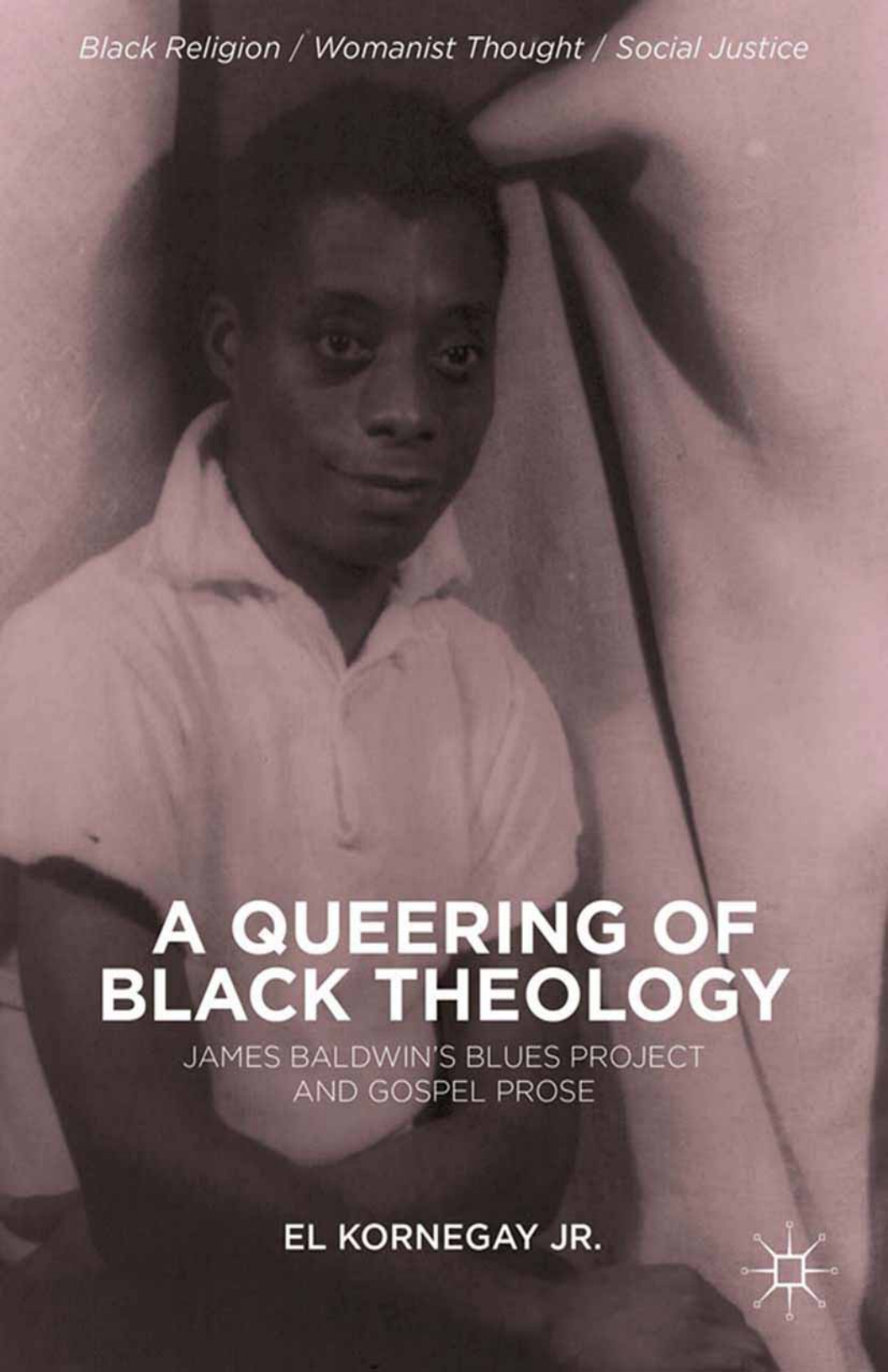
Black Religion / Womanist Thought / Social Justice



A QUEERING OF BLACK THEOLOGY

JAMES BALDWIN'S BLUES PROJECT AND GOSPEL PROSE

EL KORNEGAY JR.

Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice
Series Editors Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas
Published by Palgrave Macmillan

"How Long this Road": Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln
Edited by Alton B. Pollard, III and Love Henry Whelchel, Jr.

African American Humanist Principles: Living and Thinking Like the Children of Nimrod
By Anthony B. Pinn

White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity
By James W. Perkinson

The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God
By Sylvester Johnson

Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic
Edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins

Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church
By Jeffery L. Tribble, Sr.

Shamanism, Racism, and Hip Hop Culture: Essays on White Supremacy and Black Subversion
By James W. Perkinson

Women, Ethics, and Inequality in U.S. Healthcare: "To Count Among the Living"
By Aana Marie Vigen

Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue: Inside Looking Out, Outside Looking In
By Anthony G. Reddie

Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil
By Emilie M. Townes

Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty
By Jennifer Harvey

The Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Desmond Mpilo Tutu
By Johnny B. Hill

Conceptions of God, Freedom, and Ethics in African American and Jewish Theology
By Kurt Buhring

Black Theology and Pedagogy
By Noel Leo Erskine

The Origins of Black Humanism in America: Reverend Ethelred Brown and the Unitarian Church
By Juan M. Floyd-Thomas

Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World
By James A. Noel

Bible Witness in Black Churches
By Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher

Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America
By Renee K. Harrison

Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Wells's Interrogation of American Terror
By Angela D. Sims

Representations of Homosexuality: Black Liberation Theology and Cultural Criticism
By Roger A. Sneed

The Tragic Vision of African American Religion
By Matthew V. Johnson

Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies
Edited by Bernadette J. Brooten with the editorial assistance of Jacqueline L. Hazelton

Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics
By Melanie Harris

Racism and the Image of God
By Karen Teel

Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology
By Phillis Isabella Sheppard

Black Men Worshipping: Intersecting Anxieties of Race, Gender, and Christian Embodiment
By Stacy C. Boyd

Womanism Against Socially-Constructed Matriarchal Images: A Theoretical Model Towards A Therapeutic Goal
By MarKeva Gwendolyn Hill

Indigenous Black Theology: Toward an African-Centered Theology of the African-American Religious
By Jawanza Eric Clark

Black Bodies and the Black Church: A Blues Slant
By Kelly Brown Douglas

A Theological Account of Nat Turner: Christianity, Violence, and Theology
By Karl Lampley

African American Female Mysticism: Nineteenth-Century Religious Activism
By Joy R. Bostic

A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose
By EL Kornegay, Jr.

A Queering of Black Theology

James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose

EL Kornegay, Jr.

palgrave
macmillan

A QUEERING OF BLACK THEOLOGY

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-37906-1

First published in 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-47855-2 ISBN 978-1-137-37647-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137376473

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This project is a testament of hope reflecting my deep commitment to ushering forth a discursive that takes seriously what I have learned from James Baldwin. I am grateful to James Baldwin's bold representations of human love, acceptance, and fearlessness that helped to pave the way for me being able to think more broadly and critically about black masculinity and black theology. I could have never reconsidered who I am without his revolutionary literary genius alongside the intentional presence of bodies queered by race, gender, and sexuality—all the blues presentations with the Chicago Theological Seminary community and the community of scholars who find rally points within my scholarship. All of them have helped me make a way of learning, speaking, acting, and writing that is intended to be accountable to them all. Last, but not least I am thankful for the many acts of grace both large and small by individuals and institutions that absorbed my spurts of growth and left the door open, allowing this creative process to flow with complete candor.

I want to thank my long-time advisor, Dr. Laurel S. Schneider, for her guidance and support down through the years. From the beginning, Dr. Schneider believed in me and I credit her with challenging me to rethink what it means to do what is a necessary critical work at the intersections of race, sex, sexuality, gender, religion, theology, and culture in an era where dependency on those things is shifting even as I write. Dr. Schneider's course entitled "Queer Theories and Theologies" is where I first began to think about queerness

at the intersection of all things black and imagining queer theoretical applications to the associated issues arising in black theology, black thought, and the black church. I greatly appreciate her great mind, big spirit, and motherly fearlessness: her taking me to "woodshed" from time to time is what got me here. Dr. Schneider is my theological mother.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Theodore W. Jennings for his mentorship and much more. Dr. Jennings is responsible for sending me to a luncheon where I first heard Dr. James H. Cone identifies James Baldwin as the one who "taught" him how to write. So, I also appreciate Dr. James H. Cone's appreciation for James Baldwin and his willingness to share his thoughts with me concerning Baldwin's importance to religious and theological discourse. I am grateful for the profound assistance of Dr. Ken Stone and support of Dr. JoAnne Terrell as well. Dr. Stone's linguistc affinities coupled with Dr. Terrell's black Womanist thought are both critical to shaping my work.

I thank my dear friend the Rev. Osagyefu Uhuru Sekou for his endearing support. Our constant conversations and love of Baldwin have produced clarity and bore much good fruit over the years. I want to thank Monica Miller, Elonda Clay, Meredith Frances Coleman-Tobias, Benjamin Reynolds, the much beloved Rev. S. LaTrell Harrison, Maria Brown, and the many friends who have loved and encouraged me along the way. I want to give a special thanks to the incomparable Darnell L. Moore and the Boston crew—Quincy Roberts and Corey Yarbrough: our conversations in Cambridge, MA, were transforming. Finally, I thank Amy Caldwell, Mark D. Jordan, and my Harvard Divinity Seminar cohort for assisting me with claiming and naming my work and person as a queer theorist.

I thank my family (Marty, Myra, Maria and Jason) for all of their support. I offer a special thanks to my children Eddie Kornegay III, Taylor Kornegay, Anthony Jones and Taylar Jones for their sacrifice, love, and support. Also

I give a special thanks to my wife Vada for her love and support. Finally, I give all glory, praise, and honor to God. It is God's call that I follow and God's will that I do. I know, now more than ever that there is nothing that God cannot do and there is nothing that I cannot do through Christ who strengthens me.

