

Wexner Center for the Arts
School Programs Resources

I Am Not Your Negro



BASED ON: ***Remember this House***, uncompleted book by
James Baldwin

DIRECTOR: **Raoul Peck**

"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." - James Baldwin

[Baldwin's] "prose is laser sharp. His onslaught is massive and leaves no room for response. Every sentence is an immediate cocked grenade. You pick it up, then realize that it is too late. It just blows up in your face. And yet he still managed to stay human, tender, accessible." – Director, Raoul Peck

ABOUT THE FILM:

- In 1979, James Baldwin wrote a letter to his literary agent describing his next project, *Remember This House*. The book was to be a revolutionary, personal account of the lives and successive assassinations of three of his close friends—Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. At the time of Baldwin's death in 1987, he left behind only thirty completed pages of his manuscript.
- Raoul Peck, the director, originally envisioned a narrative film and documentary, but instead created an essay about images, their origins, discourse, and Baldwin's words. The final product envisions the book Baldwin never finished, connecting the past of the Civil Rights movement to the present of #BlackLivesMatter.
- The film is primarily visual and musical. *I Am Not Your Negro* uses archival images from private and public photos; film clips, Hollywood classics, documentaries, film and TV interviews, popular TV shows, TV debates, public debates and contemporary images. It is a kaleidoscope, featuring a frantic and poetic assemblage (a medley), all in Baldwin's very own, peculiar style.
- The images punctuate the words and the music and vice versa. By revisiting the traditional "Black" iconography, with its clichés, the unspoken, the fundamental errors of interpretation and even, at times, the paternalistic prudery, *I Am Not Your Negro* redefines their meaning and impact.
- Peck changed not only the framing of his images, but their traditional use and their "editing" as well. He changed the backgrounds, detached portions, enlarged a smile, scratched out a tear. The goal was to deconstruct original intentions and thus expose a new meaning to accepted iconography, unveil buried secrets or unknown truths of the time. Familiar B&W images were colored, actual current images were transferred to B&W.

From Magnolia Pictures' Film Background



Link to the Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNUYdgIyaPM>

Movie Review in the New Yorker by Hilton Als from February 13 and 20, 2017:

Als beautifully juxtaposes passages from literary works by various authors to both Baldwin's words and Peck's film. He also brings out key themes, such as how Baldwin's imagery-laden words accompany Peck's chosen images, as well as Baldwin's push-pull in Hollywood films. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/13/capturing-james-baldwins-legacy-onscreen>

Movie Review in Vogue by Julia Felsenthal from February 3, 2017:

Includes an interview with director Raoul Peck, that goes into depth on his introduction to Baldwin and how he came to create the film.

<http://www.vogue.com/article/i-am-not-your-negro-james-baldwin-raoul-peck-interview>

ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN



- **EARLY CHILDHOOD:** James Arthur Baldwin (1924-1987) was one of the greatest and most prolific North American writers and social critics of the twentieth century. Born on August 2nd, 1924 in Harlem to a single mother, Emma Berdis Jones, whose father had been a slave. Baldwin's life would be profoundly impacted by the entrance into this life of his stepfather, the preacher, David Baldwin. The oldest of nine children, he grew up in poverty. Baldwin's tumultuous relationship with his stepfather, paired with the social conditions in his neighborhood would inspire some of his greatest works.
- **TEACHERLY INFLUENCE:** As a young child, Baldwin developed a very positive relationship with one of his white teachers, Orilla "Bill" Miller. Miller introduced James to subjects and topics which opened his eyes to the wider world around him. She took him to plays, and she fed him books about Ethiopia, Italy, and many other topics which influenced him greatly. His informal writing career began during his schooldays, where under the influence of two African American teachers—Countee Cullen and Harry Porter, Baldwin began learning French, and developed his skill and passion as a writer.
- **CAREER:** As he grew older, Baldwin continued to observe the conditions of race in America. After working for the railroad starting at age 18, Baldwin moved to Greenwich Village, where he worked as a freelance writer. He caught the attention of the well-known novelist, Richard Wright who helped him secure a grant so he could support himself as a writer. In 1948, at the age of 24, feeling a growing sense of disquietude with race relations in his homeland, Baldwin left for France, a place where he would spend a large portion of his life. Over the years that followed, Baldwin utilized his talents as a writer, speaker and activist to take action on issues that were important to him, to develop relationships with a multitude of inspiring figures, and to provide the world with insight into topics of race, civil rights, violence, sexuality, identity, class distinctions, politics, history and more both on an American and an on an international level.

- **ACTIVISM AND LITERARY OUTPUT:** Baldwin returned to the United States and there bore witness to and tenaciously recorded the fight for civil rights for African Americans. Before Baldwin's death from stomach cancer on December 1, 1987 in Saint-Paul de Vence, France, at the age of 63, he authored over twenty-five essays, novels, plays, articles, hundreds of letters, and poems. He is known for *Go Tell It On The Mountain* (1953), *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), *An Open Letter to My Sister Angela Y. Davis* (1970), *An Open Letter to Mr. Carter* (1977), as well as *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985).

From Magnolia Pictures' Curriculum Guide, Discussion Guide, and Film Background

For a more detailed biography: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/james-baldwin-about-the-author/59/>

NOVELS, ESSAYS, PLAYS, AND SHORT STORIES:

1953: *Go Tell It On The Mountain*; Knopf; a novel.

1954: *The Amen Corner*; a play (completed but not published).

1955: *Notes Of A Native Son*; Beacon; editor, Sol Stein; essays.

1956: *Giovanni's Room*; Dial; a novel.

1961: *Nobody Knows My Name*; Dial; essays.

1962: *Another Country*; Dial; a novel.

1963: *The Fire Next Time*; Dial; essays.

1964: *Blues for Mister Charlie*; Dial; a play.

Nothing Personal; Atheneum; a photographic essay: photos by Richard Avedon, text by James Baldwin.

1965: *Going To Meet The Man*; Dial; collected short stories: "The Rockpile"; "The Outing"; "The Man Child"; "Previous Condition"; "Sonny's Blues"; "This Morning This Evening So Soon"; "Come Out The Wilderness"; "Going To Meet The Man."

1968: *The Amen Corner*; Doubleday; a play.

Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone; Dial; a novel.

1969: *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism*; Barron; an essay.

1971: *A Rap On Race: James Baldwin and Margaret Mead*; Lippincott; a dialogue.

1972: *No Name In The Street*; Dial; essays.

One Day When I Was Lost: A Scenario Based on 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X'; Joseph (London, 1972); Dial (New York, 1973); a screenplay.

1973: *A Dialogue*; Lippincott; a conversation with black poet / activist Nikki Giovanni.

1974: *If Beale Street Could Talk*; Dial; a novel.

1976: *The Devil Finds Work*; Dial; essays.

Little Man Little Man: A Story of Childhood; Dial; a children's book by James Baldwin and Yoran Cazac.

1979: *Just Above My Head*; Dial; also published by Stock in French as *Harlem Quartet* (1987); a novel.

1983: *Jimmy's Blues*; St. Martin's; poems.

1985: *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*; Holt, essays.

The Price Of The Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction; St. Martin's/ Marek; essays.

