Firstly, I intend to define love's function and meaning within these writers' works and then use these definitions to map their intersecting discourses. Secondly, I aim to define each thinker's discussion of active love as a historically situated response to particular intersections of oppression, particularly those involving race, class, and gender. Thirdly, I consider the legacy of these discussions by investigating how this testimonial discourse on active love has inspired later imaginings of love as a political force in contexts beyond that of 20th-century anti-Black racism. Baldwin explored these concepts directly and indirectly with various other thinkers, and my

project employs comparative analysis to identify the nuances of his philosophy of love. I use this analysis to argue that scholars adopt testimony to study love within and outside Black studies. Because Black American testimonies trace back to the Christian church, the discourse is highly spiritual. As a result, I pay particular attention to how the discourse's religiosity both shapes and is shaped by Baldwin's thoughts about Black people and Blackness.

My project employs a multidisciplinary methodology integrating close reading, archival research, and comparative analysis. I begin by building two analytic frameworks through which I will investigate the thinkers under study: an understanding of active love as a category broadly conceived and a parallel theory of testimony. As a theory marked by constitutive themes rather than rigid definitional borders, the notion of active love proves conceptually flexible and consistent enough to allow me to map the authors' discussions. I derive an analytic lens from the notion of testimony. Doing so allows me to focus on the substantive affinities between the authors' discourse on active love and their expressive similarities. For this project, I use the term "testimony" as a label for discourse that asserts truth claims by making pronouncements about particular lived experiences. Much of my conceptualization of testimony is grounded in two religious understandings of the concept: those found in the philosophy of religion and the practice of testifying within Black Christian churches.[3]

After developing these analytic lenses, I compare each figure's discussions of love by integrating exegesis and contextual analysis of the authors' significant texts. Because the discussions are situated within a postwar context, the items under study will range from the authors' earliest publications in the 1940s to those from the late 1980s and 1990s.[4] I then use

[3] Particularly those explored by Paul Ricoeur, Shoshana Felman, and Rebecca Chopp
[4] The 1990s witnessed several events suited to marking the end of the study including the deaths of Baldwin, Lorde, and Ellison.

these analytic frameworks to identify how Baldwin's discussions of active love hold affinity to, diverge from, and reconfigure this constellating theme. My close readings will focus on the texts that deal primarily with love – particularly *The Fire Next Time* (1963)*, Notes of a Native Son* (1955)*,* "The New Lost Generation" (1961), "The White Man's Guilt" (1965), and "Revolutionary Hope" (1984). At the same time, I identify how Baldwin's discussions of love carry implicit or explicit references to the other authors. Focusing heavily on word choice, rhetorical flourishes, and thematic trends, my analyses map the discursive and theoretical particularities that distinguish each discourse. In the process, I remain mindful of the religiosity that runs throughout them by noting how each thinker's discussion of active love involves religious concepts such as salvation, grace, and faith. I also use negative analysis by placing the discourses on active love in conversation with more studied philosophies of love.

My investigation intervenes in several scholarly conversations – especially those within religious studies, Black studies, and the emergent field of love studies. In my project, I engage two trends within the study of religion: the consideration of the religious dimensions of Black literary figures and the continued study of the divide between religion and the secular. As evidenced by texts such as Josiah Ulysses Young III's *James Baldwin's Understanding of God* (2014), Wallace D. Best's *Langston's Salvation* (2017), and M. Cooper Harriss' *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Theology* (2017), the subfield of religion and literature has witnessed reinvigorated interest in the religiosity of Black literary figures – particularly those from the 20th-century (Young 2014; Best 2017; Harriss 2017). As major American writers, the four figures under study have received persistent scholarly attention. My project engages recent literature on the authors and brings new perspectives through intertextual and comparative analysis of their discourse on love. All the more, the field of Black studies has continuously witnessed a scholarly tendency to

view racial identity as the *only* mediating factor in Black thought to the exclusion of other, non-identitarian factors such as sociohistorical context, material circumstance, and aesthetic expression (Reed and Warren 2016). This is particularly true in the case of the few studies on Black intellectual discussions of love. Similarly, my project builds upon contemporary scholarship on the divide between religious and secular discourse, given that each author uses testimony – a religious form of discourse – to discuss the secular realities of American racism. I draw methods and theoretical frameworks from classic and recent scholarship on hermeneutics, political theology, and African American Christianity.

In addition, I engage contemporary scholarship within the study of love. Drawing on the work of theorist Michael Gratzke, I argue that active love consists of the willful execution of "love acts" – the performative acts that indicate care and intimacy (Gratzke 2017). Consequently, it is the execution or demonstration, rather than the sentiment or feeling, of deep love and care that defines active love. According to the authors under study, individuals must demonstrate their love through clear actions despite the hardships of anti-Black racism. As Ellison writes, "Action is the thing. We are what we do and do not do" (Ellison 2003, 222). In each thinker's formulation, love takes on several performative qualities: the love is intentional and manifests in the form of concrete acts; the love involves risks and vulnerability; and, lastly, the love is performed out of some form of obligation or responsibility – whether metaphysical, ethical, civic, or spiritual. I aim to broaden scholarship in the field of love studies by employing highly contextual, interdisciplinary methods similar to those found in Saidiya Hartman's recent text *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019) and Felice Blake's *Black Love, Black Hate: Intimate Antagonisms in African American Literature* (2018). These methods also aid my engagement with love studies. Working within a newly emergent

field, love theorists seek to study the concept of "love" in and of itself without drawing recourse to investigations of other forms of human connection such as sexuality or community. By highlighting how Baldwin and the other authors discussed love's potential as a political force, I engage the work of love theorists such as Anna Jónasdóttir, whose theory of "love power" also speaks to love's political capacities (Jónasdóttir 2018). The discussions of active love offer radical imaginings of love's political potential and are well-suited for the field's aspiration to re-envision love amidst social conflict and oppression.

3. Structure

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I explore how Baldwin uses testimony in "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" (1963) to frame active love as a proactive form of engagement marked by risk, vulnerability, and perpetual uncertainty. Such relationality resides at the core of Baldwin's works, guiding his ethics, directing his political projects, and grounding his highly testimonial writings (Schulenberg 2007). In Baldwin's corpus, active love is not a simple idea one can easily subscribe to. Instead, it is a challenging practice that requires great honesty and constant efforts towards self-awareness (Baldwin 1993b, 104). The chapter explores Baldwin's explanation of his philosophy of love in his testimonies about his teenage years in the Black church and in his meeting with Elijah Muhammad in the early 1960s. By reading Baldwin's essay through a testimonial lens, I outline how Baldwin uses testimonies to identify love's function within the particular contexts of those events, its ability to respond to social issues such as racism and discrimination by Black people, as well as love's relevance in the lives of all human beings.

In the dissertation's second chapter, I argue that both Baldwin and Black American author Ralph Ellison developed philosophies of political love that mirror the theory of "active love" outlined in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. My analysis focuses on three parallels: Dostoevsky's assertation that love is a form of labor, that love stems from a form of universal guilt and responsibility shared by all humans, and his insistence that love must be practiced through concrete acts in the real world. Although the term "love" is found only sporadically throughout the text of *Invisible Man,* the concept holds great significance within Ellison's masterpiece and his broader discourse. When love is discussed in the novel, Ellison does so profoundly, and when love is missing, he uses irony to make clear that its absence plays a crucial role in the book's narrative. Ellison frames active love as a willful effort to mediate simultaneous urges to idealize the things or people that harm us or hate entities responsible for our growth. In the case of Black Americans, such tenuous relationships are shaped by their racialized experience.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I investigate the implicit conversations that arose between Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, and Robert F. Kennedy in their assorted discussions of love, fear, and white guilt during the mid-1960s. Despite being charged with a so-called "sentimentalism" in his writings on love, I argue that Baldwin employed a prophetic rhetoric in which his testimonies called for people to overcome their tendency to accept passive sentiments such as fear and guilt and replace them with a practice of active love. I outline three genres of prophecy within Baldwin's work at the time: jeremiads, sorrow songs, and mirrorings. Whereas the latter two genres critique the sentiments of fear and guilt, respectively, Baldwin's jeremiads express the calls for an action-based love.

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, I analyze "Revolutionary Hope," Baldwin's 1984 published conversation with Black feminist poet Audre Lorde. In the conversation, Lorde pushes Baldwin to nuance a number of his claims about love and racism raised seventeen years earlier in *The Fire Next Time* to account for the experiences of Black women and gender-based differences within America's Black community. Lorde's conception of love extends from a form of intimacy, which she terms "the erotic." In a speech delivered to feminist thinkers in the 1980s, Lorde defines the erotic as "a resource within [women] that lies on a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of [women's] unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (Lorde 2007, 53). Lorde argues that patriarchy leads women to suppress their erotic faculties. Her memoirs testify to how she willfully taps into her distinct erotic faculties and uses them to free herself of her multiple oppressions. In Lorde's philosophy, love emerges from an individual's erotic faculty, and when an individual invests energy in their erotic capacity by connecting with others, they achieve existential and political freedom. Ultimately, Baldwin's philosophy of love is a means for collective liberation and survival in a world that seems not to allow any. He espouses this eloquently in his 1972 memoir *No Name in the Street*:

> In any case, the world changes then, and it changes forever. Because you love one human being, you see everyone else very differently than you saw them before … and you are both stronger and more vulnerable, both free and bound. Free, paradoxically, because, now, you have a home – your lover's arms. And bound: to that mystery, precisely, a bondage which liberates you into something of the glory and suffering of the world (Baldwin 2007, 23)

When Baldwin bears witness, he aspires to make these connections clear and encourage the reimagination of human existence. Rather than focus on themselves as individuals, Baldwin hopes that people will see them as one part of a larger whole, and he believes embracing love for others is the most efficacious means of doing so.

Chapter 1: Racial and Nonracial Love Testimonies in "Down at the Cross: Letter From a Region in My Mind"

"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."

1. Introduction

One of the foremost examples of the confusion surrounding Baldwin's philosophy of love involves the extent to which his understanding of love's political function is shaped by race. Whereas scholars such as Grant Farred have characterized Baldwin's philosophy of political love as a largely racialized philosophy that offers love as a means of resolving racial conflict between the static populations of Black and white Americans, Pekka Kilpeläinen argues that Baldwin's love is ultimately "postcategorical" in nature – whereby it applies in any context without regard to social categories such as "Black" and "white" (Farred 2015; Kilpeläinen 2014). Farred's reading largely rests upon Baldwin's insistence that Black people's asymmetrical, unconditional love toward white people is needed to stave off the country's spiritual death. In this way, Farred's presents Baldwinian love in racial terms. Farred interprets the Baldwinian love in *The Fire Next Time* through a doctrinally Christian lens, arguing that the asymmetrical love in the text is a racial analog to the sacrificial love that led the Christian God to sacrifice his only son to save an unloving human population. Because Baldwin describes situations that are defined by the power imbalance between Black and white Americans, Farred's argument presents Baldwinian love as racialized and specific to America's racial circumstances. According to Kilpeläinen, Baldwinian love is postcategorical in nature – which means it operates without any regard for the false social categories which suppress the world's reality. In Kilpeläinen's words, postcategorical love is "an

impulse and desired movement toward…a world in which identity categories would lose their capacity for oppression" (Kilpeläinen 2014, 181). When Kilpeläinen characterizes Baldwinian love as an impulse towards a postcategorical "utopia," he refers to the phenomenon whereby loving another individual regardless of their social categorization allows the lover to overcome a dependence on categories and – if only for a moment – envision a world in which they are irrelevant. The love is highly empathetic, and through it, an individual looks past the structural positions of others and recognizes their humanity as totally independent of the representational categories that society assigns them. While both Farred and Kilpeläinen offer nuanced readings of Baldwinian love, their accounts are seemingly incongruous: how can Baldwin's vision of love be both particular to the context of Black-white relations and universally applicable to all people's experiences, regardless of race? Even more, if Baldwinian love is primarily a response to anti-Black racism, as Farred suggests, how can it create spaces that transgress social categories, as Kilpeläinen argues?

Remaining mindful that many of Baldwin's discussions of love are found in stories about his life, we can resolve the seeming inconsistency between Baldwin's discussions of racialized love and his assertions that love transcends social categories by considering the narrative structure of his witnessed accounts of the world. In doing so, we find that Baldwin's discussions of love often take the form of testimony – a narrative discourse that asserts universal truths by drawing upon the ambiguities of concrete, contextual experience. As a result, neither a narrowly racialized nor an overly broad account of Baldwin's philosophy of love is accurate: the philosophy is both particular and universal. For the most part, Baldwin's testimonies consist of four elements that can be labeled using Baldwin's lexicon: a nuanced account of an individual's lived experience; a set of "private" truths that Baldwin discerned about that individual and their

experience; a collection of "categorical" truths which Baldwin derived from the social phenomena which shaped the individual's experience; and, lastly, broader universal truths about human life itself. I draw the labels private, categorical, and universal directly from Baldwin's parlance given that Baldwin characterizes experience as "a private, and a very largely speechless affair" (Baldwin 2012, 127), discusses society in terms of its social categories (Baldwin 2012, 19), and makes clear that his claims about humankind apply universally. Love theorist Michael Gratzke validates the analysis of love by studying narratives such as testimony in his methodological writings. According to Gratzke, scholars can read discussions of love as extended narratives about acts of care and intimacy (Gratzke 2017). As a genre of narrative discourse, testimony is particularly suited for narrative analysis, especially since its validity rests upon the experiential evidence and concrete events – a source of information Baldwin finds incontrovertible. To quote him in *The Fire Next Time*: "One cannot argue with anyone's experience or decision or belief" (Baldwin 1993b, 71).

In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin's testimonial discussions of love are especially notable in "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" – the second section of his 1963 book *The Fire Next Time*. "Down at the Cross" recounts Baldwin's encounters with two religious institutions: his entrance and departure from the Black Pentecostal church as a teenager and his first meeting with Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam. At the time of the publication of "Down at the Cross," many of Baldwin's readers were privileged white liberals – including those who made up the readership of *The New Yorker.* These American citizens supported civil rights, yet their concern for the plight of Black Americans was outweighed by the split in political approaches being taken by Black activists. Whereas figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. promoted a politics anchored in Christian *agape* love – a form of social care that took

the form of nonviolent resistance – figures such as Malcolm X and the members of the Nation of Islam promoted a militant Black nationalism grounded in a protective love for Black people. "Down at the Cross' testimonies on the Black church and Elijah Muhammad addressed both religious conceptions of love, albeit without focusing on either figure.[5]

The essay was first published in *The New Yorker* magazine in November 1962 under the title "Letter from a Region in My Mind" and again in *The Fire Next Time* under the title "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in Mind" – a title drawn from a Negro spiritual which celebrates the location of Jesus' crucifixion as the origin of the singers' salvation. One could argue that this new title makes a critical element of the essay explicit: that moments of intense pain offer opportunities for sinful participants and observers of a conflict to redeem themselves and experience moral salvation. According to the spiritual, the site of Jesus' crucifixion marks the spot where the sacrificial "blood [of others] is applied" to an individual's soul and, consequently, "saves [that individual] and keeps [them] clean" (1993, 28). Given that Jesus' crucifixion is understood as the foremost example of Christian love, the invocation of "Down at the Cross" in the essay's revised form demonstrates that love, sacrifice, and salvation lie at the heart of the essay's themes. Whereas Baldwin's testimonies on his time in the church detailed his discovery of the fundamental principles of his philosophy of political love – particularly love's function as a human responsibility, the demand that love be given unapologetically to all people, and its manifestation through concrete acts of goodwill – his testimony on his meeting with Muhammad allowed Baldwin to defend his philosophy against critiques of his faith in political

[5] It should be noted that while Baldwin critiques the "Black church" as a whole – citing his individual experiences with the churches of Harlem – the congregations he visited were largely Black Pentecostal institutions that carried a distinct theology from the Black Baptist beliefs of Martin Luther King.

love. These critiques included both those of white Americans, as presented in strawman form by Muhammad, and the Black nationalist criticisms of Muhammad himself. Leeming writes of love's role in the meeting: "[Baldwin] knew that his fears were a reflection … of the struggle within himself between his longing for a life based on love and his sense that power was necessary in a world that valued only power" (Leeming 2015, 189).

Drawing upon theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, Shoshana Felman, and Rebecca Chop, I argue that Baldwin uses testimonial rhetoric in "Down at the Cross" to synthesize discussions of his interpersonal experiences with broader claims about social phenomena such as race. In doing so, Baldwin made universal claims about the experience of love and sensuality. Drawing from Baldwin's parlance, I label these truth claims as private, categorical, and universal, respectively. I argue that the inextricable link between the three forms of truth stems from the discursive logic of his testimonies. As I show, when testifying, Baldwin moves from sharing private realizations about his experiences to making identity-based claims about social categories such as race and then finishes with claims about humanity at large. In "Down at the Cross," Baldwin frames America as a metaphorical family torn apart by a preoccupation with racial categories. Working in conjunction with "My Dungeon Shook" – the first of *The Fire Next Time*'s two epistolary essays – the testimonies in "Down at the Cross" invoke unique pairs of family metaphors and rhetorical devices to outline American citizens' loving responsibility to the fellow countrypersons.[6] Because Baldwin's discussions of love take the form of testimony, his claims about familial love extend beyond the context of America's racial politics and serve as forms of love that must be demonstrated by and towards all of humanity. As a result, the text includes

[6] See Chapter 4 (Section 1. Introduction) for an overview of "My Dungeon Shook"

both categorical assertions that frame love in racial terms and universal claims that describe love's operations between all people in an identity-less manner.

Given Baldwin's deification of love, Baldwin's testimonies about his encounters with the Black Pentecostal church and the Nation of Islam are particularly noteworthy. In his testimony on the Black church, Baldwin uses irony to outline a fraternal love in which an individual helps others on their journeys of self-discovery, even if those individuals behave unjustly or come from different backgrounds. In his subsequent testimony – an account of his first meeting with Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam – Baldwin invites his readers to judge the veracity of his claims using a rhetorical maneuver that I call "juridical trust." This trust allows Baldwin to urge his readers to demonstrate a filial love for their elders, in which an individual respects the struggles of their seniors but resists unquestioningly adopting their elders' worldviews by discovering reality on their own.

2. James Baldwin's Testimonial Witnessing

The inextricable link between Baldwin's testimonies' private, categorical, and universal truths stems from their testimonial discursive logic. Throughout his corpus, Baldwin repeatedly moves from sharing realizations about his private experiences to making identity-based claims about the experiences of Black and white Americans and then theorizing universally about humanity at large. Because testimony is a discourse that conveys meanings from experience, Baldwin can use it to translate the privacy and speechlessness of personal experience – both his own and that of others – into a public discourse from which categorical and universal insights may be drawn. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History,* Shoshana Felman argues that this emphasis on lived experience distinguishes testimony from

other genres: "To testify [is] to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one's own speech as material evidence for truth … rather than to simply formulate a statement" (Felman 1992, 5).

"Down at the Cross" features a number of these private-categorical-universal discursive units. At one point in the essay, Baldwin reflects on the fear and insecurity that defined his teenage years in Harlem in private, categorical, and universal terms. He begins by describing how *he* "was icily determined" by his living conditions, only to shift just a few sentences later into a discussion about how "*every Negro boy* … who reaches this point realizes … that he stands in great peril" and then to conclude with a universal claim about all humans: "it is certainly sad that the awakening of one's senses should lead to … a merciless judgment of oneself" (Baldwin 1993b, 10, 23-25, emphasis added). In another example of the interplay between the various components of Baldwin's testimonies, Baldwin differentiates between private, categorical, and universal truth claims about love itself. As he writes: "I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace – not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (Baldwin 1993b, 95). In the statement, Baldwin distinguishes between offering personal – or private – claims about love, rebuking forms of love shaped by America's social categories, and promoting a "universal" conception of love that stands separate from the private and the categorical. He maintains these distinctions throughout his testimonies on love. Contemporary author Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts writes of this signature technique in her essay collection *Harlem is Nowhere:*

> In almost every essay James Baldwin wrote about Harlem, there is a moment when he commits a literary sleight-of-hand so particular that, if he'd been an athlete, sportscasters would have codified the maneuver and named it 'the Jimmy.' I think of it in cinematic terms, because its effect reminds me of a technique wherein camera operators pan out by starting with a tight shot and then zoom out to a wide view while the lens remains focused on a point in the distance (Rhodes-Pitts, as cited in Cole 2014).

These rhetorical jumps between private, categorical, and universal truths push Baldwin's readers to decipher the relationship between personal experience, societal institutions, and ethical behavior on their own. While Baldwin provides a framework for that discernment and the acquisition of his testimonial truths, the actual discovery lies in the hands of Baldwin's audience.

Baldwin believed that his work as a testifier and witness-bearer was tied directly to a moral obligation to articulate the experiences of those on the margins. This obligation did not involve making claims on behalf of the oppressed but instead offering a language through which they could relate and process the reality of their experience and the categorical beliefs that prevented them and their oppressors from being fully self-aware. Known for giving a voice to groups that were often overlooked – particularly Black Americans, gay people, and the impoverished – Baldwin did not believe it was presumptuous to assume that his struggles with life's realities could prove informative to others. He reasoned that his unique position as a Black American allowed him to articulate the realities of Black life and share universal insights that his audience may not have considered. In response to a question from David C. Estes in 1986 regarding the potential "audacity" inherent in the composition of autobiographical literature, Baldwin raised witnessing as a form of responsibility itself. He tells his interviewer that it took "a great deal of humility to use [himself] as a witness, which is different from an example, to the condition of others who are in your condition but cannot speak – or cannot be heard….It was only in my social situation that I had to use my personal dilemma to illuminate something" (Baldwin 1989, 276-277). By sharing his reality through witnessing, Baldwin models the sort of self-examination needed to foster self-love and uphold one's moral responsibility to love, reflecting his universal assertation that "in order to change a situation one has first to see it for what it is … [and] accept his past [by] learning how to use it" (Baldwin 1993b, 81).

Several theorists have explored testimony's efficacy as a genre for the socially overlooked. Ricoeur characterizes this component of testimony as an act of "enlarging" the spiritual archive. He writes:

> The fundamental objective of the *good* historian is to enlarge the sphere of archives; that is, the conscientious historian must open up the archive by retrieving traces which the dominant ideological forces attempted to suppress. In admitting what was originally excluded from the archive the historian initiates a critique of power. He gives expression to the voices of those who have been abused, the victims of intentional exclusion" (Ricoeur 1999, 16).

Feminist theologian Rebecca Chopp argues that testimony is a crucial means of expression for the marginalized, given their exclusion from setting the tenor and tone of rational discourse. If the dictates of logic and reason are set by those in positions of power and influence, they prove less capable of conveying the experiences of those on the margins. This is why memoirs, autobiographies, and self-narratives play a prominent role in the ideas and cultural expressions of people of color, women, the impoverished, and so forth. Testimonial truths prove logically valid because one cannot deny the lived experiences of another – even if those experiences fail to reflect the fundamental principles of the categorical society in which the testifiers and their subjects reside (Chopp 2001). By testifying to the suffering of the overlooked and ignored, Baldwin fills the gaps in understanding that permeate the white supremacist world of the modern era. Shulman writes of the way thinkers such as Baldwin use testimony to fill gaps in public discourse and historical memory: "Testimony also bears judgement … as bearing witness makes present what has been made absent – the poor and God – biblical prophets testify *against* injustice and idolatry" (Shulman 2008, 5).

Because Baldwin's writing focused heavily on personal experience, his testimonies draw their validity from non-rational sources and are laden with emotion. Rather than suggest that his assertions were objectively or factually valid, Baldwin insisted that their value extended from

their ability to cultivate the self-understanding needed to live sensually. He writes of this in "The Creative Process," arguing that an individual is "enjoined to conquer the great wilderness of himself… [and the] precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness … make the world a more human dwelling place" (Baldwin 1998, 669). Due to its subjectivity, testimony is well-suited to convey ambiguous phenomena. By drawing and sharing subjective insights from his lived experiences, Baldwin encouraged individuals to embrace the discomforting truths that accompanied sensual reality. Baldwin writes of the difference between the facts of an event and the event's greater meaning in his 1962 novel *Another Country*. Addressing the concept in the thoughts of Vivaldo, a blues-loving writer like himself, Baldwin writes:

> The occurrence of an event is not the same thing as knowing what it is that one has lived through. Most people had not lived … through any of their terrible events … They passed their lives thereafter in a kind of limbo of denied and unexamined pain. The great question that faced him this morning was whether or not he had ever, really, been present at his life (Baldwin 1993a, 128).

Speaking through Vivaldo, Baldwin claims that people can only maintain a sensual, present existence if they are honest about their emotions.

3. Fraternal Love: Unconditional Support for All Neighbors' Self-Discoveries

The first testimony on religion in "Down at the Cross" details Baldwin's teenage years in the Black church. After a short account of his years as a teenager and the existential despair that accompanied his early experiences with racism, Baldwin writes of joining the Black Pentecostal church. In the testimony, Baldwin focuses on fraternal love – a form of love in which an individual recognizes other human beings as spiritual siblings, taking loving responsibility for their wellbeing and growth regardless of their social categories. The story of these teenage years highlights the moral inconsistencies that arise when people who already love members of their

social group must determine how to show analogous love to others – especially when others behave in ways that undercut one's ability to love oneself and one's community. Although Baldwin unpacks the nature of fraternal love most substantively in his testimonies about his time in the church, he first mentions this love in "My Dungeon Shook," the first essay in *The Fire Next Time.* The text is an open letter to his nephew, affectionately named "Big James" after Baldwin himself. Baldwin tells his namesake that:

> [White] men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And 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" (Baldwin 1993b, 7-8).

Baldwin's fraternal love is heavily sympathetic. Through it, an individual ignores the structural positioning of others and recognizes their humanity as totally independent of the representational categories that society assigns them. By seeing white Americans as fearful, "lost younger brothers," rather than malicious purveyors of pure hatred, Big James will be able to love white Americans even despite the harm they caused because, without categorical markers such as race to distract him, he could accept them as misguided family members. None of this is to say that fraternal love means blind forgiveness or naïveté – Baldwin's discussions of universal brotherhood repeatedly address white Americans' responsibility to love their Black brothers and sisters. What is clear, however, is that such love cannot be achieved while one remains fixated on social categories, such as race.

When practicing Baldwin's fraternal love, Black Americans help white citizens develop the social consciousness needed to practice the world-saving actions that anchor Baldwin's philosophy of political love. While Baldwin does not excuse white people for their refusal to address racism, he sees such behavior as worthy of pity rather than bitter disdain. Early in *The Fire Next Time,* he tells Big James to "imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning

to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it's out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality" (Baldwin 1993b, 9). The idea that one must subjugate others to feel secure in one's identity illustrates existential weakness rather than superiority. By citing this lack of awareness, Baldwin validates his claim that Black Americans serve as elder siblings within his racialized metaphorical American family. Although Black Americans are not superior to white citizens in any regard, they possess more knowledge of the world than white citizens because of their experiences with racism. In this sense, they are what Baldwin calls "older siblings," a metaphor that denotes greater moral awareness rather than existential worth, as suggested by the Black church. Speaking to this idea in the first "My Dungeon Shook," the first of *The Fire Next Time's* two essays, Baldwin tells his nephew:

> These [white] men are your brothers – you lost, younger brothers. And 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 (Baldwin 1993b, 9-10).

The fraternal love of which Baldwin writes is actionable and highly intentional. His description of the love is laden with verbs, as he insists that Black people's fraternal love be used to cultivate proper actions by the white people receiving their love. This love functions to "*force*" white people to take on several actions, including: "*to see* themselves as they are, *to cease fleeing* from reality and begin *to change* it" (Baldwin 1993b, 10, emphasis added).

When making a case for fraternal love in his testimony on the church, Baldwin often uses irony to consolidate his private, categorical, and universal truths. This irony effectively highlights the natural inconsistencies in categorical spaces and institutions – particularly

religious or nationalistic ones such as the church, the United States, or the Nation of Islam.[7] Such irony is especially noticeable in his discussion of his time as a teenage member of the Black Christian church. Using irony, Baldwin contrasts his intuition for how love should function with the category-dependent rules about love espoused by the church. Because of this, Baldwin frames the private truths of this testimony not as claims about his emotional state at the time but instead about his conceptions of love that arose due to the situation in which he matured. The private truths speak to Baldwin's intuitive, honest beliefs about love, and Baldwin's categorical truth claims outline the race-dependent conception of love espoused by the Black church. In doing so, he positions institutional framings of how love should operate against those of a person not yet invested in the categorical beliefs of any institution. As a result, Baldwin demonstrated that private, concrete truths are often closer to the sensual principles of universal truths than categorical truths.

Baldwin's testimonial irony shakes people from a blind acceptance of categorical truths by showing the inconsistencies between the sensual truths about the world and those offered by categorical institutions such as the Black church. Baldwin understood this affective disruption as the artist's signature responsibility in society. As he explained in a 1961 interview with Studs Terkel:

> "Most of us, no matter what we say, are walking in the dark, whistling in the dark. Nobody knows what is going to happen to him from one moment to the next, or how one will bear it. This is irreducible. And it's true of everybody. Now, it is true that the nature of society is to create, among its citizens, an illusion of safety; but it is also absolutely

[7] Allen writes of a similar focus on the inconsistencies in religious institutions in *Go Tell It on the Mountain:* "But the most important and pervasive kind of irony in this novel is developed through the use of biblical texts and Christian doctrine to comment upon the attitudes and actions of the characters …. By using the tenets of their faith for ironic comment upon the characters' actions and attitudes, Baldwin transcends the limitations of his subjective narrator and at the same time establishes as trustworthy the religious faith they profess, even when they misinterpret it" (Allen 1977, 34-35).

> true that the safety is always necessarily an illusion. Artists are here to disturb the peace. (Baldwin 1989, 21)

A year later, Baldwin would resurrect this discussion of human ignorance in "Down on the Cross'" testimony on the church: "It probably occurred to me around this time that the vision people hold of the world to come is but a reflection, with predictable wishful distortions, of the world in which they live" (Baldwin 1993b, 40). The grammar of Baldwin's testimony allowed him to reveal these distortions and pushed Baldwin's audience to try aligning their behavior with reality and their true selves.

Literary scholar Shirley S. Allen provides one of the most valuable outlines of Baldwin's irony in her article, "The Ironic Voice in Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain" – a work of early Baldwin scholarship. Although *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is a work of fiction, it is unsurprising to see an element of Baldwin's poetics arise in the first-person narratives of his testimonies and one of his most autobiographical novels. According to Allen, in *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* the narrator's capacity to know and share insights about the characters' reality is restrained by "an internal and subjective point of view limited to the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the main character" (Allen 1977, 30). Yet by employing "irony in the narrator's diction, irony of statement and event in the action, and an ironic voice as a character" (Allen 1977, 30), Baldwin helps his narrator "transcend the limitations" of the protagonist's point of view. Without irony, Baldwin's narrator, whose voice echoes with the same testimonial poetics found throughout "Down at the Cross," would have limited insight to offer readers beyond a factual account of the characters' lives and the emotional impact of their lived experience. Instead, Baldwin ensures that *Go Tell it On the Mountain* is more than a report of the existential struggles of an adolescent: the novel sheds insight on the particularities of African American culture and the Black church, highlights moral inconsistencies of various institutions, including

the traditional family, and outlines the fear and guilt that lead individuals to choose categorical existences over sensual ones (Allen 1977, 31).

According to his testimony in "Down at the Cross," Baldwin joined the church due to his fear that racism would prevent him from receiving love, a situation that he felt was concomitant with death. At one point, he tells a story of visiting a local parish with a friend and meeting the friend's pastor. When the pastor asks him kindly, "Whose little boy are you?" Baldwin is so shocked by her unprovoked, loving interest in him that "[his] heart replied at once, 'Why yours'" (Baldwin 1993b, 28-29). Shortly thereafter, Baldwin joined a local church and became a widely known preacher. As he writes, "[my friend] was very anxious about my soul's salvation … I wasn't, but any human attention is better than none" (Baldwin 1993b, 28). Shortly after joining the church, Baldwin became a preacher, delivering sermons at congregations throughout Harlem. Yet, as Baldwin grew older, he began to divide his time between the pulpit and his integrated high school. He realized that despite the church being a space dedicated to notions of love and care, these principles and the limitless love he preached were not the love embodied by the church or demonstrated by his parishioners.[8] Early in "Down at the Cross," he laments: "When we were told to love everybody, I had thought that that meant everybody. But no. It applied only to those who believed as we did, and it did not apply to white people at all" (Baldwin 1993b, 40). While the Bible verses he cited in his sermons insisted that the Christian God was a god of love, many of his listeners also believed that the same God had damned all non-Christians and non-

[8] In his biography of Baldwin, David Leeming notes that the author's dearest friends were white and mostly Jewish. He met these classmates during his time spent writing for the high school's literary magazine "the Magpie," with many of these friendships extending on into adulthood (Leeming 2015, 37).

Black people to hell.[9] As Baldwin aged, he could not help but notice the inconsistency of these practices. While his Jewish schoolmates were some of the kindest, more charitable individuals he knew – even more so than some of his fellow parishioners – the practiced messages of his religious institution made clear that they could not receive God's love. Troubled by the hypocrisy and the inconsistency he observed, Baldwin left the church by the age of seventeen.