Introduction

This book, rightly titled *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose*, is a seminal work, which uses the selected novels and essays of James Baldwin to develop a queering methodology for constructing a black theology of liberation. It is a work meant to engage the very important question in the new millennium of *how do we reconcile sexualities with faith(s)* and to demystify and decenter queer theory from an overarching queer subjectivity signifying homosexuality, which makes its use nearly impossible in black theology due to its heterosexist and homophobic underpinnings. My interpretation of queer theory, queering, and use of James Baldwin as a primary interlocutor is also a first step in the development of my book as a model of a postmodern "third wave" theology that is conversant with liberation and concerned with social inequities, such as race, gender, and sexuality. I envision this work to be a type queering that seeks to build upon black theological and womanist models of God, which creates a relevant sociosexual accounting not readily apparent within most black religious traditions and experiences. The goal is to assist in the movement of the black socioreligious theological consciousness toward a postcivil rights, postliberation, postmodern discursive that fairly supports faith and flourishing for the multiple representations of gendered and sexualized bodies within the black church and community.

I attempt to move beyond the various criticisms and redactions of black liberation theology that reify heteropatriarchal privileging and homophobic defensiveness. This book moves toward a pragmatic religiosity, queering if you will, which

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

challenges the use of traditional sources and norms long held by the black church and found in black liberation theological discourse that marginalize bodies othered by race, sex, gender and class.

Finally, I seek to answer the question *how do we reconcile sexualities with faith(s)* by placing sex in the place where rage produces theological violence understood as sexism and homophobia, and inform how we talk about sexuality in relation to faith(s), God, the gospel, and liberation. Therefore *A Queering of Black Theology* is a generational (black) theological project that is the next (logical) evolution beyond a black theology of liberation and black womanist theology.

As such, it is crucial to articulate the importance of James Baldwin's "style" in the development of James Cone's seminal voice shaping black liberation theology. However, Baldwin is marginalized, not necessarily by Cone, or merely for homosexuality or his perceived abandonment of Christianity, but for his resistance to hegemonic forms of black masculinity, his emphasis on locating the revelation of divine love in the sensual and sexual encounters experienced by black bodies, and the social, political, and religious dilemmas created when his witness is given significance.

James H. Cone says without hesitation that James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., form his "trinity." According to Cone, James Baldwin brings the voices of Martin and Malcolm, "into one person." Cone goes on to say that as a writer Baldwin brought together the deep concern for blackness of Malcolm X and the emphasis for love of Martin Luther King, Jr, with his own. Because of Cone's deep concern for blackness and love of Christ, it is James Baldwin he credits as the one who "taught" him how to write about his love for both—blackness and Christ—without compromising either. When I stop to consider the depth of that revelation, I am overcome by the profundity of what is implied. Here the quintessential voice of black liberation theology identifies an ex-preacher, bohemian, hedonist—*a queer black male*—as

the one who "taught" him how to write and who was quite possibly the theological muse who inspired what he writes about!

My primary concern regarding Cone's position was to attempt to understand how he used Baldwin to inform his work. I soon found out that a one-to-one correlative comparison between James Baldwin and Dr. James H. Cone was an impossible task, not because of the great differences between disciplines, but due to the paucity of the use of Baldwin in Cone's corpus. I found that Cone's use of Baldwin centers on style, which I identify here as gospel prose. James H. Cone uses the trope of rage found in Baldwin's *Fire Next Time* to shape his narrative of black liberation. However, the limitations of rage leave much of what Baldwin means by his use of the term itself in relation to race, sexuality, religion, and God mischaracterized, misunderstood, and in most cases not used at all. More than anything else, Baldwin's use of the gospel and its importance in shaping his corpus is left horribly underexamined in relation to its capacity as a source for doing theology.

Gospel prose is a way of describing James Baldwin's literary style: the way in which he crafts a unique literary genre built around the way in which black people engage the gospel. James Baldwin contextualizes religious speak and the gospel as a part of the everyday language of the black community. To describe works like *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Just Above My Head* as mere novels and overall weaving of religious vernacular throughout his corpus as rage against an angry God limits Baldwin's literary genius and misses the theodical messaging he uses to engage issues concerning the church, the community, religion, sexuality, and human flourishing. This is what I mean when I use the term: gospel prose.

In this sense, gospel prose is the language (vernacular) of black religion and black Christianity deployed by Baldwin as a rhetorical trope that he uses to interrogate—signify on—the

gap between faith and sexuality and race and religion, which allows for a different outcome of Baldwin's writing: the reconciliation of sexuality with faith. This relieves Baldwin from being reduced to an exilic sojourner in the world searching for a loving God or fighting against a God bent on condemning him for his sexuality: he is a prophet, in the truest sense of the word, trying to bring us all back to God.

Baldwin's invisibility as a key source in the production of black theology creates a number of serious problems, both in terms of black theology's own articulation of its sources, and in terms of the theological and ethical implications that his invisibility imposes on black bodies. First, Baldwin's erasure limits how black theologians talk about sex. The erasure of black LGBTQI and sexualities in general and the erasure of Baldwin's homosexuality in particular distort the production of norms for black theology. In doing so, black theology limits liberation to those black bodies that fulfill an exclusively heteronormative, Christian-based black narrative of hegemonic masculinity. What constitutes "proper" sexual activity ordained by God remains unchallenged and what constitutes "improper" or sinful sexual activity is politicized through a homophobic agenda that prohibits sexual honesty, thereby creating "closets" and the "down-low" phenomenon, HIV-AIDS miseducation, and other social dilemmas related to sex, love, and marriage between black people.

Second, Baldwin's erasure limits and distorts archetypical presentations of black masculinity. Excluding Baldwin as a primary influence in the development of black theology reveals the lack of an essential internal critique of how black power's connection to and mimicry of hegemonic masculinity skews black liberation theology toward the silencing of representations of black males who fail to uphold dominating models of heteromasculinity. The social, political, sexual, economic, and religious expectations of black males are imprisoned rather than liberated by black theology.

Baldwin's invisibility in the formation of black theology limits and distorts the tradition of black religion and its relation to black theology in a third way. The exclusion of Baldwin's voice disconnects black religion from the experiential and existential messiness of black life from which it is derived. Baldwin shows us how the spirituals, blues, art, literature, love, and the God(s) of black religion do not necessarily lead us to theological, soteriological, and Christological assurances of safety in God, Jesus, and the Christian church. A theological reading of Baldwin that could help black religion to more fully reconnect with its experiential roots could locate Baldwin's bold witness in the shadow of the cross where the passion of Jesus Christ's suffering is embraced and redeemed in the unsafe and often tragic act of loving openly.

Fourth, without Baldwin black theology creates a false history and witness to contemporary attempts to address the first three problems. Baldwin has never been given full credit for being a founding/fundamental voice in the formation of black theology. Yet, the fear, inability, or lack of desire to talk about God, sexuality, and Baldwin from a "purely" theological perspective is its intriguing promise and challenge. It calls for a daring move from the established bracketed use of Baldwin's rhetoric around racial rage in black theology toward construction of new "home" of theory and method, a queering, which is better suited to challenge the sacred contracts between of black liberation theology, black patriarchy, black church, and the "holy narrative" of black Christianity used to form and police Negro respectability. Also, now at a time when the specter of a postracialism and homonormalization (the Age of Obama) signals the possibility and the fear of the deconstruction of blackness, a linguistic paradigm (a new language or use of existing language beyond liberation discourse) is needed to guide the public and private discourse searching for ways to articulate the collapsing relationship between black gender-based sexual identity respectability and heteronormative notions of socioreligious respectability.

This new discourse is what I call blues poetics. Blues poetics is not necessarily a concern for how blues gives way to jazz: in other words, it is not about the musical form of the blues. Blues poetics is about how black people express and explain how they contend with life. According to Baldwin the blues is the linguistic ability to "look on things as they are and survive your losses, or even not survive them—to know that your losses are coming. To know they are coming is the only possible insurance you have, a faint insurance, that you will survive them."[1] Blues poetics is also an explicit sexual narrative signifying moral authority that expresses rage toward what the absences of safety for the healthy expressions of love between bodies mean and seek to undo the sexual secrecy and homophobia found in the place where the question of how to reconcile faith with sexuality remains unanswered. I am presenting a queering theory, method, and language (blues poetics) by which black theology and black religion are articulated via the lens of sexuality first versus race. Blues poetics is a reintegration of the black body—a blues sexualized body whose intimate nature is birthed through the intercourse of the spirit with surviving the trauma produced in an oppressed world. The sensuousness of such bodies, blues bodies, is the expression of black life formed through intimacy, longing, and surviving through the joy only blues people can express and can only know. In other words, anyone can sing the blues, but only a certain few experience and live within it: the exiles in the Promised Land.

This project comes at a time when the public discourse around the psychic points constructing race, gender, and sexuality are more unintelligible and uncritically accepted more than ever before. The DNA of our thinking, which I define as powerful and pervasive prejudgments based on race, gender, sexuality, and religion that comprise an active epistemic framework affecting what we see and how we engage the world around us is bending toward new realities. It is important to begin putting language to what is happening—a

Pentecost (which is a queer moment?) where Jews, Gentiles, Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Intersexed, Transsexed, white, black, man, woman, and child receive the spiritual transmission of a divine culture where we all reside equally and safely.

Currently, an explicit sexualized black theological method of queering is not available. What I am doing in this work is not framed by a hermeneutic of suspicion in that this is a critique of extant theological constructions of heteropatriarchal blackness or a validation of those projects, which expand the black theological project to include women and begin to consider gender and sexuality. This is the full-on queering of black theology for the purpose of creating a completely different hermeneutic and hermeneut: a hermeneutic of queer semiotics. I define a hermeneutic of queer semiotics as a hermeneutic that is used to interpret sexuality, gender, and race as the signs and symbols of social constructions through which power is deployed in order to maintain nonnormative identities and gives the hermeneut the ability to create new interpretation where none is readily apparent. In this context, I interpret the blues, emerging from my study of Baldwin, as a hermeneutic of queer semiotics that gives new voice and meaning to sexualized and racialized bodies (a new hermeneutic) in liberation theology.