2004: *Native Sons*; Random House/One World; a memoir by Sol Stein with letters, a short story and a play by James Baldwin.

2011: *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*; Vintage; editor, Randall Garrett Kenan; essays.

WORKS PERFORMED and/or TELEVISED:

1955: The Amen Corner; Howard University, Washington, D.C.
1957: Giovanni's Room; The Actor's Studio, N.Y.
1964: Blues For Mister Charlie; ANTA Theater, N.Y., by the Actor's Studio.
Blues For Mister Charlie; Central Theater of the Soviet Army, U.S.S.R.
1965: The Amen Corner; The Ethel Barrymore Theater, N.Y.
1965: Blues For Mister Charlie; performed as part of the World Theater Festival by the Royal Shakespeare Company.
The Amen Corner; performed as part of the Arts in Freedom Festival, first in the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, then throughout Europe and Israel.
1973: The Life and Times of Ray Charles; a narrative collaboration with the musician Ray Charles, performed at the Newport Jazz Festival.
1974: A Deed From The King Of Spain; American Center for Stanislavski Theater Art, N.Y.
1982: Blues For Mister Charlie; Amistad World Theater, New York.
1983: The Amen Corner; a musical version of the play, first at the Ford Theater in Washington D.C., then In New York.
1984: Go Tell It On The Mountain; American Playhouse, P.B.S. Television.

From: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/james-baldwin-bibliography/2651/>

DESCRIPTIONS OF THESE WORKS:

<http://www.gradesaver.com/author/james-baldwin>

VIDEOS about his CHILDHOOD, LATER YEARS, and SEXUALITY, with discussion of his TEXTS woven in:

<https://www.biography.com/people/james-baldwin-9196635>

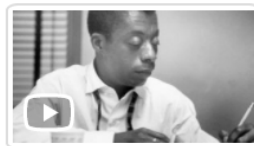
Videos



*James Baldwin -
Troubled Childhood*
(TV-14; 2:34)



*James Baldwin -
Later Years*
(TV-14; 1:46)



*James Baldwin -
Sexual Identity*
(TV-14; 3:11)



*James Baldwin -
Mini Biography*
(TV-14; 4:00)

ABOUT DIRECTOR, RAOUL PECK



- **Raoul Peck** (born 1953 at Port-au-Prince, Haiti) is a filmmaker, of both documentary and feature films, and a political activist.
- **EARLY LIFE:** When he was 8, his family moved from Haiti's capital, Leopoldville, to the newly independent Congo in Western Africa in 1961. After numerous persecutions under the Duvalier regime in Haiti, including two arrests, Peck's father, a teacher, leapt at an offer to teach in the newly de-colonized nation.
- **EDUCATION:** He studied briefly in Brooklyn before transferring to high school in France. He then studied industrial engineering and economics at Berlin University, graduating in 1982. After earning his degree Peck moved to New York City where he worked briefly as a cab driver while awaiting the results of his application to film school in Germany. He had begun making short experimental videos and films in 1982 and in 1984 became one of only 17 applicants accepted into the film program at the Berlin Film and Television Academy, from which he earned an MA in Film in 1988.
- **POLITICAL LIFE:** From March 1996 to September 1997, he was Haiti's Minister of Culture.
- **FILMOGRAPHY:** Raoul Peck's complex body of work includes feature narrative films like *The Man by the Shore* (Competition Cannes 1993), *Lumumba* (Director's Fortnight, Cannes 2000, bought and aired by HBO), *Sometimes in April* (HBO, Berlinale 2005), *Moloch Tropical* (Toronto 2009, Berlin 2010) and *Murder in Pacot* (Toronto 2014, Berlin 2015).
- **DOCUMENTARIES:** His documentaries include *Lumumba*, *Death of a Prophet* (1990), *Desounen* (1994, BBC) and *Fatal Assistance* (Berlinale, Hot Docs 2013) which was supported by the Sundance Institute and Britdoc Foundation (UK) and broadcast on major TV channels (Canal+, ARTE, etc.)

- **AWARDS:** He has been the subject of numerous retrospectives worldwide. In 2001, the Human Rights Watch Organization awarded him with the Irene Diamond Lifetime Achievement Award. Fifteen years later, his film *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) about the life of James Baldwin was nominated for an Oscar in January 2017.
- **RECENT WORK:** He recently completed shooting his latest feature film, *The Young Karl Marx*, a European coproduction, shot in Germany and Belgium (produced by Velvet Film, in coproduction with Agat Films).
- **ON BALDWIN:** He was introduced to Baldwin's work via roommates in Berlin who gave him a copy of *The Fire Next Time*. He then read all of Baldwin's works. He received the copy of the letter written by Baldwin to his literary agent, Jay Acton, informing him of his decision to write a book, *Remember this House*, on the lives and successive assassinations of three of his close friends, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. from Baldwin's sister, Gloria Karefa-Smart, who also gave him the rights to Baldwin's body of work for 10 years.

From Magnolia Pictures' Film Background – which lists his filmography, Curriculum Guide, and <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/historians-and-chronicles/historians-miscellaneous-biographies/raoul-peck>

THEMES:

- interweaving of art forms:
 - the film is based on an unfinished book, whose author was influenced by films
- word and image connections
 - the imagery of Baldwin's words juxtaposed with Peck's chosen images
- racial politics
- racial identities
- history repeats itself / juxtaposition of different time periods
- honoring someone's memory



<http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Watchf-AP-A-GA-USA-APHS346225-Dr-Martin-Luthe-/af7ab0e1d5bb409a9fdcd2181d2c6592/38/1>

***"Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced."***

-- James Baldwin, "As Much Truth As One Can Bear" in
The New York Times Book Review (14 January 1962).

VOCABULARY:

bias	prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Everyone has biases. Acting on them is not necessarily instinctive, though.
microaggression	a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.
racism	the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.
stereotype	an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group — a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.
prejudice	<p>an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude.</p> <p>Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an "in-group" such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at "out-groups."</p>
discrimination	behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

TEACHING JAMES BALDWIN and *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*:

Magnolia Pictures released both the film and great teaching resources to accompany the film:

[Curriculum Guide](#)

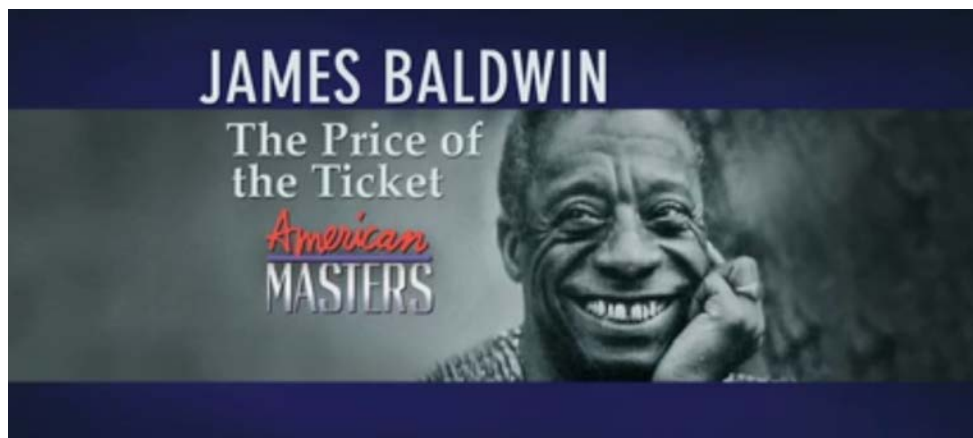
[Discussion Guide](#)

[Film Background Packet](#)

The Curriculum Guide contains information about Baldwin, Medgar, Malcolm, Martin, as well as historical context, such as on world events during Baldwin's life. In addition, it has 13 lesson plans on topics that range from Baldwin's art and words to protest and justice for all.