Much of Baldwin's testimony on the Black church focuses on its inconsistent messages about love. While a call for unconditional love echoed throughout Harlem's churches on Sundays, it was less clear as to whom God's love – and the love of his followers – was directed. Although talk of brotherhood and sisterhood towards one's fellow Christians was a given, those fundamental truths were accompanied by just as much discourse about who should not receive love. Baldwin attests to the churchgoers' preoccupation with those who had supposedly fallen by the wayside of God, whether due to criminal behavior or carrying non-Christian beliefs. Baldwin's testimony on the church ironically highlights the inconsistency and invalidity inherent in the church's insistence that followers both demonstrate and proselytize an unconditional love modeled after God's love and a conditional love reserved only for Christians. Baldwin responds to this logical flaw by promoting his own conception of the human responsibility to love others. While the church called for an active love towards one's community members, this Black Christian love was fraternal in the narrowest of senses. The church's love was not the universal care found in biblical passages such as "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[10] Instead, it was a conditional love in which the categorical discourse of the Black church insisted, "You shall love *those who look like you* as yourself." While adolescent Baldwin watched as the latter

[9] John 3:16 NRSV; John 15:9–13 NRSV; Romans 5:7–8 NRSV; Ephesians 2:4–7 NRSV; 1 John 4:16 NRSV
[10] Mark 12:31 NRSV

dictate was adopted without question by the vast majority of the parishioners to whom he preached, something innate told him that the inconsistency between their proclaimed belief in Biblical love and the racialized love that they practiced rendered the former invalid.[11]

Baldwin's use of irony emerges from his faith in the human capacity to perceive inconsistencies between what they feel should be the case, what they are categorically told is the case, and what they ultimately conclude must be true. In "Down at the Cross," he uses his younger self as an example by clarifying that even at seventeen, he could recognize the moral inconsistency that emerges when people's preoccupation with social categories leads them to adopt socially divisive rules and principles. In one example, Baldwin addresses Christian love directly. Having stated earlier that when he entered the church, he "would love to believe that the principles were Faith, Hope, and Charity" (Baldwin 1993b, 31), he returns to the sentiment midway through the testimony and testifies to the fact that the categorical equivalent of that idea – the views on love espoused by the church – precluded churchgoers from demonstrating such universal love in the real, sensual world. He writes, "I really mean that there was no love in the church. It was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair" (Baldwin 1993b, 39). In doing so, Baldwin uses formal structures from his testimony to parallel the inconsistency within the church's discussions of love. Yet rather than limit this structural setup with only an element of contradiction, Baldwin bookends the truth-claim portion of the testimony with another private truth – his teenage conclusions about this inconsistency. He asks, in a private truth, framed as a

[11] Qingping Liu notes a similar paradox found in Christianity's broader theology of love. Liu's analysis focuses on religion's two love commands: firstly, that individuals love God more than anyone or anything else and, secondly, that one love one's neighbor as oneself. In his study, Liu investigates situations in which the two principles come into conflict as individuals are required to set aside the first. In many ways, one could argue that the selective love demonstrated by the members of Baldwin's Black churches is an attempt to resolve this inherent conflict (Liu 2007).

rhetorical question for his readers to answer themselves: "What was the point, the purpose, of *my* salvation if it did not permit me to behave with love toward others, no matter how they behaved toward me?" (Baldwin 1993b, 40). In doing so, they may take an active, private role in cultivating a sensual society, even if that means departing from categorical spaces as Baldwin did at seventeen. Near the end of the testimony, Baldwin writes ironically of the conception of love he developed upon leaving the church:

> What others did was their responsibility, for which they would answer….But what I did was my responsibility, and I would have to answer, too – unless, of course, there was also in Heaven a special dispensation for the benighted black, who was not to be judged in the same way as other human beings, or angels (Baldwin 1993b, 40).

Real love, as intuited by the young, not yet categorically-minded Baldwin functioned without regard to race or religion, and he held a moral obligation to maintain the love without discrimination.

Regarding who should receive fraternal love, Baldwin uses irony to position his philosophy of love as the theoretical opposite of the church's. While both conceptions of love emerge from a moral responsibility to love others, Baldwin argues that this love must be extended to all people. At the same time, the Black church maintains that only church members should receive such love. Invoking irony, Baldwin's testimony suggests that rather than emerging from a commitment to charity, many parishioners' commitment to love extended from their fear of not receiving salvation due to a failure to love like God. In the testimony, Baldwin presents fear and love as opposites, suggesting that fear prevents an individual from embracing sensual reality and insisting that love requires overcoming fear. Instead of loving from a place of trepidation, Baldwin argues that people love due to their fundamental responsibility to care for others, as outlined by God in the Bible. As he shows, the Black church's moral inconsistency extended from its submission to modernity's desire to lock things into rigid categories due to a

fear of sensual reality.[12] Baldwin identifies the notable similarity between the fearfulness that drove the police officers in New York to mistreat him and his Black peers throughout their youths and the attitudes of the parishioners to whom he preaches, and ultimately, he draws the private conclusion that fear is the ultimate guiding force of the churches he visits. As he writes:

> In the same way that we for white people, were the descendants of Ham, and were cursed forever, white people were, for us, the descendants of Cain. And the passion with which we loved the Lord was a measure of how deeply we feared and distrusted and, in the end, hated almost all strangers, always, and avoided and despised ourselves (Baldwin 1993b, 40).

Baldwin describes how the church's most devout members insisted that if an individual were to move away from the church, they would find themselves in a position similar to white Americans and Jewish people and, as a result, be subject to damnation. Keeping in line with his belief that any effort to adopt a categorical worldview is a fearful effort to avoid facing reality, Baldwin reasons that this dismissal of others was a means of using fear to push congregants to invest in the church's racially defined version of Christian dogma. In the same way that white people's rejection of Black Americans signified their fear of death and despair over their human condition, Black Christians' "Godly" dismissal of Jews and other foreign communities was a demonstration of existential despair. Baldwin reiterates the irony in the church's hypocrisy: "People, I felt, ought to love the Lord because they loved Him, and not because they were afraid of going to Hell" (Baldwin 1993b, 35).

Baldwin also uses irony to make clear that this fraternal love is neither a form of blind forgiveness nor a passive tolerance of further harm. As contradictory as it might seem, the loving resistance championed by Baldwin requires that the lover both empathize with those who hate them and refuse to tolerate their hate. He first addressed the irony inherent in people's

[12] This is highly ironic given that the community cultivated in the church and the fellowship demonstrated during services emphasized stimulating all of an individual's senses.

responsibility to approach others with a degree of moralism in his 1955 essay "Notes of a Native Son":

> It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition. The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are…But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength (Baldwin 2012, 114-115).

In the case of America's racial divide, Baldwin argues that if Black Americans view white Americans as fearful, "lost younger brothers," rather than malicious purveyors of hatred, the country's future can be ensured because white Americans can learn to love their authentic selves and adopt practices of love analogous to those of their "older" Black siblings. Nonetheless, such love does not rest on absolution because, as he makes clear midway through the letter: "it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime" (Baldwin 1993b, 5-6).

4. Filial Love: Loving One's Elders in a Categorical World

In his subsequent testimony, Baldwin tells the story of his first encounter with Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam. The testimony outlines a form of filial love in which people find a way to set aside their elders' authority and adopt individual worldviews while still respecting their elders' struggles and refraining from making unsympathetic judgments about their behavior. Baldwin outlines this filial love by asserting private truths about the father-son-like connection he felt throughout their meeting: "[Elijah] made me think of my father and me as we might have been if we had been friends" (Baldwin 1993b, 64). Although Baldwin does spend some of the testimony criticizing the Nation for promoting an exclusionary self-love analogous to that of the Black church, the testimony's most noteworthy comments about love highlight the

complexities of the love demanded by individuals and their elders. While Baldwin clarifies that Elijah Muhammad is unlike anyone he ever encountered, the testimonial logic of Baldwin's narrative about their meeting outlines the principles of a filial love applicable in any setting involving an individual and their elders. Because Baldwin's testimonies offer private, categorical, and universal truths, the insights Baldwin shares in his testimonies about love become less limited to the circumstances of his connection with Muhammad. Baldwin begins with private truths about his reactions to Muhammad's persona and affect. He then couples these truths with categorical truths forged in response to the Nation of Islam's beliefs about white people and racism. Baldwin then extends the pairing of private and categorical truths with universal claims about the spiritual connections between individuals and their elders. Lines such as "Take your burdens to the lord and leave them there" – a direct reference to Elijah Muhammad's fatherly demeanor and intimate relationship with Baldwin and his followers – are universal enough to allude to the relationship between an individual and an authority or "lord," even though the line is a universal truth extracted from testimony about a particular person.[13]

The categorical truths in the testimony focus on the Nation of Islam and its ideology. In these race-focused claims, Baldwin expresses his concerns about ideologies and the categorical institutions that produce them. Baldwin staunchly opposed ideology and the categorical theories that gave birth to them. Baldwin spoke against ideology throughout his career. As he noted in his

[13] Given the Christian rhetoric of Baldwin's witness-based writings (see Introduction) references to "the lord" are often allusions to fathers, mothers, and other authority figures, as is the case in much discourse in the Black church. As Gillian R. Richards-G reaves argues, Black churches are marked by an air of "multi-directional" call and response in which different figures take on the various titles and positions of "lord", "elder", "caller", "receiver", and so-forth. This multidirectionality appears in Baldwin's writings as he often uses titles such as "lord" to refer to figures like Elijah Muhammad who take up a large presence in community space, even if Baldwin himself disavows any belief in these people's *divine* authority (Richards-Greaves 2016).

1955 essay "Autobiographical Notes": I think all theories are suspect, that the finest principles may have to be modified, or may even be pulverized by the demands of life" (Baldwin 2012, 9). In Baldwin's eyes, any entirely rational perspective on the world was unverifiable and needed to be supplemented with experiential knowledge derived from life's struggles. According to Baldwin's reasoning, when individuals subscribe to an ideology, they set aside their responsibility to come to know their real selves through lived experience and, instead, derive their self-understanding from the dictates of an external authority. Without proper self-understanding, individuals cannot fully love themselves, and, as a result, they cannot fulfill their responsibility to practice the love needed to save the world. As such, Baldwin rejects ideology, theology, legend, and myth – all things which he attributes to supposed "heavenly witnesses" who represent how ideologues stand far removed from the human experience of those who embrace their dogma. In his words: "Heavenly witnesses are a tricky lot, to be used by whoever is closest to Heaven at the time. And legend and theology, which are designed to sanctify our fears, crimes, and aspirations, also reveal them for what they are." (Baldwin 1993b, 70). As a result, Baldwin pushes for a communication of truths derived entirely from human experience – a set of truths that are true, verifiable, and authoritative because they come from personal experience, not the purported authority of a "theology" made by an external authority.

In "Down at the Cross," and in his testimony on Elijah Muhammad in particular, Baldwin structures his testimonies in a manner that invites his audience to make judgments about the veracity of his calls to action and then to decide to act – or refrain from acting – based on their original judgments. We might label this quality "juridical trust" given the centrality of judgment. Ricoeur cites testimony's juridical nature as a critical reason for the genre's ability to foster social change. He argues that it provides access to a set of otherwise unavailable archives and

allows listeners to act with mindfulness of others' suffering. In this way, Baldwin's testimonial accounts are not simply subjective – that is, defined and marked by the individual offering them – but also juridical – with the merits of their truthfulness determined by the recipients of the testimonies. It is by these recipients that the broader truth claims contained within the testimonies can be derived. Moreover, as Ricoeur argues, since conflict is a natural part of human life and social interaction, these differences of opinion ultimately serve as opportunities for new and better truths to be reached. As a result, any disagreement over Baldwin's reflections allows opposing opinions to be brought into conversation and new realizations to emerge. In his testimonies, Baldwin goes beyond narrating the factual events of his life by reflecting on their greater moral meaning and implications. The juridical effect of these reflections invites a moral response and level of concern from those to whom he bears witness and, in turn, enables the production of imagining original, individual solutions to the issues discussed. Since Baldwin's goal in addressing the nature of racism was to lay the groundwork for new solutions to resolving such social oppression, these ethical truth claims drawn from Baldwin's accounts ultimately can serve as sources for developing new responses to injustice. By assessing the testimonial nature of Baldwin's writings, we see that the works carry empirically evidenced conclusions that work to foster social change.

The honesty with which Baldwin communicates his truth claims invites his audience to trust the private truths he shares, even if those personal insights remain far removed from the listeners' circumstances. In his testimony on Elijah Muhammad, rather than laying out an alternative script for viewing the world, Baldwin offers an affective account of what troubled *him* about the Nation's theology, and by sharing his personal concerns, he invites his readers to join him in reflecting critically on the Nation and its ideology. Because testimony's validity rests

upon the arguably incontrovertible logic of experience, his testimonial discussions of his experiences with Muhammad and his followers allow him to highlight the problems with subscribing to ideology. While some individuals may look skeptically upon the conclusions he offers, they cannot deny the fact that the truths conveyed through his testimonies are undeniably real for him. In this way, Baldwin's testimony is less a formal critique of Elijah Muhammad and more a narrative of Baldwin's concern about the Nation's dogma. While Baldwin does not hide his doubts about the Nation, he makes clear that the truths of his experience hold no more validity than those of the Nation's members or Muhammad himself. Baldwin can push back against the Nation's ideology through this juridical trust and invite the self-trust and self-reflection that he believes will naturally lead one to adopt fellowship and love over hate. And, while Baldwin cannot force anyone to assume such behavior, he can demonstrate how trust in one's experience can lead one to see holes and dangers in staunch dogma. Because an individual's claims about their experience cannot be proven untrue, the audience of any testimony must trust that the insights offered in a testimonial discourse contain some element of truth – even if the story or anecdote from which they are derived does not match historical fact. Ricoeur argues that testimony's persuasiveness extends from listeners' implicit trust in the truth shared by the testifier. As he stated in an anthologized interview, "When I testify to something I am asking the other to trust that what I am saying is true. To share a testimony is an exchange of trust" (Ricoeur 1999).

Baldwin illustrates trust's significance at the end of the testimony. Here, he criticizes how institutions demand that individuals discern their identity using only the orders' ideology. Instead, he argues that people trust their ability to cultivate a sense of self by reflecting on their sensual experience. Baldwin speaks to this fact in a private truth about the meeting:

> Elijah mentioned having seen me on television and said that it seemed to him that I was not yet brainwashed and was trying to become myself…. I suppose that I *would* like to become myself, whatever that may mean, but I knew that Elijah's meaning and mine were not the same. I said yes, I was trying to be me, but I did not know how to say more than that, and so I waited (Baldwin 1993b, 66-67).

By the end of the evening, the conversation has shifted from whether white people are humans or devils to an examination of who Baldwin understands himself to be. At first, Baldwin is not perturbed by such a reflection. But later, after dinner, inquiries into Baldwin's ideological positioning, or, as Elijah Muhammad asks Baldwin, "What are you now?" are not considerations of his existence as an individual, but rather his current institutional and ideological affiliation and the likelihood he might join the Nation (Baldwin 1993b, 70). Baldwin makes clear that he is no longer a member of the Christian church. Still, as a result, he realizes that he lacks affiliation with any categorical institution and that such a position is just as problematic in the Nation's eyes as belonging to the wrong institution. To make clear that he has no intention of becoming a Black Muslim, Baldwin tells those at the table that rather than being a Christian, he was "a writer" – a label which brought a strange smile to Elijah Muhammad's face (Baldwin 1993b, 70).

Baldwin begins his testimony on Elijah Muhammad with various stories about the ministers who spread the Nation of Islam's doctrine. Baldwin writes of how the Nation's ministers could save the souls of people on the Avenue without turning to the rhetoric of fear and despair that filled Harlem's churches every Sunday. Though both the ministers of the Nation and the pastors of the church spoke of God's fury, the reality of damnation, and the social ills brought about by human sinfulness, the members of the Nation directed their castigation exclusively at white people. According to the Nation, Harlem's troubles did not stem from a human predisposition to sin, as was the charge of the church. Instead, the problems stemmed from a white world that had fooled them into believing that they were less than human and that crime, substance abuse, and other forms of self-destruction were their only means of numbing

the slights of a racist world. Fortunately, that oppression would soon end, as the Nation – particularly its founder Elijah Muhammad – had come to rid the world of white people. This message resonated with many in the neighborhood. As Baldwin tells it, the Harlem residents "looked toward [the Muslim ministers] with a kind of intelligence of hope on their faces" (Baldwin 1993b, 49). Like the members of the Black church, Elijah Muhammad and his followers credited a Black God for fostering their messages on life and the world. But whereas the church's God had arranged human life as a test of an individual's ability to live righteously so they might thrive after death, the Nation's lord – Allah – ordered his followers to embrace salvation in the here and now. As Muhammad and his preachers told it, Black people's ascension to power was on the horizon, and soon, white people's rule over the world would come to an end (Baldwin 1993b, 67).

After sharing stories about the Nation's presence on the streets, Baldwin details his first encounter with Elijah Muhammad during dinner at the Nation of Islam's headquarters in Chicago. At several points in the testimony, Baldwin notes the deep sense of family that permeated the headquarters. When Muhammad enters the room, all those present feel as though a loving father is greeting them. As Baldwin tells it, "Something came into the room, with [Muhammad] – his disciples' joy at seeing him, his joy at seeing them … He teased the women, like a father … [and] he talked and laughed with the others, whom I could only think of as his children" (Baldwin 1993b, 63). After dinner, Muhammad and his followers discuss Baldwin's opinions on America's racial politics, particularly Baldwin's unwillingness to reject the entirety of the world's white population. Muhammad insists that there is no justification for loving white people given that they are devils – citing the theological narrative in which Allah allowed the devil, through his scientists, to carry on infernal experiments, which resulted, finally, in the

creation of the devil known as the white man, and later, even more disastrously, in the creation of the white woman" (Baldwin 1993b). According to Baldwin, the room echoed with affirmations from Muhammad's followers throughout the evening, as though nothing Muhammad said could be denied or disproven: "Whenever Elijah spoke, a kind of chorus arose from the table, saying 'Yes, that's right.'" (Baldwin 1993b, 65). Because Muhammad and his followers insisted that there was no greater evidence of white people's sinfulness than their actions, Baldwin realized that he was unable to dispute them given the structural oppression right outside the headquarters located on the South Side of Chicago. When allowed to retort, Baldwin could only think of *exceptions* to the Muslims' claims. Any example of a moral white person that Baldwin could cite was an exception to the Nation's charge rather than evidence of its falsehood. As a result, Baldwin silenced himself, feeling that his personal experiences with one or two moral white individuals were not suited for the conversation at the dinner table.

Yet, after meeting Elijah Muhammad, Baldwin came to realize that the passion shown by those who attended the Nation's rallies was brought about less by the speeches' criticisms of racism and more by the followers' conviction that Elijah Muhammad was destined to end racism by destroying white people. Baldwin's focus on the followers' reactions to Elijah Muhammad rather than the followers' complaints about life suggests that, in his mind, the Nation of Islam members were not deriving their beliefs from their own experiences. Instead, their views of the world were derived from the assertions of a man with presumed "divine authority "and "nothing to lose" (Baldwin 1993b, 76). And as Baldwin stresses in the testimony: "There is nothing more dangerous than [such] a man" (Baldwin 1993b, 76). It is important to note that the declaration of white people's devilish nature was first raised at the dinner by one of Muhammad's followers, not Muhammad himself. In Baldwin's words, "Someone at the table said, "The white man

sure *is* a devil." He proves that by his own actions." I looked around. It was a very young man who had said this, scarcely more than a boy—very dark and sober, very bitter" (Baldwin 1993b, 65) Baldwin's emphasis on the speaker's age, affect, and bitterness reads as a lamentation over the cynicism and despair that seemed to accompany beliefs in the Nation's theology. While Muhammad's explanations about the country's racial dynamics certainly affirmed the young man's pain, the theology had translated that pain into an attitude of bitterness that lacked the affirming nature that characterized the love Baldwin was convinced would save the world.

There are two forms of juridical trust in Baldwin's testimony on Elijah Muhammad, and together, they outline the components of filial love. In the first case of juridical trust, Baldwin emphasizes his faith in his own experience – both at dinner and as a testifier to that encounter. Although Muhammad addresses Baldwin like a father figure by condescendingly suggesting that Baldwin lacks the breadth of experience to know white people and how to interact with them, Baldwin trusts his intuitive belief that all people are worthy of love, regardless of race. In this case of juridical trust, Baldwin frames his testimony on the Nation of Islam as a narrative in which he trusts himself enough to define his own reality and understanding of the world. Much like a child is eventually forced to identify how and to what degree he will adopt the beliefs of his biological family – including the somewhat "institutional" beliefs shared as fundamental to the family's position in the world – so too must Baldwin decide his investment in the messages shared by this potential father, Elijah Muhammad. While Muhammad and the members of the Nation of Islam had derived a theologically determined sense of reality based on categorical definitions of people in the world, Baldwin maintains trust in his experiences with people – particularly the falsity of race and how race eclipsed the sensual connections between people. As Baldwin writes: "I told Elijah that *I* did not care if white and black people married, and that I had

many white friends. I would have no choice, if it came to it, but to perish with them, for (I said to myself, but not to Elijah), 'I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn't love more important than color?'" (Baldwin 1993b, 71).

When Elijah Muhammad and his followers assert their firm belief that white people's time on the Earth has come to an end, Baldwin realizes that Elijah Muhammad's fatherly appeal stems from his ability to cultivate a sense of self-worth within people whose society has sought to convince them that they have none. Thinking back to Elijah Muhammad's entrance at the beginning of dinner, Baldwin notes that he "knew what he made me feel, how I was drawn toward his peculiar authority, how his smile promised to take the burden of my life off my shoulders. *Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there*" (Baldwin 1993b, 63-64). But as he reflects upon what he saw, Baldwin realizes that this sense of worth is born of a dream of power, and just as he is skeptical of a desire for power on the part of white Americans, so, too, does he look skeptically upon the power-seeking Nation.

Echoing the critiques of power that run throughout *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin's skepticism of the Nation is analogous to his teenage concerns about the Black church. In his words:

> Yet I could have hoped that the Muslim movement had been able to inculcate in the demoralized Negro population a truer and more individual sense of its worth, so that Negroes in the Northern ghettos could begin, in concrete terms, and at whatever price, to change their situation (Baldwin 1993b, 81).

Among Baldwin's foremost private realizations derived from his reflections on the two Black institutions was that institutional beliefs, as the products of social categories, lacked the experiential insight needed to cultivate self-understanding. As Baldwin saw it, the Black church and the Nation of Islam removed responsibility for honest, ethical behavior from their subscribers and placed it onto the dictates of the institution. He argued that because people did

not take up personal responsibility, they became just as harmful as white people. In his case, he found that by relying on a church grounded in purported Christian beliefs or family principles that contradicted notions of empathy and care, Baldwin himself was living a hypocritical and unvirtuous life. Deeply drawn to the idea of love, Baldwin concluded that he would need to rely upon his convictions and commitment to empathy to build internal structures of support rather than the inconsistent principles of an institution that framed love as conditional rather than universal. As far as Baldwin was concerned, implementing such a life requires an acceptance not of who one is according to institutional dogma but rather, according to the individual, personal experiences that shape them and their private truths.

While the first form of juridical trust in "Down at the Cross" highlights Baldwin's willingness to trust in his own beliefs, the second case consists of a gracious trust in the experiences of the others in the story – namely Elijah Muhammad's. In this instance, Baldwin insists that the ideological critiques thrown at him by Elijah Muhammad and his followers must be received with grace because it was clear that their experiences led them to adopt such negative attitudes towards white people. Rather than dismissing Elijah Muhammad as a patronizing figure from an older generation, Baldwin depicts him with grace similar to the kind of understanding a son might show towards an embittered but long-suffering father. Although Baldwin is skeptical of Muhammad's claims and worried about the paranoia often cultivated by such discourse, he approaches Elijah with grace. As such, Baldwin recounts remembering the origins of Muhammad's hatred of white people – seeing his father lynched – and receives Muhammad's words with patience. Rather than forcefully rebuke or dismiss his elder's claims, Baldwin contemplates the messages and remains grounded in the truths gathered from his personal experience. As he writes at one point in the testimony: "The central quality in Elijah's face is

pain, and his smile is a witness to it – pain so old and deep and black that it becomes personal and particular only when he smiles" (Baldwin 1993b, 65). And although Baldwin firmly rejects the Nation's power-focused attitude towards the world and the racial divide this attitude fosters, Baldwin refrains from dismissing Muhammad outright. Instead, he writes of the Nation's leader as an embittered prophet whose views have been stained by the burdens of an unjust life. At one point in the testimony, while offering a series of private truths about his reactions to Muhammad's questions, Baldwin interjects with a sentence-long piece of narrative on Muhammad's sufferings: "Then I remembered hearing that he had spent time in prison." (Baldwin 1993b, 65). As the night wears on, Baldwin continues to listen and consider Muhammad's claims with grace. In doing so, Baldwin demonstrates the attitude of a patient, loving son. Although separated from this metaphorical father by time and experience, Baldwin can acknowledge the validity of Muhammad's personal experiences while recognizing that the lessons learned from those experiences are out of sync with a sensual, loving existence.

While Elijah may not have been Baldwin's biological father, the nature of this dynamic – embittered elder, impressionable child – was a filial love relationship analogous to the fraternal of the earlier testimony. Consequently, Baldwin's frustrations with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam are less so rejections of their disgust with white Americans and more so disagreement with the extent to which their logic stripped individuals of their ability to act ethically of their own accord, as they found themselves operating according to the dictates of an institution – much like the members of the Black church. Baldwin makes clear that his philosophical disagreements with the Nation do not cause him to deny the struggles experienced by Muhammad and his ministers. As he wrote of Malcolm X, Muhammad's most well-known discipline:

> I, in any case, certainly refuse to be put in the position of denying the truth of Malcolm's statements simply because I disagree with his conclusions, or in order to pacify the liberal conscience. Things are as bad as the Muslims say they are" (Baldwin 1993b, 58).

In many ways, Baldwin's efforts to show grace towards Elijah are a means of resisting the despairing rhetoric and ethos Muhammad and his followers took up. While Baldwin could have taken offense at the presumptuousness of the Nation's ideology and the extent to which its bitterness stood in opposition to his commitment to love, he abstains from doing so. As he testifies to the night's occurrences, sharing private and categorical reflections with his readers, he does so with a great effort *not* to foster despair and resentment like the Nation of Islam. Baldwin sees the risk of despair: a turn to suicide and giving up. For this reason, he is so emphatic about maintaining an optimistic perspective and committing to a form of hopeful love. As he writes, "If I were a Muslim, I would not hesitate to utilize—or, indeed, to exacerbate—the social and spiritual discontent that reigns here, for, at the very worst, I would merely have contributed to the destruction of a house I hated, and it would not matter if I perished, too. One has been perishing here so long!" (Baldwin 1993b, 75).

5. Conclusion

To summarize, because Baldwin's accounts of love are testimonial in nature, his philosophy of love is both racialized and universal – offering specific truths about love's capacity to subvert racial oppression and transcendental truths about love's ability to overcome a reliance on categories altogether. A testimonial analysis of "Down at the Cross" identifies love as a practice of caring responsibility whereby individuals execute specific love acts determined by their social circumstances. Neither a narrowly racialized nor an overly broad account of Baldwin's philosophy of love is accurate: the philosophy is both particular and universal.

Baldwin discusses the connection between love, social categories, and moral responsibility in two testimonies about religious institutions. In both testimonies, Baldwin argues that acts of love ultimately lead to personal and societal transformation by subverting the modern dependence on false categories. In a testimony about his years in the Black church, Baldwin uses irony to insist that people show love for all people – even those who oppress or are different from them. In another testimony, Baldwin reflects on a meeting with Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, to outline a filial love. Baldwin shapes his rhetoric to create juridical trust between him and his readers, inviting them to judge the veracity of his claims. These discussions of love allowed Baldwin to make universal claims about love's ultimately nonracial, universal nature by extending his accounts of African Americans' concrete experiences with race and love into whatever contexts his audience may have found themselves in. The self-reflection that Baldwin writes of throughout his career is hardly idealistic or sentimental; instead, he urges us to think of ourselves as individuals in a fully realized, sensual world – hence his investment in sensuality.

"Down at the Cross" is just one of the many testimonies that anchor Baldwin's efforts as a witness. In each discussion, Baldwin conveys lessons on love's spiritual implications that constitute a transformative ethic of love. More than their form as essay-length autobiographies, character studies, and social critiques, Baldwin's testimonies carry a moral tenor derived from their testimonial dynamic. This tenor imbibes the accounts with transformative implications far broader than the private truths that speak to resolving intraracial conflict amongst Black people. Baldwin insists that love is the primary means of surviving in an unjust and oppressive world. While his position as a Black American leads these insights to be framed within the conditions of the African American experience, Baldwin's legacy proves that his musings on love carry transcendental meaning with relevance in the lives of all people. Regardless of whatever

challenges an individual may face, love proves an ever-available means of resistance. In Baldwin's mind, a love-steered refusal to give in to political biases and delusions is the only means of salvation in the wake of social divides and the disorder they foster. At one point in the text, Baldwin reflects on the nature of attestation. He argues that testimony itself is an act of love – a means of awakening slumbering people to the moral truths of the world and easing them through the chaos and turmoil that results when one's worldview has been shattered. As he tells his nephew, sharing one's life story with white people 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" (Baldwin 1993b, 10). It is easy to read Baldwin as a witness of love and see his oeuvre as a collection of truths concerning love's political power and potential.

Chapter 2: Dostoevskian Active Love in James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison

You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was Dostoevsky and Dickens who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive. Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people.

– James Baldwin, "The Doom and Gloom of Knowing Who You Are" (1963)

One can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as artist choose one's 'ancestors.' Wright was in this sense, a 'relative'… Langston Hughes … was a 'relative' … [and] Dostoevsky and Faulkner, were 'ancestors' – if you please or don't please!

– Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug" (1963)

1. Introduction

Throughout his career, James Baldwin drew attention to the literary, existential, and philosophical influence of 19th-century Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. Baldwin was particularly interested in the Russian author's ability to use the experiences and language of his society to communicate moral insights relevant to all societies. Speaking to this point in *The Devil Finds Work*, Baldwin describes Dostoevsky as a "messenger," a term which Maria R. Bloshteyn links to Baldwin's self-identification as a "witness" (Bloshteyn 2001, 284). Baldwin argued that Dostoevsky's ability to convey messages was strong because he gave his characters thought-provoking experiences. One particular example was Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Baldwin came to believe that Raskolnikov's life mirrored his own existence and claimed that the arrogant student who commits a murder to test ethical principles was in a "situation, which [he] suspected, dreadfully, to have something to do with [his] own" (Baldwin 2011, 11). In addition to this ability to convey experience-based messages,

Baldwin admired Dostoevsky's critiques of Western society's justification for its oppressive actions. Many of Dostoevsky's writings express his frustration with the ever-increasing Westernization of 19th-century Russia – a phenomenon he cited as subverting the moral spirit that anchored its Slavic identity (Kohn 1945).[14] Echoing Dostoevsky, he argued that the West's "moral authority" rests upon "the lie of pretended humanism" – the false but widely believed notion that the majority of Western history consists of ethical actions on the part of its countries (Baldwin 2007, 85). The Dostoevskianism of his critique of the West is most explicit in his 1972 autobiography *No Name in the Street*. Here, Baldwin invokes *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky's novel about the saintly Prince Myshkin's encounters with the worldliness of 19th-century Russia, to characterize the lie and its political stakes. Quoting musings on the "wagons that bring bread to humanity," Baldwin notes that industrialization – which people in the West optimistically believed would advance humanity – instead "coldly [excludes] a considerable part of humanity from enjoying what [the wagons] brought" (Baldwin 2007). Baldwin extends Dostoevsky's claims about the "cold exclusion" and cites it as the very source of the West's power: "Indeed, it was on this exclusion that the rise of this power inexorably depended;" (Baldwin 2007).

In her 2001 article "Rage and Revolt: Dostoevsky and Three African-American Writers," literary scholar Maria R. Bloshteyn unpacks the relationship between Baldwin and Dostoevsky, arguing that Baldwin was one of three Black American authors in the postwar error who cited

[14] Interestingly, recent scholarship on Dostoevsky has nuanced understandings of Dostoevsky's critique of Western Europe arguing that his frustrations were focused less on the West in general, and more so on specific ideas. As Betül C. Czerkawski noted in 2023: "Dostoevsky [was not] particularly against the Westernization of [his country] …. Dostoevsky maintained both liberal and conservative views during his lifetime: he was against serfdom, and during his youth, he became a member of a secret revolutionist group…. [He was] not [against] the Western values…[it was how] modernization [had] been done in [his country that bothered him] the most" (Czerkawski 2023).

Dostoevsky as a significant influence on their work. Just as Baldwin credited Dostoevsky for his personal growth and the broadening of his philosophical worldviews, biographers have cited Wright's frequent reading and applause of Dostoevsky throughout his career (Bloshteyn 2001, 284). Similarly, Bloshteyn notes that Ralph Ellison made clear that his novel *Invisible Man* drew heavily from Dostoevsky by quoting Ellison's "reply to an interviewer who suggested that … *Invisible Man* (1952) was written 'in the American vernacular tradition . . . [with] some correspondence between [its] prologue and that of Moby Dick' Ellison countered: 'Let me test something on you' – whereupon he read the opening lines from chapter one of Dostoevski's [sic] *Notes from the Underground* and concluded, chuckling, 'That ain't Melville.'" (Bloshteyn 2001, 7). In her analysis, Bloshteyn argues that Dostoevsky's relevance extended from his acute ability to integrate social critiques of Russian society's issues with insightful claims about human nature and existence. This skill proved highly relevant to the socially conscious writings of the three Black authors.