James Baldwin was the harbinger of a rhetorical style of radicalism that fit the time, even if his sexual orientation did not. James Baldwin is a paradox—a promise and a challenge—in the context of black power because he simultaneously represents a social critique that coalesces with the macho verve of black power and sexual selfhood that does not.[2] The same can be said for black theology since it is in a great way the religion or a religious alternative for black power, but has not as yet been able to fully accommodate women, the unmasculine, the unfeminine, and homosexuality in its scheme of liberation. There are theological projects that choose to deal directly with issues of sexism and homophobia that do effectively counter the absence of gender

and sexuality within black liberation theology. However, the counter arguments seem only to further the debate of black liberation theology's admitted limitations versus tackling the difficult task of reconciling faith and sexuality. It is imperative that black theology construct solutions to the intractable problems that sexism and sexuality present within the black church and black community.

Baldwin says that sex should be in the space violence now occupies.[3] In order to rightfully understand what is left unexamined by James H. Cone's construction of a theology of black liberation, readers must keep in mind Baldwin's idea of replacing rage with sexuality and what it challenges regarding liberation, black religion, black theology, and the black church as they move through the text.[4] Yes, Baldwin writes about race, but it is how he writes about sexuality in relation to his use of the Bible, God, and the Gospel of Christ from within the context of the black church and black community that teaches us something more about liberation than do concepts, which we currently rely on for liberation. I assert that Baldwin has taught me how to write about this emergent queering of black theology. Here is how what I propose will proceed.

Chapter 1 entitled "The Prolonged Religious Crisis" is concerned with establishing a Baldwinian definition of black religion that is foundational to my project. I also attempt to make distinction between the use of metaphor and allegory in relation to black religion undergirding the work of Baldwin. I use this distinction as a means for identifying Baldwin's allegorical consciousness, which he uses to resist puritanism and the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness. This allows me to show that Baldwin's embrace of homosexuality, that is most often seen as the reason setting him at odds with Christianity, is actually caused by puritanism and the psychological trap of black oppression, which is a psychological collision between the images created by Protestant puritan ideology and black bodies. I identify Baldwin's rejection of

his inheritance of the black Christian puritanical religious heritage as a source for the construction of an allegorical sexualized discourse that is a usable defense against the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness.

In chapter 2, entitled "Between James's Gospel and Jimmy's *blues*" I explore the form of black vernacular canon called Signifyin(g)/signifyin'/signifying employed by Baldwin to expose the disparity between meaning and fact in black religion, black theology, and the black church. I reference African-American literary theory/theorist and a Womanist blues perspective to assist in the exploration of the importance of the use of the blues in the selected works of James Baldwin. I write about how James Baldwin's use of the blues as the language/linguistics/semiotics of sexualized discourse signifies on the limitations of depravity placed on racialized and sexualized blues bodies. I write about how the effect of puritanism forces Baldwin to signify on black religion and the black church for the purposes of reclaiming black moral authority via the language of the blues. I contend that the blues is a sexual and sensuous language enabling racialized, sexualized, and othered blues bodies to resist theological violence. I advance the idea that the blues body is a site of divine revelation and sexuality a source of incarnational power that transforms the relationship between the divine incarnated in the person of Jesus and blues bodies into a site for the revelation of God.

Chapter 3 is entitled "Living Exiled in the Promised Land." In this chapter, I apply my blues perspective to construct the experience of blues bodies in exile. I explore, compare, and contrast the source of the psychic strategies found in the work of Womanist theology with that of the work of Baldwin. I highlight examples in the selected works of Baldwin that help to explain how the importance of black mother's tools for surviving the trauma of exile enables them to resist the patriarchal hierarchy of oppression, which diminishes or completely denies the condition of blues bodies in their scheme of liberation. I also discuss how prevailing narratives of

liberation that rely on exodic theology overlook the puritanical influences shaping concepts of feminine and masculine identity of blues bodies. I write about how Baldwin's blues perspective exposes the blues condition of the community and describe how the blues condition of the community challenges further the effectiveness of the (holy) narrative of liberation and racial power to make a difference in the lives of those who, like Baldwin, are marginalized by race, sexuality, and gender. I write further about the puritanical "essence" of Christianity and the problems it poses for the exodic masculine orientation of black liberation theology and blues bodies within it. I make the assertion that Baldwin employs the strategies for survival of black mothers and that this survival skill, passed from mother to son, enabled Baldwin to destabilize the reliance on an ineffective concept of the God of exodus and powerless manhood neither of which offered safety for his blues body exiled in the Promised Land.

In chapter 4, "Queering and Theological Signification," I develop a theological perspective that is meant to reintegrate racialized and sexualized blues bodies fully into black theological discourse. Using Baldwin's definition of religion and its outcome I construct a theological viewpoint that questions the primacy of racial discourse and hegemonic model of masculinity used to ensure racial power. I explore the effect Du Bois's model of masculinity and race consciousness has on how black theology is interpreted and deployed. In this chapter, I write about how the uncritical acceptance of rage fueling black masculinity and exodic theology leads to the problem that Baldwin identifies as the substitution of violence in the place where sex ought to be. I conclude the chapter with the exploration of Baldwin's hidden influence on the rhetorical construction of Dr. James H. Cone's black theology of liberation. I reveal that as long as sexual oughtness remains muted within black theology it will be unable to offer safety for blues bodies and for black religion to claim authenticity because of it.

Chapter 5 is entitled "Conversion: Queering Black Theology." In this chapter, I apply Baldwin's definition of queer *to* queer theory. I use the selected works of Baldwin to queer Christian conversion and give examples of how blues bodies are liberated to be larger, freer, and enabled to love and be loved. I discuss how the shift from exodus identity to exile identity when coupled with Baldwin's contributions to black religion and black theology actually queers conversion in the black experience. I use Baldwin's definition of queer to expand what queer theory and queering can mean for blues bodies and black theology. I explore various perspectives of queer theory and queer reflections on Baldwin to assist me in establishing an inchoate queer methodology for understanding black theology. Toward the end of the chapter, I do a queering of black sexuality, which queers blues bodies into a site of sacredness. I conclude with a queering of the Cross using Baldwin's blues body to do so.

In chapter 6, "Queering in the Black Church," I apply queer theory to the homosocial space of the church. I use James Baldwin's open embrace of male desire to locate the homoerotic as an active part of the black church. I assert that an open embrace of sexual desire resists theological violence in the form of sexism and homophobia while simultaneously transforming black masculinity into a redeeming source of love, sexuality, and sexualized bodies from puritanical notions of depravity and religion, theology, and the black church in the process. Using black queer studies to unpack the selected works of Baldwin, I give an example of how the moral essence of the black faith tradition's reliance on a heterohomophobic model of masculinity—a weak model of masculinity and Christianity—is redeemed when queered using the hidden strength of Baldwin's manhood and idea of religion. Finally, I offer a brief conclusion where I reflect on the process and offer an assessment of what was learned and what possibilities for the study of James Baldwin will yield.

This work is intended to do more than privilege sexuality and sexualized bodies to create *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose*. This means that the text contends with the challenges black heteropatriarchy presents to both male and female bodies marginalized by race, gender, and sexuality trying to find safety through black religious discourse and the theology of the black church. Specifically, this book imports the conversation of sexuality from beyond the boundaries of black theology and religious respectability using a method of queering and queer theory to do so.

1

The Prolonged Religious Crisis

In *The Fire Next Time,* James Baldwin recounts at the age of 14 undergoing a "prolonged religious crisis."[1] The onset of the crisis is shaped by Baldwin's awareness of "God, His saints and angels, and His blazing Hell" and a fear of the evil, within and without of himself.[2] The "evil" is the soulful awareness of sexuality that makes him and the other girls and boys "…unutterably different and fantastically *present*."[3] The awareness of his newfound fantastic inward sexual awareness and outward fantasized and fetishized body presence created fear in Baldwin. The fear for Baldwin is not the sexual presence itself or its power, but the unquestionable desire to be wanted by someone and the social and religious accountability that comes along with it.[4] Desire for Baldwin rests uncomfortably at the crossroad of the church and street: one a (religious) call of "spiritual seduction" and the other a call to "carnal knowledge."[5]

Baldwin points out that there is no difference in the language used to identify to whom or where you belong: be it the preacher or pimp, the church or the "Avenue." Baldwin's inward sexual awareness and outward bodily presence were both oppressed and unsafe in the church and on the street (the Avenue). The religious crisis for Baldwin is formed by the inability, the lack of moral authority needed, to find safety in God, the church or the community for his sexualized and racialized body.

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

Baldwin uses the "word 'religious' in the common and arbitrary sense…" meaning that defining religion is done at the discretion of the individual: what the word religious means for one might not be religious for another.[6] The meaning of religion is not "fixed." For and foremost I assert that for James Baldwin, religion is an exercise of power: the moral authority to validate his sexual self and budding manhood and safety when it is found. Baldwin understood the inherent dangers for a black boy attempting to face the difficult task of sexual self-discovery and manhood in a racist society that, at the same time, denied both. Baldwin faced a crisis: the inheritance of a religious tradition that did not offer him the moral authority (power) and community where his faith, belief, sexual self, and manhood could find acceptance and safety. He felt the awareness of his power expressed in the moral authority to validate his sexual self, budding manhood, and the discovery that puritanical religious influences would somehow expose him to an internal/eternal hell equal to or much worse than the external hell he found himself in.

The concern for his own safety is based on a fourfold inheritance for Baldwin: his dread of God and His blazing Hell (a theological threat to safety), his understanding of the dangers of being black in a racist society (a sociological/racial threat to safety), his sense of personal corruption (a sexual threat to safety), and his father's masculinity (a gendered threat to his safety).[7] This fourfold coconstituted concern for safety is an inherited puritanical "theological terror."