The Discussion Guide includes information guidelines to consider before the showing of the film, good discussion questions, and helpful links to organizations that continue to work for justice, like the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Southern Poverty Law Center (with its wealth of information), and the National Urban League.

The Film Background Packet describes Peck and credits those who worked on the film.



PBS's show, American Masters, created a feature-length 16mm documentary called, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*. Similar to IANYN, the film allows Baldwin to tell his own story without using narration: exploring what it means to be born black, impoverished, gay and gifted. Intercutting rarely-seen archival footage from over one hundred sources and nine different countries, the film melds intimate interviews and eloquent public speeches with astounding private glimpses of Baldwin. The film also includes a rich selection of original footage: scenes from Baldwin's extraordinary funeral service; explorations of Baldwin's homes on three continents, including France, Switzerland, Turkey and Harlem; plus on-camera interviews with close friends, colleagues and critics.

In addition, the site contains links for more about Baldwin, biographical and bibliographical timelines, and about Baldwin as writer, teacher, and preacher.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/james-baldwin-film-synopsis/2647/>

Based on this documentary, PBS created 4 lesson plans with clips from the show around 4 topics:

- *A Writer in the Making* - on his youth in 1930s Harlem
- *Preaching the Gospel of the Revolution* – on his return to the US from France to support the Civil Rights Movement
- *All Men are Brothers* – on his intolerance with any form of violence or racial hatred
- *Take this Hammer* – on how he tried to raise the morale of African American adolescents in San Francisco in the early 1960s

They each have support links, like discussion questions about the clips, and teaching tips.

https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/amast/?topic_id=645#.WUK6YVXyuUI

Varsity Lesson Plans

<https://www.varsitytutors.com/englishteacher/baldwin>

Aside from offering links to Harlem Renaissance materials, and posters with quotes from Baldwin, it also offers lesson plans for *The Fire Next Time*, “Sonny’s Blues,” “The Rockpile,” and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

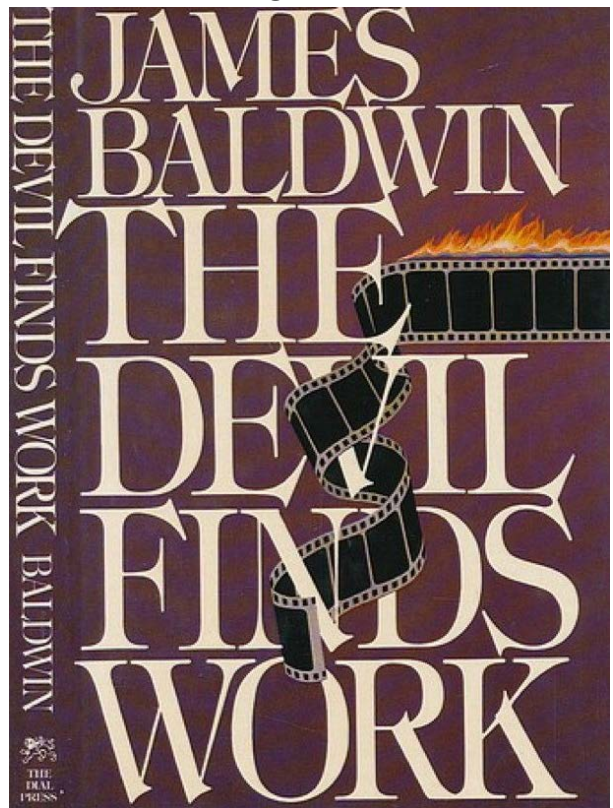
JAMES BALDWIN'S RELATED LITERATURE:

The Devil Finds Work

One of the most connected pieces of Baldwin's literature to the film. Baldwin's personal reflections on movies gathered here in a book-length essay are also a probing appraisal of American racial politics. Offering an incisive look at racism in American movies and a vision of America's self-delusions and deceptions, Baldwin challenges the underlying assumptions in such films as *In the Heat of the Night*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and *The Exorcist*. Here are our loves and hates, biases and cruelties, fears and ignorance reflected by the films that have entertained us and shaped our consciousness. And here too is the stunning prose of a writer whose passion never diminished his struggle for equality, justice, and social change.

Description from:

<https://www.amazon.com/Devil-Finds-Work-Vintage-International/dp/0307275957>



“A Talk to Teachers” in which he addresses how context, or the hidden curriculum, affects what one learns. It is grounded in his experience growing up in Harlem.

[PDF version](#)

About “Talk”: <https://www.enotes.com/topics/a-talk-to-teachers>

Zetta Elliott, childrens book author and educator, shared “A Talk to Teachers” with three teachers from different backgrounds and asked them to respond to it, in February 2017. As two work in different countries, their thoughts about nationhood and identity are illuminating.

<https://medium.com/@zettaelliott/a-talk-with-teachers-revisiting-james-baldwins-vision-for-education-e8dad7c5207e>

OTHER KEY FIGURES IN IANYN, BALDWIN’S FRIENDS:

Medgar Evers:

Civil rights activist Medgar Evers was born on July 2, 1925, in Decatur, Mississippi. In 1954, he became the first state field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi. As such, he organized voter-registration efforts, demonstrations, and economic boycotts of companies that practiced discrimination. He also worked to investigate crimes perpetrated against blacks. On June 12, 1963, Evers was assassinated outside of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. In 2017, President Barack Obama designated his home a national historic landmark.

Videos and Bio. Link:

<https://www.biography.com/people/medgar-evers-9542324>





Malcolm X:

Born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm X was a prominent black nationalist leader who served as a spokesman for the Nation of Islam during the 1950s and '60s. Due largely to his efforts, the Nation of Islam grew from a mere 400 members at the time he was released from prison in 1952 to 40,000 members by 1960. Articulate, passionate and a naturally gifted and inspirational orator, Malcolm X exhorted blacks to cast off the shackles of racism "by any means necessary," including violence. The fiery civil rights leader broke with the group shortly before his assassination on February 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan, where he had been preparing to deliver a speech. Videos and Bio. Link:

<https://www.biography.com/people/malcolm-x-9396195>

Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, King was a Baptist minister and civil-rights activist, had a seismic impact on race relations in the United States, beginning in the mid-1950s. Among his many efforts, King headed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Through his activism and inspirational speeches he played a pivotal role in ending the legal segregation of African-American citizens in the United States, as well as the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, among several other honors. He was assassinated in April 1968, and continues to be remembered as one of the most influential and inspirational African-American leaders in history. Videos and Bio. Link:



<https://www.biography.com/people/martin-luther-king-jr-9365086>

CONTEXT:

HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS and AMERICAN RACE RELATIONS:

“From Slavery to Civil Rights: A Timeline of African American History” provided by the Library of Congress.