Although Bloshteyn also cites Richard Wright's engagement with Dostoevsky, her discussion of Ralph Ellison and Dostoevsky is noteworthy, given Ellison's support of political love. Like Baldwin, both Dostoevsky and Ellison used their writings to promote love as an action capable of fostering social and personal transformation. Whereas Dostoevsky connects love, God, and human nature, arguing that by loving "your neighbors actively … the more you'll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul," Ellison argues that love and democracy serve as twin terms for "the condition of man's being at home in the world" (Dostoevsky 2002, 59; Ellison 2003, 154). Baldwin shared these emphases on love's need to be translated into action and its ability to provide existential security when speaking with MacInnes and Mossman when insisting that he believed love was "something active … [that provides] a

passionate knowledge of what a human being can do … to change the world in which he finds himself (Baldwin 1989, 48).[15] More than shallow allusions to an oft-discussed topic, Baldwin, Dostoevsky, and Ellison's discussions of love made it an object of significant religious, philosophical, and political inquiry.

Baldwin and Ellison's philosophies of love mirror Dostoevsky's theory of active love. Broadly conceived, active love is a form of human regard that manifests through concrete acts of goodwill towards all people a person encounters. These acts of love are defined more by intent than by impact: the active lover loves out of a moral obligation to support other people, whereas practitioners of other forms of love might have other priorities – such as love's social benefits or ability to cultivate wisdom. Dostoevsky discusses the nature of active love throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*, his epic novel of patricide amidst the social and political backdrop of 19th-century Russia. Using the Russian monk Zosima as a mouthpiece, Dostoevsky emphasizes love's infinite power and stresses what he perceives to be humanity's fundamental obligation to love. According to Dostoevsky's reasoning, humans are all guilty for the sins of all others and, as a result, possess the potential to atone for and, in some cases, forgive the sins of others. While many moral philosophies would not allow for such ethical interventions, Dostoevsky offers a love-based worldview in which God's love cultivates a spiritual fellowship wherein both guilt and injury are shared (Mochulsky 1971, 588). Zosima argues that humanity is marked by a degree of kinship so strong as to render all people guilty and responsible for one another. Such universal guilt necessitates the ethic of active love and renders it a matter of duty. Thus burdened with the guilt of all other humans, active lovers try their best to balance atoning for their own sins, helping others seek redemption, and bettering the world through acts of goodwill.

[15] Note: This quote was referenced earlier in the Dissertation's Introduction

Reading Baldwin, Ellison, and Dostoevsky's discussions on love in conversation, I argue that, like Dostoevsky, Baldwin and Ellison call for a practice of political love, which, borrowing from Dostoevsky, I term "active love." While Ellison did not speak explicitly of love's active nature as Baldwin did in his conversation with Mossman and MacInnes, the term love is used as a verb in 80% of its 68 appearances in Ellison's magnum opus, *Invisible Man* (Ellison 1995b, 579). All the more, the novel's narrator places heavy emphasis on action, arguing that "without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled 'file and forget'" (Ellison 1995b, 579). Although it is difficult to judge whether Baldwin and Ellison drew directly from Dostoevsky's philosophy of active love, it seems reasonable that since Dostoevsky played such a prominent role in the work of Baldwin and Ellison, their writings would share some elements of philosophy given that the concept shaped his worldview during the height of his career. By examining the relationship between Dostoevsky's theory of active love and discussions of love in Baldwin and Ellison, I will outline the Dostoevskian logic that undergirds each of the Black authors' philosophies of political love. This is especially true in several of the 1950s writings, particularly Baldwin's essay collection *Notes of a Native Son* and Ellison's seminal novel *Invisible Man*, in which a bright Black man who lives underground in New York City recounts the racist experiences that led him to seek refuge below the city's streets.

A comparative analysis shows that Baldwin and Ellison draw three critical elements from Dostoevsky's philosophy of active love. First, Dostoevsky's claim that love should manifest as a laborious, lifelong practice; second, an existential logic which individuals are obligated to practice this laborious love because they are simultaneously guilty for the sins of all other human beings and responsible for their salvation; and third, an insistence that love take the form of close, concrete encounters with people in the world. In *Notes of a Native Son,* Baldwin

demonstrates these three elements in testimonies about his father's passing, his father's funeral, and his travels to Europe. In *Invisible Man,* the narrator explores the connection between love and labor when telling of the murder and funeral of his friend Clifton, draws a connection between love and universal guilt when recounting a dream in which he meets a slave woman who murdered her husband, and addresses the topic of entering the world while resolving to emerge from under and recognize and affirm America's diversity.

2. The Logic of Dostoevsky's Theory of Active Love

Dostoevsky's theory of active love reconfigures the Biblical command to "love your neighbor as yourself" into a spiritual practice and ethical lifestyle.[16] Dostoevsky expands the Old Testament commandment to show unconditional care for those around us into a form of love that involves accepting guilt for others' wrongdoings and taking responsibility for the salvation of their souls. This guilt is universal, and the active lover must adopt it regardless of their familiarity or conflicts with other people. As a result, the elder Zosima – the character who best embodies the tenets of active love – extends love to all members of the Karamazov family: his devout pupil Alyosha, the former's hedonistic brother Dimitri, the family's selfish patriarch Fyodor, and the nihilistic Ivan – Alyosha's deeply atheist brother. As a form of regard that is both universal and particular, active love requires that an individual make concrete efforts to love every individual they interact with while also loving all of humankind. Dostoevsky's most substantive discussions of the relationship between love and guilt are in *The Brothers Karamazov* section "From the Life of the Hieromonk and Elder Zosima." Here, in a biography of Zosima attributed to Alyosha Karamazov, Dostoevsky writes of his notion of universal guilt.

[16] Leviticus 19:18, NRSV

Different versions of the phrase "I am perhaps the most guilty of all, and the worst of all men in the world as well!" reappears throughout this portion of the novel – first during Zosima's retelling of his brother Markel's death and later resurfacing in several sermons and discourses included in the monk's biography (Dostoevsky 2002, 315). Zosima speaks of the onset of his brother's illness during his adolescent years, and he details his brother's sudden embrace of this notion of universal guilt as he comes to face death. He describes how Markel "awoke every day with more and more tenderness, rejoicing and all atremble with love," and he quotes his brother's repeated declarations that "each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and [he] most of all" (Dostoevsky 2002, 289). Zosima attributes his Christian worldview to his brother's premature death at age seventeen – an event that took place when Zosima was only nine years old. As he awaits his own death, Zosima tells close friends that while "making [his] way through life, [he] gradually came to see that [his] brother was … a pointer and a destination from [God] in [his] fate, for if [Markel] had not appeared in [his] life … [Zosima] would [never] entered monastic orders" Zosima contextualizes this connection by citing one of his last moments with Markel – the latter's insistence that his younger brother leaves Markel's deathbed and "go … play, live for me!" Zosima claims that this exhortation "remained indelibly in [his] heart … [waiting] to rise up and respond in due time" – with this time implicitly being Zosima's entrance into the monastery (Dostoevsky 2002, 302, 307).[17]

Although Dostoevsky's discussions of active love and responsibility are deeply religious

[17] It is important to note the fact that because Zosima's biography is attributed to Alyosha, the implication that Markel's exhortations led his brother to the monastic order cannot be attributed entirely to Zosima. The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* makes clear that "this last talk of the elder with those who visited him on the last day of his life has been partly preserved in writing [by] Alexei Fyodorovich Karamazov … But whether it was just that conversation, or he added to it in his notes from former conversations with his teacher as well, I cannot determine."

and philosophical, he developed the concept as a response to the concrete social and cultural politics of 19th-century Russia. The latter half of the 1800s was marked by both internal and external attacks on the Russian Orthodox mysticism and spirituality that had anchored the country's Slavic identity for centuries. As a Slavophile deeply invested in Russia's unique Christian identity, Dostoevsky rebuffed these changes and used the last decades of his life to critique these cultural shifts. Dostoevsky traced these lines of thought to the celebration of rational thought that emerged during the Enlightenment in Western Europe. By the 19th-century, a new Russian endorsement of reason thinking could be found in all areas of Russian thought – whether philosophical, political, social, or religious. Fully aware of this turn towards isolation, Dostoevsky cites it as a defining factor of the modern world's focus on the individual, decrying 19th-century society's nature as world in which "the idea of serving mankind, of the brotherhood and oneness of people, is fading more and more in the world … [and mankind] is isolated [with little] care about the whole" (Dostoevsky 2002, 314). Dostoevsky uses the novel to speak out against these trends, arguing that the 19th-century was marked by an individualism in which "everyone now strives most of all to separate his person [from others], wishing to experience the fullness of life within himself (Dostoevsky 2002, 303-304). Ironically, Dostoevsky notes, this effort to experience "the fullness of life within [oneself]" ultimately leads to a "full suicide … [because] men … are separated into units" and lose the "brotherhood" that allows one to fulfill their moral duty to take responsibility for others (Dostoevsky 2002, 303-304). Nevertheless, Zosima's lamentations comprise only a small portion of his discourses on modern man, brotherhood, and connection. Ever cheerful and wrapped up in a joy he attributes to his love for the world, Zosima insists that all people use love to subvert modernity's shift towards isolation and, as a result, the turmoil and angst it brings. By accepting a life marked by love and

responsibility, one frees oneself from the burdens of modernity and instead experiences the joy, salvation, and paradise that active love is said to bring.

3. Love as Labor & Perseverance: The Deaths of David Baldwin in "Notes of A Native Son" and Tod Clifton in *Invisible Man*

The first analog between Dostoevsky's theory of active love and James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison's discussions of political love involves the notion of love as a form of labor and perseverance, which takes the form of a dedicated effort to avoid isolation by loving others in the case of Baldwin and upholding one's love for others by sharing in their pain of others in the case of Ellison. In several sermons, Zosima describes active love as a form of work, telling listeners that "active love is labor and perseverance, and for some people, perhaps, a whole science" (Dostoevsky 2002, 58). It is this necessary effort and perseverance that makes active love a practice of responsibility, for by loving others actively, individuals prove their willingness to take on the duty and burdens that come with adopting the guilt of all other human beings. Zosima quotes his older brother when reflecting on such behavior:

> We must all serve each other …. It is not possible for there to be no masters and servants, but let me also be the servant of my servants, the same as they are to me. And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all …. You must know that verily each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything. I do not know how to explain it to you, but I feel it so strongly that it pains me. And how could we have lived before, getting angry, and not knowing anything? (Dostoevsky 2002, 289).

In Zosima's mind, for a person to lead a full and honest life, they must acknowledge their responsibility to others by loving them tirelessly to the point of subservience and full humility. Using Zosima's descriptions of love as a form of labor and perseverance sheds light on the experience of active love in both Baldwin and Ellison's theories. Baldwin clarifies that the experience of active love involves stepping outside the modern tendency to view oneself as an

individual. Ellison, on the other hand, suggests that practicing love is quite painful but inspiring because it involves sharing in others' pain while finding moments of joy through the effort to share emotions with others.

One of the most noteworthy intersections between Baldwin, Ellison, and Dostoevsky's philosophies of love is their emphasis on love's redemptive capacity – namely, how love shown for and to others can redeem them of their sins. In Baldwin's corpus, the most potent depictions of the relationship between love and labor are found in the story of his father, David Baldwin, Sr. Though Baldwin would write and discuss his father throughout his career, the most notable discussion is in the 1955 essay "Notes of a Native Son." Here, Baldwin argues that his father proved unable to do the work of preventing himself from internalizing white supremacy and adopting the belief that Black people were somehow less human than their white counterparts (Baldwin 2012, 89). Baldwin says that his failure to do the work of love meant that he "had lived and died in an intolerable bitterness of spirit" fostered by his internalization of white supremacy. Baldwin concludes that because of this bitterness, his father was unable to practice the labor of love and ultimately succumbed to lethal self-isolation. Having internalized white supremacist ideas about Black people's purported inferiority, David Baldwin proceeded to disavow all Black people due to his inability to recognize Black people's full humanity. Baldwin characterizes his father's rejection of Black people as different forms of moral, epistemic, and aesthetic dismissals of black personhood. On a moral plane, Baldwin describes his father as having suffered tremendous shame over his morality, a sentiment driven by distorted comparisons with the presumed virtue of white people. Baldwin argues that this rejection of his moral worth was most evident through his father's shame over his origins in New Orleans, a city he "always presented … as one of the most wicked of cities" (Baldwin 2012, 88). Baldwin's father protested any

representations of his hometown in their house – a stance so strong that it ultimately led David Baldwin to cut ties with a relative. Similarly, his ontological disavowal took an aesthetic form, as he showed great disdain towards his physical blackness and dark skin tone. As Baldwin writes:

> It must be said that there was something else in him, buried in him … [that] had something to do with his blackness … and with the fact that he knew he was black but did not know that he was beautiful. (Baldwin 2012, 89)

In these ways, David Baldwin's perceptions of his blackness prohibited him from recognizing the fullness of his personhood. As his son tells it, the white supremacy of his social order clouded David Baldwin's vision and prevented him from drawing independent conclusions about his blackness.

According to Baldwin's testimony, in addition to hating himself, David Baldwin hated the Black people around him – including those in his neighborhood, Harlem, and his family. While reflecting on his father's relationship with Harlem, Baldwin notes, "he spent great energy … keeping us away from the people who surrounded us …. He treated almost everybody on our block with a most uncharitable asperity" (Baldwin 2012, 92) Reportedly, the elder Baldwin found the neighborhood's appearance to be a perpetual reminder of its immorality and believed the residents could not make the choices needed to live fruitful lives. A devout Christian, David Baldwin identified sin with the Black residents of Harlem, and he consequently associated his very understanding of sin with the Black bodies in the neighborhood. Yet rather than despair over his rejection, the residents of Harlem simply distanced themselves from him. As Baldwin attests: "By the time that he died none of his friends had come to see him for a long time" (Baldwin 2012, 90). At the same time, David Baldwin also showed great resentment towards his family, which took the form of intense beatings and vocal rage. Yet, whereas David Baldwin's resentment towards the neighborhood's residents had little to no effect on its recipients, his proximity to his family intensified his hatred and made it deeply impactful. Eventually, Baldwin

and his siblings came to resent and fear their father until his death. Baldwin spoke about his father's anger and hate throughout his career, arguing that there was no greater recipient of said hate than James Baldwin himself. When reflecting on how his father disparaged his dreams and wishes, Baldwin describes David Baldwin's resentment as a mixture of cruelty and rage. Each time he belittled his son's intelligence, character, or appearance, the elder Baldwin projected supremacist ideals and dismissed the humanity of other nonwhites – a dismissal which his son attributed to an internalization of supremacist ideology: "his cruelty, to our bodies and our minds, had been one of the symptoms of his illness" and his illness stemmed from internalized racism (Baldwin 2012, 91).

One of the significant intersections between Dostoevsky's theory of active love and David Baldwin, Sr.'s racial difficulties involve the extent to which both Dostoevsky and James Baldwin argue that isolation leads to spiritual and physical death and that this death cannot only be subverted through love and collectivity. Both Baldwin and Dostoevsky argue that isolation can only be avoided through laborious efforts to love and connect with others. While attesting to his father's struggles, Baldwin suggests that only love can overcome the resentment and bitterness of spirit that led to David Baldwin's death. Convinced that freedom from this resentment is crucial to survival, Baldwin prescribes love – resentment's opposite – as a cure for the enmity and isolation. Baldwin insists that by recognizing, accepting, and eventually loving their humanity, Black people find themselves capable of overcoming the trappings of white supremacy and its ills – namely, its suggestion that Black people are less than human. As he puts it, only by facing the "complexity of ourselves … can we find at once … the power that will free us from ourselves" (Baldwin 2012, 15). Having undertaken the process of self-love, an individual liable to internalizing white supremacist ideology may then continue their love-based

resistance through the willful love of their nonwhite neighbors and communities. In doing so, they will come to recognize the humanity and full personhood of all members of the social order, even despite white supremacy's continuous assertion that nonwhite people are somehow less than human. Unfortunately, cultivating self-love requires an awareness and acceptance of one's private existence, categorical circumstances, and potential for growth – an endeavor David Baldwin proved too insecure to do.

Similarly, Zosima argues that although the conditions of the modern era lead people to believe that a world [anchored] in the pursuit of freedom can facilitate community, it cannot. He maintains that what most people call "freedom" is a delusional urge to possess material objects that illustrate a worldly individualism that moves us further away from our natural state as spiritual, loving creatures. Beginning with the belief that "the spiritual world [is] the higher half of man's being," Zosima decries people in the modern era who take "freedom to mean the increase and prompt satisfaction of needs" (Dostoevsky 2002, 332). He insists that humankind's true nature is marked by spiritual solicitude with others, and he argues that when people pursue worldly desires, "they distort their own nature" (Dostoevsky 2002, 332). Instead, Zosima champions the lifestyle of Russian monks, citing "obedience, fasting and prayer … alone [as] … the way to real and true freedom," given that they liberate the practitioner from dependence on worldly objects that stand apart from God's natural order (Dostoevsky 2002, 333). Recognizing that monastic life is not suitable for everyone, Zosima concludes that simply mirroring monastic humility is enough to set society on a path toward fellowship. By rejecting the allures of the modern world, individuals can work tirelessly to foster the spiritual fellowship for which they were created. Quoting Mikhail, Zosima insists that until society at large takes "a different path psychically … [and] one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood"

(Dostoevsky 2002, 321). He notes that the principles of active love and fraternity cannot be taught, as "no science or self-interest will ever enable people to share their property and their rights among themselves without offense" (Dostoevsky 2002, 321).[18]

Because Baldwin's testimony focuses exclusively on his father's struggles, Baldwin presents his father's behavior as a form of structural self-isolation – a retreat from the world brought about by the racism of 20th-century America and a retreat that is particular to the circumstances of David Baldwin's life but that still bears categorical insight into the workings of a racially-determined world. On the other hand, Zosima levels a broad, universal critique of modern humanity. Whereas Baldwin laments his father's isolation, Zosima decries the isolation of "all men in [our] model age" (Dostoevsky 2002, 332). At the same time, Baldwin's use of testimony leads Baldwin to assert universal truths that resemble Zosima's grand claims about humanity. At one point, Baldwin notes that his father's situation was not suited for moral judgment because the complexities of his psychical situation were too complex to be subjected to human evaluation. Baldwin's call for a restraint of judgment on his father and other suffering humans is not unlike Zosima's insistence that guilt is too complex for human understanding.

Baldwin points out that his family had not been able to recognize the behavioral symptoms of his tuberculosis because the paranoia that the disease caused cultivated a paranoia that simply led to him behaving in a manner more ascetic and rejecting the world in the name of

[18] When set within the context of all of Book 6, Zosima's various critiques of isolation – whether quoted in his stories about Markel or Mikhail or stated directly in his sermons, – stand against his applause of the natural world. Unlike humankind, whose capacity for thought allows humans to justify their divestment from the spiritual collectivity that exists because all of the world has been created through God's holy spirit the entities of the natural world embrace this collectivity. Zosima even goes so far as to characterize the plants' and animals' appreciation of this collecting as a reflection of Jesus' own love since "[God's] Word is for all, all creation and all creatures, [with] every little leaf … striving towards the Word, [singing] glory to God, [weeping] to Christ, [and] doing so through the mystery of its sinless life" (Dostoevsky 2002)

God. While it appeared to be the behavior of an eccentric believer, in truth, David Baldwin was distancing himself from the world because physical illness cultivated a sense of paranoia, and, as the doctors discovered after he was finally committed, "the disease of his [father's] mind allowed the disease of his body to destroy him" (Baldwin 2012, 81). Yet, as a Black man whose most difficult opposing force in the world was racism, the paranoia he experienced was marked by a rejection of Black people, whether they be his family, his neighbors, or himself. After acknowledging that he inherited his father's racism-stirred bitterness, Baldwin describes this bitterness in pathological terms, characterizing it as a "dread, chronic disease, the unfailing symptom of which is a kind of blind fever, a pounding in the skull and fire in the bowels" (Baldwin 2012, 96). Although Baldwin focuses on his father's struggles with racism, he argues that the bitterness and fever showcased by his father were carried by all Black Americans – the consequences of bearing "the weight of white people in the world … [which] had been for [his Black] ancestors … an awful thing to live with" (Baldwin 2012, 90). But whereas Baldwin and other Black Americans had found means of keeping the bitterness from overtaking their sense of self and leading to spiritual or physical death, his father's tuberculosis-caused paranoia allowed the bitterness to overtake his mind (Baldwin 2012, 90). Without the psychical resistance, the fever eventually caused his physical body to collapse and die.[19] Baldwin and his family were so used to his father's religiosity and decrial of the outside world that they interpreted his paranoia as nothing other than an intensification of his religiousness. Baldwin notes the fact that his father "had always been so strange and had lived, like a prophet, in such unimaginably close communion with the Lord that his long silences [and isolation from others] … never seemed

[19] While Baldwin can provide no medical evidence for his claim, the testimonial nature of his account eschews the necessity of physical verification: for the purposes of promoting a practice of active love, Baldwin only needs to prove to his readers that isolation leads to death.

odd" to Baldwin or his family (Baldwin 2012, 91). Whereas Baldwin is empathetic in his discussion of the dangers of isolation, Zosima is less accommodating, as he emphasizes the deontological nature of active love and the cultivation of brotherhood. Zosima argues that even in the most unjust settings, people can take even a little time to "remember God" by reflecting on scripture and appreciating the world's beauty in fellowship with others. At the same time, it must be made clear that although Zosima rebuffs the behavior of those who pursue worldly desires over love, his commitment to the practice of active love renders his laments as assumptions of those people's sinful rejection of love rather than the judgment of a fallible human who believes he is qualified to judge another human being.

The parallelism between *Notes of a Native Son*, *The Brothers Karamazov,* and *Invisible Man* continues through the analogs between Zosima's discussion of love as a form of labor and the narrator of *Invisible Man's* reflections on his membership in "The Brotherhood" a collectivist organization similar to the Communist Party of America. The discussion begins as a question raised by the narrator during his time in the Brotherhood. While attending a funeral for Tod Clifton, a member of the organization who was shot by police after peddling paper Sambo dolls on the street, the narrator looks out upon the sea of attendees and asks, "Did [their attendance] signify love or politicalized hate? And could politics ever be an expression of love?" (Ellison 1995b, 452). The narrator's query is confusing due to the ambiguity of the nouns that comprise it. It Is unclear whether "politics" means government activity, an organization's activities, particular individuals' practices, or a set of principles and beliefs about society. Similarly, it is unclear what the narrator means to be an "expression of love" and whether said love is an emotion, a concept, or an action.

While telling the events of Clifton's funeral, the narrator offers two ways of looking at the political implications of his comrade's death and the events surrounding it. On the one hand, the shooting and the resultant funeral serve as an "expression of love," wherein the events debate personal connection despite the structural oppression of the police officers' conduct. On the other hand, the death serves as a missed opportunity to foster brotherhood by educating people about the organization's scientific conception of history. In the first case, those in attendance share in Clifton's pain, feeling grief due to the loss of someone they loved. In the second case, those in attendance were potential subscribers to the Brotherhood's ideology, with their presence at the funeral advancing science. This first perspective – the death as an opportunity for collective grief, renders the political consequences of the death an "expression of love" that parallels Zosima's claim that active lovers can find "happiness in sorrow." In the second case – in which Clifton's death marks an opportunity for education – political activity is an opportunity to advance a rational, "scientific" understanding of the world and its history.

Clifton's funeral is a highly political event.[20] As the narrator says, Clifton's death "was political," with its causes and effects fostering various political reactions, whether it be the police officers' tepid concern, the Brotherhood's focus on the potential for education, or the narrator's

[20] Although the narrator claims that his speech did not go "the way [he] wanted it to go [because] it wasn't political" the fact that he follows this self-critique with a thought about the likely disapproval of Brother Jack, a prominent member within the Brotherhood, suggests that in this case the definition of "political" is the Brotherhood's not the narrator's own. Both Ellison and the narrator speak to the latter's acceptance of the Brotherhood's definitions and worldviews over his own. Early in the novel he alludes to this blind acceptance of others' ideas, pointing out that "all [his] life [he] had been looking for something, and … [he] accepted their answers … though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory" (Ellison 1995b, 15). Similarly, in a 1954 interview with writers Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard, Ellison discusses the narrator's involvement with the Brotherhood and notes that "the major flaw in the hero's character is his unquestioning willingness to do what is required of him by others as a way to success" (Ellison 1995a, 15).

grief. As such, after already labeling the Brotherhood's response as an opportunity for education (Ellison 1995b, 445), when he asks, "Could politics ever be an expression of love?" he is wondering whether political action such as that found at the funeral could serve as an opportunity to foster love. In a rare instance, the narrator follows up his rhetorical question with two hypothetical answers that answer the question through process of elimination. His question as to whether politics could be an expression of love comes at the end of a series of questions about political activity and collaboration, and the question serves as a summary of the questions that precede it. He begins the series of questions wondering why the people had attended the funeral and provides two possible reasons: whether they had had relationships with Clifton or whether they attended out of a desire to "express their protestations … come together … and [look] in a common [political] direction" (Ellison 1995b, 452). Although he remains uncertain as to which reason is correct, he furthers his inquiry by wondering whether their gathering demonstrated "love or politicalized hate" with the implication that whatever the reason for their attendance, the gathering was caused by – and thus an expression of – either love or hate (Ellison 1995b, 452). Yet, while he leaves the question unanswered, the options he raises offer an implicit answer. At no point does the narrator suggest that the attendees gathered due to bitterness towards Clifton – leaving the first reason for their attendance – a relationship with him – as a form of warm connection, something closer to "love" than the "politicalized" action he mentioned. Similarly, the narrator only uses positive terms when describing the second possible reason for their attendance: a coming together in a "common [political] direction." As a result, according to the narrator's logic, love – not hate – is the only suitable label for people's attendance at the funeral and, by extension, their political response to Clifton's shooting.

As organizer of the event, the narrator is tasked with delivering Clifton's eulogy. As he offers his tribute to his fallen comrade, he makes clear that the attendees' relationship with Clifton was, in fact, a relationship of love, repeating variations of the statement, "his name was Clifton … and we … loved him" (Ellison 1995b, 455-456). The narrator describes the funeral as an "action," echoing Dostoevsky's insistence that love in an active manner (Ellison 1995b, 449). Rather than a passive event in which those mourning Clifton's death could step back and peacefully reflect on the loss of their friend, the event is an activity spurred by that death. After delivering Clifton's eulogy, the narrator steps down from the stage and reflects one final time on the attendees, noting that they were "not a crowd but the set of faces of individual men and women" (Ellison 1995b, 459). Whereas the narrator's emphasis on education at the time of Clifton's shooting had led him to describe the attendees of other Brotherhood gathers as nondescript audiences there to digest the organization's ideology, the personal nature of the funeral leads him to see those in attendance as individuals rather than part of an abstract mass. It is important to note that the narrator precedes his question about the connection between politics and love with a question about whether the funeral attendees knew Clifton. Because the funeral was a political event planned by a political organization and conducted in the name of the Brotherhood's ideology, those in attendance participated in *some* form of politics. But as the narrator looks out upon the crowd, something about the gathering suggests that this political collectivity was different from the communality fostered by the Brotherhood – a difference he speculates might be love. Rather than serve as an opportunity for scientific education about history at large, the event was focused on the life history of a particular individual – ironically, a man who supposedly fell outside the bounds of the history his former organization promoted.

Like the narrator's encounter with Clifton on the street, the narrator concludes that the funeral is personal and implies that it serves as a political expression of love.

When we couple the analysis of Clifton's funeral with Zosima's discussions of active love as a form of labor, a particularly noteworthy similarity emerges: the extent to which the work of love can inspire some level of happiness, optimism, and hope through the difficulties of sharing in the sorrow and pain of others. This is most true in the case of active love, wherein one's love for other individuals involves recognizing the particularities of an individual's life – both their good works and their sins – and finding joy in the life they lived. In Ellison's case, that pain is reflected when the narrator mentions that he had "wondered at the depths of [the funeral attendees'] sorrow as the lines began to form" (Ellison 1995b, 450). In contrast, in Zosima's reflections, sorrow is something that an individual observes and reflects upon to find happiness. The narrator and the other attendees at the funeral can share in Clifton's pain because they are intimately familiar with the racial oppression that led to his death. This ability for connection, even in tragic moments, echoes a concept Zosima describes as "happiness in sorrow." Zosima sees pain as the origin point for the sort of self-discovery that allows one to love and appreciate the world, telling his listeners that throughout life, they "will behold great sorrow, [and] in this sorrow [they] will be happy," so much so that they must "seek happiness in sorrow" (Dostoevsky 2002, 77). Zosima makes clear that such a pursuit is a form of tireless work – much like the efforts to avoid the isolation that speak to the plight of David Baldwin.

The notion of happiness in sorrow extends from Zosima's Christian understanding of the world. His strong faith in God's grace and glory leads him to view the world as a place of infinite beauty and perfection – a space reflective of the splendor of its creator. Active love and its universal guilt foster an awareness of such beauty and humanity's relationship with it: the ethic

of active love pushes individuals to showcase regard similar in glory to God's while also pushing them to embrace the beauty held within. Such pursuits provide an escape from the challenges of the earthly world and go so far as to create what Zosima terms a "paradise" on earth. At one point in the novel, Zosima makes his case for faith in a laborious form of love by alluding to life's beauty and its worthiness to encounter. Zosima insists that the brevity of human life necessitates a tireless and consistent appreciation of the beauty and glory of God's world. He argues that hate and isolation serve only to distract from the beauty of the world and that by conquering one's disdain for others, one will gain a full appreciation of the world's beauty and will come to experience God (Dostoevsky 2002, 289).

Zosima's candor about the negatives of the laborious nature of active love makes up only a small portion of his discourses on humankind, modernity, and connection. Throughout the novel, Zosima speaks of how active love provides a happy and fulfilling life for those who live according to it. When one succeeds at loving actively, they expose themselves to a so-called "ecstasy" – a feeling Zosima at various times equates with "faith," "joyfulness," and the love of (Dostoevsky 2002, 56, 288, 52). According to Alyosha's biography of the Monk, Zosima is a wholly positive figure, and he traces his joy back to the practice of active love. Ever mindful of his blissful life, Zosima is adamant in his assertion that active love remains the only cure for the pain and angst of modern-day individuals. As he reminds one of his parishioners early in the novel, one may only cure their soul through "the experience of active love. [One must] try to love [their] neighbors actively and tirelessly [for] the more [they] succeed in loving, the more [they'll] be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul" (Dostoevsky 2002, 56). By accepting a life of love and responsibility, one frees oneself from the burdens of modernity and instead experiences the joy, salvation, and paradise that active love is said to

bring. At times, this ecstasy is so overwhelming as to cause fear – an occurrence that Zosima addresses in one of his sermons, telling his listeners to embrace the power and majesty of the feeling. As Alyosha quotes him saying: "Seek this rapture and ecstasy. Water the earth with the tears of your joy, and love those tears. Do not be ashamed of this ecstasy, treasure it, for it is a gift from God, a great gift, and it is not given to many, but to those who are chosen" (Dostoevsky 2002, 322).

4. Love & Universal Guilt: David Baldwin's Funeral in "Notes of a Native Son" and the Slave Woman's Grief in *Invisible Man*

The second analog between Baldwin and Ellison's discussions of love and the logic of Dostoevsky's active love is Dostoevsky's nuanced understanding of the relationship between guilt, responsibility, and free will. Dostoevsky concluded that without human guilt, there is no reason for individuals to take responsibility for their sins and the sins of others. Without free will, active love remains an abstract ideal rather than an intentional practice of taking responsibility (Scanlan 2000, 100). When discussing ethical obligation in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky often uses the Russian term *vinovatyi*, which evokes meanings of both guilt and responsibility (Toumayan 2004, 56). According to Dostoevsky's reasoning, human existence is marked by a moral state of wrongdoing, signified by the term "guilt," and by a position of ethical duty, signified by the definition of "responsibility."[21] In this way, the duality

[21] While Baldwin is indebted to Dostoevsky's discussions of sociality and ethical obligation, he looks frowningly at expressions of guilt, understanding it to be a sentimental emotion that precludes action (See Chapter 3). Instead he places emphasis of responsibility – as demonstrated in *The Fire Next Time*.

of *vinovatyi* extends beyond the realm of definition and into the Christian logic of active love.[22] According to Browning, Dostoevsky remained convinced that the complexities of guilt lay outside the realm of human comprehension or manipulation and could only be addressed on a transcendent level by God (Browning 1989, 525). To illustrate this, Browning cites an event near the novel's end: the trial and wrongful conviction of Dmitri, the eldest Karamazov brother. After his father, Fyodor Karamazov, is murdered by the sinister Smerdyakov – Dmitri is found is found guilty of the crime despite his innocence. Browning argues that the trial's inability to provide justice serves as evidence of Dostoevsky's belief that human beings are not fit to address guilt and wrongdoing. According to Browning's reading, just as Russia's judicial system is incapable of righting the wrongs surrounding Karamazov in Dostoevsky's novel, so, too, is humanity unable to save themselves from the guilt over their sins – especially amidst the ever-increasing nationalism of 19th-century Russia.[23]

At the same time, although Dostoevsky doubted humanity's ability to understand guilt, he was equally convinced that humans possess great freedom of choice, and he reasoned that such existential freedom could only exist if balanced out by an equal level of moral answerability. In his eyes, this moral answerability demanded enactment, and because humans cannot actively

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[22] Slavic studies scholar Gary L. Browning argues that Dostoevsky's allusions to guilt hold religious connotations that "responsibility" does not – namely its allusions to the Christian notion of original sin and God's capacity to absolve it (Browning 1989, 527, note 2)

[23] Other examples of false convictions in the novel include that of the serf Pyotr who was found guilty of murdering his mistress who was actually killed by the hand of Zosima's friend Mikhail, "the Mysterious Visitor," as recounted in Book VI, Chapter II of the novel. Interestingly, Zosima alludes to Dostoevsky's lack of faith in society's efforts to provide justice. He notes that by failing to convict the actual murderer, those involved in the investigation and trial "handed [it] over to the will of God, [as] everyone—the judges, the authorities, and society at large—remained convinced that the crime had been committed by no one other than the dead servant." This becomes even more true after the Mysterious Visitor confesses to his crime, as all those around him presume his confession is the result of mental illness as opposed to a desire to take responsibility.

resolve their guilt, their enacted relationship with *vinovatyi* takes the form of responsibility – which, in Dostoevsky's eyes, takes the form of an enacted effort to take responsibility for one's own sins and secure salvation. To do this, humans must live in a Godlike manner by mirroring the love of Christ – particularly his willingness to take responsibility for the sins of others. Dostoevsky emphasizes this obligation throughout Zosima's homilies, conversations, and discourses, as the monk emphasizes his devotion to the notion of universal guilt and his conviction that, due to this collective guilt, all people have the responsibility to perform acts of love in the world as penance for the sins of all humankind. As Alyosha reports Zosima to have said, speaking to the dutiful nature of this universal love using servants as a metaphor: "Let me also be the servant of my servants, the same as they are to me" (Dostoevsky 2002, 289). According to Alyosha's biography of the elder, as time proceeded, Zosima emphasized his role as a "servant of [his] servants … with more and more tenderness, rejoicing and all atremble with love" (Dostoevsky 2002, 306). Zosima's increasing conviction in the principles of active love – on all sorts of days and amidst all kinds of conditions – suggests a willful decision to invest in the life practice. In this way, universal service – as a signifier of the practice of active love – is an intentional practice that is performed daily.