This is the framework for Baldwin's "dark puritan imagination" and subsequent religious crisis.[8] This brings into focus Baldwin's own understanding of his "prolonged religious crisis," namely, the effect of puritanism on what it means to be religious, to be black, and to be sexually aware (in the body). In contrast, Baldwin seeks to find a "religion of love" centered on bodily self-discovery and self-expression of love that can be safely acted upon.[9] As Baldwin says, "The word 'safety' brings us to the real meaning of the word 'religious' as we use it."[10]

Baldwin locates his individual need for safety within the universal human need for safety. In this way, being religious is to have a personal ultimate concern for human safety and a means for questioning those things, such as a God and religion that Baldwin says is "supposed" to make us safe in and against the world.[11]

If safety is the real meaning of the word religious for Baldwin and if "God and safety" are synonymous then Black American religion presents him with a prolonged crisis of attempting to reconcile the moral authority (power) of religion with his sexual self and budding manhood. He needs a religious interpretation and understanding that can overcome the puritanical rendering of an all-powerful Christian God and His blazing Hell. In this way, Baldwin's religious crisis is hermeneutical in that ultimately he refuses to hold onto interpretations and beliefs in a God that do not "make us larger, freer, and more loving" or make us safe.[12]

Safety: The "Prolonged Religious Crisis"

James Baldwin's argument—his religious crisis—implies that safety and the Christian God are not synonymous, thereby creating the ground for contradictions between himself, society, religion, God, and family.[13] The contradictions often highlighted in most critiques of Baldwin pit his Christian religious upbringing against his sexual self-discovery—black manhood that is an open expression of homosexual love—and against the anointed privilege of whiteness and racist social conditions seemingly attended to by the same Christian God. Michael F. Lynch's discussion of a common misunderstanding of Baldwin's work is helpful here.[14] Lynch states that Baldwin's work suffers because of "critics' dualistic approach to his work," wherein his political concerns are set against spiritual ones.[15] Lynch sees Baldwin as a "dialectician" whose work maintains a "vital tension between political reality and spiritual vision" used by Baldwin to develop a "theology based on Christian ideals and on his individual

quest for a loving God."[16] Lynch's assessment of the "spiritual theme" of Baldwin's "theology" is his search for an "elusive, undefined, God and his evolving theology of self-examination and love."[17]

Yet, Baldwin's quest is not concerned with an elusive God hidden by whiteness or blackness, but with a religion that obstructs his own moral authority and requires him to hide his sexual self and manhood in order to belong. In this sense salvation is the ability to love, be loved, and belong to God and community as you are. In this sense Lynch's view of Baldwin in relation to a theological viewpoint misses the complexities of race, sex, gender, and religion and in particular the quest for safety in his work and life.[18]

Lynch's characterization of Baldwin's work as a search for an elusive God borders on a notion of the kind of sentimentality Baldwin rejects. A quest for a loving God assumes that God cannot love Baldwin as he is. This assumes Baldwin feels that God does not love him because of his sexuality and his blackness. In doing this Lynch himself invokes the whiteness of the God who shows up in American Black religious puritanism. Lynch recasts Baldwin's quest for safety as a social gospel of black civil rights and black theology culminating with moral authority remaining affixed to whiteness and black people in search of a God that will love them.

In a similar way Clarence E. Hardy, III obfuscates Baldwin's quest for safety as a religious crisis saying Baldwin "rarely" engaged Christian doctrine. However, Baldwin's religious crisis and quest for a safety is based on a vision of a loving God. Again God is not hidden and Baldwin refuses to hide: this is the crisis. Baldwin writes about love more than anything else and the commandment to love is his key to Christian doctrine. Hardy notes that Baldwin's critique of Christian tendencies and institutions is concerned with Christianity's "corrupt connection to imperialist state power."[19]Again, social justice related to black political motives limit Baldwin to a narrow form of black moral authority related to Negro

protest and puritanical proscriptions that inform notions of black respectability. Baldwin must either accept his homosexuality and reject the social gospel of the Black Christian church or deny his homosexuality and accept the black Christian church and its fight against a white god. His view that religion offered safety for his whole self was implausible in the face of the realities of the influence of puritanism on both of these planes.[20]

When Baldwin was coming of age, there was insufficient evidence for him to believe that a life of crime or a Christian life resulted in safety. According to Baldwin, the lack of a guarantee for safety meant: "Every Negro boy . . . who reaches this point 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*."[21] Choices for safety afforded black males who adhered to "Christian virtues" did not prevent them from "being polished off with no effort whatever."[22]

According to Baldwin, the "Puritan-Yankee equation of virtue with well-being" that created the "moral [religious] barriers" between Christianity and a criminal career "were so tenuous as to be nearly nonexistent."[23] The decision not to choose a *gimmick* was never an option and the choice to be religious or more specifically choosing the uncritical acceptance of black religion and the black Christian church was, for Baldwin, a "momentous" decision to opt for safety first from the imposition of his own (personal) dark puritan imagination and second from the puritanical social (public) conception of his dark body.

To Baldwin, being present in the world was to be haunted by the circumstances of a puritanical psychosocial bifurcation, which produced the American Negro, the secular and sacred as well as black saints and black sinners.[24] It was this coming to an awareness—the awakening—of his psychosocial twoness, which left him bound for damnation no

matter the choice. Gimmicks didn't matter, because being born black "forced" him to make a decision to think and to live in spite of the lack of safety and danger associated with blackness.[25] For Baldwin, it is a matter of being pragmatic. Baldwin says,

> It was this last realization that terrified me and – since it revealed that the door opened on so many dangers – helped to hurl me into the church. And, by an unforeseeable paradox, it was my career in the church that turned out, precisely, to be my gimmick.[26]

The dread caused by the hand he had been dealt drove him to make an objective (Kierkegaardian) "leap of faith" if you will into the arms of a waiting God whose harsh judgments produced a theological terror in Baldwin that "drove" him into the church.[27] In this sense, a religious choice did not offer safety: not even from the darkness he imagined for himself or experienced in his world there in Harlem. As such, being religious is to acknowledge these facts, as well as a sense of twoness that makes being itself unsafe. However, he understands that for people to find safety, they must first face their fears. Baldwin says, "To defend oneself against a fear is simply to insure that one will, one day, be conquered by it: fear must be faced."[28] What must he face to achieve safety? Baldwin says that he must face the "living proof of inheritance."[29]

Baldwin's Inheritance: An Epistemology of Black Religious Tradition

One of the primary struggles faced by Baldwin is that of inheritance. This fourfold inheritance (theological, racial, gendered, and sexual) imparted to Baldwin his "dark puritan imagination," which affects his understanding of God, homosexuality, and society.[30] I contend that a primary source of his private and public religious discontent is due in great part to what Baldwin came to understand as puritanism and

its effects on American Christianity. What is puritanism to Baldwin and how does it relate to (his) inheritance?

The impact of the puritan heritage on black religion is not subtle for Baldwin. His rhetorical development of a concept of puritanism was influenced by his exilic sojourn and is a continuous reminder of what he felt to be the cause for his theological terror.[31] It is an inheritance of dread in the face of an impossible condition of racialized sexuality, which is inclusive of his sense of personal corruption understood as an awareness of social/sexual self-loathing, the dread of racism and his fear of his father—black masculinity—that he had to confront before he could become, or write about, anything else. The journey toward self-awareness required him to do so:

> If I was to discover myself – on the whole, when examined, a somewhat dubious notion, since I was also trying to avoid myself – there was, certainly, between that self and me, the accumulated rock of ages. This rock scarred the hand, and all tools broke against it. Yet, there was a *me,* somewhere: I could feel it, stirring within and against captivity. The hope of salvation – identity – depended on whether or not one would be able to decipher and describe the rock.[32]

Baldwin says the accumulated rock of ages "deciphered itself as a part of my inheritance—a part mind you, not the totality…"[33] In order for Baldwin to claim his "birthright, of which my inheritance was but a shadow, it was necessary to challenge and claim the rock."[34] Baldwin says his inheritance, while "specifically limited and limiting," was connected to his birthright that was "vast, connecting me to all that lives and to everyone forever. But one cannot claim the birthright without accepting the inheritance."[35] This makes it necessary to talk about inheritance in relation to tradition, which is a part of the vast connection to all that lives, and to everyone forever.[36]

According to Baldwin birthright is the "living proof" of inheritance. Birthright carries within it the accumulated

rock(s) of tradition. Tradition—black tradition—in particular is a means of accountability to the historical representations of what it means to be black (the accumulated rock of ages), both individually and collectively. The birthright of blackness carries with it an inherent lack of safety, ambiguity, indeterminacy, and a dangerous sense of twoness. The coupling of twoness with puritanism creates a birthright that complicates the ability for self-actualization. The birthright of blackness contrasts greatly with the birthright of whiteness with its pinpoint clarity, high capacity for self-actualization and unchallenged safety fully integrated and available at birth. Such was not what Baldwin, or most black people even now, have traditionally known as an inherited birthright. Black religion is used to respond to this inheritance. Therefore, *a part mind you, not the totality*, of the Black religious tradition is concerned with what it means to be religious when safety is theologically and sociologically in question, and when to attempt self-actualization is met with certain danger.