This site provides detailed timelines on slavery, abolition, the Civil War, the Progressive Era, and more periods in between. (Unfortunately, it doesn't have a “back” button so you will have to paste it directly into a browser if you want to explore its links and return to previous sites.)

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentation/civil-rights/>



Ohio Historical Society's "African Americans in Ohio" site has links for more information on the African American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920, pictures and poems from Ohio Memory, links to several more sites on the Underground Railroad and more.

<http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/>

The Library of Congress's site for "American Memory" contains a myriad of sites on not only African Americans, like Frederick Douglass Papers at the LOC, but on the diversity of American history, from a link on Hispano Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande, to Photos of Native Americans. The links are worth a skim.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/updatedList.html>

"Asian-American Experience, Issues, and Resources" contains great sources, such as on the Experience of Vietnamese Refugee Children to medical facts.

http://www.ithaca.edu/wise/asian_american/

The Latino American Experience (LAE) explores the rich heritage and current culture of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Guatemalans, Cubans, Dominicans, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and other Hispanic cultures in the United States—an estimated 44 million individuals who have formed unique, self-sufficient, and vibrant communities across the nation.

<http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96950&p=627235>

“Teaching Tolerance” links classroom resources, film kits, and articles for “educators who care about diversity, equity and justice can find news, suggestions, conversation and support.”

www.teachingtolerance.org

HARLEM RENAISSANCE:

Spanning the 1920s to the mid-1930s, the Harlem Renaissance was a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement that kindled a new black cultural identity. Its essence was summed up by critic and teacher Alain Locke in 1926 when he declared that through art, “Negro life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self determination.”

Harlem became the center of a “spiritual coming of age” in which Locke’s “New Negro” transformed “social disillusionment to race pride.” Chiefly literary, the Renaissance included the visual arts but excluded jazz, despite its parallel emergence as a black art form. Baldwin grew up during this exciting time in Harlem. At this time, many African American writers fled to different countries, such as France, like Baldwin later would.

Description and Video Link: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harlem-renaissance>

Langston Hughes was a poet and the leading voice of the Harlem Renaissance. Though he is associated with Harlem, he lived in many places as a youth. In his teens, his family settled in Cleveland, Ohio. It was during this time that Hughes first began to write poetry, and that one of his teachers first introduced him to the poetry of Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman, both whom Hughes would later cite as primary influences. Hughes was also a regular contributor to his school's literary magazine, After high school, he lived in Mexico with his father for a year. He returned to New York, to study at Columbia University. After dropping out, he worked in a freighter that took him to Africa and Spain. He left the ship in 1924 and lived for a brief time in Paris, where he continued to develop and publish his poetry.



For more on Hughes: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/langston-hughes>
Hughes wrote "Theme for English B" (included below) which illuminates how African Americans and white Americans are an interwoven part of each others' identities.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/47880>

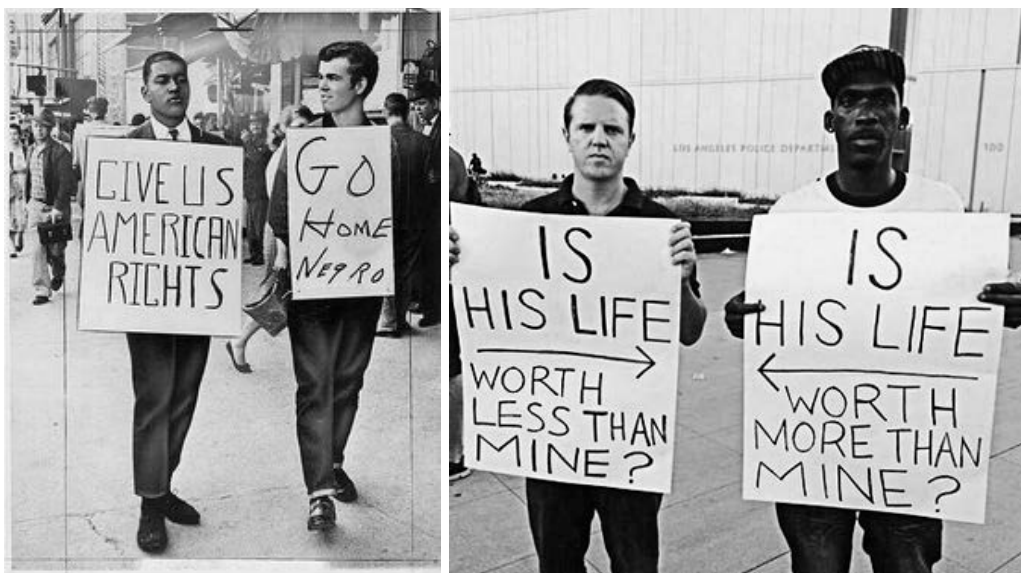
AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1950s – 1960s and TODAY:

The civil rights movement was a mass popular movement to secure for African Americans equal access to and opportunities for the basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship. Although the roots of the movement go back to the 19th century, it peaked in the 1950s and 1960s. African American men and women, along with whites, organized and led the movement at national and local levels. They pursued their goals through legal means, negotiations, petitions, and nonviolent protest demonstrations. The civil rights movement was largest social movement of the 20th century in the United States. It influenced the modern women's rights movement and the student movement of the 1960s.

The civil rights movement centered on the American South. That was where the African American population was concentrated and where racial inequality in education, economic opportunity, and the political and legal processes was most blatant. Beginning in the late 19th century, state and local governments passed segregation laws, known as Jim Crow laws; they also imposed restrictions on voting qualifications that left the black population economically and politically powerless. The movement therefore addressed primarily three areas of discrimination: education, social segregation, and voting rights.

For digestible descriptions on the Brown Decision, the Challenge to Social Segregation, Voting Rights, Black Power, and the Movement Legacy, please visit:

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/civil-rights-movement-overview/>



Left: <http://www.politicsnc.com/two-steps-forward-one-step-back/>

Right: <http://healthyblackmen.org/ptsd-black-men-under-siege/>

#BlackLivesMatter:

“Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”

Website: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>

“Every Time You Say ‘All Lives Matter’ You are Being an Accidental Racist” argues that #AllLivesMatter disregards the judicial attention given to African Americans. This HuffPost article also includes a slam poem by 14-year-old Royce Mann on white privilege.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-damiani/every-time-you-say-all-li_1_b_11004780.html

**YES, ALL LIVES
MATTER**
BUT WE'RE FOCUSED ON THE
BLACK ONES RIGHT NOW, OK?
— BECAUSE IT IS VERY —
APPARENT
THAT OUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM
DOESN'T KNOW THAT.
PLUS, IF YOU CAN'T SEE WHY WE'RE EXCLAIMING
#BLACKLIVESMATTER
YOU ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM.