In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin notes the fact that his father died not long before a major riot in Harlem and around the time of the birth of David Baldwin, Sr.'s youngest child. His father's funeral took place as Harlem residents dealt with the atmosphere of the riot, and as Baldwin notes, he and his family "drove [his] father through a wilderness of smashed plate glass" (Baldwin 2012, 87). During his father's funeral, a young Baldwin, once prone to judgment and disdain at the behavior of those around him, realizes that his father's situation was not suited for moral judgment because the complexities of his psychical situation were too complex to be

subjected to human evaluation, given that – as cited earlier – the young Baldwin "[knew] *not his* [father's] *wrassling*" (Baldwin 2012, 108). As a result, Baldwin's call for a restraint of judgment on his father and other suffering humans is not unlike Zosima's insistence that guilt is too complex for human understanding and his conviction that "[a] man … cannot commit so great a sin as would exhaust God's boundless love" (Dostoevsky 2002, 55). Baldwin argues that the David Baldwin found at the funeral "was not the man [Baldwin and the other attendees] had known," but rather a man eulogized and forgiven for the sins and misgivings of his past (Baldwin 2012, 106). The man being grieved, according to Baldwin, was:

> The man they had not known, and the man they had not known may have been the real one. The real man, whoever he had been, had suffered and now he was dead: this was all that was sure and all that mattered now (Baldwin 2012, 106-107)

Because of this, the young James is able to relate with his father in a manner quite different from their earlier encounters, for as he notes, while at one he *had* hated his father, such bitterness was now gone (Baldwin 2012, 103). Here in the small Harlem church, Baldwin has one of his first relational experiences relevant to his personal growth. For, as he sits at the funeral reflecting both on the person in the casket before him and the figure from his past, his memories and present impressions intermix and lead to a bounty of new truths and understandings about the world.

When reflecting on the days leading up to the riot, Baldwin distances himself from the anxiety and angst felt by the people who would later participate in the looting and destruction. Whereas those latter individuals are marked by "a directionless, hopeless bitterness [and] panic … [that arises] when one knows that a human being one loves is beyond one's reach, and in danger," Baldwin's communion with his father's peaceful soul is shielded from such hate (Baldwin 2012, 102). In one of *The Brothers Karamazov's* earliest discussions of love, Zosima reflects on the essential roles sin and guilt play in the practice of active love. He equates love

with forgiveness and repentance, telling a group of angry disciples to "forgive the dead man in [their hearts] for all he did" so that they can live and "be reconciled with him truly" (Dostoevsky 2002, 53). He tells them that repentance is very similar to forgiveness, arguing that "if you are repentant, it means that you love" (Dostoevsky 2002, 52).

The intersubjective experience between James and his memory of his father during the funeral helps Baldwin understand that the relationship between Black and white Americans is too important to be ignored and too complex to be addressed in terms of pure hate or idealized love. Before his father's passing, Baldwin understood the precariousness of American race relations to be a phenomenon at great distance from his own life and experiences, admitting that:

> Although I knew about the south … and about how southerners treated Negroes and how they expected them to behave … it had never entered my mind that anyone would look at me and expect *me* to behave that way (Baldwin 2012, 94).

After his father's death and before his funeral, Baldwin's newfound awareness of racial inequity fosters "a blind fever" – an incurable rage against which forces one to either resist unceasingly or to surrender (Baldwin 2012, 96). It is this fever that Baldwin would later seek to escape by fleeing to Paris, yet as he notes in the essay, "the fever … recurred in me … and will until the day I die" (Baldwin 2012, 96). Baldwin says this best when closing the essay:

> All of my father's texts and songs, which I had decided were meaningless, were arranged before me at his death like empty bottles, waiting to hold the meaning which life would give them for me. This was his legacy: nothing is ever escaped (Baldwin 2012, 114)

This notion rings true of *all* of Baldwin's interpersonal encounters, with each imparting slightly veiled wisdom and knowledge as to his true person only after they engage in later encounters. The fact that the young James Baldwin came to understand these texts echoes Zosima's claim that everyone can understand the Bible and its lessons: "Let him, the priest of God, weep too, and he will see how the hearts of his listeners will be shaken in response to him [and scripture]

… there is no need, no need of much explaining and teaching, he will understand everything simply." (Dostoevsky 2002, 311).

At the funeral, Baldwin feels deep sympathy for his father and realizes that love is the only means of overcoming the pain that plagues bitter and unhealthy relationships. While at his father's funeral, Baldwin finally develops a spirit of compassion for the man. After his father has been eulogized, Baldwin looks upon his elder in a new light – with a degree of charity and empathy he has never felt before (Baldwin 2012, 107). In this relationship model, Baldwin serves as an ethical lover and his father as a recipient of that love. Unfortunately, Baldwin's care came too late – realized only after his father passed. These feelings of compassion would remain with James Baldwin for the rest of his life and serve as the foundation for his entire moral philosophy. In this way, the compassionate relationship between him and his father would benefit Baldwin more than anyone. Baldwin had secured purpose and vision by finding the capacity to feel for his father despite the bitterness and tension.

When reflecting on the experiences surrounding his father's death, Baldwin argues that by reflecting and coming to trust in oneself, a racially marginalized individual can resist the oppression placed upon them. However, this self-love comes only through the struggles that come with self-awareness and self-reflection. As he puts it, only by facing the "complexity of ourselves … can we find at once … the power that will free us from ourselves" (Baldwin 2012, 15). At one point in *The Brothers Karamazov,* Zosima speaks similarly of love and self-understanding, though he speaks in parables rather than testimony. He tells his listeners:

> A certain spiritual being, through his appearance on earth, was granted the ability to say to himself: "I am and I love." Once, once only, he was given a moment of active, living love …. And what then? This fortunate being rejected the invaluable gift …. This being, [after] having departed the earth … beholds paradise … but his torment is precisely to rise up to the Lord without having loved … he sees clearly and says to himself: "Now I have knowledge, and though I thirst to love, there will be no great deed in my love, no

sacrifice, for my earthly life is over (Dostoevsky 2002, 342).

This self-reflection of which Baldwin writes throughout his career, is hardly idealistic or sentimental; instead, he urges his readers to think of themselves as individuals in a fully realized world. Baldwin's attention to lived reality allows us to make our extended claims, for by grounding his analyses in the experiences of real human beings, such as his father, Baldwin helps situate his discussions of race and love insights in an experiential context, one suited for deriving insights into the particularities of various human lives.

An analogous form of love as guilt and forgiveness is found in *Invisible Man.* In one of the earliest discussions of love and racial politics in *Invisible Man*, the narrator recounts a dream in which he encounters an old slave woman who is moaning and singing a Negro spiritual. He is startled by the song's seemingly contradictory mood, as he claims the song was as "full of Weltschmerz as flamenco" – a highly ironic claim given that the terms "Weltschmerz" and "flamenco" connote very different forms of emotion (Ellison 1995b, 9). Whereas Weltschmerz suggests feelings of melancholy, flamenco is a vibrant musical genre that lacks melancholy's lethargy. Later in the dream, the narrator asks the slave woman why she is moaning, and she explains that she is grieving the death of her former slave owner, who she killed. She tells the narrator that while in some ways she is glad he is dead – given his refusal to free her and her sons – she also grieves because she was the father of her children, and she loved him. She explains that she murdered the man to prevent him from experiencing a painful death at the hands of their sons, who were prepared to attack their father and owner with sharp homemade knives.

In the prologue, the narrator relies heavily on sleep metaphors to convey the complexities of the social phenomena that shape his experience. In addition to labeling himself as invisible, the narrator claims that the inability to see him is possessed by "sleepwalkers" who navigate a

dreamlike reality (Ellison 1995b, 14). He makes clear that this dreamworld is "only too real" – in that the actions performed there by the so-called sleepwalkers have tangible effects on others and are believed to be real by the sleepwalkers (Ellison 1995b, 13). Nevertheless, the invocation of dreams and sleepwalking suggest that while the experience of the reality is tangible, it is illusory and not in accordance with the world's actual reality. Ironically, the narrator provides little insight into the nature of the world navigated by those awake, as his narrative focuses on invisibility and the conditions that cause it. When describing his invisibility, the narrator talks of his "epidermis" – making clear that the invisibility has something to do with his skin (Ellison 1995b, 3). Nevertheless, he stresses that his condition is not a biological one, and the fact that he claims there is a division between people whose skin marks them invisible and so-called sleepwalkers who prove unable to see them suggests that the former group consists of white people.

The narrator insists that invisibility leads Black people to harm those who refuse to see them because their invisibility leads to resentment. Whereas white people often harm Black people unintentionally or without realizing that their behavior is harming another human being, eventually, Black individuals are liable to harm white people in return. Extending the metaphor of invisibility, the narrator describes this form of harm as a form of "bumping" into others. Early in the prologue, the narrator laments being "bumped" into by white people who are unable – or refuse – to see him. He tells one story in particular, in which he accidentally walks into a blond man who proceeds to curse at him.[24] The narrator responds violently, beating and kicking the man as he demands an apology, but the man refuses to apologize for cursing the narrator. The fight continues to escalate, and the narrator realizes that "the man had not *seen* [the narrator and]

[24] Ellison uses the spelling "blonde" in the novel (Ellison 1995b, 4)

that [the man], far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare." (Ellison 1995b, 4) He follows: "Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life …. Poor fool, poor blind fool … mugged by an invisible man!" (Ellison 1995b, 4). The narrator finds humor in these circumstances: by dehumanizing Black people and rendering Black Americans like the narrator invisible, people like the blond man were frightened by their encounters with these purportedly inhuman Black citizens. Their very own prejudice caused their fear and danger.

The slave woman's reactions to the situation are seemingly contradictory. All at once, she moans with grief over her master's death (Ellison 1995b, 10); laughs joyfully because he is no longer alive; and feels anger at his inability to free her and her sons. She tells the narrator:

> I dearly loved my master, son …. He gave me several sons … and because I loved my sons I learned to love their father though I hated him too …. I moan this way 'cause he's dead …. I laughs too, but I moans too. He promised to set us free but he never could bring hisself to do it …. Still I loved him … but I loved something more … Freedom … it's in loving. (Ellison 1995b, 10-11)

One could argue that the woman achieves freedom by enacting her love for her master by killing him. By no longer living, the slave owner is no longer guilty of harming the slave woman and their sons by enslaving them. This act of freeing the slave owner of his guilt and bringing about the freedom of his sons and their mother is also characterized as an act of love – and while the narrator's love of irony suggests that this notion of violent loving is a metaphor, the logic of loving acts that subvert wrongful behavior still stands. Speaking to this ambiguity, the narrator points out that invisibility erases the clear distinction between purported opposite ideas such as "the problems [of] good and evil, [and] honesty and dishonesty" (Ellison 1995b, 572). Given the narrator's repeated allusions to his lifelong lack of self-understanding, one could argue that this difficulty occurs because when an individual lacks recognition from others, it becomes difficult to determine how best to fulfill one's social responsibility. This is demonstrated most notably in

the case of the slave woman, given the moral ambiguity surrounding acts of violence that are committed to secure people's freedom. Although the murder of a loved one is presumably "evil," the designation becomes less apparent when the murder liberates several enslaved people and prevents an even more gruesome murder from occurring. Speaking of his own experiences with the moral ambiguity surrounding social responsibility, the narrator argues that the ethics of a situation shift "depending upon who happens to be looking through him at the time" (Ellison 1995b, 572). This assertion complicates the question of moral ambiguity and his concept of social responsibility all the more, given that these shifts in ethics depend on external circumstances such as the worldviews of the white people he engages.

This moral ambiguity described by the narrator is comparable to the moral ambiguity in Dostoevsky's novels. Notably, Dostoevsky's characters only come to accept that "each of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone" only during moments of impending death or extreme violence. This fact makes the notion all the more analogous to the *Invisible Man,* given that the slave woman's decision to murder her children's father is framed as an act of love, and the patricidal nature of her actions mirrors the patricide that serves as a center point of the plot of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Whereas Markel adopts the sentiment on his deathbed, Zosima claims that his decision to join the monastic order came after beating his servant, Afanasy, without reason (Dostoevsky 2002). A day later, the memory of Afanasy's bloody face awakens the sense of universal responsibility that Zosima would later promote throughout his life, just as the slave woman's murder-born grief and Clifton's death helped raise the narrator's first considerations about love and social responsibility.

5. "Go Into the World": James Baldwin's Travels to Europe in *Notes of a Native Son* & the Narrator's Emergence in *Invisible Man*

The last of the parallels between Dostoevsky's theory of active love and Baldwin and Ellison's discussions of love involves Zosima's assertion that active love requires concrete action in the real world: an active lover cannot declare their magnanimity in the abstract. At one point in *The Brothers Karamazov,* Zosima orders Alyosha to leave the monastery, telling the younger monk to address the turmoil plaguing his family rather than remain at Zosima's deathbed. He tells a sorrowful Alyosha, "Go, my dear, go … You are more needed there. There is no peace there. You will serve and be of use" (Dostoevsky 2002, 81). Russian scholar Konstantin Mochulsky argues that Dostoevskian active love is immediate in its execution and experience, and he suggests that it is this real-world execution that lends the love its "active" nature (Mochulsky 1971, 564). Demonstrating active love requires a significant degree of proximity between active lovers and the recipients of their love. Without this closeness, an active lover cannot fulfill their responsibility to assist the recipients' moral growth and spiritual salvation. Mochulsky argues that this ethical-spiritual relationship inspires active lovers to mirror God's unconditional love for humankind – a feat accomplishable only by actively imitating the example set by Jesus, both as a manifestation of perfection in God in human form and as an embodiment of his loving responsibility for humanity (Mochulsky 1971, 622). Dostoevsky reasons that by taking a human form, God supplied a model of the performance of Godly love while also affirming his own love for humankind by sacrificing his son. Dostoevsky reasons that by following in Jesus' footsteps, people may atone for their sins, love actively, and then access and live out God's love to the greatest extent possible. Because God's love sustains his efforts to rid the world of sin, active lovers must accept a fundamental responsibility for all people and their actions, including redemptions for any sins or wrongdoing.

Wary of essentialism and denials of human complexity, James Baldwin insisted that individuals acknowledge the multilayered nature of their identities. Believing self-awareness to be more than a simple embrace of the complexity of one's identity, Baldwin prescribed it as a method of enfranchisement and self-determination in the wake of societal oppression. Baldwin's testimonies in the second half of *Notes of a Native* Son focus on his experiences as an expatriate in Europe. Baldwin used the testimonies to outline a conception of himself that drew upon all parts of his identity. To do this, he synthesized his social locations into an ambiguous subjectivity that undermined the categorical disenfranchisement he faced as a black, gay male. In what are often referred to as the "Paris Essays," Baldwin's project of self-definition and the determination of his multilayered identity emerge from his experiences with other human beings. Understanding these writings to demonstrate Baldwin's embrace of his multilayered identity demonstrates one means of redefinition in the face of a restrictive, totalizing society. These essays frame Paris as a formative space in which intimate encounters with a diverse array of people in the world allow for Baldwin's growth as a multifaceted individual with a new understanding of the relationship between love and existence.

In both the 1955 and 1984 editions of *Notes of a Native Son*, James Baldwin begins his book with essay-length reflections on his experiences at the time of the text's composition. In "Autobiographical Notes" – the first essay in the 1955 edition – and "Preface to the 1984 Edition" – an introduction to the 1984 text as a whole – Baldwin constructs an autobiographical persona made up of two identities: "James Baldwin the writer" and "James Baldwin the Black American." Baldwin aligns each identity with a distinct goal and purpose, arguing that while writers must deeply self-reflect, Black Americans must face the social burdens that mar their lives in America (Baldwin 2012, 5-6). Baldwin frames his career as a writer in existential terms.

At one point, he characterizes the moment he began writing as one of realization that writing "would be [his] life" (Baldwin 2012, xx). Later, in an assortment of interviews, Baldwin would characterize the self-reflective writing discussed in *Notes of a Native Son* as a means of bearing witness (Baldwin 1989, 85, 92, 129, 177, 179, 225, 282, 289). Throughout *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin reflects heavily on his expectations for any good writer, and much of "Autobiographical Notes" serves as an assessment of his ability "to examine attitudes, to go beneath the surface, [and] to tap the source" when composing (Baldwin 2012, 6). He argues that such critical reflection must begin with an examination of oneself, claiming that "one writes out of one thing only – one's own experience" and that "everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop … it can possibly give" (Baldwin 2012, 7). Unfortunately, the conditions of his categorical existence in America prevented such self-examination.

Baldwin's self-reflections in "Autobiographical Notes" shed light on the tensions between his Black and authorial personas – conflicts that he attributes to American racism. Baldwin argues that societal conditions often prevent Black authors from acquiring the "distance" and "clarity" required for insightful writing (Baldwin 2012, 7). He argues that "any writer … feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent," suggesting that his own "conspiracy" stems from the realities of his experience as a Black American (Baldwin 2012, 4). Baldwin describes his attempts at separating the two identities, having hoped that he might acquire said clarity through a refusal to write about his Black experiences or the "Negro problem" (Baldwin 2012, 4). Yet, the conflicts between Baldwin's authorial and racial identities extend past the difficulties imposed on his ability to write. In its own way, Baldwin's inclination to write fosters trouble for his identity as a Black man, for it was Baldwin's love of Western culture – the love which he ties to his lifelong

love of literature – that helped foster much of the resentment and bitterness which he associates with his Black identity. Unable to find his heritage within the Western cultural artifacts he held dear, Baldwin developed fear and hate for the world. He characterizes this frustration as a bitterness towards both white and Black Americans, citing his former laments about his existence as "a kind of bastard of the West" – a person whose understanding of the world was shaped by white culture, even though the individual lacks ancestral ties to the European origins of that culture (Baldwin 2012, 6). This conflict leaves him in a state of "limbo" in which he cannot write, as his bitterness prevents him from conducting the self-reflection needed to write (Baldwin 2012, 7).

Despite his focus on the difficulties incited by his identity conflict, Baldwin still recognizes the importance of such tension, acknowledging the benefits of the struggles he described. As he explains, "Any writer finds that the things which hurt him and the things which helped him cannot be divorced from each other; he could be helped in a certain way only because he was hurt a certain way; and his help is simply to be enabled to move from one conundrum to the next" (Baldwin 2012, 5). These difficulties forced him to move forward with his attempt to understand himself, and ultimately, this difficult self-reflection allowed him to write about and address the challenges themselves. At the end of "Autobiographical Notes," Baldwin states that his ultimate goal in life is "to be an honest man and a good writer" – two objectives made accessible by his identity conflict (Baldwin 2012, 9). Baldwin's inner tension stimulated his commitment to honesty and pursuit of self-reflection, and this reflection allowed him to write successfully and be a good writer. Whether conscious of it at the time or not, Baldwin's narrative in *Notes of a Native Son* suggests that his exile to France in 1948 gave him

the clarity and distance needed to self-examine and write honestly. This clarity was brought about through his interactions with others – both those similar and different from him.

In "Equal in Paris," Baldwin attests to the role that encounters with French citizens allowed him to recognize the extent to which his self-understanding was limited to the bounds of race and his blindness to the extent to which "American" was a significant component of his personhood. The essay offers an account of Baldwin's experiences with the French justice system after he unwittingly accepted stolen bedsheets from an acquaintance. Having recognized – and being in the midst of lamenting over – his identity as a Black man, Baldwin arrived in Paris with little knowledge of the other dimensions of his personhood. When he interacts with the French police officers who arrest him for taking the sheets, individuals who prove just as different from him as his white counterparts in the United States, Baldwin comes to realize just how large of a role his Americanness plays in his greater intersectional identity. Whereas previously, the young James Baldwin perceived himself to be a Black man who happened to be *from* America, his interactions with the French officers and their clear disdain for him showed him that while "in the commissariat [he] was not a despised black man …. [but rather a despised] American" (Baldwin 2012, 148). Baldwin finds himself forced into a false stereotype extending from the misassumptions the French make about Americans in general, not Black Americans in particular.

Yet according to Baldwin's testimonies, it is at his moments of greatest despair – when it becomes apparent that he is not likely to be released without help, having been oppressed by the French legal system – that interpersonal encounters are capable of subverting even the most complex social constructs. To emphasize the importance of his interpersonal encounters during these proceedings, Baldwin draws a stark contrast between his descriptions of his interactions

with the police and his progression through Paris' legal system. When describing his processing through the system, Baldwin notes the degree to which "the various policemen who escorted [him] … always answered in such a way as to corroborate what [he] wished to hear" and juxtaposes this with the mechanical nature of the institution through which he was being processed (Baldwin 2012, 149). While not intimate or sentimental, there is a level of humaneness in the police officers' recognition of Baldwin's unfamiliarity with French society. This recognition – illustrated by their willingness to answer his questions – heightens his recognition of his Americanness and the degree to which he stands apart from the other residents of Paris. While this acknowledgment of his humanity is not strong enough to undo the disdain with which they looked upon him for being an American, it does confirm that Baldwin's interpersonal experiences held the greatest significance in his memory. After interacting with various members of the criminal justice system, Baldwin becomes aware that although he came to Paris to escape from institutions, institutions were just as present in France and had existed longer there than in the relatively young United States. The kindness of another prisoner and the support he receives from a former employer soon bring Baldwin his freedom, and it is precisely the ambiguity, complexity, and strangeness of these relationships that subvert the carceral system's oppression of Baldwin.

After his racist experiences in the outside world and his time "hibernating" in his hole, the narrator concludes that he must emerge and reengage with others, even if they render him invisible. He tells his readers that entering his hole and fleeing the false reality that rendered him invisible was "not enough" and that he was responsible for engaging with the world, its sleepwalkers, and other invisible people (Ellison 1995b, 573). In his words:

> The hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath … I'm coming out, no less invisible without [the old skin], but coming out nevertheless. And I

> suppose it's damn well time. Even hibernations can be overdone … [and] perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play (Ellison 1995b, 580-581).

His claim that he will "shake off his old skin" suggests that his return to society will involve presenting himself in a new way – an act of responsibility in that it allows him to live in accordance with his true self and worldview. And while he recognizes that he will be "coming out of [his hole] no less invisible" without his old skin, he can at least live an honest life free of the justification that brought him false love. This decision to come out and navigate the world resembles Zosima's insistence that Alyosha leave the monastery and return home. Without interacting with others and practicing active love, Alyosha cannot fulfill his obligation to perform concrete acts of care for others or model the principles of active love.

Having reflected on the slave woman's challenges with love and hate in the prologue, the narrator reflects on the topic again in the epilogue, though this time in the context of his own life. He argues that, in order to resist being overcome by hate towards those who harm us, people must balance their resentment and hate with an intentional effort to love. Like the slave woman who was forced to balance her love for her owner with the hatred she felt towards him, the narrator uses love to keep hate from consuming him. In his words:

> So it is that I now denounce and defend, or feel prepared to defend. I condemn and affirm, say no and say yes, say yes and say no. I denounce because though implicated and partially responsible, I have been hurt to the point of abysmal pain, hurt to the point of invisibility. And I defend because in spite of all I find that I love. In order to get some of it down I *have* to love. I sell you no phony forgiveness, I'm a desperate man – but too much of your life will be lost, its meaning lost, unless you approach it as much through love as through hate. So I approach it through division. So I denounce and I defend and I hate and I love. (Ellison 1995b, 579-580).

In his case, this balancing manifests as critique and defense of America's social reality, even though that reality has rendered him invisible. While he must denounce the "men who did the violence" in the nation's history, just like the slave woman denounced her master and ultimately

killed him, he defends the "principle" of democracy that anchors the country's social reality, much like the slave woman defended her owner from a gruesome death by killing him before her sons did. In this way, his behavior matches all possible definitions for his grandfather's instructions on living with his head "in the lion's mouth" (Ellison 1995b, 16).

At one point in the epilogue, the narrator considers the nature and logic behind Black people's social responsibility – the responsibility he cites as necessitating the balance of love and hate. He thinks back to a startling moment in his childhood in which his dying grandfather insisted that his grandchildren "Live with [their heads] in the lion's mouth … to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller [the grandchildren] till they vomit or bust wide open," and questions the greater meaning of the statement (Ellison 1995b, 16). Inferring that "the lions" and "'em" refer to white citizens, he wonders whether responsibility suggested by his grandfather required that he "affirm the principle [of democracy] on which [America] was built [but] not the men who did the violence" to Black Americans (Ellison 1995b, 574). In this case, the narrator and other oppressed people could neglect the well-being of their white counterparts so long as democracy was upheld – though the nature of such upholding was not clarified. In the second case, the narrator wonders if he and other Black Americans had a responsibility to democracy above any white citizens, despite – or even due to – the fact that white people had "compromised [democracy] to the point of absurdity" (Ellison 1995b, 574). He couples this suggestion that Black people are the only people qualified to sustain American democracy by raising similar translations of his grandfather's claim: that Black people needed to take responsibility both for American democracy and its white creators because it was the best means of addressing Black people's political needs, as they were metaphorically "older than [white people], in the sense of what it

took to live in the world with others," or because Black people were "linked to all the others in the world" (Ellison 1995b, 574). The narrator refrains from selecting one reason in particular – keeping in line with his insistence that, given his experience, everyone's social responsibility looks different – but the shared emphasis on preserving democracy makes clear that whatever form a person's responsibility might take, it was a democratic exercise.

While the novel focuses primarily on the unjust events in the narrator's life, the prologue and epilogue make it clear that the narrator is just as critical of himself for accepting the reality that rendered him invisible as he is of white Americans for sustaining it. There is a shared responsibility to divest from the racist social order that fosters invisibility; the responsibilities simply differ only in terms of action, given the fact that the groups relate differently to the social order. Speaking of this fact, the narrator says:

> I'm an invisible man and it placed me in a hole – or showed me the hole I was in, if you will – and I reluctantly accepted the fact [that I was an invisible man]. What else could I have done? Once you get used to it, reality is as irresistible as a club, and I was clubbed into the cellar before I caught the hint (Ellison 1995b, 572).

By emphasizing his need to reenter the world, the narrator shifts focus from discerning the cause of his invisibility to the remedy for his circumstances. This focus on active efforts to change the world rather than its ills mirrors Zosima's prioritization of active love. Although Zosima affirmed the guilt of all people, given his belief in the unchangeable fact of original sin, he placed his greatest emphasis on active love and its capacity to redeem others. As such, at one point in the epilogue, the narrator makes clear that no single party is to blame for his invisibility: "I'm not blaming anyone for this state of affairs, mind you; nor merely crying *mea culpa*" (Ellison 1995b, 575). That said, he does acknowledge his parting in sustaining his invisibility because although he was aware that his experiences with racism were causing him problems, he passively accepted his condition. Comparing his invisibility to an illness, he tells his readers, "I carried my sickness

for a long time … [and] at least half of it lay within me … You go along for years knowing something is wrong, then suddenly you discover that you're as transparent as air" (Ellison 1995b, 575).

The narrator's emergence from his hole requires deep honesty on his part. Like Zosima, who became a monk after realizing his responsibility to step away from the problems of his social reality in 19th-century Russia, Ellison's narrator recognizes his responsibility to change his social reality by adjusting his interactions with others. Upon looking back at his life above ground, the narrator realizes that, when attacked by people with more power than he, he must address the mistreatment with an active response rather than passive speeches or attempts to appease the harmful people by adopting their worldview. At one point in the novel, the narrator mocks his tendency to appease others by subscribing to their beliefs:

> All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naïve. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man! (Ellison 1995b, 15).

Although the narrator's invisibility is determined by his circumstances, and at times, it provokes violent behavior towards others. This is illustrated in the narrator's conflict with the blond man. Nevertheless, the narrator recognizes that he has a responsibility to act as though he were not invisible – challenging though that may be – and to push those who sustain the social processes that led to his invisibility to better the "peculiar disposition of [their] eyes" and worldview that prevents them from recognizing his humanity (Ellison 1995b, 3). However, this cannot be done in his hole, and he must emerge to fulfill this responsibility.

The narrator suggests that by adopting other people's worldviews, he lived dishonestly and prevented himself from recognizing his true identity: a sense of self separate from the

oppressive social reality in which he lived. While he had to acknowledge that he was invisible, this recognition functions more as an ironic acceptance of how he is treated in society rather than accepting society's definitions of him. One could argue that by failing to understand his existence, the narrator could not fulfill his social responsibility. Without recognizing his true relationship with the dreamlike social reality that oppressed him, the narrator could not respond appropriately to the injustices in the world. The responsible action that he describes requires some awareness of society's ills and his relationship to those problems, and by accepting other people's "answers" to his existential questions, the narrator delayed his ability to act. Recognizing all this, the narrator concludes that he must come to know himself, his circumstances, and the people whose faulty vision of the world leads to his invisibility.

As he reflects on the nature of honesty, the narrator notes the fact that he received a great degree of hate when he "tried to be honest … [or] tried to articulate exactly what [he] felt to be the truth" (Ellison 1995b, 572-573). Instead, he garnered the greatest amount of love from others when knowingly affirming their "mistaken beliefs" or providing false information that those people desired (Ellison 1995b, 573). The narrator labels this behavior "justification" – a form of regard towards others that sustains the self-delusion that allows an oppressive social reality to exist. Again and again, the narrator makes clear that white Americans cannot see the narrator and other Black people because they have a false view of the world. As a result, if that worldview is justified – particularly by the individuals it oppresses – then there is little likelihood that those white Americans will fulfill their responsibility to subvert the oppressive social reality that they sustain. The narrator's discussion of justification echoes Zosima's description of "love in dreams" – a shallow form of care in which one "thirsts for immediate action, quickly performed, and with everyone watching" (Dostoevsky 2002, 61). Both forms of regard arise when an

individual performs what appear to be acts of care – such as affirming others by supplying them with information – but does so dishonestly. The narrator argues that justification is a form of self-harm, stating with great hyperbole that justifying meant he "had to take [himself] by the throat and choke [himself] until [his] eyes bulged and [his] tongue hung out and wagged like the door of an empty house in a high wind" (Ellison 1995b, 573). Ironically, despite the pain, this sort of behavior led him to live a life in accordance with the justified wishes of others and, as a result, prevented him from fulfilling the particular acts of responsibility that extended from his existence and worldview.

The narrator uses the scene with the blond man to define "recognition" – a key element in his understanding of one's responsibility to love. The narrator argues that the blond man should have recognized that the narrator was liable to be a threat due to the mistreatment of other Black people like him – a quality the narrator labels "danger potential" (Ellison 1995b, 14). By recognizing this risk, the man would have ensured his safety and recognized the narrator's humanity by acknowledging the oppressive circumstances that define his life as a Black person. Although the narrator reiterates the fact that many white people are not even aware that they render Black people invisible, he reasons that since they control the dream world they live in – the false reality that allows some people to be visible and others invisible – they should be able to eliminate invisibility. Although the narrator was the perpetrator of the violent reaction, the conditions that led to the reaction are in the hands of white people. One could argue that, according to the narrator, without recognizing Black people as real entities and seeing them, white people cannot expect Black people's social responsibility to be free of violence and anger. Yet, at the same time, after a long discourse in which he denies responsibility for harming the blond man, the narrator then cites himself as having been an *irresponsible* person for not killing

the man for the betterment of society. According to the narrator, both he and the blond man must make a better society. The man must adjust his worldview and actions so that he does not harm others. Doing so will lessen the likelihood that the narrator and other Black people will harm others. At the same time, the narrator is obligated to take action against racists who sustain white supremacy. These duties can only occur if he and the blond man recognize and see each other, and while the narrator can, his blond counterpart will not.

By reentering the world and recognizing others, the narrator can acknowledge the diversity of American society and the extent to which all the nation's citizens – including him – have their own worldviews and experiences. The narrator emphasizes embracing diversity to live in a healthy society, arguing that "men are different and that all life is divided and only in division is there true health" (Ellison 1995b, 576). He notes that doing this requires that one resist adopting a "passion toward conformity," even though people are liable to creating monolithic societies (Ellison 1995b, 576). He places particular emphasis on the importance of diversity in the United States, telling readers to remember that "America is woven of many strands" and that a person "should recognize them and let it so remain … [because the country's] fate is to become one and yet many" (Ellison 1995b, 577). Acknowledging this diversity requires entering the world and facing others in the country's social reality – something the narrator cannot do while underground in his hole.