This ontological concept of safety at play in Baldwin's work means that it is prudent to identify Baldwin's particular *religious understanding of religion* as something loaded with complicated and accumulated meaning—the living proof of inheritance—a birthright that only tradition itself could convey. As noted by Hans Gadamer, tradition as an effective historical force working at the subjective level, for example, intricate web of psychological forces, is a powerful force, especially when linked to the biblical text or other classics. Baldwin understood how the power of these psychological forces created a horizon of inheritance, the accumulated and complex rock of ages, and a birthright of twoness that was something *necessary to challenge and claim* before that rock claimed him.[37] According to Ross, Baldwin's "hope of salvation—safety for his sexuality and manhood" depended on it.[38]

In this sense, black religion is, in part, the inheritance of an intricate web of psychological forces that are linked historically to puritanism. Gadamer suggests that collective

knowledge forms a kind of horizon of meaning. For Baldwin, the horizon represents the collected knowledge—accumulated rock of ages—of the dual history of blackness that is both situated and limited by puritanism. I contend that this is the portion of the black religious inheritance, which Baldwin is dealing with. It is the source of Baldwin's fears and a reflection of his literal search for safety. The inheritance of the puritan master and accumulated rock of ages of his enslaved ancestors is the horizon that shapes the "practical-existential" character of Baldwin's religious understanding of black religion and his black religious experience.[39] As such, through Baldwin's work, the horizontal limit of the black religious tradition is altered hermeneutically; this means the primary source for interpreting what is religious about black religion shifts from a relationship centered on God's saving grace to one that is centered on the question of whether or not God and black religion can offer safety for black bodies. In part, this shapes the "practical-existential" character of Baldwin's understanding of the black religious experience and the catalyst exposing the link between puritan religious/theological myth and associated pagan meaning/language of black bodies.[40]

Puritanism

> We have all heard the bit about what a pity it was that Plymouth Rock didn't land on the Pilgrims instead of the other way around. I have never found this remark very funny. It seems wistful and vindictive to me, containing, furthermore, a very bitter truth.[41]

Baldwin's references focus attention to the roots of puritan ideology that informed the notions of the sacred and profane signified by black bodies in an emerging "New World." Puritanism is itself the rock of "symbolic and mythological language used to describe and interpret the new worlds" of

the European and enslaved African in America.[42] Puritanism as a fundamental historical social-cultural-religious problem for Baldwin is expressed and symbolized as a part "rock" of inheritance, which includes puritan beliefs in the American Republic. Baldwin expressed,

> It is very important to remember what it means to be born in a Protestant Puritan country, with all the taboos placed on the flesh, and have at the same time in this country such a vivid example of a decent pagan imagination and the sexual liberty with which white people invest Negroes – and then penalize them for.[43]

Puritanism is an important theme within Baldwin's corpus. The symbolic and mythological language of puritanism provides the metaphorical equation of twoness with produces the *likenedness* for what it means to be both black and religious in America. The metaphorical equation presupposes that blackness cannot be compared equally to whiteness and must therefore be likened to something that is less than and unequal to it. As such, the metaphorical equation makes blackness the dumping ground for all that puritanism deems unrighteous. In other words blackness becomes the shadow side of whiteness. It is the combination of the accumulated rock of ages, perceived by Baldwin as the shadow of inheritance, and the rock of puritanism, which creates and is itself a shadow. Twoness is the birthright of black identity.

According to Studs Terkel, the very nature of the American heritage is a "conflict" derived from the combination of Puritanism and Paganism."[44] Puritanism is the foil that becomes an integral shadowy part of the irreconcilable heritage of "twoness" of the American Negro. In *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, author Stanley Macebuh points out that Baldwin has a "twofold" heritage that is comprised of "fear and veiled anger," the latter of which constitutes the "quintessential social fury" that is most readily referenced by theologians such as James H. Cone and others.[45] Yet the social fury

that is simply associated with race is complicated by Baldwin's identification of the impact of puritanism on his social, economic, class, political, sexual, and religious identity. In other words, the intersecting bifurcations are coconstituted in such a way that puritanism is converted into "a quintessential social fury" constituted as black rage.[46] As such, readers with selective interpretations of Baldwin's rage are limited to the political while the social, economic, class, sexual, religious complexities coconstituting the "private nightmare" of the puritanical damnation of blackness remains closeted.[47] In identifying puritanism, Baldwin shifts the dynamics of black religious theory into a different direction where the sacred nature of the American identity and the profane nature of the Negro identity are established by puritan religious ideology. This establishes my concept of a Baldwinian interpretation of black religious twoness that is in part a "psychological warfare" similar to Du Boisian "double-consciousness" between body and soul, church and the street in which you may "perish."[48] In this regard, puritanism's historical significance is that it creates a social-sexual-cultural-religious-theological "spectrum" of double-consciousness (twoness) of black bodies and black religious tradition.[49]

In the context of a Baldwinian religious interpretation, the associated twoness parallels/intercalates the poles of the puritan socio-economic-religious ideology and paganizing of black bodies and the fourfold inheritance of God, sexuality, race, and masculinity created between them. Baldwin understood this twoness as "one of the great dilemmas, one of the *great* psychological hazards, of being an American Negro."[50] Baldwin amplifies this when he says,

> I've seen a great many people go under because of this dilemma. Every Negro in America is in one way or another menaced by it. One is born in a white country, a white Protestant Puritan country, where one was once a slave, where all the standards and all the images . . . when you open your eyes on the world, everything you see: none of it applies to you.[51]

Puritanism can be understood as form of "religious creativity" that paved "the ground for historical evolutionary thinking, racial theories and forms of color symbolism that made the economic and military conquest of various cultures and peoples justifiable and defensible" as part of the Enlightenment Canon.[52] I use the term "Enlightenment Canon" as means of identifying puritanism as an emergent "social and cultural equation" of people and the sacred within a philosophical, religious, scientific, and economic movement (colonialism) and its connection to the Glorious Revolution that gave birth to the establishment of the American Puritan ethos.[53] Finally, the puritan influence on religious interpretation is a hermeneutic of "conquest and suppression" concealed behind a veil of noble religious motivations, for example, slave conversions, which hides the fact that it is accountable for interpretations of black bodies that are disingenuous and oppressive.[54]

Baldwin's work represents a hermeneutical break with puritan religious mythology and the black religious response to it. The hermeneutical rupture is the path to the "recreation" or reconstitution of the black self via the "tone and cadence" of language. Baldwin says it is "a cadence . . . a question of the *beat*" of what it meant to be an American Negro. Baldwin seeks to privilege a blues hermeneutic position that dispelled the suspicion and lies which buried him beneath a whole fantastic image of himself that was not his, "but white people's image" of him.[55] Baldwin constructs a hermeneutical circle that privileges the cadence—the blues as the gospel—the beat of what it means to be an American Negro. Such hermeneutical independence reveals a quest for safety. However, you cannot overlook the fact that for Baldwin a true religion depends on whether or not it can offer safety—moral authority—to black bodies from puritanism.

Metaphors of Oppression

Baldwin challenges traditional interpretations of the black religious tradition by his lack of desire—his resistance—to

being *likened* metaphorically and therefore defined by social, cultural, and "racial compartmentalization in religion."[56] In this sense metaphor presupposes that there is nothing to which one can be compared and must, therefore be likened to *something* in order to *likely* become *somebody*. Baldwin's religious heritage places oppressive limitations on his ability to likely achieve "somebodiness."[57] Somebodiness is limited to a choice between "pimps and racketeers on the Avenue" and the "church racket," and Baldwin says he surrendered to a "spiritual seduction" of the church long before he "came to any carnal knowledge" of the Avenue.[58] Baldwin's experience in the black Christian church exposes the *real issue, which persists beneath the surface* of black religion is its dependence on Protestant Puritanism, that makes it no more capable of offering human relief from danger than the Avenue.

> For many years, I could not ask myself why human relief had to be achieved in a fashion at once so pagan and so desperate – in a fashion at one so unspeakably old and so unutterably new. And by the time I was able to ask myself this question, I was also able to see that the principles governing the rites and customs of the churches in which I grew up did not differ from the principles governing the rites and customs of other churches, white. The principles were Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror, the first principle necessarily and actively cultivated in order to deny the two others.[59]

The real issue Baldwin exposes is that black religion, like its white counterpart, is unable to offer somebodiness: the moral capacity to exert relief from the puritanical fear of racial and sexual oppression. Instead, the likelihood of relief needed for somebodiness is met with *Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror: Blindness being the primary principle* of puritanism. In this sense, the desire to be included in "mainstream American Protestant religion" creates what Baldwin calls the "metaphors of our oppression." According to Baldwin, the metaphors of our oppression are the masks of race, sex, gender, and religion creating a "psychological collision" between the images,

"white man's stereotypes," created by Protestant Puritan ideology and accepted as truth concerning black bodies.[60]

Baldwin clearly identified the psychological complexity of blackness created by the metaphorical relationship between puritanism and the black religious tradition, between black folk and white folk; between the enslaver and the enslaved; between homosexuality and heterosexuality; and finally between God and his own salvation. The metaphorical relationship between blackness and all other social, religious, and sexual categories creates a form of detachment or a *hazard*, which makes blackness a dangerous idea: the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness. This means that blackness is inherently unsafe and not recognizing the lack of safety related to black social, religious, and sexual categories can be hazardous. The hazard caused by the principle of blindness is required to obscure the fact that the heritage and inheritance of blackness is likened to danger and made perpetually unsafe by puritanism.[61] As such, Baldwin understands "to be born, in a white, an Anglo-Teutonic, antisexual country, black" makes any choice for human relief—whether that choice is sacred or profane—an unsafe choice.[62]

Baldwin does not regard Christianity or society as innately unsafe; but rather he exposes the metaphorical oppressiveness of blackness caused by the principle of religious Blindness that masks puritanism as the catalyst that makes Christian society so unsafe for black bodies. However, the language of black Christianity, which he sees as the most tangible piece of his inheritance/heritage—his blackness—is metaphorically dependent on the principle of blindness, meaning puritanism remains out of sight in the creation of the bifurcated (racial and religious) psychological complexity informing the oppressive nature of black religion. The heritage of the metaphors of oppression is puritan encoding for black bodies articulated in black Christian religious interpretation.