Activity: Bias Quiz

As humans, we all have biases. It's important to know what they are and how they influence us so that we can control them. The following test tests several categories of biases. The first page offers

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

RACE RELATIONS NOW:



When discussing her new novel, *Small Great Things*, Jodi Picoult describes her awareness of how ingrained white privilege is, and the different shades of racism. In this powerful article, she explains how she learned to differentiate between racism and bias.

http://time.com/4544356/jodi-picoult-confronts-racism/?xid=time_socialflow_twitter&utm_campaign=time&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social

“In a Divided America, James Baldwin’s Fiery Critiques Reverberate Anew” by Lavanya Ramanathan, The Washington Post.

The journalist nicely captures a revival in Baldwin’s still all-too-relevant ideas and writing. As Kevin Young from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is quoted saying, Baldwin’s work “seems especially prophetic now.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/in-a-divided-america-james-baldwins-fiery-critiques-reverberate-anew/2017/06/30/fbbf7ee4-552a-11e7-a204-ad706461fa4f_story.html?utm_term=.6abfed5bc935

“Can Computers be Racist? The Human-Like Bias of Algorithms”

This deals with how algorithms used to track our interests are innately racist and sexist because they are programmed by people.

Link to transcript by Laura Sydell and audiofile of Ari Shapiro’s “All Tech Considered” segment: <http://www.npr.org/2016/03/14/470427605/can-computers-be-racist-the-human-like-bias-of-algorithms>

“History of Our Time: Software’s Power to Replace Humans”

Rachel Martin talks to Jaron Lanier, a Silicon Valley pioneer, who offers some solutions to the moral impact of technology on our livelihoods and our humanity. Lanier brings up how “if you’re poor, black, it affects what loans you can get, where you can end up living, what schools you might get into. There are all of these things being affected by these algorithms that we don’t get to see.”

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/13/532724722/history-of-our-time-softwares-power-to-replace-humans>



At this year's Whitney Biennial, Dana Schutz exhibited a painting of Emmett Till's body called *Open Casket* from 2016, to much controversy.

"White Artist's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Draws Protests" explains the controversy, and includes the voice of the curators.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/arts/design/painting-of-emmett-till-at-whitney-biennial-draws-protests.html?mcubz=0>

"Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar Over Her Emmett Till Painting at the Whitney Biennial" <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-responds-to-the-uproar-over-her-emmett-till-painting-900674>

The NY Times also raises the question of censorship in "Should Art that Infuriates be Removed?" in relation to the painting:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/arts/design/emmett-till-whitney-biennial-schutz.html?mcubz=0> (source of photo above)

LITERARY CONNECTIONS:

The Dream Bearer **Walter Dean Myers**

This 2003 novel deftly draws a compassionate portrait of a boy's odyssey of self-discovery and the acceptance and empathy for others he learns along the way in modern day Harlem.

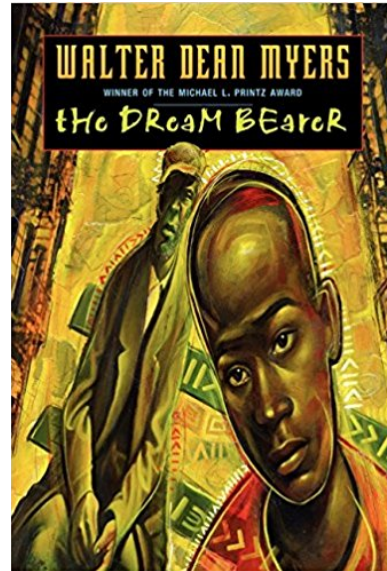


image: <https://www.amazon.com/Dream-Bearer-Walter-Dean-Myers/dp/0064472892>

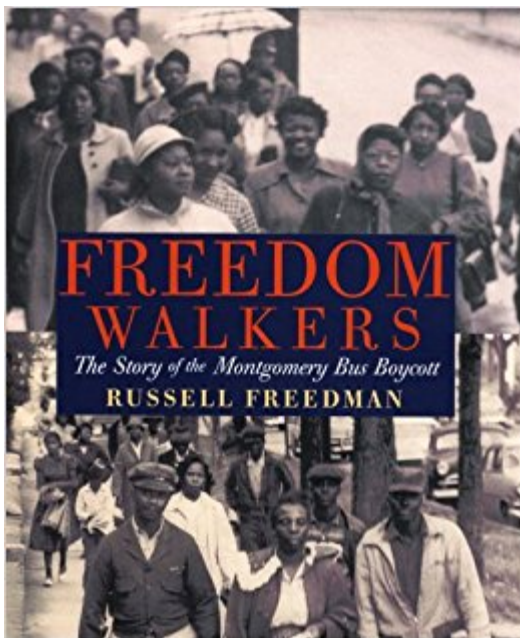


image: <https://www.amazon.com/Freedom-Walkers-Montgomery-Boycott-Grades/dp/0823421953>

Freedom Walkers **Russell Freedman**

Freedman draws on personal stories and historical accounts to provide a dramatic overview of how the 381-day resistance to segregated buses spearheaded the civil rights movement (2009).

The Glory Field
Walter Dean Myers

This is the story of one family whose history saw its first ancestor captured, shackled, and brought to this country from Africa. It is a story of pride, determination, struggle, and love. And of the piece of the land that holds them together throughout it all (1994).

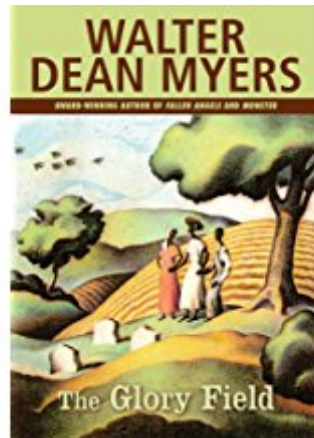


image: https://www.amazon.com/Glory-Field-Walter-Dean-Myers/dp/054505575X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1498591172&sr=1-1&keywords=the+glory+field

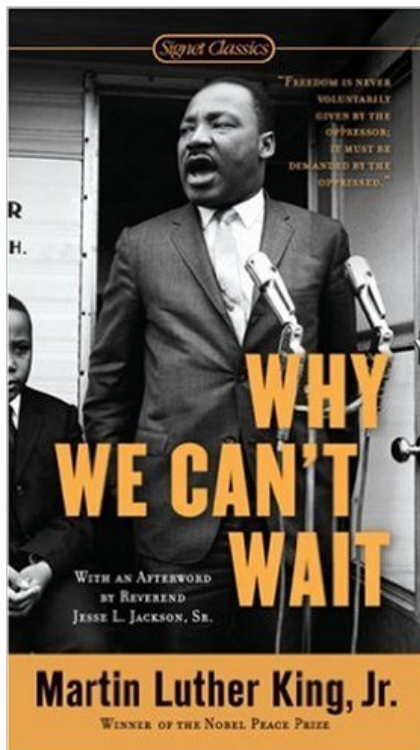


image: http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/160939.Why_We_Can_t_Wait

Why We Can't Wait
Martin Luther King, Jr.

This is a book about the nonviolent movement against racial segregation in the United States, and specifically the 1963 Birmingham campaign. It describes 1963 as a landmark year in the Civil Rights Movement.