6. Conclusion

To summarize, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison's discussions of love parallel the theory of active love found in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Whereas Dostoevsky outlined a form of love based on concrete acts of goodwill as a response to the social issues

facing 19th-century Russia, the two Black American authors developed discussions of love that emphasized the need for actionable love that could address issues of American racism. The discussions of love intersect in three ways. Firstly, Dostoevsky frames active love as a form of labor. This notion is paralleled in Baldwin's essay "Notes of a Native Son," wherein the death of Baldwin's father is identified as stemming from his inability to practice the labor of love. In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the labor of love is explored in the narrator's discussion of his friend Tod Clifton's funeral, wherein the attendees experience a form of joy amid their mourning – a phenomenon which leads the narrator to discover that "politics [can be] an expression of love" (Ellison 1995b, 452). The second analog between Dostoevsky, Baldwin, and Ellison stems from Dostoevsky's claim that active love emerges from the fact that humans are guilty and responsible for the sins of all others. In Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin explores this fact by telling the story of his father's funeral and his realization that his father needed to be forgiven for his misdeeds. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison explores the topic of love and guilt in the novel's prologue and epilogue, recounting the narrator's dream about a slave woman who kills her master and yet mourns the loss of him. Lastly, Dostoevsky's claim that active love must be practiced out in the world echoes Baldwin's testimonies about his travels through Europe and his efforts to define his own identity – one separate from the racist stereotypes placed on him in America. In *Invisible Man,* the narrator discusses this form of love in the world by deciding that he will emerge from the hole underground and balance the hate he is liable to feel towards racist white people with love.

Chapter 3: Post-Sentimental Prophecies in James Baldwin's 1960s Witnessing

I find myself, not for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah. It would seem to me that the question before the house is a proposition horribly loaded, that one's response to that question depends on where you find yourself in the world, what your sense of reality is. That is, it depends on assumptions we hold so deeply as to be scarcely aware of them.

– James Baldwin, "The American Dream and the American Negro" (1965)

1. Introduction

In addition to his intertextual discussions of love with Black authors such as Ralph Ellison, Baldwin's ideas on love also came into conversation with public figures. This was especially true in the years following the release of *The Fire Next Time*, by which point Baldwin was the foremost literary spokesperson of the civil rights movement. Among those conversation partners was political theorist Hannah Arendt. Twelve days after "Letter From a Region in My Mind's" publication in *The New Yorker*, Arendt wrote a letter expressing her simultaneous admiration and concern about "the gospel of love" found at the end of the text (Arendt 2006). While she complimented the essay's significance and artistry, Arendt refused to accept Baldwin's assertion that love should serve a political purpose. As she wrote, "What frightened me in your essay was the gospel of love which you … preach …. In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy" (Arendt 2006). Martin Caver characterizes Arendt's critique as a misreading of Baldwin in which Arendt "mistakenly conflated Baldwin's invocation of love with a plea for mere compassion" (Caver 2019, 37). In doing so, Carver argues, Arendt charged Baldwin with an "alleged sentimentalism" in which Baldwin's calls for love were understood as cries for "public pity" rather than invitations to adopt practices of social change (Caver 2019, 37). Arendt was one of many American

intellectuals who charged Baldwin with promoting a troubling sentimentality. In the eyes of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver, Baldwin's passionate calls for Black Americans to love their white counterparts were masked exclamations of racial self-hate. And according to then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., the moralism that undergirded Baldwin's promotion of love only drew attention away from the policies needed to resolve the nation's racial divide. While each approached Baldwin's writings from a different perspective, Cleaver, Kennedy, and others suggested that this purported sentimentalism left Baldwin's writings "devoid of a political, economic, or even social reference" (Cleaver 1967, 109). Similar charges of sentimentalism would recur in the decades following, as literary critics such as Henry Louis Gates argued that sentimentalism affected the political expediency and strength of Baldwin's writings (Jernigan 2014, 173).

Despite the prevalence of these charges, Baldwin clarified that the love he described was anything but sentimental. Baldwin was highly critical of sentimental discourse, as was made clear in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel." A work of literary criticism, the 1949 essay offers a comparative analysis of two landmark American novels: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940). Baldwin identifies both novels as prime examples of protest fiction – a genre in which authors use dramatic politics, highly emotive language, and references to political issues to critique social injustices. While Stowe and Wright's novels have been applauded for helping spread awareness about anti-Black racism, Baldwin argues that this political protest came at the expense of character development, as the characters in the novel functioned more as plot devices than richly crafted human beings. Baldwin characterized this phenomenon as an example of sentimentality and critiqued it heavily, using prose that echoed the charges of Arendt, Cleaver, Kennedy, and Gates. Baldwin argued

that this sentimentality involved "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty" (Baldwin 1998, 14). According to his reasoning, the emotional excess of sentimentality deprives the individual from embracing the challenges of lived experience and, as a result, keeps them from fulfilling their ethical responsibility to love.

Christopher Freeburg explains the connection between love, sentimentality, and social change in his essay "Baldwin and the Occasion of Love." Freeburg notes that "so often, [love's] representation reinforces the idea that professing love for an individual is good enough as a commitment to social change and that declaration is equivalent to the hard work of telling the truth about oneself" (Freeburg 2015, 181). When Arendt writes that love's appearance in politics leads to "nothing…being achieved except hypocrisy," she is decrying these shallow, action-less professors of care and concern (Arendt 2006). Yet, as Freeburg shows, Baldwin's discussions of love serve as heavy critiques of these shallow depictions of love. According to Freeburg's reading, Baldwin sought to push Americans from wrapping "themselves in a 'protective sentimentality' that represses feelings of instability and inner 'chaos'" (Freeburg 2015, 181).[25] In Baldwin's eyes, this turn to sentimentality arose because people were too preoccupied with their fear of or guilt surrounding life's difficulties. As a result, they avoided the painful work of social and political change, which, according to Baldwin, requires that one demonstrate love by

[25] It must be noted that Baldwin's understanding of sentimentality as any excessive display of emotion does not match the term's everyday usage. As a result, his conception of fear and guilt as sentiments, as opposed to normal emotions might not fit into a stand theoretical model of philosophy of emotion. When approaching Baldwin from the latter standpoint Arendt's charges may still seem applicable, even if the two may be talking past each other due to their singular understanding of the concepts at play.

assisting others and acknowledging potential wrongdoing. Nevertheless, Baldwin argues that love can overcome this embrace of sentimentality because it requires that individuals face life's uncertainties and risk being hurt by others. As Freeburg puts it:

> Love's currency in Baldwin's prose hinges on its ability to signify interpersonal instability, moments in life when subjects are rocked by emotion, physical intimacy, and vulnerability – moments that, in his work, are crucial to identity-making" (Freeburg 2015, 181).

As a result, Baldwin framed love as a wholly unsentimental practice: a concrete human behavior with transformative implications that stood against more superficial, sentimental forms of human connection. In Baldwin's eyes, feeling and emotion lie at the heart of love's politically transformative potential, and these emotions are intentional and enacted rather than passive and sentimental.

While Baldwin emphasized love's emotional dimensions, this emphasis did not extend from an idealized, sentimental, or mystical philosophy of love. Drawing upon the growing field of love studies and the philosophy of love, I argue that there is an undeniable link between love and emotionality. Although there is no scholarly consensus that love, in itself, is an emotion, with scholars such as O.H. Green arguing "no" and Robert C. Solomon arguing "yes," even Green identifies "the close relation in which love stands to emotions" (Green 2018, 209; Solomon 1993, 277). Given this connection, Baldwin's discussions could hardly be devoid of robust reflections on the feelings inherent in the experience of love. Baldwin did not hesitate to mention or allude to the emotion and feeling tied to this orienting force – how could one describe a phenomenon like love without alluding to feeling? Moreover, as Baldwin saw it, love's position as a transformative force was undeniable – what was needed was an explanation of its suppression and the potential change it could bring.

One can resolve these misrepresentations of Baldwin's discussions of love by conducting an historical analysis of his 1960s witnessing. I argue that Baldwin's witnessing in the years of the civil rights movement possessed "prophetic" rhetoric through which Baldwin called all Americans to take up acts of love in response to the horrors of the nation's racism. As far back as the publication of "Letter from a Region in My Mind" in 1962, readers and critics have used the term "prophetic" to describe Baldwin's work. Highly reflective of sermons found in the Black Pentecostal churches of his youth, Baldwin's witnessing at this time was simultaneously passionate, diagnostic, and prescriptive, much like the prophecies of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Prophecy is inherent in the practice of bearing witness. Political theorist George Shulman describes prophets in a manner analogous to Baldwin's description of witnesses. Just as Baldwin argues that witnesses are tasked with pushing individuals to confront uncomfortable truths, Shulman claims that "prophets are *messengers* who announce truths their audience is invested in denying. Addressing not an error in understanding but a partly willful blindness" (Shulman 2008, 5). With this mandate in mind, Baldwin used texts such as *The Fire Next Time* and "The New Lost Generation" to characterize love as a moral practice marked by vulnerability, self-awareness, and intentional efforts to take responsibility for oneself and others.

Building upon Adam T. Jernigan's analysis of Baldwin's relationship with sentimentalism, I argue that although Baldwin focuses heavily on emotion in his testimonies, he does so intentionally to push his audience to divest from the passive lifestyle fostered by a preoccupation with sentimental feelings. As a result, although the prophecies emphasized emotion, they were better understood as "*post*-sentimental" in nature, to borrow phrasing from Jernigan (Jernigan 2014, emphasis added). Whereas a sentimentalist engagement with feeling would encourage a preoccupation with sentiment, Baldwin's prophetic, post-sentimental

testimonies pushed individuals to take note of the troublesome nature of sentiments and partake in the practice of active love instead. In this way, Baldwin's discussions of love were prophetic critiques of Americans' preoccupation with passive sentiments such as fear and guilt and prophetic calls for citizens to replace those preoccupations with efforts to make concrete social change by attending lovingly to the needs of their counterpersons. Baldwin believed that active love helped both African Americans and white Americans free themselves from the spiritual shackles of racism, the legacy of slavery, and the so-called "Negro Problem."

When read through a prophetic lens, Baldwin's 1960s discussions of love can be divided into two broad, complementary categories. The first includes a set of idioms that critiqued and dissected sentiments and institutions that hindered one's ability to practice loving responsibility. I label these idioms "sorrow songs" and "mirrorings" – borrowing directly from Baldwin's writings.[26] Baldwin's sorrow songs grieve Black Americans' struggles with a degree of frankness similar to the slave songs of the past. His mirrorings force white Americans to face discomforting truths about themselves, much like Baldwin's skin "[operates] as a most disagreeable mirror" to white Americans afraid of the nation's racial history (Baldwin 1998, 722). The second category includes "jeremiads" – a genre of prophecy that traces a community's decline from its origins and calls for a return to those origins through willful acts of repentance and change. Baldwin acknowledged a jeremiadic quality within his writing, noting in 1965 that he found himself "not for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah" amidst the nation's discourse on race (Baldwin 1998, 714).

[26] See "Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption" (1979) in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* and "The White Man's Guilt" (1965) in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, respectively.

Most of Baldwin's sorrow songs focused on the pain that resulted from individuals' fears of love. However, rather than functioning as expressions of pity, Baldwin's sorrow songs served as defiant rejections of this fear, as he critiqued fear as a crippling sentiment rather than a helpful emotion. When Baldwin expressed this sorrow, he posited an alternate reality in which the pain and suffering he bore witness to was no longer the defining marker of human experience. Baldwin's mirrorings primarily involved discussions of white Americans' immoral behaviors and troublesome mentalities. Although Baldwin's sorrow songs affirmed the downtrodden's ability to fight their oppression, and his mirrorings drew attention to evils that people must address, neither form of prophecy was structured to ensure that the emotional investment fostered by these forms of prophecy would stimulate listeners to act. As a result, Baldwin coupled each of his sorrow songs and mirrorings with jeremiadic calls for people to practice active love. Throughout the 1960s, Baldwin's sorrow songs and mirrorings cultivated a deep, unsettling empathy within his audience as people were forced to reconcile with the failings of American society and their moral struggles. Those prophecies invited his audience to empathize with the subjects to whom Baldwin bore witness – whether they be poor Black schoolchildren, hardened Black fathers, or amoral white liberals – while his jeremiads functioned as valedictions that posit love as the best means of translating that unsettling empathy into a transformative action which fills the lover with a sense of purpose. After Baldwin's prophetic testimonies cultivated dissatisfaction with sentiments such as fear and guilt, they encouraged his audience to translate this discontent into rejecting the racial status quo. Scholar Christopher Michael Brown addresses the political function sorrow songs play within the history of African American literary history:

> The foundational texts of the African American literary tradition often enact a kind of double performance, representing black performativity through narrative and poetic and

> dramatic forms. Frederick Douglass…describes his earliest memories of the "sorrow songs," the chanting and moaning of the enslaved during their labor, as a kind of witnessing: "They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension …. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains." The resistance was masked, of course, disguised from the overseer and undermining the performative customs of slave law.(Brown 2016).

These elements arise within Baldwin's witnessing, as his forms of prophetic sorrow songs speak against the racist experiences of the Black people to whom he bore witness.

The jeremiads served as emphatic invitations to envision and construct a postcategorical utopia. In this way, Baldwin supplanted the pessimism in many unsentimental critiques of racism with a post-sentimental optimism that was neither idealistic nor uninspiring. As he told psychologist Kenneth Clark when reflecting on his worldview: "I can't be a pessimist because I am alive. To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter. So, I am forced to be an optimist. I am forced to believe that we can survive, whatever we must survive" (Baldwin 1989, 45). Fulfilling this optimism required that all Americans reimagine the world entirely, disregard any self-understandings drawn from the country's false historical narratives, and replace their passive sentiments with the affective activities that constituted active love. In his words: "Any real change 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 … It is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free" (Baldwin 1993c, 117).

Firm in his belief that institutions are comprised of and guided by individuals, Baldwin argued that this prophetically inspired postcategorical utopia could only arise through small, concrete acts of love. In his words, "Now, it is entirely possible that we may all go under. But until that happens, I prefer to believe that since a society is created by men, it can be remade by men" (Baldwin 2010, 97). Baldwin argued that one could not take responsibility without being

honest with oneself and cultivating a profound self-awareness. In the case of white Americans, this meant recognizing America's history of racism and their role in preserving racial oppression. In the case of Black Americans, this meant denying the myth that they were inferior to white people and the inclination to hate that resulted from internalizing that myth. Both efforts served as a form of self-love. By recognizing the reality of their personhood, America's citizens could free themselves from falsely defined identities and act more charitably towards their fellow citizens. Because Black and white Americans related differently to America's racism, the jeremiads in Baldwin's 1960s discussions of love included distinct calls for each group. Whereas Black Americans are invited to "accuse" white people of their wrongdoings and those of their ancestors, white Americans are challenged to go through the long and challenging process of accepting the accusation and taking action to address it.

2. Responses to Black Fear: Sorrow Songs

During his imprisonment in Folsom State prison, Eldridge Cleaver – Black nationalist, former convict, and early leader of the Black Panther Party – composed "Notes on a Native Son," an essay-length reflection on Baldwin's art, politics, and sexuality. Cleaver's critiques aligned with the broader objections issued by Arendt and others in their characterization of Baldwin's discussions of love and emotions as illustrative of a certain sentimentalism. Although Cleaver admits to originally appreciating Baldwin, he clarifies that at the time of the essay's composition in the mid-1960s, that admiration had disappeared. He takes issue with Baldwin's supposed love of white Americans, a love he attributes to self-hatred and resentment of all things Black. In his words: "There is in James Baldwin's work the most grueling, agonizing, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning,

sycophantic love of the whites that one can find in the writing of any black American writer of note in our time" (Cleaver 1967, 99) According to Cleaver this "total hatred" and "sycophantic love" are the consequences of Baldwin's subscription to "the monolithic myth of White Supremacy/Black Inferiority" (Cleaver 1967) upon which the country was founded. This subscription is an entirely sentimental process – there is no rational explanation or justification for it, Cleaver says. However, the myth and the love of white people are all-consuming. Instead of directing his love and appreciation to his fellow Black people, Baldwin was consumed by his devotion to whiteness and white people. Cleaver argued that this sentimental love for white people and hatred towards Blacks resides at the core of Baldwin's being and work. As such, although Baldwin's voice was "transmitted magnificently in *The Fire Next Time* … [it] is the fruit of a tree with a poison root" (Cleaver 1967, 104). An admirer of Norman Mailer, Cleaver borrows the beatnik's language and accuses Baldwin of employing "a perfumed" style and an inability to say "fuck you" to his white readers, characteristic of Black homosexuals.[27] However, whereas Mailer believed Baldwin's style was indicative of a morality-masking egoism, Cleaver argued that it was an expression of a highly sentimental love which left Baldwin's writings "devoid of a political, economic, or even social reference" (Cleaver 1967, 109). In Cleaver's eyes, Baldwin's passionate calls for love were simply exclamations of racial self-hate. As a result, Baldwin's love proved incapable of resolving the racial tensions he outlined in *The Fire Next Time* and his other 1960s writings. However, while Baldwin did hold love *for* white people – just as he did all people – he made no claims of loving them because of their skin color. In fact, Baldwin explores many of the same mindsets, behaviors, and worldviews that Cleaver accuses

[27] See Douglas Field's "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors: James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Eldridge Cleaver on Race and Masculinity" for an extended discussion of the three authors' engagements with race, sexuality, and gender.

him of supporting. However, in Baldwin's works, white Americans were the ones guilty of subscribing to myths of white supremacy. In contrast, Cleaver charged Baldwin with accusing Black people of being preoccupied with white purity and denying black humanity.

Baldwin joined Cleaver in critiquing such sentimental attitudes – particularly the belief in white purity and supremacy. He expressed his frustrations with such sentiments fervently in the essays written in the years following *The Fire Next Time's* publication. Nevertheless, Baldwin insisted that Black people persist in practicing loving responsibility for white people, even if there is no guarantee that white people will return that love and respect. In doing so, he demonstrated that loving responsibility was not about reciprocity. Instead, the practice of responsibility was marked by the care shown by the lover rather than any love received. Giving love affirmed one's dignity and role in securing a more just society. Baldwin did not see this as an act of reifying power differentials but rather as a means of building a reimagined society. To help build that society, Black people would need to commit to loving – even despite its uncertainties – both to sustain their humanity and moral position and make the country more open to a position of care rather than division and harm.

To make such a case, Baldwin expressed his rejection of sentimental fear in pieces that qualified as empathetic sorrow songs about the struggles of the Black experience. Baldwin explores the nature of such pieces in his 1979 essay "Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption." While writing ostensibly about jazz musicians whose work echoes the grieving irony of nineteenth-century slave songs, thus earning the designator "sorrow song," at one point, he described his art similarly. He designated himself "a black witness to the white condition … [and the fact that] the black condition creates the trap of the white identity" (Baldwin 2010, 151). Highlighting the anti-sentimentalist nature of the genre, Baldwin defined a sorrow song as a

work that offers "an exceedingly laconic description of black circumstances, and as a way, by describing these circumstances, of overcoming them" (Baldwin 2010, 149). We can understand the sorrow song's function within his civil rights musings by considering it alongside the prophetic genre of lamentation. While Baldwin never declared himself a lamenter, the parallels between the two genres are strong enough for the lamentation to serve as a useful lens into the prophetic function of Baldwin's sorrow songs. His sorrowful writings emphasized people who found themselves fearful of adopting love due to their pain – particularly Black Americans who, understandably, proved hesitant to love and accept white people given the harm that white people had caused.

Baldwin cited several reasons for inviting Black people to take responsibility for white people and assist their efforts to love. On the one hand, he foretold the turmoil that would befall all of America if white people made no effort to better the country's racial dynamics. He suggested that if white citizens continued to claim innocence and succumbed to fear and guilt, the country would experience no structural change and would eventually crumble since the country's white majority possessed the nation's political power. On the other hand, Baldwin drew upon his observations of the fates of Black Americans who refused to accept white people and retained a hateful disposition toward their country. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin decries Black people's tendency to succumb to self-hate due to their sociopolitical circumstances and the lies of the American myth. He argues that guilt only cripples their ability to fulfill their obligation to love. Instead, he insists that they love white people – not simply to change hearts but rather to affirm their existence and stave off spiritual degradation. He speaks briefly of how his father was plagued by an internalized hatred wrought from the belief that he was, in fact, inferior to white people – a hatred that emerged from undue guilt over his position in the country.

As Baldwin wrote to his nephew: “Well, [my father] is dead, he never saw you [James], and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him” (Baldwin 1993b, 4).

“The New Lost Generation” may be read as a representative example of a sorrow song on exile, alienation, and a fear of love. At its core, the essay resolves two opposing perspectives on love. The first, expressed by Baldwin’s Black friend Eugene Worth, involves a firm belief in love and its capacity to foster change. As Eugene asked a twenty-something James Baldwin during an exchange about the human capacity to change: “What about love?” (Baldwin 1998, 660). Appalled by his friend’s question, the young Baldwin responded with the second perspective: “Love! You’d better forget about that, my friend. That train has *gone*” (Baldwin 1998, 660). Throughout the essay, Baldwin bears witness to the inaccuracy of the latter claims, using the exiles’ struggles in 1940s Paris to demonstrate love’s necessity. He tells the story of a group of individuals – himself included – who came of age in the years following the end of World War II and fled to Europe out of a purported desire to escape the limits of American life. Writing of his exiled Parisian life, Baldwin’s witnessing details the necessity of small concrete acts of love. Baldwin’s sorrow over Eugene’s eventual suicide rebukes the fearful shallowness of ostentatious self-absorption – a sentiment Baldwin associated with him and his fellow exiles after the war. In his words, “The people I had been raised among had orgasms all the time, and still chopped each other up with razors on Saturday nights” (Baldwin 1998, 663). In doing this, Baldwin reaffirms his commitment to the active love required by his jeremiads by lamenting the consequences of Eugene losing faith in love and, by extension, his humanity. Baldwin models how the responsibility of the individual American, especially among his generation, was to

embrace the vulnerability of these small, concrete acts of love by witnessing within the essay the deadly consequences for Eugene when Baldwin could not offer love.

In Baldwin's eyes, individuals who grew up immediately after World War II were raised to adopt "formulaic" lifestyles inspired by the American dream and promoted by the country's victory in the war. However, as Baldwin tells it, little satisfaction came from scripted lifestyles. As a result, he and his peers rejected these formulas by adopting life practices inconsistent with any notion of "proper" American living. And while they may have been thoughtful enough to see past the falsehood of formulaic American life, in retrospect, their new lifestyles only replaced one formula with another. Whereas one approach to life involved bourgeois, middle-class aspirations, the other involved sex, petty crimes, and drug use. In both cases, individuals attempted to avoid experience – a profoundly emotional navigation of the world and its joys, challenges, and unpredictability. In Baldwin's eyes, Americans of both sorts would focus on dreams rather than reality because "as long as [a person's] aspirations are in the realm of the dream, [they are] are safe; when [they] must bring them back into the world, [they] are in danger" (Baldwin 1998, 664). Ultimately, Baldwin concludes that underneath the exiles' narcissism and concurrent rejections of love lay a deep desire for human contact – a deeply frightening desire, perhaps even more than war, because its unpredictability suggested that it might amount to nothing more than "useless pain" (Baldwin 1998, 660).

In an essay that consists primarily of a broad discussion of an entire "generation," the fact that Baldwin only bore specific witness to the experiences of Black individuals suggests that the essay's conclusions hold relevance for Black Americans. This is especially true of Eugene Worth. During their discussion, Baldwin announced that he had lost faith in politics and "right paths," which led Eugene to raise his question about love. And although Baldwin witnessed the

deep vulnerability in his friend's eyes, Baldwin's discomfort with the idea of connection led him to disparage the remark, as he insisted that love held no place in the world. His words ultimately led Eugene to replace his faith in love with great feelings of sadness and fear of the future:

> My friend looked very saddened by these original reflections. He said that it seemed to him that I had taken the road which ended in fascism, tyranny, and blood …. He looked at me …. And he put his head down on the table and began to cry (Baldwin 1998, 659-660).

Baldwin revisited the story of Eugene's death several times throughout his career, linking the suicide to Eugene's inability to sustain his faith in love and his relationships. In some of Baldwin's writings, Eugene's love is directed at vaguely described individuals and, at other times, Baldwin himself. Regardless, Baldwin was consistent in his assertion that the subversion of Eugene's faith in these and other loving relationships led to his death.

When one narrows the essay's discussions of love and fear to the context of Black life, the stakes of rejecting love become much higher than those attributed to the American exiles. Given that only Black Americans demonstrate active love in "The New Lost Generation," it is telling that Eugene dies when his faith in love disappears. Baldwin reasons that his death stems just as much from his race as from his worldview's subversion. In Baldwin's words: "I feel now, that he would not have died in such a way and certainly not so soon, if he had not been black" (Baldwin 1998, 661). There is no implication that Eugene stopped loving Baldwin, the white woman, or whomever else. Instead, Baldwin lamented Eugene's inability to sustain faith in his worthiness of love. Eugene concluded that his life was not worth living due to his fear of being unlovable. However, Baldwin refused to believe that such fears were legitimate. Eugene's willingness to embrace what Baldwin believes to be the most human of all experiences verified his dignity as a human being, even if he could not see it. Later in the essay, Baldwin cites Eugene's death as the primary catalyst for his departure to Paris, arguing that if he stayed in

America, he "would come to a similar end" (Baldwin 1998, 661). One could find suggestions that Black people are unworthy of love throughout the country. As a result, if a Black person with Eugene's commitment to love could eventually believe they were inhuman, so could Baldwin and other Blacks who rejected love and vulnerability.

One of Baldwin's most noteworthy critiques of fear involves his insistence that Black people show fraternal love for white people, even if there is no guarantee that white people will return that love and respect. In doing so, he demonstrated that loving responsibility was not about reciprocity. Instead, the practice distinguished itself by the care the lover shows rather than any love received. Giving love affirmed one's dignity and place in securing a more just society. Baldwin did not see this as an act of reifying power differentials but rather as a means of building the reimagined society called for in his jeremiads. To make such a case, Baldwin lamented the struggles of people who found themselves fearful of adopting love due to their pain. This was especially true of Black Americans who, understandably, proved hesitant to love and accept white people, given the harm that white people had caused.

Although Eugene's experiences with love are socially unacceptable or unreciprocated romances, Baldwin connected Eugene's talk of love to the broader, more expansive notion of human connection discussed in the rest of the essay. I argue that Baldwin's conclusions were not limited to romantic encounters. While these sorrow songs on Black death are deeply affective, they set up the anticipation accompanying any expression of lament. Whether in "The New Lost Generation," "The Price of the Ticket" (1985), or his various interviews, Baldwin's testimonies about Eugene's death set the stage for jeremiads that outline how such deaths can be prevented. In each case, Baldwin's calls to action remain the same: people must cultivate or sustain faith in love, whether by affirming the faith of their peers or vulnerably attempting to love others, even

without reciprocity. Baldwin argues that all humans know of the power of love, regardless of whether they recognize and live accordingly. At their core, people desire and believe in love, much like Eugene. The difference lay in Eugene's willingness to acknowledge this desire. And while Eugene would eventually kill himself, his vulnerability would later inspire Baldwin to evangelize love by bearing witness to other missed opportunities. As Baldwin would note twenty-five years later: "To be valued is one thing, the recognition of this assessment demanding, essentially, an act of the will. But love is another matter: it is scarcely worth observing what a mockery love makes of the will" (Baldwin 1998, 883). Anyone can will themselves to embrace only those who saw fit to recognize them; it took a whole other type of person – someone akin to Eugene – to demonstrate the faith and vulnerability needed to qualify as a Baldwinian lover.

Baldwin's sorrow songs prove that vulnerability is a prerequisite for active love – an idea he would extract from that moment of revelation and pass on to a diverse audience in need of similar awakenings to the power of active love. In doing so, individuals had to navigate the uncertainties of life and gain the experience needed to become more authentic and more aware of their fundamental nature as loving creatures. In an interview with journalist Elsa Knight Thompson, he reflected on the uncertainty and faith involved in political action – especially as manifested in the protests in Birmingham. To quote: "In order to do anything at all, one's got to be aware that you cannot see the effects. It is not a two and two that make four, or it may be a two and two that make four, but you will not live to see the sum… I think that what is happening in Birmingham will either prove to be the end of that endeavor called America or the beginning of it" (thepostarchive 2016).

Baldwin was not dismissive of the skepticism of Black Americans and others who questioned the utility of political love – let alone one that involved forgiving and accepting the authors of the evils that needed to be erased. He displayed great sympathy for the victims of social disenfranchisement. Unsurprisingly, his criticisms of American institutions won relentless applause as he appeared in front of live audiences in arenas such as the Cambridge Union. While Baldwin ostensibly directed his criticisms of the country at white Americans, his invitation to love functioned more like an affirmation that America's downtrodden could survive even the worst of the country's ills by loving themselves and passing that love on to others. Ultimately, Baldwin insists that love is the primary means of surviving in an unjust and oppressive world. As Baldwin sees it, transcendent love manifests regardless of circumstance; analogously, active love is a practice available to all.

3. Subverting White Guilt: Prophetic Mirrorings

On May 24, 1963, Baldwin organized a meeting between a diverse group of Black artists, intellectuals, and activists with then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. – an icon of white liberalism. While Kennedy would eventually adopt a relatively progressive view on race, his views at the time were moderate. He endorsed incremental change, believing that "the nation's" – that is, white people's – needs should trump any efforts to resolve racial injustice. The meeting was contentious, and none of the attendees left satisfied. Kennedy expressed frustration with Baldwin's lack of interest in discussing gradual policy changes. Baldwin left angry with the Attorney General's seeming inability to empathize with the Black people in the room. Well-known for his aggression, pride, and deep loyalty to his brother, John, the Attorney General did not take Baldwin's criticisms well. At the time, he believed love was a political force that should

take the form of great pride and care for one's nation – particularly amidst the tensions of the Cold War, given that America's reputation and future were on the line. This patriotic love included a deep faith in the country's institutions and their capacity to bring about change and support for its citizens – white people included – who, he felt, shared a desire to improve the country on all fronts. Suggestions that one could attribute racism and moral ills to all white Americans greatly bothered Kennedy. He was frustrated with Baldwin's insistence on discussing moral issues rather than policies. Such a focus was sentimental and naive: moralism could never replace institutional change, such as that sought by Kennedy's brother.

Months later, by 1964, Baldwin's discussions of human connection were located almost exclusively in conversations about white supremacy's concrete realities. Moreover, while his writings and interviews at the time carried the same emotional intensity found in "The New Lost Generation," stark mirrorings had replaced sorrows as the primary method of prophetic witnessing. The prophetic authority of Baldwin's writings and interviews took the form of righteous anger, not unlike that of a storefront preacher, and his essays – almost always addressed to white Americans – were damning both in style and content. Just like Robert F. Kennedy, Baldwin believed that the intersection of love and politics should be patriotism. However, when Baldwin discussed an implicit love of country, his messages harkened back to the words of his 1952 essay "Autobiographical Notes": "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually" (Baldwin 2012, 9). Although their charges had been false, to begin with, Mailer and others could no longer accuse Baldwin of being "incapable of saying 'Fuck you' to the reader" (Mailer 1992, 471). Many of these discussions involved critiques of "white guilt" and white Americans' tendency to evade their moral responsibility towards their Black countrypersons. In essays such

as “Words of a Native Son” (1964), “The White Problem” (1964), and “The White Man’s Guilt” (1965), Baldwin followed up on earlier critiques of the Kennedy Administration by exploring how white liberals were subconsciously aware of their connections to the nation’s history of racial oppression. This subtle awareness led to an unproductive sense of guilt, which they tried to soothe by making appeals of innocence and hoping Black Americans would curb their accusations and turn their attention elsewhere. At the same time, in “The White Man’s Guilt,” Baldwin addressed those Black Americans who insisted on taking violent measures to absolve the same guilt. Like their liberal counterparts, white racists sought to distance themselves from Black Americans, believing that pushing Black people away would stave off reminders of their culpability in Black people’s suffering. In every case, Baldwin’s discussions pathologize the absence of love in America by describing it as a cause for Black people’s struggles and white people’s moral degradation. If, as *The Fire Next Time* suggests, love is a form of responsibility, any efforts to avoid taking responsibility for others’ well-being suppress love. In Baldwin’s eyes, white Americans spent too much time lamenting an unproductive sense of guilt. They then tried to soothe by making appeals of innocence and hoping Black Americans would dismiss their accusations or deny white culpability altogether.

While all of Baldwin’s writings are reflective, the mirrorings of his mid-decade writings are unique in that they shine a direct light on the behavior of his audience. The pieces often speak directly to readers. Calls of “white man hear me!” and hypothetical dialogue with those perusing the piece surface throughout the text (Baldwin 1998, 722). The mid-decade essays are directed at white readers. Baldwin does not refrain from taking up this direct address, and his writing is quite blunt. He often writes of how individuals shine a light on the nature of their fellow citizens, and he argues that artists are obliged to shine a light on the concrete realities of

the world. If, as Baldwin wrote, witnessing is a means of testifying to the world's realities and moral needs, then mirroring – as a technique that shows the artists' audiences their moral failings – is undoubtedly an element within the broader practice of bearing witness. Baldwin clarified that mirroring is essential to a righteous and authentic human experience. In his words, a person who lacks a "mirror, [has] no corroborations of his essential reality; and this means that he has no grasp of the reality of the people around him" (Baldwin 2010, 9). While Baldwin notes that a sort of natural mirroring occurs when an individual encounters another, the mirroring taken on intentionally by artists runs differently – namely in its function as a means of highlighting discomforting truths. Whereas sorrow songs operate with a sense of compassion, acknowledging the pain felt by individuals whose experiences reflect that of the witness, the artistic mirroring discussed by Baldwin is blunter and more unnerving.