Stanley Macebuh notes Baldwin's "continuous attempts to come to terms with his inheritance in the Western world"

put him at odds with the "millennialism and the metaphorical protest in Black Christianity."[63] The "guarded political protest" found in the analogous relationship between black people and Jews created in large part the "very mythology of Black Christianity."[64] Macebuh writes,

> We have seen how, in response to the actual suffering of its members, the Black Church evolved a theology in which the promise of the celestial city took on a lurid fascination for them, and we have suggested that the practical considerations of safety contributed to the rhetorical extravagances of this theology. For the preacher who contemplated the plight of his congregation, safety, the evasion or assuagement of white anger, lay in metaphor, in indirect statement.[65]

Safety (human relief from danger) and the metaphorical indirectness of black religion and theology as a means of accessing safety lay at the heart of Baldwin's religious crisis. Macebuh says Baldwin understood, from the perspective of a preacher, the offer of celestial safety and invective sermons against "the corruption of Sodom and Gomorrah, against the oppression of the Pharaohs" can be done "with far more impunity than he could decry, in straightforward language" the real suffering of black people.[66] The metaphorical likening of black religion to white religion, which is used to create safety and salvation has the opposite effect of creating and maintaining oppression and damnation "with a chill puritan certainty."[67] As Macebuh notes, the "metaphorical evocations" espoused by the black church evaded "any confrontations it may have had with white oppression" beyond race.[68] Baldwin's interpretation of black religion confronts the puritan encoding of blackness beyond race to include issues of sexuality and a direct criticism of the black and white church. For Baldwin, the crisis faced in the quest for black somebodiness is based on the exposure to metaphors of oppression supported by black religion, rather than it being based on the argument for similarity or likeness to mainstream American

Protestantism predicated on metaphorical indirectness and outright blindness to issues of race, sex, gender, and culture.[69] Baldwin's interpretation of his religious heritage in particular and black religious tradition in general is a direct reflection of the mythic history of America.[70]

These metaphors of oppression hide that tensions, differences and ultimately religious, social, sexual, and racial prejudice are derived from puritanism and not from black somebodiness. In this sense, black religion colludes with the Puritan Protestant Christian in the creation of the world of the metaphorical other. This is a taxonomic archetype much like the "empirical others," which Charles Long says Europeans used to "define a cultural phenomenon in which extraordinariness and uniqueness of a person or culture is first recognized negatively."[71] Long says, "because the recognition of the person or culture is necessary for interpreters of cultural identity, various stratagems of description and/or diagnosis are employed to represent the other in the relationship."[72] Somebodiness and the metaphorical other comprise a stratagem of description used by puritanism to identify itself as a "new sacred power" in the world that creates "new meaning of human freedom" for whiteness, while using that same meaning of definition to oppress blackness. Black religion for Baldwin is both a source of creative inspiration for religious freedom from puritanism and a conceptual and psychological constraint because of it.[73] However, Baldwin chooses to break with maintaining an interpretative paradigm that exempts puritanism from the discussion concerning the metaphors of oppression that limit the choices for social, sexual, and religious black somebodiness. This is the metaphoric exemption of black religious interpretation.

According to Laurel Schneider's category of "metaphoric exemption," all images of the divine are just limited human stabs at comprehending the divine and examined for how they reinforce socially and environmentally harmful attitudes and social structures, such as patriarchy and dualistic

thinking.[74] Schneider's notion of metaphoric exemption by which the divine always escapes human attempts to liken it could help to illuminate the ways in which puritanism, as a cultural force, escapes from view in discussions of black American Protestantism and black religion. The metaphors of blackness sublates puritanism, which is the "real issue that persists beneath the surface" of American Protestantism and the theological terror produced by it. The metaphorical exemption "demands caution" concerning the (puritan) religious status quo or "puritan restraint" that seeks to prevent "divine trespass" of black religious belief.[75] In this sense, metaphoric exemption precludes the fact that the concept of religion and the divine becomes something different—psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—when encountered by black people.[76] Baldwin realized that his religious conversion had not allowed his escape "from nothing whatever."[77] Religion made him more aware that his choices for human relief—somebodiness—were bound to an accursed past and despised present.

> 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.[78]

Puritanism *is* exempt from the social and historical development of the Protestant underpinnings of black religious tradition and imagination. Baldwin says,

> Thus, in the realm of morals the role of Christianity has been, at best, ambivalent. Even leaving out of account the remarkable arrogance that assumed that the ways and morals of others were inferior to those of Christians, and that they therefore had every right, and could use any means, to change them, the collision between cultures – and the schizophrenia

> in the mind of Christendom – had rendered the domain of morals as chartless as the sea once was, and as treacherous as the sea still is.[79]

The Christian arrogance Baldwin identifies is based on puritanism's exemption from accountability in the creation of the principles of *Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror* that leave black and white Christianity morally chartless. Baldwin says, "…whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being…must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church."[80] The inability of black religion to divorce itself from the metaphors of oppression of blackness and the hypocrisy of the metaphoric exemption of puritanism means black Christianity is based on exceptional belief and Blind faith in a concept of God that does not offer human relief or make black people "… larger, freer and more loving."[81] In *Black Religion,* Joseph Washington says,

> Thus, virtually from the beginning [of the American Colonial Project] Negroes were introduced to the rewards of Christianity for the good of the planters in this world and for the good of the slaves in the world beyond. Negroes were exposed to Christianity quite apart from their participation in the Church and its full faith. They were treated as "exceptional" Christians from the earliest days and they came to understand themselves as exceptions. This theological laxity was the basis for depriving not only the helpless slaves of a firm grounding in the Christian tradition, but the vast majority of Negroes ever since.[82]

Puritanism makes black people exceptional via metaphor and brainwashes the Negro into thinking the puritan god (of exodus) can save them from the damnation of their own blackness. Yet, the Negro still believes in the puritan god (of exodus) in spite of the theological terror that likens damnation with blackness. Baldwin says, "Negroes in this

country—and Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking exist in any other—are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world."[83] Such despising or self-loathing can be seen as a slave mentality or "slavish dogmatism," which is *strictly or legally speaking* an adherence to a religious belief that upholds puritan ideals that the God who made them did so, but not in its' own image.[84] What is most important is this viewpoint reveals the God of the Oppressed to be, in actuality the God of the Oppressor. In this sense, black people are not oppressed but traumatized, given the schizophrenic twoness of blackness.

Being likened to, but not being the same as the puritan *masters* or left unsafe by the puritan god (of exodus) they serve sustains the theological terror of damnation affixed to blackness and creates the vociferous "political rage" against exceptionalism (exceptional belief or exceptional faith) and the metaphorical exemption codified by a slave mentality. The twoness of blackness becomes the void where the "foundations of society are hidden" and the safety many black people seek forever destabilized by the metaphorical uncertainty caused by likeness to an image they can never obtain. Metaphorically, their backs are placed perpetually against the wall: only allegory can set us free.

Allegory becomes a hermeneutical defense against being torn asunder by puritanically induced twoness: something that is able to assuage suspicion with a more sustainable interpretive endeavor. Baldwin confronts puritanical metaphors of oppression with an allegorical defense.

Allegorical Defense: A Sexualized Discourse

What do I mean when I say allegorical defense? What makes it a sexualized discourse? Allegory is extended metaphor: meaning that is not permanently affixed to that to which it is being likened. Allegory reflects the diachronic aspect of meaning-making in that it accounts for extant interpretations

or likenesses while allowing for new ones to emerge. Where metaphor creates permanent likenesses, allegory presumes change. Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory states it "arises from an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent, as passing out of being: a sense of transitoriness," and Jeremy Marousis-Bush's defines allegory being both an outward physical expression and "the intuition, the inner experience itself."[85] Building on Benjamin, Marousis-Bush says,

> The form such an experience of the world takes is fragmentary and enigmatic; in it the world ceases to be purely physical and becomes an aggregation of signs…Transforming things into signs is both what allegory does – its technique – and what it is about – its content. Nor is this transformation exclusively an intellectual one: the signs perceived strike notes at the depth of ones' being, regardless of whether they point to heaven, to an irretrievable past, or to the grave.[86]

Allegory reveals the fact that metaphors of oppression are mere signs that have become psychic manifestations with physical realities. In other words, allegory is essential for the creation of a discourse of change. Allegory defends against and liberates us from remaining permanently bound to metaphoric likenesses, which oppress physical expression and spiritual experience. This is a form of consciousness (allegorical) that accounts for the physical, the spiritual, and the pasts that hold it captive. Baldwin's experience of coming of age in a strict bible-based Holiness Pentecostalism environment, raised by a people whose primary location in the American world is defined by their past and present captivity, is the ground of his allegorical consciousness.[87]

Second, what is the defense? Referring to the use of Joban allegory, Jeremy Marousis-Bush says that "anyone who has been raised in a strict Christian, bible-based environment" could easily make allegorical connections between the trouble in their lives and religious belief. He goes on to say that "religious allegory, and more specifically biblical allegory,

becomes a kind of second consciousness or extended metaphor for such people's lives."[88] The idea of a "strict-Christian, bible-based environment is key to understanding Baldwin's allegorical defense. Baldwin is not in tension with or absconding any portion of his religious heritage: he is in tension with puritanism and is using black religious allegory to overcome sublimation of the black body. As such, religious allegory is for Baldwin a "second consciousness" or "extended metaphor" that privileges sexuality, used as a defense against the puritanical ideals embedded within Holiness Pentecostalism, which he employs to tell the story of *his* black life. This is James Baldwin's allegorical defense.

What is his defense concerned with? Marousis Bush's experience of growing up in the strict Holiness Pentecostal environment is similar to that of Baldwin's and in this way related to Mary Rowlandson's strict puritan environment.[89] This interrelatedness is based on a strict interpretation of the biblical text in relation to human restraint on the one hand and forced captivity on the other.

Rowlandson uses her strict puritan interpretation of captivity to establish an allegorical connection to Job, while Marousis-Bush is relating his experience of the limitations caused by the metaphoric connection of puritanism to holiness Pentecostalism. Marousis-Bush says, "Rowlandson views her world in the context of biblical events, as evidenced by a nearly constant flow of biblical references in her narrative, and it is through these spectacles that she interprets her life events."[90] This is a cause for vindication of her captivity and "elevates her status, at least in her mind, to that of God's chosen, suffering, and delivered servant."[91] Rowlandson establishes an allegorical connection between her experience of captivity with the suffering and redemption of Job that extends to God making it allegorical. This same strictness when applied to black people reveals a different form of captivity—one that does not extend to God, but to Ham, making the connection to Ham's captivity perpetual and therefore

metaphorical. This interrelatedness is based on a strict interpretation of the biblical text in relation to human captivity.