Unless noted, descriptions from <http://www.ccsch.us/Downloads/Novel-Novel%20Guides%20Borrow%20List%20Update7%202015%202.pdf>

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

Art Forms (film, literature) and Life

- Can you think of a character in a movie or popular book that looks like, lives like, and/or acts like you or your family? If so, how accurate are they? How are they different or similar to your own life? If not, why might this be? How does this make you feel?
- How is your perception of the world influenced by what you see represented on television, in music, or in movies?

Word and Image Connections

- Since the advent of books, illustrators have not been the same people as the writers. What are some factors to consider when illustrating someone else's words? What if the story does not have a narrative arc? To what extent could the images stand alone and apart from the text? If you were to direct a movie based on a play or story you wrote, how would you propose the layout and progression of images?
- Post-Viewing: How did Baldwin's words and Peck's choice of images blend on screen? smoothly? Did any pairings stand out? If so, why?

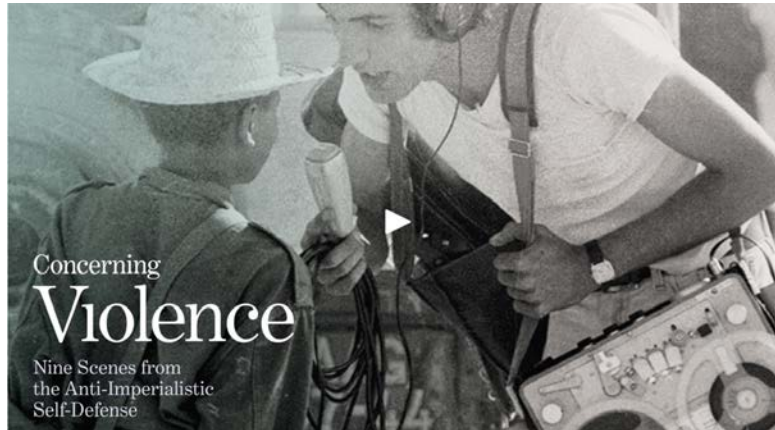
Racial Politics

- What is the legacy of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow in our culture? What are some ways you see these historical institutions directly affect contemporary society?
- How can one discuss racism in a group of people from mixed races, if everyone has a different perspective and different ends? Does one discuss incidences of it, its causes, how practices and views can change?
- Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Empathy, which goes beyond sympathy, has been described as the characteristic that makes us most human and mature. Is empathy the end goal of racism? Is it ever enough?
- According to Baldwin, racism in the United States began as a form of scape-goating: "white" people have created
- In her article on white privilege (link above), Jodi Picoult says that "racism is systemic and institutional, but it is both perpetuated and dismantled in individual acts." If racism is institutional and systematic, will it ever be possible to erode it? Do individual acts balance out the microaggressions?
- What kinds of violence are there? What role does violence play in American history? In world history? When is violence perceived as acceptable? When is it not? What kinds of war exist? Is war ever justified?

Honoring Someone's Memory

- How do you keep alive the memory and legacy of someone deceased? How can you do her/him justice if she/he is no longer around to legitimize or contradict you?

SIMILAR FILM:



Concerning Violence, film by Göran Hugo Olsson from 2017.

Concerning Violence is both an archive-driven documentary covering the most daring moments in the struggle for liberation in the Third World, as well as an exploration into the mechanisms of decolonization through text from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's landmark book, written over 50 years ago, is still a major tool for understanding and illuminating the neocolonialism happening today, as well as the violence and reactions against it.

<https://dogwoof.com/concerningviolence> includes a trailer, information about the filmmaker, and reviews.

POETRY:

Theme for English B Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

*Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you.
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me—
although you're older—and white—
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

The Poetry Foundation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/47880>

Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B" from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by The Estate of Langston Hughes. Reprinted with the permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.

Source: *Selected Poems* (Vintage Books, 1959)

The Congo: A Study of the Negro Race

Vachel Lindsay

I. THEIR BASIC SAVAGERY

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, BOOM,
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.
THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision.
I could not turn from their revel in derision.
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
Then along that riverbank
A thousand miles
Tattooed cannibals danced in files;
Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong.
And "BLOOD" screamed the whistles and the fifes of the warriors,
"BLOOD" screamed the skull-faced, lean witch-doctors,
"Whirl ye the deadly voo-doo rattle,
Harry the uplands,
Steal all the cattle,
Rattle-rattle, rattle-rattle,
Bing.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM,"
A roaring, epic, rag-time tune
From the mouth of the Congo
To the Mountains of the Moon.
Death is an Elephant,
Torch-eyed and horrible,
Foam-flanked and terrible.
BOOM, steal the pygmies,
BOOM, kill the Arabs,
BOOM, kill the white men,
Hoo, Hoo, Hoo.
Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell.
Listen to the creepy proclamation,

Blown through the lairs of the forest-nation,
Blown past the white-ants' hill of clay,
Blown past the marsh where the butterflies play: —
"Be careful what you do,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you."

II. THEIR IRREPRESSIBLE HIGH SPIRITS
Wild crap-shooters with a whoop and a call
Danced the juba in their gambling-hall
And laughed fit to kill, and shook the town,
And guyed the policemen and laughed them down
With a boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
A negro fairyland swung into view,
A minstrel river
Where dreams come true.
The ebony palace soared on high
Through the blossoming trees to the evening sky.
The inlaid porches and casements shone
With gold and ivory and elephant-bone.
And the black crowd laughed till their sides were sore
At the baboon butler in the agate door,
And the well-known tunes of the parrot band
That trilled on the bushes of that magic land.

A troupe of skull-faced witch-men came
Through the agate doorway in suits of flame,
Yea, long-tailed coats with a gold-leaf crust
And hats that were covered with diamond-dust.
And the crowd in the court gave a whoop and a call
And danced the juba from wall to wall.
But the witch-men suddenly stilled the throng
With a stern cold glare, and a stern old song: —
"Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you." ...
Just then from the doorway, as fat as shot,
Came the cake-walk princes in their long red coats,
Canes with a brilliant lacquer shine,
And tall silk hats that were red as wine.
And they pranced with their butterfly partners there,
Coal-black maidens with pearls in their hair,

Knee-skirts trimmed with the jassamine sweet,
And bells on their ankles and little black-feet.
And the couples railed at the chant and the frown
Of the witch-men lean, and laughed them down.
(O rare was the revel, and well worth while
That made those glowering witch-men smile.)

The cake-walk royalty then began
To walk for a cake that was tall as a man
To the tune of "Boomlay, boomlay, BOOM,"
While the witch-men laughed, with a sinister air,
And sang with the scalawags prancing there: —
"Walk with care, walk with care,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.
Beware, beware, walk with care,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay,
BOOM."
Oh rare was the revel, and well worth while
That made those glowering witch-men smile.

III. THE HOPE OF THEIR RELIGION

A good old negro in the slums of the town
Preached at a sister for her velvet gown.
Howled at a brother for his low-down ways,
His prowling, guzzling, sneak-thief days.
Beat on the Bible till he wore it out
Starting the jubilee revival shout.
And some had visions, as they stood on chairs,
And sang of Jacob, and the golden stairs,
And they all repented, a thousand strong
From their stupor and savagery and sin and wrong
And slammed with their hymn books till they shook the room
With "glory, glory, glory,"
And "Boom, boom, BOOM."
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
And the gray sky opened like a new-rent veil
And showed the Apostles with their coats of mail.
In bright white steel they were seated round
And their fire-eyes watched where the Congo wound.