In Baldwin's eyes, "guilt" is a form of immoral self-interest, while taking responsibility for others' well-being is a means of ethical growth and change. Individuals consumed by guilt often show more concern for the emotional burdens accompanying their wrongdoing than for the pain of those they have harmed. In this way, guilt prevents people from recognizing their culpability. Guilt blinds a person to revelations of transcendent love, and, as a result, it prevents people from translating that love into practice. Reading *The Fire Next Time* in conversation with the mid-decade essays enables a clearer understanding of what Baldwin means when writing about responsibility. Comparing his discussions of guilt and responsibility makes it clear that Baldwin distinguishes between the two concepts. Whereas guilt is a self-referential sentiment that distracts a person from fulfilling their fraternal obligations to others, responsibility is an affective activity that enables people to engage lovingly with others.

While Baldwin's critics may have read his repeated discussions of guilt and shame as evidence of a sentimentalist outlook, the machinations of his mid-1960s witnessing suggest otherwise. At this time, Baldwin developed a form of prophetic witnessing that was well-suited for addressing the moral failings of white Americans of all backgrounds. While on the one hand, he used prophetic mirrorings of society to decry sentimental preoccupations with guilt, he also used jeremiads to outline proper responses to feelings of guilt. Without the decrial of guilt found in these essays, Baldwin's jeremiadic calls for white people to take up loving responsibility would serve little purpose. His audience would have remained blind to the damage wrought by their guilt-induced silence and appeal to innocence.

Baldwin extended this definition of guilt into the realm of America's racial politics to pathologize white supremacy. He characterized white guilt as a more specific sentiment involving a repressed yet burdensome knowledge of one's racist immorality. When Baldwin asserted that "guilt is a luxury we can no longer afford," he critiqued how white people have hidden behind the sentimental lie that they were somehow removed, and thus "innocent," from crimes against their Black neighbors committed by people supposedly more intolerant than they were (Baldwin 1998, 713). In doing so, he demanded that white people consider the implications of their physical or emotional violence. Nevertheless, such lies only brought a cycle of increasing guilt. In his words:

> What [white people] see is a disastrous, continuing, present, a condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility …. But since in the main they seem to lack the energy to change their moral condition they would rather not be reminded of it …. In any case, whatever they bring to one another, it is certainly not freedom from guilt. The guilt remains, more deeply rooted, more securely lodged, than the oldest of fears (Baldwin 1998, 722).

These mirrorings highlighted white guilt, and many focused on a collective white America comprised of liberals, moderates, and avowed racists. Rather than draw reductive conclusions

about white Americans from essentialist conceptions of race, Baldwin focused on white Americans' behavior. At its core, this behavior was a refusal to face the realities of white America's history and to recognize or acknowledge how racism still existed because of their rationalizations and lack of empathy. The Attorney General demonstrated the very same behavior. Baldwin maintained that such attitudes ultimately served as a denial of the humanity of Black citizens.

In a subtle jab at public figures who referred to America's racial ills as the "Negro Problem," Baldwin titled one of his most potent mirrorings "The White Problem." The essay highlighted how racism was just as much an issue for white people as it was for Black people – albeit in different ways. Baldwin was deeply disturbed by the idea that people should think of racial justice as a "Negro problem." While the phrase's common usage was a conjugation of the European "Jewish question" – a debate over the treatment and political status of Jews across the Atlantic – Baldwin's focus on responsibility led him to identify an additional, veiled definition. The phrase spoke to the issue of how Black Americans should be treated, but it also suggested that only Black people were responsible for addressing their struggles. As far as most white Americans were concerned, their whiteness set them apart from their Black counterparts' difficulties. The fact that the country's historical record tied white people to the country's racial tensions was irrelevant: their guilt, cries of innocence, and violent rejection of Blacks reassured them that they held no responsibility. Consequently, the Negro problem served as a discursive symbol of the white people's willingness to reject their shared responsibility to address racial injustice.

Baldwin centered some of his most fervent mirrorings on the behavior of white liberals – a group whose need to maintain false sentiments of innocence required that they decry racism in

public while remaining proud of their whiteness and America when in private. Unfortunately, Baldwin understood that the antiracism of most liberals involved little besides talk. Although they may have decried the police beatings or church bombings, a preoccupation with sentiment – whether in the form of their discomfort or their desire for applause – left them inactive and neglectful of their responsibility. These liberals made constant "appeals to innocence" to prove that they played no role in Black oppression. Baldwin described appeals to innocence as the guilt-induced habit of an individual who is at least somewhat conscious of their moral lapses and yet decides to deny the truth of those failings. By claiming innocence and drawing from a vocabulary that ostensibly precludes anyone from being culpable for racism, guilt-wracked white people sustain racial injustice and unintentionally expose themselves to even more guilt. Baldwin's primary frustrations with the appeals concerned their capacity to allow white people to escape from accountability and, in doing so, prevent any chance for progress and change. Because white people – particularly wealthy white liberals in the north – served as the country's powerbrokers, it was in their hands to execute justice. As a result, no one could convict them of any wrongdoing because they functioned as judge, jury, and the accused. Black people could not fully forgive them without any sense of sentencing or conviction.

Baldwin was equally frustrated with white liberals as he was with explicit racists: their unwillingness to help end racial violence occurred at the expense of the nation's Black citizens. In Baldwin's eyes, their lack of direct involvement meant they held an even more outstanding obligation to support Black enfranchisement. They possessed the political power to stop the violence. Because they possessed the distance to recognize anti-Black racism's immorality, they were perfectly positioned to intervene and stop the wrongdoing. However, as he told it, most white liberals refused to acknowledge this burden – whether due to deep-seated hate of Black

people, a great degree of moral apathy, or fear of their existence and position in the country. Taking responsibility for their Black countrypersons' well-being would require recognizing their moral lapses and reconsidering their political position. If America were to undergo any social transformation, white people would need to start by acknowledging the harm their privilege inflicted on Blacks. To remedy this problem, they must divest themselves of their political inequity.

Kennedy's behavior during the meeting offered prime examples of the white liberalism, guilt, and appeals to innocence, which Baldwin decried. In an interview with one of the attendees – psychologist Kenneth Clark – Baldwin critiqued the phenomena by bearing indirect witness to the event. As Clark asked about the interactions with Kennedy, the tenor of Baldwin's delivery changed dramatically as he shifted from expressing frustration over the state of the Black ghetto to condemning white refusals to recognize and address Black suffering. Clark himself noted the inextricable ties between the Kennedy meeting and Baldwin's musings during the interview. He seemed to suggest – as though highlighting the witnessing taking place – that one could not separate Baldwin's memories of the event from the points he would make throughout the remainder of the conversation. As Clark said, "I believe much of the emotion of that historic occasion spilled over into our conversation" (Clark 2004). Kennedy's refusal to admit any failure by his brother's administration was highly illustrative of white guilt and appeals to innocence. Moreover, given the Attorney General's well-known support of his brother, a defense of the President's administration was less a case on behalf of the federal government than a personal claim of innocence. Baldwin told Clark with incredible frustration:

> There are days, this is one of them when you wonder what your role is in this country and what your future is in it. How precisely you're going to reconcile yourself to your situation here, and how you are going to communicate to the vast, heedless, unthinking, cruel white majority that you are here. I'm terrified at the moral apathy – 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* (Baldwin 1989, 41).

Clark's silence reflected the sort of unease cultivated by Baldwin's prophecies. While his conversant was Black himself, it seemed as though Baldwin made his prophetic statement with hopes that white audience members might prepare themselves for a jeremiad instructing them on how to avoid behavior like Kennedy's.

In 1965's "The White Man's Guilt," Baldwin argues that interactions between Black and white Americans incited more feelings of guilt and appeals to innocence than any other social phenomenon. These interactions were so intense that some whites would rather inflict violence against Black people than be reminded of their moral culpability and the need to take responsibility. Not even face-to-face encounters – commonly understood as the benchmark of calls to responsibility and human recognition – seem capable of inspiring white people to take responsibility and practice love. Rather than acknowledging the transcendent love revealed by the face of disenfranchised country persons, violent actors such as those in "The White Man's Guilt" were liable to view Black people self-referentially and take Black visages as sources of shame rather than revelation. For this reason, they considered the faces of their fellow citizens to be "disagreeable mirrors," as Baldwin put it, which reflect their troublesome moral standing (Baldwin 1998, 720-722). Baldwin argued that a person's existence is inseparable from the history of the society that formed them. The disagreeable mirroring is not just a reminder of specific wrongs but instead of the country's entire history of injustice.

The essay testifies to this disagreeable mirroring by describing a representative confrontation between police and protestors on a courthouse's steps. Baldwin writes of how both the bearings and the gazes of each party prove analogous to those of their larger racial groups. While postured aggressively and armed with weapons, the white officers hold great fear and

worry in their eyes. The Black protestors, unarmed and physically powerless, carry great confidence – an inverse of the police officers' trepidation. Rather than recognize the humanity of the Black citizens standing before them, the officers – like most white Americans, Baldwin would argue – see nothing but their emotional burdens in the protesters' faces. Unable to acknowledge the hardships that may have led the protestors to march, the officers see only their guilt and moral insecurity. The Black protestors represent nothing other than a window into the police officers' struggles with their history:

> In a moment, because he could resolve the situation in no other way, this sheriff … began to club these people down. Some of these people might have been related to him by blood. They are assuredly related to the black mammy of his memory and the black playmates of his childhood. And for a moment, therefore, he seemed nearly to be pleading with the people facing him not to force him to commit yet another crime and not to make yet deeper that ocean of blood in which his conscience was drenched (Baldwin 1998, 725-726).

The police officers cannot escape the reminders of their wrongdoing or acknowledge their culpability. As a result, their inaction operates as an implicit claim of innocence in the matter. For example, their pleas that the protestors turn away put the burden of responsibility on the Black people in front of them. However, as Baldwin noted, the confrontation only worsens the feelings of and preoccupation with guilt. The face of the Black American will always serve as a reminder of their wrongdoing. This proves to be the case whether the disagreeable mirror projects the image of an individual with a record of past discrimination as an employee of the state with the mandate to inflict harm or as a member of a collective white population responsible for slavery and the subsequent disenfranchisement of Black Americans.

However, it is not enough for police officers to feel bad about their crimes against Black citizens, just as it is not enough for white liberals to decry racism publicly and vocally. Both parties are liable to entrench themselves into the crime of their self-concern, and, as a result, these sentimental preoccupations preclude responsible action. Baldwin sees significant parallels

between the mentalities and behavior of white police and white, well-meaning liberals. Just as the essay ends with an examination of the face-to-face encounter between police and protestors, the piece begins with a parallel account of a face-to-face encounter between a white liberal and Black people. And, while the white liberal might ultimately speak out against racism to prove their innocence, this is not a suitable response. Their talk is nothing other than a sentimental means of avoiding responsibility. When Baldwin writes that white people "don't want to realize that there is not one step, one inch, no distance, morally or actually, between Birmingham and Los Angeles," he refers to this analogousness. He cites segregated Alabama and progressive California as hotbeds of sentimental self-delusion (Baldwin 1998, 97).

Baldwin ends "The White Man's Guilt" with a jeremiad that invites white people to humbly set aside their preoccupations with guilt so that they can accept responsibility and address Black people's struggles. In the case of the essay's white police offers, this might involve standing down and working constructively with the Black citizens to resolve whatever issue they are protesting. For the white liberals criticized earlier in the essay, this might involve making public declarations of culpability and using those declarations to convince other white people to take responsibility and vote accordingly in elections or other civic processes. Doing so requires a degree of honesty not yet practiced by many Americans, and by invoking jeremiads rather than offering ideological scripts, Baldwin leaves it up to his white audience to determine how best to participate in the enfranchisement of Black people. He calls for a confrontation with oneself, with any lies that helped form that self and the history that gave rise to those lies. By negating guilt, ceasing claims of innocence, and interrupting other forms of moral distraction, individuals will see that honesty and self-awareness are essential to active love. It is not enough to announce or "admit" to being culpable, given that one can make vague overtures to justice by

decrying only a piece of one's participation in sustaining white supremacy. It is more important that an individual becomes fully aware of the extent of one's culpability – not so that a person can advertise this awareness, but instead to take responsibility and try towards personal and social change. To do this, white people must accept the truths of their historical record – particularly those facts verifying the disenfranchisement of Black people – and come to know themselves without recourse to the American Myth. Rather than understand themselves as the products of hard work, freedom, and opportunity, they must acknowledge how a legacy and presence of white supremacy has defined much of their status in the nation. At the same time, they must also accept that their social position has little to do with them as singular existents. They must also acknowledge the painful history of Black Americans and the legacy of white supremacy. Doing so requires that they recognize the flip side of the history they must disavow – the wrongs brought about on Black Americans traced back from slavery to the conflicts of their current moment.

Nevertheless, Baldwin maintains that white individuals must prepare for great pain if they shirk their preoccupation with sentiment and adopt responsibility and the affective practice of love. Resolving guilt requires reconciling faulty self-conceptions with the nation's dark racial history and other social phenomena that produced that "self." White Americans must come to terms with the legacy of slavery and the facts of American racism – both by taking note of their power and becoming cognizant of those moments in which they did play a direct role in the oppression of Black people. In Baldwin's eyes, accepting the truths of America's history and committing to responsibility for fellow citizens was a prime form of patriotic love. Rather than adore an abstract "America" consisting of a false record or hidden oppression, Kennedy and others must accept their place in American society. While the Attorney General's complaints

about Baldwin's lack of interest in policy held merit, Baldwin's moralism proved valid in these other ways. And while the wrongs that had extended from white supremacy would never fully be resolved, the improvement of society and white lifestyles was needed. Baldwin's jeremiads worked to cultivate a social transformation that required constant moral efforts. As Baldwin wrote in *The Fire Next Time*, "Neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive [white Americans], that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it" (Baldwin 1993b, 7). Nevertheless, Baldwin insisted that one's duty to take loving responsibility for others stood apart from moral absolution or the procurement of forgiveness. One's obligation to the other was always present. And even if white Americans could not escape their past, they remained responsible for preventing the sustenance of white supremacy and other forms of oppression.

4. Conclusion

In looking at the events in his life and around the country, Baldwin concluded that his envisioned love would require a highly intentional effort to cultivate a heartfelt desire to assist others as they struggled with structural oppression. In Baldwin's view, America needed to embrace active love as a fundamental lifestyle to save the country's "moral soul." He insisted that white Americans take ownership of the country's past and present racism by overcoming any hesitancy or guilt that may be holding them back from doing so and by embracing vulnerable self-reflection. He clarified to Black Americans that white Americans would need assistance and forgiveness. Recognizing the prophetic elements of Baldwin's discussions of love proves essential for two reasons. Firstly, it corrects mischaracterizations of Baldwin's discussions of emotion as "sentimental." These discussions are primarily *post*-sentimental (Jernigan 2014), as

Baldwin's sorrow songs and mirrorings decry sentiments, and his jeremiads call for affective acts of love that are too intentional to qualify as frivolous. On the other hand, such a reading responds to our current moment in which activists, politicians, and socially committed artists and scholars draw upon Baldwin's writings when responding to contemporary racism and social divides. By remembering that even Baldwin's most sorrowful and damning discussions of American society are inextricably linked to jeremiadic calls for love, care, and broad responsibility, we are prevented from reducing Baldwin's discussions of love to endorsements of shallow collegiality or stripping his social commentary of its emphasis on love altogether.

All of Baldwin's condemnations of racist policing and sorrow songs concerning Black death accompany calls for Americans of all races to love one another in a manner particular to their circumstances. While his testimonies echo the pain and frustrations of the downtrodden, Baldwin refuses to embrace unabashed anger or hate as a suitable response to injustice. Baldwin's words cannot be reduced to mere expressions of sentimentality. Instead, they catalyze transformative action from both sufferers and wrongdoers – a message that often eludes social justice discourse. Throughout the 1960s, Baldwin insisted that his "gospel of love" was ultimately a remedy for contemporary society's corruptive hate. Baldwin's prophetic promotions of love reminded his audience that, rather than being passive sufferers of destructive hate, individuals must supplant any such sentiments with an intentional commitment to active love. As he wrote in *The Fire Next Time:* "Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (Baldwin 1993b, 90).

Despite the complexity of Baldwin's discussion, his 1960s witnessing were not without flaws. Baldwin's rhetoric and reflections are intensely masculine. In some cases, this is understandable, given his use of witnessing. Nevertheless, his reliance on personal testimony led

to a troubling absence of women in these 1960s writings. Interestingly, this erasure began to dissipate as he discussed the conflicts between Black men and women with feminists such as Audre Lorde. Whether intentionally or not, testimonies about Black men and women took center stage during Baldwin's post-civil rights work, and, at this time, his nonfiction worked in tandem with his past and present fiction to frame intergender active love as redemptive and healing.

Chapter 4: Invitational Calls and Confessional Responses in James Baldwin's and Audre Lorde's "Revolutionary Hope"

"And our blood is high, our furies are up. I mean, it's what Black women do to each other, Black men do to each other, and Black people do to each other. We are in the business of wiping each other out in one way or the other – and essentially doing our enemy's work."

– James Baldwin, "Revolutionary Hope" (1984)

"It's vital for me to be able to listen to you, to hear what is it that defines you and for you to listen to me, to hear what is it that defines me – because so long as we are operating in that old pattern, it doesn't serve anybody, and it certainly hasn't served us."

– Audre Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope" (1984)

1. Introduction

In the 1970s, Baldwin's integrationist politics and promotion of active love took a backseat to the Black nationalism of organizations like the Black Panthers and members of the Black arts movement. As a result, Baldwin stepped back from his position as literary spokesman for the fight for racial justice in America, letting figures such as Amiri Baraka and Pat Parker take the stage. Baldwin's retreat was also spurred by grief over his intimate knowledge of the limits of the civil rights movement, particularly given the assassinations of three close friends within the movement – Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers.[28] Yet, at the same time that Baldwin's career declined, Black feminist discourse rose in prominence. Black intellectual discourse in the 1970s and 1980s was saturated with considerations of intraracial love and the conflicts between Black men and women, most of which were guided by Black

[28] Shawn A. Ginwright frames the years after the Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination as representing a "decline" in Black community organizing as a whole, even beyond that encouraged by Baldwin in the like. In his words: "Since the 1970s community organizations dedicated to activism have experienced a steady decline… [that has] marginalized organizing as a meaningful and effective tool for community change (Churchill & Vander Wall, 2002)" (Ginwright 2015, 36).

women eager to establish equity within the race. Given this growth in gender discourse, Baldwin became liable for criticism due to the lack of female perspectives in his essays. While it is true that Baldwin's essays and interviews rarely addressed the particularities of women's struggles with racism and sexism in America, one could argue that this lack of a female perspective stems from the nature of testimony itself. As a discourse that draws its truths from the experience of the testifier, individual testimonies are liable to exclude other people's unique insights on the world. Given experience's privileged role within Baldwin's thought, it stands to reason that he would avoid bearing witness to phenomena outside his personal experience, particularly women's struggles with sexism.

I maintain that Baldwin was invested in the complex relationship between Black men and women, as evidenced by his many publicly recorded or transcribed conversations with Black feminists in the post-civil rights era. While Baldwin may not have written testimonials about the lives of Black women, he certainly discussed them, whether they were the autobiographical musings of Black poet Nikki Giovanni in 1973 or Maya Angelou's personally crafted interview questions two years later (Baldwin and Giovanni 1973) (Thirteen WNET 1975-05-13).[29] I argue that considerations of gender are found in these conversations because Baldwin's witnessing is marked by a dialogic component, in which his testimonies invite philosophical exchange with others. During these discussions, Baldwin's claims about society and human existence converse

[29] Although Angelou interviewed Baldwin for "Assignment America" – the weekly public access series in which notable Americans were interviewed by a different individual – the conversation between the two was notably intimate, unlike the more journalistic interviews between Doris Kerns and advertising executive Jerry Della Femina or Studs Terkel and politician Sissy Farenthold (Thirteen WNET 1975-08-01, 1975-06-24). As noted in *Maya Angelou: A Glorious Celebration* – the notable biography developed by the Angelou estate – Baldwin was Angelou's "'brother'… they were kindred spirits in so many ways" – a bond reflected in Angelou's smiles and gentle tone during the interview (Gillespie et al. 2008).

with the truths of other people's realities. In doing so, Baldwin's witnessing demonstrates the multifaceted nature of society and its categories without dismissing other people's experiences. As a result, rather than tackle the topic of gender from his privileged position as a man, Baldwin instrumentalized this dialogic component of witnessing to produce testimonial truths that attended to the diversity of Black men and women's experiences with love and racism.

In many ways, the dialogic function of Baldwin's witnessing is analogous to the practice of "call and response" prevalent in the Black church – especially in Black Pentecostal churches that Baldwin attended and preached in as a child. During call and response, parishioners and preachers exchange declarations of faith in a manner that both expresses the passions of a person's spiritual experiences and solicits affirmation of those experiences from those around them. When Baldwin's testimonies operate in dialogue with the self-narratives of others, they participate in a discursive back and forth in which one of the figures' life narratives calls upon – or invites – their interlocutor to rethink a presumptive truth. Shortly thereafter, the listener responds by confessing to their misguided perspectives and sharing the experiences that led to the misdirected beliefs.

"Revolutionary Hope" – the transcript of Baldwin's 1984 dialogue with Black feminist Audre Lorde at Hamilton College – is perhaps most illustrative of how the dialogic nature of Baldwin's witnessing addresses the subjects of race and gender. Audre Lorde first began writing poetry in the 1960s, but she rose to prominence in the 1970s, especially with the publication of *Coal* in 1976. Although Lorde's writing emerged within the Black Arts Movement, her work engaged multiple audiences, including mainstream white feminists, Black writers, and writers in Europe – particularly Germany. By the 1980s, this broad appeal had made Lorde a household name in the poetry world, Black activist spaces, and the feminist community. Lorde's conception

of love as a means of overcoming hardship is analogous to Baldwin's, yet whereas he emphasizes love's ability to foster sensuality, Lorde emphasizes the roots of love, tracing human connection to an affective force that she labels "the erotic." Though she refrains from using the term explicitly in "Revolutionary Hope," elements of the erotic surface in her claims about male-female interactions within the Black community.

In addition to being a notable example of the many transcribed and recorded dialogues between Black intellectuals in the post-civil rights era, "Revolutionary Hope" illustrates Black feminists' central role in discussions of love at the end of the 20th-century. Although Baldwin spoke of love in his conversations with Giovanni, Angelou, and Lorde, Baldwin's dialogue with the latter is noteworthy because it focused exclusively on love and social interactions between Black men and women. Even more, the dialogue is significant given that Lorde shared Baldwin's fascination with love and was one of the 20th-century's foremost philosophers on the subject. Yet while both she and Baldwin wrote continuously about how one's identity could play a role in the oppression a person experiences, Lorde lacked Baldwin's emphasis on a postcategorical existence. Lorde self-identified as a "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet" – emphasizing her personal experience and the multidimensionality of her identity (De Veaux 2004, 179). Whereas Baldwin believed that categories distracted a person from their true, sensual existence, Lorde celebrated identity as a crucial part of who one is. Operating from the intersections of her race, gender, and sexuality, Lorde produced a rich understanding of love and the complications that arise when a person seeks or demonstrates love in a highly stratified society. These theoretical differences help shape the unique perspectives on love that Baldwin expresses by the end of "Revolutionary Hope."

In “Revolutionary Hope,” Lorde and Baldwin explore the subjects of love, race, and gender by taking the roles of caller and responder, or “inviter” and “confessor,” to draw upon Baldwin’s lexicon, respectively. A comparative analysis of “Revolutionary Hope” and *The Fire Next Time* shows that during their exchange, Lorde calls upon Baldwin to recognize how his male-centered understandings of parental love and self-love – both best expressed in his 1963 text – suppress the erotic capacity in Black women. In return, Baldwin responds to Lorde by confessing to his oversight and sharing a more inclusive understandings of love. During the conversation, Audre Lorde pushes Baldwin to nuance his belief that a sensual, familial love was enough to resolve America’s social injustices by recognizing that by relying on personal testimony, his universal ideas about love do not speak to the needs of Black women. Whereas the familial love Baldwin outlined in *The Fire Next Time* emphasized unity and similarities across social categories, Lorde argued that a prioritization of sameness led to an oversight of differences between men and women and the unique harm women experienced due to those differences. She says that because everyone is ultimately different, efforts to prioritize sameness – even under the guise of family – are potentially misguided and harmful. Using Black married couples as an example, Lorde pointed out that despite husbands and wives being family, Black men often perpetrate violence against Black women. As a result, Lorde argues that it is not enough to think about Black people in a monolithic, genderless manner. Instead, she insists that Baldwin and others think about the diversity and differences within Black families. To do so, Lorde insists that people adopt a love that celebrates difference and similarity at the same time. As Lorde shows, in the midst of oppression, the celebration of difference will allow an individual to love themselves so that they can be a better lover to others and the world. In the case of parental love, Baldwin and Lorde agree that Black elders must push younger Black people to recognize the

"samenesses and differences" between Black men and women to maintain respect for each group's particular struggles. In the case of self-love, the two authors conclude that loving oneself takes the form of what I call "mutual redefinition" – a form of self-recognition that not only overcomes internalized oppression but also acknowledges how one partakes in one's own forms of discrimination. To quote Lorde directly: "We have to redefine ourselves for each other because…we have all absorbed this sickness and ideas [about gender] in the same way we absorbed racism" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

2. Audre Lorde's on Love: The Erotic & Zami: A New Spelling of My Name

Lorde's philosophy of love centers on an active form of intimacy that she terms "the erotic." In a speech delivered to feminist thinkers in the 1980s, Lorde defines the erotic as "a resource within [women] that lies on a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of [women's] unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (Lorde 2007, 53). Lorde argues that patriarchy leads women to suppress their erotic faculties. Her memoirs testify to how she willfully taps into her distinct erotic faculties and uses them to free herself of her multiple oppressions (Lorde 2007, 58). In Lorde's writings, love and the erotic faculty from which it is derived enable the self-actualization that she finds key to surviving oppression. Lorde's biographical testimonials in Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (1982) demonstrate that such acts are best achieved with the assistance of others. She labels this network of connected action "interdependency" – a term that speaks to the necessity of loving and connecting with others. Interdependency ultimately leads to the active lover's freedom. Lorde writes, "Interdependency… is the way to a freedom which allows the *I* to *be*, not in order to be used, but

in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive *be* and the active *being*" (Lorde 2007, 111).

Though Lorde celebrates the female capacity to feel and the potency that stems from the depths of women's emotions, she does not mean to imply that men are devoid of feeling or that rationality should or does belong to men alone. Instead, she argues for a firm embrace of both emotion and reason, citing men's tendency to fear emotion as a significant source of misogyny and arguing that men privilege reason to excuse for their hesitancy to feel. In her words:

> The male world … values [women's] depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but … fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves" (Lorde 2007, 53-54).

As Lorde sees it, in order to maintain patriarchal norms, modern society is built upon institutions and policies that subdue women's erotic and affective power. As she writes:

> In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic (Lorde 2007, 53).

Lorde argues that patriarchy fosters suspicions of the erotic, and because the erotic lies within all women, Lorde notes the fact that in showing distrust towards the erotic, women who struggle under patriarchy are ultimately distrusting a key part of themselves. Lorde attributes the suppression of the erotic to an undue concern with living in accordance with society's unjust expectations and demands. Rather than living their life for their own sake, such an individual prioritizes the concerns of others as though they are living a life of bad faith.

Because erotic encounters are often pleasurable and exciting, Lorde argues that the erotic reminds individuals of their ability to feel joy and encourages them to adopt a joyful disposition towards life and their existence. In several interviews, she speaks of how structural oppression often stamps out any room for joy in the lives of marginalized individuals and thus makes them unfamiliar and uncomfortable with joy. She talks of the shame and unease that often accompany

joyful moments when experienced by the oppressed – noting how women, the poor, people of color, and so forth often feel as though they should be working harder and as though they are being spoiled when they are greeted with joy. In Lorde's eyes, the erotic is a force that, if taken up willfully and intentionally, shows that joyfulness is neither inappropriate nor the result of happenstance. Because the erotic lies at the core of one's humanity, a person's decision to embrace the erotic and fulfill their desire to feel joy allows them to take full responsibility for their personhood.

Given these circumstances, the existential conceptualization of the erotic makes this effort a matter of ethical responsibility. Building upon this reasoning, Lorde argues that when an individual embraces the erotic and their emotions, they simultaneously set aside acceptance of their oppression. In her words: "As we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering, and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like the only alternative in our society (Lorde 2007, 58). Like Baldwin and Ellison's understandings of love, the Lordean embrace of the erotic is an active investment in love and political resistance. She argues that the embrace is filled with:

> Acts against oppression [that] become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within… [as a person is] less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to [them], such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial (Lorde 2007, 58).

Here, Lorde reasons that because we gain power through feelings, emotions are a primary means for oppression to affect one's individuality and sense of self. As a result, she insists that embracing the erotic and one's feelings is the foremost means of undoing this internalized oppression. When a person embraces the erotic by connecting lovingly with others, an individual can talk and share feelings, which Lorde argues are typically suppressed due to Western society's tendency – or, as she and Baldwin would frame it – western society's *fear* of emotions.

As she writes in “The Transformation of Silence into Action,” “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect” (Lorde 2007, 40).

The intimacy that Lorde describes carries a great degree of personal responsibility. She reasons that while everyone is unique, all human beings are interdependent: their sense of self depends on their connections to others. At the same time, she also argues that people must balance this interdependency with an equal degree of self-reliance. As a result, although numerous allusions to intimacy-fostered liberation mark her descriptions of erotic experiences, her reflections on the greater realities of the erotic insist that it must not be infected with excessive amounts of dependence on others. Instead, Lorde envisions a society where individuals’ loving encounters with others also cultivate self-love and self-awareness. While acquiring such knowledge involves others, incorporating this knowledge into one's sense of self is an individual activity. An over-dependence on another individual can impede one's ability to do these things independently. As Lorde notes in *Zami*: “Just because you're strong, doesn't mean you can let other people depend on you too much. It's not fair to them, because when you can't be what they want they're disappointed, and you feel bad” (Lorde 1982, 153). The self-definition, self-actualization, and self-reliance stimulated by the erotic foster a healthy existence within the social world in which they reside. To ensure that these processes occur for the betterment of the world, Lorde insists on the importance of collective action and responsibility. As she insists in "Learning from the 60s":

> Can anyone of us here still afford to believe that efforts to reclaim the future can be private or individual? Can anyone here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of anyone particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class? (Lorde 2007, 140).

Love can help foster the communities needed to bring about such social change, and she insists that some of the stronger communities are grounded in shared erotic and intimate experiences.

Finally, the erotic serves as a means of transcending fear. Lorde critiques fear due to its capacity to keep us from the self-actualization she finds essential to surviving oppression. In Lorde's eyes, fear prevents one from speaking one's truth; it keeps one from wanting to self-define and, instead, encourages them to accept the restrictive categories and labels of others. As a result, Lorde insists that we find a way to overcome fear, especially given that the conditions of American society foster an inner fear from an early age citizens need to learn how to overcome fear. Love is the perfect means of learning to overcome fear because taking a leap of faith and accepting the responsibility to love another individual force a person to continuously face their fears during each moment of the relationship. The act carries the presumption that eventually, they will believe firmly in their capacity to love without fear and tackle its hindrance to self-actualization.

There is no better illustration of a Lordean love testimony than her 1982 autobiography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name.* Designated a "biomythography" by its author, Lorde's memoir offers a mythological illustration of the erotic's capacity to self-empower and the significant influence it can play in the life of Black women. Designated a "biomythography" by its author, Lorde's memoir *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* offers a mythological illustration of the erotic's capacity to self-empower and the significant influence it can play in the life of black women. The book's title refers to a new name Lorde takes up in an act of self-definition. She tells readers that Zami is a "carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers" and, in doing so, makes clear that love is the bedrock of the book's narrative (Lorde 1982, 108). This new name references the various components of her personhood, including her

feminism, lesbianism, and Blackness. As she tells it, she only learned those dimensions of loving and caring for people who mirror those social locations. By befriending other Black people, she gained further insight into her Blackness; by loving other women, she learned more about her lesbian identity; and by bonding with other women, she acquired a more robust understanding of her womanhood. In Lorde's eyes, naming oneself is an act of revolt against the dangers of categorization and labels, for in her words, "my experience with people who tried to label me was that they usually did it to either dismiss me or use me" (Lorde 1982, 108).

In *Zami*, Lorde argues that self-definition is critical to an emotionally healthy life. Without it, individuals are liable to accept the labels and categories imposed by others, incredibly the privileged, and internalize those designations as accurate, regardless of how inaccurate those labels and their stereotypes may be. Lorde argues that self-definition is key to an emotionally healthy life. Without it, individuals are liable to accept the labels and categories imposed by others, especially the privileged, and internalize those designations as true, regardless of how inaccurate those labels and their stereotypes may be. Lorde insists that external definition is a phenomenon people must resist at all costs – especially marginalized people such as Black Americans and women. Lorde addresses this in an oft-quoted line: “You cannot use someone else’s fire. You can only use your own. And in order to do that, you must first be willing to believe that you have it” (View et al. 2020, 115). She only knows those portions of herself through loving and caring for people who mirror those social locations. By befriending other Black people, she gains further insight into her Blackness; by loving other women, she learns more about her lesbian identity; and by bonding with other women, she acquires a more robust understanding of her womanhood. Unsurprisingly, Lorde’s emphasis on the practice of naming allows for easy comparisons between *Zami* and the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Yet while

similarities exist between the two figures' emphasis on the connections between names and agency, in *Zami* Lorde's renaming is a constructive act: it allows an individual to build a *new* persona, one shrouded in connection to Africanity and feminine unity – whereas in Malcolm X the decision to change one's name is an empowering act of deconstruction – a radical assault on the oppressive legacy of slavery. In both cases, to take naming into one's own hands is an act of revolt against the dangers of categorization and labels, for in Lorde's words: "my experience with people who tried to label me was that they usually did it to either dismiss me or use me" (Lorde 1982, 108).