Puritanism and Holiness Pentecostalism converge around materially different outcomes based on an interpretation of captivity. It is material because it determines the social location of white bodies and black bodies in relation to God. Captivity is situational and redemptive as allegorized by puritanism, but perpetual and damning as a metaphor of blackness. In this sense the idea of captivity becomes the reason and explanation for the enslavement of black people in the mind of the Puritan. The allegorical consciousness of puritanism creates the metaphors of oppression for black people, which in turn are exposed by Baldwin's critique of Holiness Pentecostalism.

Baldwin's allegorical defense represents a hermeneutical rupture with black social/sexual/religious/theological mythology and meaning/language of puritanism's interpretation of captivity and God's chosen upheld in Holiness Pentecostalism. Baldwin remains conscious of the twoness of blackness in a way that accounts for the affective nature of his religious inheritance and the puritan historical construction of his American black-Negro religious heritage. In other words, he is still able to authentically claim and defend his experience as a Christian (God's saving Grace) and black man who is homosexual (the rubric for black sexual depravity) without compromise or excuse in the world. Baldwin uses this "inner vocabulary" to construct allegorical connections between puritan notions of the sacred and the profanity of blackness.[92]

This *conceit* creates is a different type of hermeneutic governance: a Baldwinian interpretation of black religion, that allows for a deeper extended critique, questioning, and understanding of the sophisticated and damning puritan restraints/captivities between black/white, sinner/saved, and male/female, heterosexual/homosexual that is the hallmark of Protestantism and black religion.[93] It brings into view

the impermanent search for a black body that is likely able to become one of God's chosen people—somebodiness—changing the captivity narrative from one of the perpetually enslaved descendants of Ham/Canaan to suffering servant like Job and the puritans who inherent the New World. Spiritual/psychic captivity imposed by the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness can only be overcome by rethinking allegorically, the concept of God in black religion and Christianity. Physical captivity imposed by metaphors of oppression can only be overcome by rethinking allegorically, the concept of black bodies and black sexuality. This is what reshapes and relocates the idea of Negro "protest" to include sexuality. This is a hallmark of Baldwin: the construction of a prophetic sexualized religious discourse.

Baldwin's allegorical consciousness represents a psychological complex of race, sex, religion, culture, and politics constituted by the tension held between the poles of his dark puritan imagination and his black body. His allegorical defense is a psycho-sexual-religious rebellious protest against his black inheritance and puritan American heritage.

Allegorical consciousness and allegorical defense are inextricably connected to and affected by history. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, history—according to Hans Gadamer—*is an effective historical force working at the subjective level*. In this sense, allegorical consciousness shows how black bodies are affected by a puritan historical consciousness and how Baldwin effectively contends with the historical forces of puritanism as well.[94] Allegorical consciousness is a defense against being "trapped" in the "problem of history" that is dehumanized by a puritan interpretation of captivity and the slave mentality ensconced in a historical consciousness of black sexual depravity.[95] It is a defense in that it seeks to rupture the metaphoric conceptual framework created by Puritan/Protestant social, political, and religious mythology that supports a presumed continuous sexually depraved religious history of black people that has yet identified it as

the source of their Christian identity and theological terror due in large part to the sexual depravity imposed on blackness because of it. I am identifying puritanism as a historical problem working at the subjective level of consciousness informing aspects of the black religious tradition in relation to sexual agency. Baldwin identifies historical subjectivity as a "nightmare from which no one *can* awaken."[96] As such, historical consciousness creates a problem of properly locating puritan religious influences on black religion because of its metaphorical exemption from history and black religious rhetoric. The interpretation of captivity creates allegorical room both spiritually and physically for black bodies. This is a hermeneutic dispensation—an allegorical defense—made manifest as a sexualized discourse, which reveals the subjective nature of puritanism on the black psyche.

The problem of history is the metaphorical exemption creating a puritan historical vacuum, which perpetually bifurcates and imprisons black identity. According to Baldwin, "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them."[97] This reality creates the grounds for black religious exceptionalism leading to a false sense of historical respectability and a slavish dogmatism to the metaphorical limitations that misinforms black religion's attempts to create truly transformative discourse and a less problematic notion of the divine. Baldwin says,

> To accept one's past – one's history – is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought. How can the American Negro's past be used?[98]

Baldwin recognizes the liabilities of a history that was (re)invented for black people. Baldwin locates the source of the historical (re)invention of the Negro in Protestant Puritanism. The metaphors of oppression that are used to invent that history and seek to drown out the truth are what

he accepts and learns to use to "crack and crumble" with a true rendering of the realities of black life. In order to do so he employs an allegorical defense—a sexual discourse—that transgresses this history and transforms the American Negro's past into a usable commodity versus it remaining a socioreligious liability.

Baldwin is not, in the words of Stanley Macebuh, "burdened by a dilemma of contradictions" in such a way that negates "neither the meaning of his experience nor his desire to express this in an artistically satisfying way."[99] Baldwin seeks to overcome the metaphorical limitations of black religious dialog without losing the concern of religious convictions in the "formidable standards" of political protests that earmarked the commitment one had for presenting a respectable rendering of black faith and life. Macebuh says,

> He [Baldwin] was *expected* to demonstrate a certain competence in dealing artistically with the raw material of his experience, but it was also assumed that since the nature of the experience was a peculiar one, there were necessary conclusions to be drawn from such peculiarity.[100]

Baldwin sees his political responsibilities differently, in the sense that he chooses to engage the theological terror that imposed proscriptions on black bodies versus a political protest against racism that did not engage its Puritan/Protestant history and social/psychological/sexual coconstitution. As such, Baldwin's allegorical consciousness engages the hermeneutic horizon—the accumulated rock of ages—of the history of black religion that is not limited by metaphors of oppression and the ways of engaging them literally.

In this sense, sexualized discourse becomes a religious discourse. Sexualized discourse is a means of reinserting bodies back into black religion and history. It is a means of protest that is both religious and political wherein the black body is no longer an index for religious or social evil. The black body becomes a site of liberation and black homosexuality or more

pointedly homosexual love a form of rebellion against puritan heresy and the slavish dogmatism/slave mentality of black religion, which maintains it. Macebuh notes that Baldwin "had for long been preoccupied with "how effectively to present the homosexual as an authentic instrument of change in society."[101] This is now, more than ever, not far from the truth as the barriers shaped by homophobia have begun to crumble in the minds of the American public. However, the black church remains a bastion of homophobia, which reveals just how deeply black religion, black Christianity, and the black church are affected by puritanism. In this regard Baldwin's allegorical consciousness can be seen as a catalyst for breaking down the barriers between the sacred/secular, homosexual/heterosexual, and likeness/sameness.

Baldwin's allegorical consciousness reveals a concern in relation to the truth of the human condition via homosexuality, which allows for a mutual embrace between God and the dispossessed. Macebuh says, "All through Baldwin's fictional works, the homosexual character had always been seen as the authentic symbol both of theodical and secular rebellion."[102] Baldwin becomes an authentic instrument who uses religion as the conduit for political, social, sexual, and theological change. Baldwin awakens us to the possibility of religious interpretation, which makes it *safe* to say black bodies and black sexuality have the divine capacity that *makes us larger, freer, and more loving.*

2

Between James's Gospel and Jimmy's *blues*

Chapter 1 begins by identifying Baldwin's encounter with religion as prolonged crisis: the inheritance of a religious tradition that did not offer him the moral authority (power) and community where his faith, belief, sexual self, and manhood could find acceptance and safety. His religious tradition is shaped by puritanical influences that demonize black bodies and black sexuality. Toward the end of the chapter 1, I identified the emergence of an allegorical sexualized discourse that is a defense against the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness: the psychological collision" between the images created by Protestant Puritan ideology and black bodies. This discourse also offers a means for reinserting black bodies (back) into religion and Christianity.

In this chapter, I write about James Baldwin's use of the blues as a model of sexualized discourse. This chapter explains how Baldwin's use of the blues can be used to liberate black bodies from the psychological trap of black oppression: the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies.

James's Gospel Prose: Signifying Christianity

Based on the religious and theological perspectives arising from Baldwin's understanding, what is Christianity?

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

What is the gospel? What is the blues? What is Signifyin(g) with regards to both? Baldwin's rhetorical treatment of Christianity throughout his writings focuses on what he sees as its fatal flaw, namely, a linguistic and theological anthropology of color hierarchy. Baldwin sees this Christianity exemplified linguistically in the puritanical ideal of America that "considered black people to be less human than [white Christians]" in the Calvinist scheme of divine election in which the "kingdom of heaven . . . [is] no place for black people to start trying on their [white Christian] shoes."[1] Baldwin's rhetorical treatment of Christianity is twofold: it is allegorical and it is a form of Signifyin(g).[2] Signifying can be defined on three levels. First it can be seen as a form of what Charles Long calls "verbal misdirection."[3] According to Long, verbal misdirection "parallels the real argument but gains its power of meaning from the structure of the discourse itself without the signification being subjected to the rules of the discourse."[4] Seen in this way, the "healing blood of the [alabaster] Christ and bloody cross" of redemption identified by Baldwin requires black people to "accept" the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness given to him by white missionaries who "braved the jungles to bring him these glad tidings."[5] In the act of signifying, Baldwin exposes the contradictions between the profession of Christian love and justice for all and the Christian practice of hate and injustice against black bodies. In this sense, what Christianity denotates metaphorically (and semiotically) concerning its use to liberate black bodies from black depravity is figurative rather than actual.