And the twelve Apostles, from their thrones on high
Thrilled all the forest with their heavenly cry: —
“Mumbo-Jumbo will die in the jungle;
Never again will he hoo-doo you,
Never again will he hoo-doo you.”

Then along that river, a thousand miles
The vine-snared trees fell down in files.
Pioneer angels cleared the way
For a Congo paradise, for babes at play,
For sacred capitals, for temples clean.
Gone were the skull-faced witch-men lean.
There, where the wild ghost-gods had wailed
A million boats of the angels sailed
With oars of silver, and prows of blue
And silken pennants that the sun shone through.
'Twas a land transfigured, 'twas a new creation.
Oh, a singing wind swept the negro nation
And on through the backwoods clearing flew: —
“Mumbo-Jumbo is dead in the jungle.
Never again will he hoo-doo you.
Never again will he hoo-doo you.

Redeemed were the forests, the beasts and the men,
And only the vulture dared again
By the far, lone mountains of the moon
To cry, in the silence, the Congo tune:—
“Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
“Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.
Mumbo ... Jumbo ... will ... hoo-doo ... you.”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/47374>

Revolt

Martha Augmon

A strong voice from decades past, presently shouting for a revolt of peace...

Yet, revolt is a turbulent time with violent change, peace seeming an impossibility.

Black, strong voice of love urging for change...

Peaceful revolt?

But, revolt is a quick shifting of ideals and circumstances causing inevitable damage experienced from shifting ideas and dividing up sides.

Revolt... Sadly must I admit, the voice I have known most of my life may not have understood?

Rather than encourage peace, he should have pushed for TRUE REVOLT and allow all the

violence to surge out quickly killing off the hatred that even now slowly simmers...

because, passive revolt allows hatred to survive

<http://www.blackpoems.net/?p=66>

alternate names for black boys

Danez Smith

1. smoke above the burning bush
2. archnemesis of summer night
3. first son of soil
4. coal awaiting spark & wind
5. guilty until proven dead
6. oil heavy starlight
7. monster until proven ghost
8. gone
9. phoenix who forgets to un-ash
10. going, going, gone
11. gods of shovels & black veils
12. what once passed for kindling
13. fireworks at dawn
14. brilliant, shadow hues coral
15. (I thought to leave this blank
but who am I to name us nothing?)
16. prayer who learned to bite & sprint
17. a mother's joy & clutched breath

Source: *Poetry* (March 2014)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56843/alternate-names-for-black-boys>

Excerpts from “summer, somewhere”
Danez Smith

somewhere, a sun. below, boys brown
as rye play the dozens & ball, jump

in the air & stay there. boys become new
moons, gum-dark on all sides, beg bruise

-blue water to fly, at least tide, at least
spit back a father or two. I won't get started.

history is what it is. it knows what it did.
bad dog. bad blood. bad day to be a boy

color of a July well spent. but here, not earth
not heaven, boys can't recall their white shirt

turned a ruby gown. here, there is no language
for *officer* or *law*, no color to call *white*.

if snow fell, it'd fall black. please, don't call
us dead, call us alive someplace better.

we say our own names when we pray.
we go out for sweets & come back.

•

this is how we are born: come morning
after we cypher/feast/hoop, we dig

a new boy from the ground, take
him out his treebox, shake worms

from his braids. sometimes they'll sing
a trapgod hymn (what a first breath!)

sometimes it's they eyes who lead
scanning for bonefleshed men in blue.

we say *congrats, you're a boy again!*
we give him a durag, a bowl, a second chance.

we send him off to wander for a day
or ever, let him pick his new name.

that boy was Trayvon, now called *RainKing*.
that man Sean named himself *I do, I do*.

O, the imagination of a new reborn boy
but most of us settle on *alive*.

•

sometimes a boy is born
right out the sky, dropped from

a bridge between starshine & clay.
one boy showed up pulled behind

a truck, a parade for himself
& his wet red gown. years ago

we plucked brothers from branches
unpeeled their naps from bark.

sometimes a boy walks into his room
then walks out into his new world

still clutching wicked metals. some boys
waded here through their own blood.

does it matter how he got here if we're all here
to dance? grab a boy, spin him around.

if he asks for a kiss, kiss him.
if he asks where he is, say *gone*.

•

no need for geography
now that we're safe everywhere.

point to whatever you please
& call it church, home, or sweet love.

paradise is a world where everything
is a sanctuary & nothing is a gun.

here, if it grows it knows its place
in history. yesterday, a poplar

told me of old forest
heavy with fruits I'd call uncle

bursting red pulp & set afire,
harvest of dark wind chimes.

after I fell from its limb
it kissed sap into my wound.

do you know what it's like to live
someplace that loves you back?

•

here, everybody wanna be black & is.
look — the forest is a flock of boys

who never got to grow up, blooming
into forever, afros like maple crowns

reaching sap-slow toward sky. watch
Forest run in the rain, branches

melting into paper-soft curls, duck
under the mountain for shelter. watch

the mountain reveal itself a boy.
watch Mountain & Forest playing

in the rain, watch the rain melt everything
into a boy with brown eyes & wet naps —

the lake turns into a boy in the rain
the swamp — a boy in the rain

the fields of lavender — brothers
dancing between the storm.

•

if you press your ear to the dirt
you can hear it hum, not like it's filled

with beetles & other low gods
but like a mouth rot with gospel

& other glories. listen to the dirt
crescendo a boy back.

come. celebrate. this
is everyday. every day

holy. everyday high
holiday. everyday new

year. every year, days get longer.
time clogged with boys. the boys

O the boys. they still come
in droves. the old world

keeps choking them. our new one
can't stop spitting them out.

•

ask the mountain-boy to put you on
his shoulders if you want to see

the old world, ask him for some lean
-in & you'll be home. step off him

& walk around your block.
grow wings & fly above your city.

all the guns fire toward heaven.
warning shots mince your feathers.

fall back to the metal-less side
of the mountain, cry if you need to.

that world of laws rendered us into dark
matter. we asked for nothing but our names

in a mouth we've known
for decades. some were blessed

to know the mouth.
our decades betrayed us.

•

there, I drowned, back before, once.
there, I knew how to swim but couldn't.

there, men stood by shore & watched me blue.
there, I was a dead fish, the river's prince.

there, I had a face & then I didn't.
there, my mother cried over me

but I wasn't there. I was here, by my own
water, singing a song I learned somewhere

south of somewhere worse. that was when
direction mattered. now, everywhere

I am is the center of everything.
I must be the lord of something.

what was I before? a boy? a son?
a warning? a myth? I whistled

now I'm the God of whistling.

I built my Olympia downstream.

•

you are not welcome here. trust
the trip will kill you. go home.

we earned this paradise
by a death we didn't deserve.