Although Lorde is a fervent supporter of self-definition, *Zami* shows us that such acts are best achieved with the assistance of others, with such mutual efforts qualifying as manifestations of love. Though the person in question carries out the individual act of self-definition, the collection of identities that the individual pulls together to form their new subjectivity and personhood is built of identities encountered through one's intimate engagements with others. Because Lorde was a promoter of all forms of love, she saw great importance in friendship, familial love, and desire-based love, which taps into the erotic.

Great degrees of fantasy run throughout *Zami* – so much that Lorde labels her life narrative a "biomythography" to highlight the inextricable link between myth and the narration of her transformation into Zami. Life narrative scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson cite Lorde as the creator of the genre of life writing. They argue that her use of the term "biomythography" addresses the fantastical elements of her memory while still implying the narrative's grounding in the realities of growing up in mid-twentieth century America (Smith and Watson 2010, 12). Zami is a wholly mythic figure – one who appears only at the end of the text within its epilogue. She closes out the book's earlier discussion of Lorde's identities and leaves

readers with a mythological image of Lorde herself. Yet because Zami is a mythic figure, she must exist in a mythical world. For this reason, Lorde frames her text as a "biomythography" instead of a standard autobiography, for her ultimate identity must exist amongst other mythic figures, like the women in the text. Lorde writes of all her female relations in a fantastical manner – whether it involves descriptions of her mother as a "very powerful woman … in a time when that word-combination of *woman* and *powerful* was almost unexpressible [*sic*] in the white american [*sic*] common tongue" – or her remembrance of "*Afrekete, who came out of a dream to [her]"* (Lorde 1982, 15, 249). Regardless of the relation – familial, cordial, or romantic – connections with other women are fantastical phenomena, and they lead Lorde to depict the people with whom she related mythically. Because Lorde makes clear that her identity as Zami is wholly intersubjective, having been shaped by her encounters with various women, it takes on the mythic nature of the relations that forged it. Yet we must note that Lorde's heavy emphasis on her relationships' involvement in forging her identity does not indicate that all interrelated people are the same. As she writes in *Zami*:

> Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different (Lorde 1982, 226).

Thus, Zami and whatever other similar identities emerged from female-female relations create subjects that are wholly unique while nevertheless interconnected.

3. Confession & Invitation: The Dialogic Logic of Baldwin's Witnessing

Testimony, dialogue, and call and response have a storied relationship in Black history. S. R. Toliver provides a helpful understanding of their connection in a study of Black women's storytelling. She notes:

> The recreation of experience through testimony and the call to witness the narratives of Black people suggest the prominence of the dialogical voice— "the act of listening, writing, and conversing in one's cultural point of reference" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 22)—in the Black intellectual tradition. The storyteller testifies by sharing their experience, invites the listener to witness their testimony, and waits for the listener to provide a response to their call. Through this process, the listener is encouraged to participate by challenging prior suppositions, suspending judgment, analyzing the story for meaning, and situating their own stories within the context of the story being told. Through testimony, then, the personal and communal life of the storyteller is affirmed, and dominant stories are challenged (Toliver 2020, 508).

Toliver also notes the role call and response plays during dialogue – a dynamic that arises during "Revolutionary Hope." In the text, while Lorde testifies to her experiences as a Black woman, Baldwin acknowledges the validity of her truth claims and offers responses marked by two discursive elements: confession and invitation. To quote Toliver: "Call-and-response is a dialogic exercise between a speaker and listener in which 'all of the speaker's statements…are punctuated by expressions…from the listener" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 104)." Given this back and forth and Baldwin's designation as a prophet and witness, call and response effectively define the rhetoric that marks "Revolutionary Hope."

In the dialogic call and response of Baldwin's witnessing, the call takes the form of an invitation. In Baldwin's dialogues and interviews, Baldwin sometimes serves as an inviter – calling his interlocutors to consider an idea or take up an action, and in other cases, he allows his conversation partner to invite him. In Baldwin's written work, the invitational statements are emphatic invitations for his readers to envision and construct a new society. Firm in his belief that institutions are comprised of and built by individuals, Baldwin fervently argued that, while not guaranteed, the creation of new social orders and the repudiation of oppressive institutions caused by faith in the American myth was a reality that must be aspired to. As he wrote in "The White Problem" – published one year after *The Fire Next Time*: "Now, it is entirely possible that we may all go under. But until that happens, I prefer to believe that since a society is created by

men, it can be remade by men" (Baldwin 2010, 97). Fulfilling this responsibility, however, would require all Americans to reimagine the world as they knew it and disregard any social perspectives forged by the country's false historical narratives. This notion was first articulated in "Faulkner and Desegregation" (1956), wherein Baldwin argued that:

> Any real change 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. 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 cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free — he has set himself free — for higher dreams, for greater privileges (Baldwin 1993c, 117).

Baldwin's use of invitational rhetoric is directly connected to his witnessing. As a self-defined witness, Baldwin prioritized sharing his observations of the world and its uncertainties rather than offering systematic solutions to troubling realities such as death. For this reason, Baldwin's calls for love-based action are not dogmatic. Instead, they expose the untruth of social categories and call for their dissolution using love without presumptively outlining the best way to use love to address the problems caused by this untruth. As a result, when Baldwin claims that all Americans "must like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others in order to save the world," in "Down at the Cross," he offers no further explanations as to how one might change another person's consciousness (Baldwin 1993b, 105). In doing so, Baldwin invites his readers to judge his claims and draw personal solutions to the troubling situations he describes. While the ambiguity in his message might seem to dampen its value, its function becomes more recognizable if one reads it as the universal message of Baldwin's testimony. Because the universal lessons derived from Baldwin's attestations must transcend social contexts, any guidance on how best to love must carry a degree of ambiguity so Baldwin's audience might apply it in their lives. Any context-specific instructions on how to love hold little relevance in other people's lives. As such, in testimonial essays such as "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin

couples his categorical discussions of love and society with perplexing universal statements such as the "acceptance of life as it is" or the refusal to "accept … injustices as commonplace" that lead his audience to question their role in using love to resolve the social issues in the anecdote (Baldwin 2012, 115).

The invitational elements of Baldwin's writings address a broad, diverse audience reflective of the unified multicultural America he one day hopes to see. His invitational statements function openly: though on the surface they are written for specific individuals or the particular readers of publications like *The New Yorker*, the breadth of the testimony's universal truths indicate that their intended audience is diverse. In fact, towards the end of "Down at the Cross," Baldwin makes this diversity clear, noting that the "we" he has invoked throughout the text is a collective group that involves himself, Black Americans, and white people ready to divest from the American myth. He writes:

> If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world (Baldwin 1993b, 105).

When Baldwin testifies, he invites his readers to discern their own practice of love: as an artist, he must expose life's ambiguous truths, while his readers must translate those truths into acts of social change.

Because the truth claims in Baldwin's discussions in "Revolutionary Hope" and other dialogic texts are derived from reflections on his own experience, one might describe them as confessional. Within the call and response structure of the dialogue, they take the role of a response to Lorde's invitation by demonstrating the lessons Baldwin has learned by connecting his experiential knowledge with the insights of his inviter. This confessional quality allows Baldwin to discern and share deep insights into his lived experience so others might understand

themselves better and live more prosperous lives. These confessions carry great weight and intensity, as the truths to which Baldwin admits speak to some of his foremost convictions and beliefs. This quality only bolsters the testimonial quality of Baldwin's witnessing, as the confessional tenor of Baldwin's discourse reflects Ricoeur's assertion that "testimony is the action itself as it attests outside of himself, to the interior man, to his conviction, to his faith." (Ricoeur 1980, 130). By confessing the insights garnered by self-reflection, the confessor shares truth claims derived from a particular experience with both them and the listener. More than simply acknowledging an event's facts, Baldwin's confessions express the insights gathered from experiencing the event. In his testimony on the church, it was not enough for Baldwin to simply describe his teenage frustrations with his congregation and its doctrines.[30] Instead, Baldwin must share the lessons he learned *from* the struggles and admit the ideas that frustration worked to reveal, and he must wrestle with the meaning those ideas carry with them on broader, more universal levels. In his 2022 essay "The Rights of Black Love," literary scholar Dagmawi Woubshet helps explain the epistemic value that Baldwin assigns to personal experience. Woubshet emphasizes that Baldwin's insights into love are derived directly from his experiences with social categories such as race. To quote Woubshet directly: "Baldwin's [idea of love] … is rooted in human existence and experience" (Woubshet 2022, 129).

[30] See "Chapter 1: Racial and Nonracial Love Testimonies in 'Down at the Cross: Letter From a Region in My Mind'" (Section 3. "Fraternal Love: Unconditional Support for All Neighbors' Self-Discoveries") for a discussion of Baldwin's testimonies on the Black church.

4. Parental Love as Recognition of Samenesses and Differences

One of the most notable discussions of love in "Revolutionary Hope" includes Baldwin and Lorde's discussion of parental love – the intimacy elders direct towards those younger than them. In Baldwin's writings, this parental dynamic consists of elder community members assisting children and young adults as they embrace their actual, sensual subjectivities. According to Lorde, a proper parental dynamic is marked by an interdependent interaction in which intimate forces such as the erotic stimulate that of people younger than them. Lorde illustrates the experience in books such as her speculative "biomythography" *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) and practices it by sharing her private reflections during breast cancer treatment in *The Cancer Journals* (1980). In "Revolutionary Hope," Lorde nuances Baldwin's masculinist conception of how Black adults should demonstrate love to the younger generation. Baldwin offered his most substantive thoughts on parental love two decades earlier in The Fire Next Time. As a result, any analysis of Lorde's critique in "Revolutionary Hope" must examine the testimony in which parental love is explored. One can argue that the testimony in *The Fire Next Time* is split in two: the anecdote and private truths of Baldwin's account are primarily found in "My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," while the universal truths are mainly found in its second section, "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind." Baldwin makes categorical claims about racism in both portions of the testimony. Using this structure, Baldwin begins with an illustration of the social circumstances that necessitate active love and closes with a spirited invitation for his readers to love actively to save the world for their progeny. In these testimonial accounts on parental love, Baldwin uses invitational rhetoric to push his audience to question the validity of categories, recognize their untruth, and ultimately join in the effort to reject

categorical beliefs for the sake of their children. This invitational rhetoric reappears in "Revolutionary Hope" in the form of call and response's "call." In this case, the call is a rhetorical technique on Lorde's part that invites Baldwin to reconsider his gendered notions of parental love. As Baldwin told reporters from *The Black Scholar* in 1973: "An artist is here not to give you answers but to ask you questions" – a task Lorde fulfills during her conversation with Baldwin (Baldwin 1989, 89). In "Revolutionary Hope," Lorde invites Baldwin to expand his conception of parental love into a form of affection that addresses both the racial and gender discrimination faced by Black Americans. To do so, she insists that Black creatives such as she and Baldwin attend to both the "Samenesses and Differences" that define the Black American experience, arguing that as public figures, they can play the role of political parents that push younger Black Americans to respect one another across gender lines.

The anecdote in Baldwin's testimony on parental love is mainly located in the first section of *The Fire Next Time* – "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation." The piece is an epistolary discussion of racism's role in the lives of his family, the politics of the United States, and the future of Black Americans.[31] Baldwin writes the letter to his nephew, "Big James" – notably named after the author – with the paternal affection of an elder (Baldwin 1993b, 6). In the letter, Baldwin reflects on the intersection of two upcoming events: the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation – the moment at which all Black male Americans were granted the *legal* freedom that was supposed to distinguish America from all other nations, as well as his nephew's fourteenth

[31] See "Chapter 1: Racial and Nonracial Love Testimonies in 'Down at the Cross: Letter From a Region in My Mind'" for a discussion of the other love testimonies in *The Fire Next Time*

birthday.[32] By bringing these two contexts together, Baldwin's testimony consists of two frameworks in which he can discuss love and interpersonal connection. Whereas his categorical truth claims – those about racism, American history, and the nation's future – address the complexities signified by the Emancipation, Baldwin's personal truths – claims about his family, Big James' affect, and Baldwin's experience speak to his nephew's coming of age. The letter is filled with references to time, generations, and familial connection, as Baldwin refers to Big James as "my dear namesake," suggests that he "can make America what America must become," and reminds him of the strength and resolve he has inherited from "men who … in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity" (Baldwin 1993c, 117).

In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin testifies to the significance of parental love midway through "My Dungeon Shook," citing the role it played in his nephew Big James' upbringing and telling his nephew of the role it must now play in his future as an adult: "If we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children's children" (Baldwin 1993b, 6-7). The fact that Baldwin instructs his nephew to demonstrate love to his children years before Big James has come of age and had any illustrates the urgency of learning to overcome racism. Young people must learn of love's necessity as early as possible – a lesson they learn from their elders' efforts and modeled behavior – and then pass that love on to their descendants.

[32] Age fourteen is representative of the turn to adulthood throughout Baldwin's oeuvre. Later in *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin describes his own coming of age around the time he turned fourteen (see Section 4), and Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* begins on the fourteenth birthday of the protagonist John Grimes (Baldwin 1985, 3).

Although the paternal love Baldwin describes is both strenuous and without end, he insists that it is the foremost demonstration of the human capacity to save the world. He cites Black American history as evidence of this fact. Baldwin argues that Black Americans' long history of resisting racism makes their experiences ripe with testimony about human survival through collective effort. As he writes near the end of *The Fire Next Time*:

> I know that what I'm asking is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand—and one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history, for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible (Baldwin 1993b, 104).

As Baldwin sees it, the "spectacle of … American Negro history" is Black Americans' ability to resist the impulse to control and disenfranchise their white oppressors – a feat that he reasons "is probably … the most important thing that one human being can do for another" and "the enormous contribution that the Negro has made to this otherwise shapeless and undiscovered country" (Baldwin 1993b, 85-86, #3278).

Baldwin argued that for parental love to be fulfilled in the United States, adult citizens must do their best to make the American dream accessible to all. Although he reflected on the American dream throughout his career, arguing that the nation's social realities tied it to a false social trope he labeled "the American myth." In various writings, Baldwin argued that the American myth was the false narrative that white people were superior to Black people. In *The Fire Next* Time, Baldwin argued that the Myth was among the biggest threats to the nation's children and cited its destruction as elders' most pressing part of their fight to save the world. He reasoned that the myth was unfounded because the narrative was grounded in categorical truths rather than individual experience. As a result, it risked leading American children of all races to draw false understandings of themselves and others. By reasoning that America's history was better thought of as a mythology than a record of actual events, Baldwin argued that the

narratives taught in schools and shared by much of the nation's citizenry had been crafted to hide the injustices that led to the nation's racially unjust circumstances. As Baldwin tells it, the myth's supporters denied the existence of systematic racism, believing that Americans were in charge of their social, political, and material destinies, given the country's status as the land of the free. In the eyes of myth believers, racial inequities between Black and white Americans resulted from the latter's inferiority rather than America's politics, history, and traditions. Religious studies scholar Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty reflects on the relationship between myth and moral inconsistency, arguing that "when logic fails, and theology fails, irrational resolutions are offered by other modes of religious thought – notably mythology – and these, proving psychologically satisfactory, are acceptable to the members of that faith, however inadequate they may appear to professional philosophers" (O'Flaherty 1980, 2). Baldwin's descriptions of America's mainstream historical narrative highlight the moral inconsistency that Doniger attributes to mythology at large. In one of the private truths of "My Dungeon Shook," Baldwin tells his nephew that "the details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you" (Baldwin 1993b, 8). According to Baldwin, when America's founders found themselves unable to reconcile the poor treatment of Black people in a country that promised freedom for all human beings, they developed several "irrational resolutions" about Black people's inferiority.

Although Baldwin rejected the American myth, he recognized historical narratives' significant impact on people's self-understanding and behavior. By deriving self-understanding from a lie, Americans of all backgrounds were liable to misunderstand who they were, believing in categorical truths about their existence rather than the sensual, legitimate truths Baldwin endorsed. As Baldwin tells it, Americans' belief in the nation's mythological history fostered

racially distinct forms of self-understanding on the part of Black and white Americans. While Black people who accepted the Myth's tenets were liable to believe that they were less human, white people were likely to believe that their humanity was greater than Black people's. Both these senses of self are liable to foster passive dispositions within the people who believe in the myth. Whereas the myth's Black subscribers might make little effort to sustain their self-esteem or affirm their humanity, white Americans were likely to develop apathy, fear, or guilt, whether by harming Black Americans directly or by ignoring the nation's anti-Black racism. While some white Americans may decry the suffering they witness, they are unlikely to take action to address the source of the suffering because doing so would disturb their empowered, yet ultimately false, sense of self.

While discussing the dream in *The Fire Next Time* and his pieces on the American myth, Baldwin identifies the pessimism that undergirds people's faith in the falsehood of the American dream and sustains the disenfranchisement of Black Americans. According to Baldwin, the pessimism took multiple forms – most of which were racially delineated. As Baldwin tells it, white people's pessimism took the form of deep insecurity and despair, which was masked by their shallow celebration of false historical narratives. White Americans convinced themselves that only they deserved to achieve the American dream because only their race was good enough to reap the benefits of American citizenship and opportunity. Baldwin argued that this racial disenfranchisement cultivated a sense of despair within Black Americans, as they internalized racism projected by white people and their insecurities. In both cases, people were left in a position of moral stasis and had no recourse to take responsibility for others. Adopting this responsibility would begin by disputing the lies that supported false understandings of the

American dream and fostering loving spaces where people – particularly children – could work together to engage the facts of America's past.

Baldwin would return to parental love and the American dream two decades later when conversing with Lorde in "Revolutionary Hope." While invitational rhetoric appears throughout Baldwin's writings, "Revolutionary Hope" is unique because its dialogic, call and response grammar puts Lorde in the position of "inviter." Baldwin starts the conversation by discussing the American dream. Still, he explains Black people's relationship with the dream using an example limited to the experience of men: fighting for the United States during war. He argues:

> To be a Black American is in some ways to be born with the desire to be white … [a desire that] affects every Black American …We can go back to Vietnam, we can go back to Korea. We can go back for that matter to the First World War. We can go back to W.E.B. Du Bois … who campaigned to persuade Black people to fight in the First World War, saying that if we fight in this war to save this country, our right to citizenship can never, never again be questioned – and who can blame him? … Du Bois believed in the American dream. So did Martin. So did Malcolm. So do I. So do you. That's why we're sitting here (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Upon hearing this, Lorde corrects Baldwin: "I don't, honey…. Deep, deep, deep down I know that dream was never mine…. I was Black. I was female. And I was out – out by any construct wherever the power lay…. Nobody was dreaming about me. Nobody was even studying me except as something to wipe out" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Here, Lorde implies that Black men can aspire to the American dream because only one hurdle stands in their way: race. Black women, on the other hand, were doubly removed from social power by both race and gender.[33] While fighting for the nation was just one of several examples Baldwin could have used to justify the accessibility of the American dream, the masculinism of the one he chose was

[33] Interestingly, both Baldwin and Lorde were gay – a social marker not addressed in their conversation. Their sexuality also made them odd choices for the discussion, given that their conversation focused primarily on heterosexual conversations between men and women. All the more, both Baldwin and Lorde had white partners at the time of the discussion.

illustrative of the fact that much of his political discourse spoke only of male experiences. Though common at the time, Baldwin used the term "men" as a collective phrase for all of humankind, and his reliance on testimony meant many of the stories he used to comment on racism excluded the perspectives of women. In doing so, Lorde implicitly invites Baldwin to nuance his understanding of the American dream and its relationship so that his perspective is more inclusive of women's experiences.

After Lorde makes her point, Baldwin responds to Lorde's unspoken call by adjusting his language, suggesting that the metaphor "nightmare" is better suited to represent Black women's relationship to the success promised to all people living in the United States. He responds to Lorde's call for him to adjust his phrasing: "You are saying you do not exist in the American dream except as a nightmare" – shifting his claims about Lorde from a presumption to a restatement of Lorde's claims about her experience (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Although Baldwin and Lorde do not provide an explicit definition of the American "nightmare," Baldwin maintains this rephrasing of Lorde's comments by speaking of how Black women are "despised" due to their double disenfranchisement within the United States. The term "nightmare" suggests that after Lorde's invitation and Baldwin's response, the two thinkers consider Black women to be haunting reminders of the limits of an idea many in the United States treasured. If the American dream – a concept that stands at the core of the nation's identity as a free nation – is only available to a particular portion of the population, then the nation is not the country of freedom it claims to be. Because of Lorde's invitation, Baldwin suggests that Black women's disturbance of people who have access to the dream – white men, white women, Black men, and so forth – is so great that the new metaphor should be the antonym of the term it is replacing.

For the remainder of the conversation, Lorde continues to invite Baldwin to broaden his focus from a purportedly narrow concern over the inequities between white and Black Americans into a broader frustration that includes the disparities between Black men and women. Not long after the discussion of the American dream, Lorde argues that while Black women participate in the American dream as nightmares, Black women are also "the blank" – a term that she does not define but arguably invokes to make clear that the intersection of Black women's racial and gender identities separate them even further from other marginalized communities. Whereas Baldwin is confident in celebrating Black Americans' unique perspective and position in the world, Black women, as the Lordean blank, lack such a special space due to their lack of social power. When Baldwin argues that "the Black sense of male and female is much more sophisticated than the western idea…[and] that Black men and women are much less easily thrown by the question of gender or sexual preference," Lorde dismisses that sentiment's relevance and invites him to think beyond racial division. She tells Baldwin:

> Yea, but let's remove ourselves from merely a reactive position – i.e., Black men and women reacting to what's out there. While we are reacting to what's out there, we're also dealing between ourselves – and between ourselves there are power differences that come down (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Although Baldwin and Lorde discuss the nuances of gender differences throughout the conversation, Lorde's rebuttal about the reactive position is a prime example of invitation in Baldwin's witnessing dialogues. Although Baldwin attributes his conclusion about Black conceptions of gender to his experience, Lorde insists that they not focus on comparing Black and white people's ideas. Rather than dismiss his experience, she encourages him to think beyond it, including the experiences of her and other Black women, and Baldwin gladly accepts the invitation, responding, "Oh yes" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Lorde's invitations for Baldwin to broaden his discussions of American racism ultimately lead the two thinkers to conclude that any discussion of race in America must attend to what Baldwin first refers to as the "differences and samenesses" between Black men and women (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Lorde points out that people tend to focus on samenesses during moments of social struggle and that, as a result, those struggling tend to ignore the highly impactful difficulties faced by those facing similar struggles. In the case of Black Americans, this leads Black men to overlook the unique challenges faced by Black women, and, in some cases, it causes Black men to harm women as the men confront anti-Black racism. Lorde likens this behavior by Black men to the development of weapons. She tells Baldwin:

> In a crunch, when all our asses are in the sling, it looks like it is easier to deal with the samenesses. When we deal with sameness only, we develop weapons that we use against each other when the differences become apparent. And we wipe each other out – Black men and women can wipe each other out – far more effectively than outsiders do (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

She argues that by focusing only on racial samenesses, Black men cultivate power differences within Black spaces that give them more significant social standing over Black women. Lorde reasons further that the exertion of power over those who are different is ultimately a mechanism for the oppression of all people within a group, citing Black men and women as an example. She tells Baldwin that when Black men and women focus on differences, they are "in the business of wiping each other out in one way or the other and essentially doing [their] enemy's work" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Although Baldwin tended to focus on "samenesses" throughout his career – emphasizing the postcategorical nature of humankind, in "Revolutionary Hope," he responds to each of Lorde's invitations to rephrase his descriptions of Black existence to acknowledge the differences amongst Black Americans better. Unlike Baldwin, Lorde does not promote postcategorical understandings of oneself. Instead, she emphasizes differences, encouraging her

readers – and, in "Revolutionary Hope" Baldwin – to develop a sense of self within one's social categories. This is reflected most notably in *Zami*. By attesting to her life-defining experiences while in love with other Black women, Lorde makes clear that her true self is *not* postcategorical. While Baldwin agrees with Lorde in *The Fire Next Time* that people's existence is marked by their connections to others, Lorde is very selective in her choice of relational figures as she only writes about her relations with women. Lorde establishes from the outset that her text is highly intentional about the identity it seeks to explore – in this case, her identity as a gay woman. In a series of paratexts – acknowledgments, epigraphs, and prologues – Lorde thanks "each woman who shared any piece of the dreams/myths/histories that [gave the] book shape" and dedicates the book to Helen, Blanche, and Afrekete – three women described in the text (Lorde 1982, Epilogue). *Zami* is just as much a story about love as it is about Lorde-the-individual and her transformation from Audre into Zami. In the book's opening, one finds a declaration that "in the recognition of loving lies an answer to despair" (Lorde 1982). The statement could be read as a summary of how Lorde's various views on interrelatedness in *Zami* carry on throughout the text: love serves as a cure for pain, as it was in Lorde's through its engendering of her transformation.

After laying out the importance of acknowledging both samenesses and differences, Lorde frames the idea as a lesson that needs to be taught to young Black people – especially Black boys. Here, Lorde's invitation for Baldwin to broaden his perspective goes from being a call for an intersectional view on race to an invitation for a broader understanding of parental love. To do so, Lorde cites the example of violent fourteen-year-old boys – invoking the previously mentioned trope found many times in Baldwin's writings. Referring to violence between Black men and women, she asks Baldwin, "How do we get a 14-year-old [Black] boy to know I am not the legitimate target of his fury?" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Lorde's collective

"we" suggests that Black adults, such as Baldwin and her, are responsible for ensuring that the interactions between Black boys and girls are nonviolent; peace rather than struggle defines the interactions between men and women. As she tells Baldwin shortly thereafter:

> Your responsibility [is] not just to me [as a woman] but to my son and to our boys. Your responsibility to him is to get across to him in a way that I never will be able to because he did not come out of my body and has another relationship to me. Your relationship to him as his farther [sic] is to tell him I'm not a fit target for his fury (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Lorde speaks of this responsibility elsewhere in the conversation, telling Baldwin that if the scientific wonders of the modern world could be produced by human ingenuity – namely the ability to "put people on the moon and…blow [the] whole planet up" – then she, Baldwin, and other older Black people could help shift young Black people's perspectives on gender (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Although Baldwin attempts to continue the discussion of gender expectations, he eventually concedes to Lorde's point – accepting her invitation to focus on resolving intraracial sexism rather than its current realities. Again, Baldwin and Lorde illustrate the prevalence of invitation within the dialogue and, more broadly, Baldwin's witnessing.

5. Self-Love as Mutual Redefinition

In addition to their rich discussion of parental affection, Baldwin and Lorde spend significant time asserting that self-love is essential to a healthy existence. Although Baldwin and Lorde agree on this, their divergent yet similar views of human existence lead to differing conceptions of whether self-love should be a Baldwinian rejection of categories or a Lordean embrace of the erotic. These discussions of self-love in "Revolutionary Hope" build upon Baldwin and Lorde's previous explorations of the topic in works like "Notes of a Native Son" and *Zami*, respectively. Baldwin takes the role of confessor in this "Revolutionary Hope"

discussion on self-love and violence. He shares vulnerable experiences to bring emotional nuance to Lorde's highly assertive claims about the interactions between men and women. Ultimately, both thinkers' narratives focus on how self-love can prevent racism from bringing about Black people's political, existential, and physical erasure. Baldwin and Lorde spend most of their narratives empathizing with the young Black people's situation – both as individuals who spend their youths struggling under the weight of multiple oppressions and as adults who somehow survived those circumstances. However, as they examine these struggles, Baldwin and Lorde highlight their intensity and celebrate the young people's ability to survive such circumstances. They especially applaud young Black people's willingness to face their fears and the shame they felt in a society that suggests that Black people are less than human.

Throughout his conversation with Lorde, Baldwin speaks to the fundamental role self-love and self-affirmation play in human existence. Just as he cites a lack of self-love as the cause for his father's death, Baldwin links the foremost struggles faced by many Black men to their inability to love themselves. As a result, Baldwin champions self-love as the key means for the Black community to move forward despite racism. Although Lorde is a noteworthy advocate of self-love, as demonstrated by her writings on the erotic and the power of self-discovery, she responds to Baldwin's discussions of the need for Black self-affirmation by invoking a call and response. In this dialogic encounter, Lorde insists that Baldwin's conception of self-love is incomplete and that he must expand it. In the conversation, Lorde invites Baldwin to his understanding of self-love to ensure that it attends to the gendered experiences of Black women. Just as he did with their discussions of parental love, Baldwin confesses to his mistake and makes his philosophy of self-love more inclusive. He agrees with Lorde's claim that love for oneself requires "mutual redefinition" – a form of self-recognition that outlines one's

internalization of oppression and discriminatory behavior. Lorde tells Baldwin about the necessity of this interaction: "It's vital that we deal constantly with racism, and… we must also examine the ways that we have absorbed sexism and heterosexism" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

Baldwin's discussions of self-love with Lorde build upon Baldwin's most substantive exploration of the topic: the testimony of the struggles faced by Black youth in Harlem in *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin's testimony emphasizes that their social circumstances seemed to suggest that their lives held little or no value in the world. As such, the teenagers struggled to love and accept their authentic selves. The testimony begins with an account of the "religious crisis" that occurred when Baldwin reached age fourteen – highlighting the confusion that took hold of him as he began to find himself on a path towards a predetermined fate of sin and destruction demonstrated by those on "the Avenue." Ostensibly a reference to "uptown Fifth Avenue," as mentioned in a similarly titled essay published two years prior, the label demarcates Harlem's criminal activity – whether that criminality existed in the eyes of the law, the church, or the neighborhood. Baldwin argues that the turn to criminality traced back to the precarious circumstances of Harlem life. He laments about "being spat on and defined and described and limited, and [that he] could have been polished off with no effort whatever" (Baldwin 1993b, 24). As Baldwin and other adolescents grew older and more aware of the injustices around them, many of them turned to crime as a way of rejecting the limitations imposed on them by society. As he writes:

> It turned out, then, that summer, that the moral barriers that I had supposed to exist between me and the dangers of a criminal career were so tenuous as to be nearly nonexistent. I certainly could not discover any principled reason for not becoming a criminal, and it is not my poor, God-fearing parents who are to be indicted for the lack but this society (Baldwin 1993b, 23).

Baldwin clarifies that whatever sinfulness or immoral acts might seem to "justify" or "explain" the young people's ill fates were not the source of their demise. Speaking for the male youth, he

argues that the true source was "indefinable." He laments that, in many cases, his male classmates succumbed to "a curious, wary, bewildered despair, as though they were now settling in for the long, hard winter of life" (Baldwin 1993b, 19).

Rather than think of the young Harlemites as sinners on the Avenue, they were better thought of as victims of a societal crime. As Baldwin explained:

> Crime became real, for example – for the first time – not as *a* possibility but as *the* possibility. One would never defeat one's circumstances by working and saving one's pennies … and, besides, the social treatment accorded even the most successful Negroes proved that one needed, in order to be free, something more than a bank account. (Baldwin 1993b, 21).

As he examines these struggles, Baldwin highlights their intensity and celebrates the adolescents' ability to survive such circumstances. In particular, he notes their willingness to face their fears and the shame they felt in a society that suggested that Black people were overly sensual to the point of being less than human. And in doing so, he makes the universal claim that all people must adopt a form of personal love that allows them to face their fear of death in order to overcome the despair and pain that extends from it.

As the testimony continues, this despair goes beyond being a path toward criminality and becomes a catalyst for death. In many ways, this the testimony tells the story of the young Harlemites' erasure from the world – both physically and existentially. While on the one hand, the "something deeper" which Baldwin holds responsible for the teenagers' shift into adolescence brings about a spiritual despair that haunts Baldwin and his peers and ultimately shapes their behavior, on the other hand, the force leads to death and removal of many of Baldwin's classmates, as they leave Harlem and never return or depart from the community and enter spaces not suited for their well-being. While the particularities of the young Harlem residents' struggles varied greatly, in the end, their difficulties shared at least one commonality: the risk of death brought about by their rejection from society. The young people's move to the

Avenue and the women's withdrawal into submissive roles within their households and church meant they were no longer considered valued participants in Harlem's approved culture – whether by the racist white people of New York or the judgmental adults who once raised them.

Upon recognizing that the despair was the product of white racism, Baldwin – like his peers – took on a bitter, futile fight against the indefinable source of his despair. While he and his peers knew the force was born of racism, it remained intangible and, as a result, unconquerable. As he wrote of those who left Harlem:

> My friends were now "downtown," busy, as they put it, "fighting the man." They [were] … lost, and unable to say what it was that oppressed them, except that they knew it was "the man"—the white man. And there seemed to be no way whatever to remove this cloud that stood between them and the sun, between them and love and life and power, between them and whatever it was that they wanted. One did not have to be very bright to realize how little one could do to change one's situation; one did not have to be abnormally sensitive to be worn down to a cutting edge by the incessant and gratuitous humiliation and danger one encountered every working day, all day long (Baldwin 1993b, 19).

Despite observing his peers' struggles, Baldwin adopted a similar attitude, accepting the despair laid upon him and translating it into a certain bitterness that would neither protect him from the "something deeper" nor address its structural source. As he made his way through his teenage years, he seemed to become more committed to a suicidal fight against the racist, limiting world affecting Harlem. To quote him directly: "I was icily determined … never to make my peace with the ghetto but to die and go to Hell before I would let any white man spit on me, before I would accept my 'place' in this republic" (Baldwin 1993b, 23).