I am sure there are other heres.
a somewhere for every kind

of somebody, a heaven of brown
girls braiding on golden stoops

but here —
how could I ever explain to you —

someone prayed we'd rest in peace
& here we are

in peace whole all summer

Source: *Poetry* (January 2016)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/58645/from-summer-somewhere>

-Includes a link to hear Danez Smith read it aloud, next to the title.

“summer, somewhere” influenced by:

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

Lucille Clifton, “won't you celebrate with me” from *Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton*.
Copyright © 1991 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions
Company, Inc., on behalf of BOA Editions, Ltd., boaeditions.org.
<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/12-poems-read-black-history-month>

The African Picnic
Elizabeth Alexander

World Cup finals, France v. Brasil.
We gather in Gideon's yard and grill.
The TV sits in the bright sunshine.
We want Brasil but Brasil won't win.
Aden waves a desultory green and yellow flag.
From the East to the West to the West to the East
we scatter and settle and scatter some more.
Through the window, Mamma watches from the cool indoors.
Jonah scarfs meat off of everybody's plate,
kicks a basketball long and hollers, "goal,"
then roars like the mighty lion he is.
Baby is a pasha surrounded by pillows
and a bevy of Horn of Africa girls
who coo like lovers, pronounce his wonders,
oil and massage him, brush his hair.
My African family is having a picnic, here in the USA.
Who is here and who is not?
When will the phone ring from far away?
Who in a few days will say good-bye?
Who will arrive with a package from home?
Who will send presents in other people's luggage
and envelopes of money in other people's pockets?
Other people's children have become our children
here at the African picnic.
In a parking lot, in a taxi-cab,
in a winter coat, in an airport queue,
at the INS, on the telephone,
on the cross-town bus, on a South Side street,
in a brand-new car, in a djellaba,
with a cardboard box, with a Samsonite,
with an airmail post, with a bag of spice,
at the African picnic people come and go.
The mailman sees us say good-bye and waves
with us, good-bye, good-bye, as we throw popcorn,
ululate, ten or twelve suitcases stuffed in the car.
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye—
The front door shut. The driveway bare.
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye.
The jet alights into the night,
a huge, metal machine in flight,
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye.

At the African picnic, people come and go
and say good-bye.

From *Crave Radiance: New and Selected Poems 1990-2010*. Copyright © 2010 by Elizabeth Alexander. Used by permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. for Graywolf

Press, www.graywolfpress.org.

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/african-picnic>

What If I Am A Black Woman?

Unknown Poet

Is it a disease? Well, if it is, I sure hope its catching
Because they need to pour it into a bottle,
label it, and sprinkle it All over the people
men and women who Ever loved or cried,
worked or died For any one of us.

So...What if I am a Black woman?
Is it a crime? Arrest me!
Because I'm strong, but I'm gentle,
I'm smart, but I'm learning,
I'm loving, but I'm hateful.
And I like to work because
I like to eat and feed and clothe
and house Me, mine
and yours and everybody's,
Like I've been doing for the past 300 years.

What if I am a Black woman?
Is it insane? Committ me!!
Because I want Happiness,not tears;
Truths not lies; Pleasure not pain;
Sunshine not rain; A man not a child!

What if I am a Black woman? Is it a sin?
Pray for me! And pray for you too,
If you don't like women of color
because we are... Midnight Black,
Chestnut Brown, Honey Bronzed,
Chocolate Covered, Cocoa Dipped,
Big Lipped, Big Breasted, and BEAUTIFUL
all at the same time!

So what if I am a Black Woman?
Does it bother you that much because
I want a man who wants me...
Loves me and trusts me, and respects me
And gives me everything because
I give him everything back, PLUS!!

What if I am a Black woman? I've got rights,
same as you! I have worked for them,
died for them, played and laid for them,
On every plantation from Alabama to Boston and Back!

What if I am a Black woman?
I love me, and I want you to love me too,
But I am as I've always been,
Near you, close to you, beside you,
strong giving, loving,

For over 300 years, Your Black woman...Love me!

<http://www.tributetoblackwomen.com/poems/whatif.htm>

The Black Woman's Tears Swap Meet Is Open Every Day
Douglas Kearney

some black women are my friends & their tears seem the hems
of blue dresses. I ball un-ball
my pocketed palms
& think on stockings, bells.

among my students sometimes number black women—
I wish their tears were rungs; such desire may too be grease, tho.

my mother's youngest sister's torn calendar tears,
Mondays, Marches, 29ths, '91s & '83s
till wicker bins choke, shredder hacks.

a couple of tears, middle sister pinches at her eye,
a black woman's spyglass. she peers
through the wide between her &.

my older cousins, black women, their tears are:
(a) fresh batteries in broken clocks
(b) ruined coin souvenirs
(c) wheatbread heels jim crowed in fridges
(d) what pitted the yellow linoleum thus

the black mother of the black woman who married me,
her tears're sunk ships:
coral polyps load the lode & awful hopeful at it.

...!!!] then I'm at last quiet.
my daughter, black girl, rattles,
at me, her scabbard of tears.

my younger cousins, black women, their tears are:
(a) pill bottles
(b) in pill bottles
(c) lids you press down, then turn to loose
(d) anything bottled & near bathroom mirrors

likely my father's oldest sister, black woman,
kept her tears where they'd pass for shotgun:
slant shade the jamb threw as simmering mask.

my father's other sister, her tears stop his mouth,
or they're wood doves, cote'd in his chestnut mind?

grandmother, my black father's mother? gone.
her tears were empty chairs: pine
among pine-ware.

white bowl though the rice there was tears of my great aunt,
black woman.

these days, my grandmother, black woman who mothered my mother, mislays her tears—she always finds them in the, finds them in, finds them—.

the black woman who married me,
her tears inside her out like black church stockings / runs.

& my black mother dead.

Copyright © 2016 by Douglas Kearney. Originally published in Poem-a-Day on July 25, 2016, by the Academy of American Poets.

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/black-womans-tears-swap-meet-open-every-day>

Incendiary Art
Patricia Smith

The city's streets are densely shelved with rows
of salt and packaged hair. Intent on air,
the funk of crave and function comes to blows

with any smell that isn't oil—the blare
of storefront chicken settles on the skin
and mango spritzing drips from razored hair.

The corner chefs cube pork, decide again
on cayenne, fry in grease that's glopped with dust.
The sizzle of the feast adds to the din

of children, strutting slant, their wanderlust
and cussing, plus the loud and tactless hiss
of dogged hustlers bellowing past gusts

of peppered breeze, that fatty, fragrant bliss
in skillets. All our rampant hunger tricks
us into thinking we can dare dismiss

the thing men do to boulevards, the wicks
their bodies be. A city, strapped for art,
delights in torching them—at first for kicks,

to waltz to whirling sparks, but soon those hearts
thud thinner, whittled by the chomp of heat.
Outlined in chalk, men blacken, curl apart.

Their blindly rising fume is bittersweet,
although reversals in the air could fool
us into thinking they weren't meant as meat.

Our sons don't burn their cities as a rule,
born, as they are, up to their necks in fuel.

Copyright © 2016 by Patricia Smith. Originally published in Poem-a-Day on July 21,
2016, by the Academy of American Poets.

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/incendiary-art>