While the anecdotal portion of Baldwin's testimony lays out the difficulties that faced the young Harlem residents, the testimony's private claims unveil the overlooked ways many of the residents' actions were a means of self-preservation. As Baldwin tells it, such survival necessitated self-reflection and the self-love required to do so, and he makes clear in his

universal claims that all people must employ similar self-love if they wish to survive. At one point in the testimony, Baldwin notes the fact that:

> Every Negro boy … who reaches this [age] realizes, at once, profoundly, because he wants to live, that he stands in great peril and must find, with speed, a "thing," a gimmick, to lift him out, to start him on his way. *And it does not matter what the gimmick is* (Baldwin 1993b, 23).

Baldwin makes clear that developing a gimmick requires complete honesty with oneself so that the individual can assess their reality and recognize their real – rather than socially stereotyped – skills and deficiencies. Baldwin tells of his own process of self-honesty at this time, explaining that despite his issues with his devout father, his only gimmick was preaching due to a lack of athleticism and a belief that he could never be a professional writer. It must be noted that Baldwin distinguishes a gimmick from a criminal act. Whereas a gimmick is a method of self-preservation, criminality was an effort to secure and maintain power – a set of behaviors that Baldwin described as working "to be feared but not respected" and charged white Americans with perpetuating (Baldwin 1993b, 23).

Most of the testimony's categorical claims critique the social phenomena that necessitated Baldwin and his peers' intentional efforts to survive. In Baldwin's eyes, the categorical phenomena he wrote about had no place in a social world, and their consequences were tragic, even if the Black children whom Baldwin described survived. This is especially clear in his description of the psychical results of living in a world in which the category "Black" or "Negro" implied death, inadequacy, or an inability to participate or thrive in the world. In his words:

> Negroes in this country … are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks (intrinsically, that is: God decreed it so), and the world has innumerable ways of making this difference known and felt and feared (Baldwin 1993b, 25-26).

As Baldwin understood it, while the material impact of such categories was undeniable, the poverty and violence of American racism carried with it psychical damage – the damage ultimately responsible for any young Black people who succumbed to the roles society said they occupied: criminals, sinners, or dead. These fates were not the result of inadequacy on the parts of the individuals themselves but rather their lack of faith in themselves. He maintains that the acceptance of a false inadequacy is the result of structures that tell these young Black people that their individual, sensual selves are not suited for the world and that they are less than human – a message that they eventually internalize and come to believe in themselves.

Having described how Black Americans cultivate self-love and use it to develop individual survival techniques, Baldwin lays the groundwork for his universal claim: self-love is crucial to survival in a categorical world. At one point, Baldwin notes that the despair, self-loathing, and fear that marked the moment arose alongside the children's deepening sensuality. He writes: "It is certainly sad that the awakening of one's senses should lead to such a merciless judgment of oneself … but it is also inevitable that a literal attempt to mortify the flesh should be made among black people like those with whom I grew up" (Baldwin 1993b, 25). As he shows, the adolescent Black people's fear and despair are ultimately disgust at their sensual selves. Baldwin notes the fact that some of the racism he encountered suggested that he was too sensual and thus less civilized and suited for the categories of modern life. Yet because Baldwin and his peers draw upon their innate skills so that they can survive, they demonstrate a faith – however unconscious it may be – that something about the sensual lifestyle can perform one essential requirement of human life, as Baldwin sees it: the capacity to survive. In doing so, they appealed and came to recognize the power of the sensual – even if only partially – by using it as an alternative guide to the categorical norms used by white people. Baldwin lauds such behavior

and the young Black people's efforts to face their fears, noting that "to defend oneself against a fear is simply to ensure that one will, one day, be conquered by it; fears must be faced" (Baldwin 1993b, 27). And given that Baldwin believed that love was inseparable from the experience of sensual life, the sensually driven self-affirmation and self-preservation that Baldwin identifies and celebrates are ultimately forms of self-love. Yet because the sensual presence is life itself, one can only embrace life's totality – including the fact that it will end – by embracing the sensuality, particularly one's sensual existence. No feeling of safety and being more than human – and death – could be sought – especially the false sense of safety when one convinces oneself that one's existence is more significant than another person's. Yet in doing so, one shows love for themselves, and this form of self-love encourages a person to seek assurance from their true selves that their life is worthwhile.

Baldwin notes the fact that a fear of death is not limited to the young people in Harlem: all people are fearful of their demise, and some succumb to a sense of despair brought on by this fear. As a result, one could argue that this fear of death is also a fear of sensuality, given that the sensual is the marking of life and lived existence, and a fear of death is a fear of that existence's end. As he writes, towards the end of *The Fire Next Time*: "Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives … in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have" (Baldwin 1993b, 91). According to Baldwin's logic, when people avoid thinking about the sensual due to fear, they avoid the embodied reminder that they will no longer sense the world one day. When defining sensuality towards the end of the testimony, Baldwin uses white Americans as a particular example of this fear of death sparked by a misplaced fear of one's sensuality. As he writes, white Americans "are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it …. Something very sinister happens to the people

of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become" (Baldwin 1993b, 42-43). And given that living sensually means embracing life – both its ups and downs – Baldwin reasons that white America's fear has laden them with a particularly destructive form of existential despair. Later in the testimony, Baldwin insists that individuals must overcome their fear of coming to know their true, sensual selves. As he writes:

> 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 (Baldwin 1993b, 43-44).

Convinced that freedom from isolation is vital to survival, Baldwin locates self-love as the starting point for such interpersonal resistance, insisting that embracing one's humanity can overcome the trappings of categorical bigotry and its ills. After recognizing their sensual self, they can turn to loving others and encourage them to confront their fears, embrace their sensual capacities, and survive the challenges of the categorical world because, as Baldwin says. "Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people" (Howard 1963, 89).

Baldwin returns to the topic of self-love and young people in "Revolutionary Hope." Just as Lorde plays the role of "inviter" in the dialogue, calling for Baldwin to rethink some of his preconceptions about love, race, and gender, Baldwin takes the position of "confessor," responding to her calls by sharing his own experiences. This is especially true on the topic of self-love. Although both he and Lorde conclude that parental love must be shown to young Black people to prevent Black boys from attacking Black women, Baldwin also shares the pain linked to the Black male experience – responding to Lorde's invitations not just with a shallow "yes" but with an active confession of his trauma and the trauma of Black men more broadly. This

confession is a response to Lorde's call, and it demonstrates that the back and forth within Baldwin's dialogues is marked by a noteworthy passion found in all of his witnessing. Baldwin's confessions in "Revolutionary Hope" focus most notably on why Black men turn to violence – the "reactive position" that Lorde invites him to look beyond. And while Baldwin ultimately accepts her invitation and broadens his discussion beyond the troubles surrounding the American dream, he ties each of his responses to a testimonial discussion of why and from where Black men's violence stems. At one point in the conversation, he reflects on that violence, telling Lorde:

> Something happens to the man who beats up a lady. Something happens to the man who beats up his grandmother. Something happens to the junkie. I know that very well. I walked the streets of Harlem; I grew up there, right? Now you know it is not the Black cat's fault who sees me and tries to mug me. I got to know that. It's his responsibility but it's not his fault. That's a nuance. [I] got to know that it's not him who is my enemy…. I'm trying to say one's got to see what drove both of us into those streets. We be both from the same track. Do you see what I mean? I've come home myself, you know, wanting to beat up anything in sight (Baldwin and Lorde 1984).

By placing himself in the example and citing many of the same situations he raised when testifying to his years as a young person in Harlem, Baldwin confesses to his role in the social phenomena the two thinkers are discussing and responds to Lorde's invitation in a highly personal way. The truths he offers are deeply personal, and while Lorde can continue to invite Baldwin to focus on other ideas, she cannot dismiss his experience and – by extension the experiences of the Black men he speaks on behalf of.

Baldwin's confession shifts the tenor of the conversation, as Lorde becomes less insistent on inviting Baldwin to redirect his focus and instead shifts towards finding a common solution. While at the beginning of the dialogue, Baldwin's acquiescence led him to accept Lorde's invitations without much hesitation, this confession about his youth in Harlem and the experiences of other Black boys like him fosters a space of empathy – a sort of fraternal and

sororal love that both figures seem to have been searching for throughout the conversation. Suddenly, Lorde addresses Baldwin by his nickname, telling him, "Jimmy, we don't have an argument" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). At this point in the dialogue, Lorde responds with short affirmations of Baldwin's claims – much like Baldwin did when he accepted her invitations. Lorde makes statements like "I'm here, I'm here…" – which may not be acceptances of invitations but are responses to heartfelt confessions. The intimacy of the dialogue distinguishes the conversations from other exchanges between people of different social positions, and it demonstrates that witnessing of all sorts involves deep emotion. While Lorde may not consider herself a witness, her engagement with Baldwin situates her in this emotionality, and the dialogue becomes a loving call and response.

By the end of Baldwin and Lorde's exchange of call and response, invitation and confession, the two thinkers brainstorm another solution to the gendered conflicts between Black Americans. As though building upon Baldwin's advocacy for self-love in *The Fire Next Time*, they argue that Black men and women must adopt a collaborative form of self-love that one might term "mutual redefinition." The term emerges from Baldwin's claim that Black people's "real responsibility is to endlessly redefine each other" and Lorde's suggestion that, in addition, they have to "define [themselves] for each other" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Baldwin argues that mutual redefinition is done not just for the sake of the individual but for all Black people. He tells Lorde: "The inevitable dissension between brother and sister, between man and woman – let's face it, all those relations which are rooted in love also are involved in this quarrel" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Baldwin insists that rather than accept the definitions of Black masculinity and womanhood developed by white people in "the North American wilderness," Black people should eschew these oppressive ideas and define themselves for themselves. He

argues that maintaining these definitions is an act of trying to prove one's worth to white people, even though "neither [Black men nor women] have anything to prove (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Lorde agrees – an explicit affirmation rather than a subtle or implicit one – telling Baldwin that the racist definitions created by white supremacy are a "distortion" of Black people's true identities, and she insists that Black people have "absorbed" the racist "underpinnings of the distortion (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). By communicating across gender differences and helping one another craft racism-free senses of self, Black men and women can recognize how they have absorbed distorted self-conceptions. Both Baldwin and Lorde insist that this communication requires both speaking and listening so that each party can take in the unique perspectives of the other.

This mutual redefinition echoes the sentiments of self-love in *The Fire Next Time,* which dismissed the white supremacist narratives of Black inferiority and the self-love in *Zami* involving adopting a self-designated name. Yet, whereas in those earlier texts, self-definition was primarily an individual effort, in "Revolutionary Hope," Baldwin's vulnerable confession encouraged the two to reframe self-love and self-definition as an act that involved multiple parties helping each other. Nevertheless, Lorde makes clear that any such redefinition must not come at Black women's expense. She insists that Black women have shifted themselves from being nothing other than means for Black men to process racism – a dangerous position in which they often become the recipient of the violence she decries earlier. Lorde tells Baldwin, "We are finished being bridges" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Instead, she reiterates Baldwin's earlier claims about recognizing the intersections of white supremacy and intraracial violence – no doubt moved by his confessions – and insists that mutual redefinition must involve Black men being introspective and realizing that "what's going on between them and [Black women] is

related to what's going on between" Black and white people (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). To do otherwise, she says, is an exercise in "wasting energy" that could be used collaboratively to love themselves and help Black women exercise their own self-love and self-definition. Lorde's talk of wasted energy echoes Baldwin's insistence that love be active and pragmatic, and it is analogous to Baldwin's prophetic calls to avoid passive care and turn sentimental fear into action.[34]

Interestingly, Baldwin and Lorde's talk of helping one another takes upon the communicative act of naming and definition, which makes the mutual redefinition that they promote a form of dialogue. Lorde speaks of the process of mutual redefinition as a form of collaborative exploration of their oppression, telling Baldwin: "It's vital that we deal constantly with racism…that we recognize this as a legitimate area of inquiry… [and that we] …examine the ways that we have absorbed sexism and heterosexism" (Baldwin and Lorde 1984). Given that this is precisely what "Revolutionary Hope" is – a joint analysis of oppression by a Black man and woman, one might argue that the thinkers' conversation illustrates mutual redefinition. By the end of the dialogue, Lorde and Baldwin have agreed to work on identifying the impact of their oppression, confronting it, and defining themselves beyond its grasp. They tell each other:

> AL: Well then, in the same way you know how a woman feels, I know how a man feels, because it comes down to human beings being frustrated and distorted because we can't protect the people we love. So now let's start –
>
> JB: All right, okay…
>
> AL: - let's start with that and deal.

In making such a pact, Baldwin and Lorde demonstrate that even years before their death, Black men and women can come together and commit to working together to foster self-love and

[34] See Chapters 2 and 3

cultivate self-definition. In doing so, they honor their existence and their loving connection as human beings. As a result they recognize that their existence and behavior shapes, and is shaped by, those of others. The dialogue and confession offered proves to be practical and not just theoretical.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Baldwin's witnessing contains a dialogic element that allows his testimonies to operate in conversation with those of others, like the "call and response" discourses found in the Black church – particularly the Black Pentecostal church of Baldwin's youth. This dialogic component was especially prominent in the latter half of his career, as he engaged Black feminist thinkers who had found new platforms to address the intersections of anti-Black racism and sexism. We can identify women's role in Baldwin's philosophy of love by looking at "Revolutionary Hope" – a 1984 conversation with Audre Lorde. Employing several of the same rhetorical techniques found in Baldwin's work as a witness, Lorde uses invitational and confessional rhetoric to nuance a few of the claims about love Baldwin first raised in *The Fire Next Time* and repeated in his conversation with Lorde. We find that Baldwin steps back from his masculinist framing of the parental love he encourages his nephew to adopt in *The Fire Next Time,* and by listening to Lorde's invitations, Baldwin reconsiders some of his emphasis on postcategorical identity – though he remains steadfast in his decrial of social categories. A comparative analysis of *The Fire Next Time*, "Revolutionary Hope," and Lorde's discussions of love in *The Cancer Journals* and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* illustrates the complexities of active love, identifying it as a broad discourse between several individuals including Lorde, alongside Ellison and others.

Conclusion

"Love does not begin and end in the way we think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up."

– James Baldwin, "In Search of a Majority" (1960)

1. Project Purpose & Summary

In my dissertation, I have answered the question: "What role have African Americans played in conversations about love and politics in the 20th-century?" To do so, I drew upon two recent academic trends. Firstly, I built upon scholars of Black religion who have probed the work of Black creative intellectuals for insight into the complex relationship between the religious and the secular in Black thought. Secondly, I have turned to the growing study of love. On the one hand, I adopt Black feminist scholars' conviction that the sociopolitical circumstances of Black Americans have inspired singular understandings of love's definition and political function of love (Harrison, Phillips, and Jackson 2022). At the same time, I have employed "critical love analysis," a methodological framework that reads discussions of love as extended narratives about acts of care and intimacy (Gratzke 2017). Using these frameworks, I examined James Baldwin's philosophical discussions of love, arguing that his self-identification as a "witness" and his practice of "witnessing" involved several discursive elements that allowed him to both observe love's function in the world, offer constructive critiques of those machinations, and invite his audience to take up political action suited to their sociopolitical contexts. In addition to outlining Baldwin's conception of witnessing, I also investigated how the discourse reflects the Christian rhetoric and ideas that Baldwin was exposed to during his time as a preacher in the Black Pentecostal Church. In this way, the project lays the groundwork for a study of how

witnessing and Baldwin's philosophy of love may be understood using religious concepts even though Baldwin himself did not identify as a Christian.

To demonstrate the singularity of Baldwin's witnessing and his philosophy of love, I situated my analyses within the broader intellectual conversations in which those discussions fit. In addition to Baldwin, I paid particular attention to the work of Ralph Ellison and Audre Lorde. As I showed, a discourse on political love unfolded from the figures' shared belief that acts of love could foster significant personal, political, and ethical change amidst the worst social conditions. As a result, each participant defined love as a concrete act of intimacy, a response to structural politics, and a life-sustaining spiritual force. Throughout their careers, Baldwin simultaneously attested to the role of love acts within African American lives and drew connections between these acts of love and racial justice. Armed with the logic of testimony, Baldwin used these historically specific narratives as evidence of a larger, universal truth: that acts of love are guided by a metaphysical ethic applicable in any social or political context. As one of America's most prolific users of testimony, Baldwin stood at the center of the discourse, with his writings, letters, and interviews engaging the testimonial discussions of love offered by the other Black thinkers. As I showed, the discourse's testimonial nature sets it apart from many other love philosophies by freeing it of vague abstraction, social essentialism, and exclusionary ideology. Because testimony is a form of narrative discourse, it is well suited for critical love analysis.

My argument unfolded over four chapters that explore the discourse's development from 1945 to the present. In the first chapter of the dissertation, I investigated the seeming inconsistencies between two scholarly interpretations of the philosophy of political love found in Baldwin's most substantive discussion of the topic: *The Fire Next Time*'s "Down at the Cross:

Letter from a Region in My Mind." Whereas some scholars have read the essay's philosophy of love in racial terms, arguing that the love Baldwin describes can only be practiced by Black Americans, others have interpreted the philosophy in nonracial terms, insisting the love in the text can be demonstrated by all. Looking at the discursive form of the text, I argued that "Down at the Cross" is filled with testimonies on love – a form of discourse in which universal claims are made by analyzing concrete, highly contextual experiences. As I read him, Baldwin outlines a universal conception of a willful form of love that can be practiced by all people, using stories from his highly racialized experiences in the world. To demonstrate the testimonial logic of the text, I focused on two of the essay's most noteworthy testimonies – his account of his time in the Black church during his teenage years and his meeting with Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam. Using narrative analysis, I demonstrated how Baldwin uses distinct pairs of familial metaphors and literary techniques to outline different versions of this love. Whereas the testimony on the Black church uses irony to sketch the fraternal love by highlighting the hypocrisy laden in the church's simultaneous celebration of Christian love and discrimination against non-Christians, the testimony on Elijah Muhammad develops a form of "juridical trust" between Baldwin and his readers to allow them to determine the validity of his claims and decipher their own vision of how Baldwinian love should be practiced.

The second chapter placed Baldwin's discussions of love in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) in conversation with those of 19th-century Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky and those in Black American author Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). Building on the work of literary scholar Maria R. Bloshteyn, I outlined the shared literary and philosophical origins of Baldwin and Ellison's theories of political love, arguing that the two authors broaden the philosophy of "active love" espoused in the Russian's magnum opus *The Brothers Karamazov*. After outlining

the logic of Dostoevsky's theory of active love, I examined the manifestation of three elements of active love within Baldwin and Ellison's texts. In the first case, I demonstrated how Baldwin and Ellison reconfigure the notion that active love is a form of "labor and perseverance" by unpacking Baldwin's testimonies about his father, David Baldwin, Sr., in the titular essay "Notes of a Native Son" and Ellison's discussion of the death and funeral of Tod Clifton in *Invisible Man*. Secondly, I explored the parallels between Dostoevsky's claim that active love involves universal guilt or responsibility – depending on translation – in Baldwin and Ellison's writings by examining Baldwin's discussion of his father's funeral in "Notes of a Native Son" and the narrator's dream about the slave woman who murders her former master in *Invisible Man*. Lastly, I investigated the adoption of Dostoevsky's mandate that active love be practiced in the real world, as opposed to theoretically or through passive pronouncements, by examining Baldwin's discussions of his years in Paris in the so-called "Paris Essays" and the narrator of the *Invisible Man's* return to society and emergence from his hole. Although Dostoevsky is often cited as an influence on 20th-century Black American literature, many studies focus on the authors' invocation of his approach to death and suffering. As a result my second chapter makes a significant contribution to this line of inquiry, showing that Dostoevsky offered more than a lens for unpacking the oppression faced by Black Americans by serving as a model for Black liberation, as well.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I explored how Baldwin used prophetic rhetoric to invite his audience to replace their submission to stagnant sentiments such as fear and guilt with efforts to practice the active love explored in this dissertation. Focusing on Baldwin's writings in the 1960s, I engaged the writings of scholars such as George Shulman, Adam T. Jernigan, and Christopher Freeburg to outline three forms of prophecy within Baldwin's work: jeremiads,

sorrow songs, and mirrorings. Whereas the latter two forms of prophecy decry preoccupation with feelings that distract an individual from performing acts of loving responsibility, the former calls people to replace those unproductive feelings with the active love that Baldwin promotes in texts like *The Fire Next Time*. I drew heavily on scholarship from the study of religion in this chapter, examining the prophetic logic of each form of discourse and expanding the plethora of scholarship that positions Baldwin as a prophetic figure within the civil rights movement. The chapter examined how this model of Baldwin's prophecy differs depending on the race of his audience. Whereas essays like "The New Lost Generation" (1961) address the feelings of fear that hinder love on the part of Black Americans using prophetic sorrow songs and jeremiads, essays such as "The White Man's Guilt" criticize the distracting feelings of guilt the plague white Americans who are concerned about their participation in anti-Black racism but refuse to act due to that guilt. Each of the essays invokes the testimonial form discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation and – as a result – offers insight into the complicated relationship between passive or what Baldwin labels "sentimental" feelings, such as fear and guilt, and actionable emotions, such as love. To demonstrate the singularity of Baldwin's discussions of love and emotion, I situated each use of prophecy within a historical discourse about anti-Black racism during the civil rights movement. Whereas my analysis of sorrow songs, Black people, and fear revived Baldwin's conversation with Black nationalist Eldridge Cleaver, my analysis of white people and guilt revisited the conflict between Baldwin and the political efforts of Robert F. Kennedy during his time as Attorney General in the early years of the 1960s.

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, I close the project by examining one of Baldwin's final discussions of love: his conversation "Revolutionary Hope" with Black feminist Audre Lorde. The chapter addressed a seeming gap within Baldwin's writings on love: the lack

of women's perspectives on a topic that involves both Black men and women. I argued that Baldwin's emphasis on firsthand experience led him to avoid speaking about love on behalf of Black women. At the same time, I maintained that Baldwin engaged with the topic of Black women and love through the dialogic nature of his witnessing. Using "Revolutionary Hope" as a model, I outlined how Baldwin's witnessing held a structure suited for conversation with other discourses offered by intellectuals – most notably by featuring the elements of "invitation" and "confession." Whereas the first element allowed Baldwin or his interlocutor to request that their counterpart consider a perspective they had not yet pondered, the second element involved one of the participants sharing a personal truth so that the other individual might reconsider a topic. In my analysis of "Revolutionary Hope," I outlined how Baldwin and Lorde took the role of confessor and inviter, respectively, and used the discussion to develop two practices for Black men and women to take up in a collaborative effort to overcome white supremacy. In the first case, the two thinkers called for recognition of the "samenesses and differences" between Black men and women so that members of the race can work together to resist white supremacy and prevent themselves from taking their racial sufferings out on one another. In the second case, Baldwin and Lorde push for what I term "mutual redefinition," a process in which Black men and women assist one another in developing new understandings of self that are free from the limitations and oppressive scripts of anti-Black racism. Drawing upon academic research on the Black church, I identified parallels between the dynamic of invitation and confession and the tradition of call and response in Black Christian spaces.

2. Scholarly Contributions

As an interdisciplinary investigation, my project contributes to several fields, the most

prominent of which is the growing field of Baldwin studies. Since the turn of the century, renewed interest in Baldwin's work has led many people – activists, authors, directors, and public intellectuals – to draw upon Baldwin in their social commentary (Vogel 2020). My findings address these figures' concerns and suggest that active love is a pragmatic alternative to both overly pessimistic and unreasonably idealistic responses to anti-Black racism. The project also identifies Baldwinian testimony and witnessing as valuable tools for contemporary activists, just as they were for the discourse's originators (Johnson 2021). In addition, the project illustrates the efficacy of witnessing as a form of political discourse, demonstrating how testimony, prophecy, and dialogue can communicate political ideas and stimulate political action. It is easy to describe social and political phenomena and human behavior in totalizing, essentialized terms.

In many cases, Baldwin employs what Douglas Taylor describes as a "strategic essentialism" when Baldwin discusses America and its people (Taylor 2010). Yet this is always done in accordance with the central logic of optimism, which marks Baldwin's thought: an identification of a seemingly universal concept or phenomenon and a reminder that there are exceptions to this – exceptions that must be noted through concrete examples. Witnessing is Baldwin's means of presenting these examples so that totalities can be undercut, and people can see an outlet past the darkness of the oppression through which they can cultivate the hope needed to resist pessimism and despair. This willing effort is a practice of active love, and, as presented and described in Baldwin's writing, it functions inextricably with Baldwin's witnessing because his witnessing proves that self-love and other-regarding are needed to resist oppression.

At the same time, the project contributes to the academic study of religion as scholars such as Vincent Lloyd investigate the role Black creative intellectuals have played in the field of

Black religious thought (Lloyd 2017). By tracing Baldwin's invocation, rebuke, and reimagination of Christian concepts and forms of discourse, the project broadens the field from focusing on traditional religions such as Christianity and Islam and Afro-diasporic religions such as Santería to the realm of the various humanisms developed by figures such as Baldwin. By bringing the work of Lloyd and others into conversation with fields such as Baldwin studies, the project celebrates the diversity of Black religious thought and invites contemporary Black religious thinkers to take up Baldwin's mantle as a Black political prophet – whether within Black religious institutions or in nontraditional spiritual spaces. The project also engages the growing field of political theology and leaves room for conversation with other semi-religious philosophies in subfields such as Jewish studies, wherein figures such as Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber drew upon religious tropes in their philosophical discussions of human connection. Similarly, testimony's function as an emotional discourse allows my project to address the recent interest in affect and emotion within Black and religious studies (Palmer 2017). Lastly, given Baldwin's popularity at the current moment, the project helps address a constant issue within the academic study of religion: the undue criticism the field receives from individuals who presume scholars of religion are proselytizers instead of critical analysts of a human phenomenon. By broadening an understanding of the religious elements in the work of a popular figure, the project invites those interested in Baldwin to assuage their doubts about the academic study of religion and see its merit when tackling complicated figures such as Harlem's prophet.

Finally, the project contributes to the emergent field of love studies – an interdisciplinary line of inquiry that seeks to define love without recourse to concepts such as sex and friendship love (Mayer and Vanderheiden 2021). Regarding the study of love, in particular, my project demonstrates how narrative analysis, philosophy, and the study of religion can be brought

together to make interventions within scholarship on love and Black American life, politics, and culture. I argue that testimony should be adopted as a method for studying love, given that its logic helps extend the benefits and overcome the limitations of identitarian discussions of love. Given love studies' European origins, my project allows the field to engage further with non-white love philosophies as it grows. By introducing love studies to the rhetorical and theoretical ambiguity of the discourse on active love, I help address European love scholars' repeated concerns about the binarism, divisiveness, and archaicism of many European understandings of love. This is especially true in religious studies, as scholars question the relevance of *agape* and similar Christian concepts in what some have described as a "post-Christian" moment (Wischmeyer 2021). I also join recent philosophical and religious conversations about love's nature and its relationship to responsibility, politics, and race (May 2011, 2019; Haji 2023; Hartnett 2020; Cherry 2019). Similarly, my analysis of the discourse's discussions of love's embodiment, the complexities of male love, and queer intimacy also invites dialogue with interdisciplinary fields such as disability studies and queer of color critique (Sarah Smith 2011; Carrillo Rowe and Royster 2017). The rich discussions of race in the discourse on active love can provide a theoretical starting point for a potential field of "Black love studies," just as critical race theory has laid the groundwork for fields such as Black sound studies and Black trans studies (Timmermans 2021; Morrison 2019; Ellison et al. 2017).

3. Limits of Study & Plans for Further Study

Despite my project's contributions to Baldwin studies, religion, and love studies, it has some gaps and limitations. Firstly, while the dissertation's fourth chapter explored the topic of race, love, and gender in "Revolutionary Hope," the project overlooked Baldwin's 1970s

discussions of the subject, given "Revolutionary Hope's" publication in 1982. As a result, the dissertation did not consider Baldwin's substantive considerations of love and racial politics in his 1972 memoir *No Name in the Street*. There is a similar absence in his 1970s considerations about the love between Black men and women located in his open letter to Angela Davis (1970), his televised conversation with Nikki Giovanni (1973), and his interview with Maya Angelou (1975). To resolve this gap, I intend to add a chapter examining Baldwin's conversations about love with these young Black feminists in the years following the civil rights movement and how Baldwin appeared to pass the mantle of promoting political love onto the next generation of Black creative intellectuals. In two additional chapters, I will outline Toni Morrison's and bell hooks' reconfiguration of Baldwinian love, respectively. In the manuscript's conclusion, I will trace the discourse's legacy in contemporary academic research and 21st-century cultural works – particularly those of Barry Jenkins, Raoul Peck, and Jesmyn Ward. In these final parts of the manuscript, I will use the discourse to address contemporary political debates. Potential topics include police violence and race in school curricula.

A second limitation of the project emerged from its interdisciplinarity. While I engaged several recent texts within love studies and its methodology, the project did not draw as heavily from the wealth of knowledge supplied by fields such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and political theory. When revising the project, I will extend the scope of secondary literature to flesh out Baldwin's contributions to broader debates about political love to ensure that his theories hold a noteworthy place within the growing field. Drawing upon these social scientific discourses will allow me to demonstrate the accuracy or possible inaccuracy of Baldwin's insights by today's standards. At the same time, I intend to engage in perennial debates within the storied field of the philosophy of love and the philosophy of emotions – particularly the

question of the divides between romantic, unromantic, and transcendent love. Baldwin's unique understanding of human connection prevents his vision of love from fitting into the traditional Western model of *eros* (romantic-desirous love), *philia* (friendship), and *agape* (ethical and unconditional love). Baldwin rarely distinguishes romantic love of *eros* from other forms of love when discussing love. Even more, when he speaks of ethical love, it lacks the distance that helps distinguish the *agape* of most Western philosophies of love and Baldwin's emphasis on simultaneous joy, loyalty, and sensuality experienced while in the presence of anyone who is loved or receives love shows that the distinction is not there. While I addressed this fact briefly in the dissertation's introduction, this line of inquiry requires expansion.

Similarly, I intend to extend my engagement with the numerous constructive investigations of love in Black feminist thought. Over the past three years, Black Studies has witnessed profound shifts toward the topic of love. In 2019, Saidiya Hartman published her third monograph, *Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments*, a book that employs her singular methodology of critical fabulation to explore the love practices of Black women from the early twenties century and fill in gaps within the archive (Hartman 2019). Two years later, the journal Women's Studies Quarterly released a call for papers that addressed the topic of Black love, seeking "papers that interrogate Black love as a concept and tool for forming, sustaining, and fragmenting global Black communities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (2022). And months after the passing of Black feminist scholar bell hooks in December 2021, the numerous reflections on her career drew attention to the depth and impact of her love investigations from the standpoint of a black feminist and educator.

Lastly, my project focused exclusively on Baldwin's nonfiction writings. Doing so allowed me to identify the fundamental elements of his witnessing – most of which are found in

his essays and interviews. Nevertheless, Baldwin considered himself a novelist more than an essayist – even despite the greater critical reception he received for the latter. As a result, I must consider the role fiction plays in witnessing, and I must integrate investigations of Baldwin's novels into my study. The relationship between the two forms of writing is an understudied, though intriguing, element of Baldwin's writing. By exploring that connection, we can better understand his philosophy of love, given that it was the topic to which he bore the most significant witness. To tease out the mechanics, I intend to integrate an analysis of at least one work of fiction into each of my monograph's chapters. As things stand this includes putting the novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953) in conversation with Chapter 1's study of "Down at the Cross"; the novel *Giovanni's Room* in conversation with *Notes of a Native Son* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*; the novel *Another Country* (1962) in conversation with the texts on prophecy in the current Chapter 3; and the books *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1973), and *Just Above My Head* (1979) in the chapters on the young Black feminists, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks.

4. Closing

In the preface to the 1984 edition of *Notes of a Native Son,* Baldwin looks back upon his lifelong struggles with identity and self-understanding, and, in a typical fashion, he avoids giving any dogmatic answers as to how such hindrances could have been overcome. He describes his situation as one in which the intergenerational trauma and long history of white supremacy prevented him and other Black Americans from inheriting the rights and freedom promised to all of the nation's citizens. As he saw it, society imposes sociopolitical hindrances to loving since love is critical to proper human existence. Baldwin speaks of these obstructions metaphorically,

describing them as an "accumulated rock of ages" that stood in the way of discovering his authentic, free, American self. More than a paratext for the second edition of *Notes of a Native Son*, one could read the essay as a coda for Baldwin's oeuvre, given its publication only three years before his death. The preface draws readers in with the implicit question: "How can an individual overcome sociopolitical hindrances to living a true?" It then leaves them wrestling to decipher an answer of their own. Yet throughout the piece's critique of the individualism of modern society, Baldwin suggests that the answer is simple: "You must love." This answer becomes even more apparent if we couple the preface with Baldwin's testimonial reflections on his childhood in Harlem, the witness he bore to his father's struggles, and his prophetic calls to love-based action. Baldwin is committed to reminding us that love allows an individual to overcome their particular rock of ages – though that love differs from person to person.

Ultimately, the testimonies offered in Baldwin's oeuvre convey a series of lessons on love's spiritual implications, which eventually crystallize into a philosophy of love. More than essay-length autobiographies, character studies, and political commentaries, each piece carries a theological tenor derived from their testimonial form. This dynamic imbibes the accounts with both observations about the world and universal messages about the human experience. In doing so, Baldwin insists that love is the primary means of surviving in an unjust and oppressive world. While his position as a Black American frames these insights within the context of the Black American experience, Baldwin's legacy proves that his musings on love are relevant in the lives of all people. In Baldwin's mind, a love-steered refusal to give into political biases and delusions is the only means of salvation in the wake of modernity's social divides. As he tells it in his 1960 essay "In Search of a Majority": "Love does not begin and end in the way we think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up" (Baldwin 1993c, 116).

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