Second, signifying is a rhetorical strategy. Charles I. Nero describes signifying as a "rhetorical strategy [which] assumes that there is shared knowledge between communicators and, therefore, that information can be given indirectly."[6] As a rhetorical strategy signifying avoids becoming a metaphor in the sense that metaphor is a fixed fact: meaning permanently affixed to and dependent on that to which it is being

metaphorically likened. The avoidance of fixed meaning—meaning permanently affixed to and dependent on that to which it is being metaphorically likened—creates an allegorical (extended metaphor) breakthrough of new meaning. An example of this is identified by Baldwin in literature where the Negro is framed in the context of "problem" by whites and framed in the context of "protest" by blacks exposes "disparity of tone between the two creations."[7] The gap is the location of the signifying act wherein the shared knowledge or the "…unspoken recognition of shared experience that creates a way of life" identified by Baldwin signifies on the disparity of tone between the two differing depictions of black life. In this sense, signifying extends the metaphor into an allegorical revision of the "story" of black people or a black person or a black condition that indirectly tells the truth that has been "cut away."[8]

Third, signifying is a form of black vernacular that is "canonical."[9] According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr, signifying represents a closed language of tradition. Gates writes "… Signifyin(g) functions as a [extended] metaphor for formal revision or intertexuality, within the Afro-American literary tradition."[10] Baldwin uses the power of black (religious) vernacular to revise what Christianity means in the context of black (blues) life. Baldwin shifts the power of (black) Christian discourse toward a new meaning: a signification that carries with it the moral authority needed to define blackness and the gospel on its own terms: this is what I call black religious vernacular. An excellent example of the interpretation of the gospel as black religious vernacular is stated in Baldwin's novel *Just Above My Head,* by the character Arthur Montana.

> When a nigger quotes the Gospel, he is not quoting: he is telling you what happened to him today, and what is certainly going to happen to you tomorrow: it may be that it has already happened to you, and that you, poor soul, don't know.[11]

In describing Crunch's singing, Arthur reveals a revision of the gospel from something meant to condemn black people into a Gospel that connects black people one to another.

> He was not singing about the road in Egypt two thousand years ago, but about his mama and his daddy and himself, and those streets just outside, brother, just outside of very door, those streets which you and I both walk and which we are going to walk until we meet.[12]

In this case a young black homosexual male speaks out of this "new" linguistic paradigm—black religious vernacular—a language of liberating himself from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness: the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies. Therefore liberation constructed as black religious vernacular is an inclusive language that can be used and understood by those in the church and in the street. Liberation expressed in the form of black religious vernacular creates a linguistic bridge that "everyone must cross" and that everyone *can* cross.[13]

The black church in which Baldwin first seeks safety actually lacks the moral authority to speak (black religious vernacular) for sexualized and racialized bodies that fall into the gap between sexual problem and racial protest. Rather than signify on puritanical proscriptions against black bodies, the black church reifies the gap versus confessing that everyone must cross the bridge—release from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—before liberation can occur.

According to James Baldwin, in order to create sacred meaning—the holy narrative of sin and salvation—Christianity uses the "alabaster Christ" and "bloody cross" to interpret the gospel according to color and race in the "new world."[14] Baldwin points to the "mountain of blasphemous rhetoric" that has been written to make black people "less than human" and "Jesus Christ and his Father" white.[15] In this

sense, Christ represents whiteness and embodies the immaculately conceived relationship between itself and God through Christ, exemplified in sexual purity: thereby scapegoating, condemning, and hanging black bodies upon the bloody cross of American Christianity.[16] The black church emerges as a spiritual institution dependent on race, color, and puritan (sexual) morality that affirms this oppressive linguistic equation, uses the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness: the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies to defend itself, and patriarchy to enforce its moral authority. Kelly Brown Douglas, who identifies the need for a sexual discourse of resistance, says "whatever is ostensibly unacceptable according to white sexual standards is absolutely intolerable for the black community."[17] The belief in God to deliver is replaced with a puritanical belief in God to condemn.

God is not hidden or ungiven or rejected or mocked in Baldwin's religious context: it is the belief that the ability to speak to God and that God will answer giving us "power over Satan" that is lost.[18] The lack of a recognizable language of "belief" leads Baldwin to say that black people need to "reinvest" in those things symbolizing Christianity—belief, faith, and revelation—with their "original energy," which is the power to "plead the blood to bring the embattled and mortally endangered soul 'through.'"[19]

Reinvestment is a form or step toward liberation in the sense that the original energy described by Baldwin is the power of black religious language used by everyday people to make it through dangers faced in body and spirit. Reinvestment signals the return to black religious vernacular: a language that liberates black bodies from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness: the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies that deprive sexualized and racialized bodies from relationship with God.

The reinvestment in the use of black religious vernacular I identify in the work of Baldwin points to a sociohistorical moment in time before blacks had given up the power of black religious vernacular for the purposes of being theologically claimed, then rejected and finally marginalized by white Christians.[20] It is a time of power and freedom wherein black people were able to protect themselves within what Gates calls a "closed black vernacular tradition" that is indicative of the development of a form of self-reflexive grammar used to signify on the gospel they were given to create a real connection with God. Therefore the "existence and authority of blacks" that is expressed in black religious vernacular is a language of liberation that is inclusive of sexualized bodies.[21] In essence the revelation of God is expressed in black religious vernacular by black bodies on the streets just outside the church and not necessarily inside the black church that gave up black vernacular for "an unwritten, dispersed, and violated inheritance" of puritanical (religious and theological) discourse.[22] The revelation of God that first occurs with those on the street (or in the hush harbors) just outside the doors of the church—the poor, the homosexual, and sexually and physically abused blues bodies—is coopted by the black church and puritan-based benevolence. James Baldwin is representative of this interpretive paradigm that privileges black religious vernacular. By signifying on religion and Christianity Baldwin reveals that the social and spiritual conditions of black bodies, black life, black faith, the black church, and the black community are controlled by the language of puritanism: the psychological collision between the images created by Protestant Puritan ideology and black bodies.

Baldwin's signifying deftly brackets the puritanical and Calvinistic principles shaping the morals and ethics of the black church, which gives more clarity to the connection between Christianity and the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies. In the same way, Baldwin is also seeking to liberate black bodies from the problem of

black depravity by placing the source of oppression squarely on the immorally and unethically racist imagination of the Christian church. Baldwin's signifying on Christianity reveals a language of power (black religious vernacular), which conveys the moral authority to speak grace, mercy, and justice, and righteousness on behalf of black people; and that already exists with a record of signs and wonders of God's capacity to liberate and to make safe passage through trouble: this is a revelation.[23]

My interpretation further solidifies my claim that Baldwin is not in tension with Christianity or expressly rejecting it, but lamenting its failure to accurately reflect the racist-sexist-homophobic-puritanical nature within its language. Baldwin's use of the word authority in relation to black moral authority and the word revelation in relation to the black church speaks of the need for the creation of a "new hermeneutical model" that yields meaning to both.[24] For Baldwin, the hermeneutical model—black religious vernacular—is the blues. The language of the blues becomes a starting point for building a language that accounts for black bodies in a way that liberates them from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness and connects to a protective and liberating God.

Semiotics of Blues Bodies and the Black Church

Baldwin says the blues "does not refer to music . . . it does refer to the experience of life, or the state of being out of which the blues come."[25] Baldwin uses the blues as "metaphor" where he says in the acceptance of ". . . anguish one finds in the blues, and the expression of it creates also, however odd this may sound, a kind of joy."[26] The use of metaphor here is not a contradiction, but a reallocation of metaphor that is neither puritanical nor oppressive, but extended (allegorically) beyond it puritanical limitations to become joyfully expressive. Blues becomes an extended metaphor for black (religious) vernacular, which signifies on the metaphors of black

oppression and in the process liberates black vernacular and meaning from the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies. Baldwin does this in three ways.

First, Baldwin uses the blues as a type of Christological hermeneutic (black religious vernacular) to signify on the cause of the anguish (suffering) associated with black Christian faith: the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies. Instead of Christianity being a source for puritanical conceptions of black depravity that foster the psychological collision, a blues metaphor extends the sacred to include the messiness of black life. The blues metaphor creates an *allegorical* self-reflexive connection between Christianity and black bodies that liberates them from puritanical proscriptions of black depravity and the "violated" religious inheritance of black people.

Second, by signifying on the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness, the blues metaphor presents Christianity as a living parable—the blues—which is expressive of the secret to black survival in the American context: to not "despise" yourself and have "joy" in the midst of a "hostile and brutally alienating [puritan] white world."[27] Joy, like love for Baldwin is not sentimental and therefore has "nothing to do with what most people have in mind when they talk about happiness, which is not a real state and does not really exist."[28] Baldwin says joy is a "true state, it is [a spiritual and physical] reality" that is about "love, death, floods, lynchings: in fact, a series of disasters which can be summed up under the arbitrary heading, 'Facts of Life.'"[29] This is amplified by Baldwin when he says that the facts of Negro life are found "only in his music…" and through it [music] "…has been able to tell his story [the blues]."[30] The term music does not refer here to a rhythm accompaniment of horns, symbols, and drumbeats, but what Baldwin calls the experience of black life. The fact that the experience of life has a melody, a pitch, a tone, and a rhythm is what allows it to be "admired" as music and not despised as

a troubling tale of "estrangement from ourselves."[31] Baldwin notes that this ensures the "protective sentimentality" limiting the understanding of Americans [both white and black] to the blues condition of the Negro remains untouched or its meaning hidden in the recognized language.[32] However, it is the blues—the "music" to the facts of life that reconciles the messiness of black life to black Christian faith and black church experience.[33]

By signifying Baldwin removes the veneer of the "holy narrative" of Christianity in the black church and exposes the dehumanizing oppressiveness of the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness lurking beneath.[34] For James Baldwin, Christianity is a blues signification, a divine rhetorical device used to break down the connections between black bodies, and the puritanical proscriptions against the body that shape the inherited condition of black life in America.

Baldwin never abandons faith and belief, but transfers it from the narrow interpretive paradigms of black Christianity to blues in order to signify on the puritanical constraints against the black body, the black church, and black community embedded within each. Baldwin overcomes the puritanical barrier of the holy narrative to recapture and privilege a blues language that can "carry the spirits and patterns" of black life.[35] Seen in this way the revelation of the symbols of faith and belief is liberation: not from race, but from puritanism and the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness that produce the religious and theological problems for black bodies in the ghetto space of exile in the Promised Land in America.

How does the blues relate to the black church? I already noted that Baldwin sees the church as the site where the "unwritten, dispersed, and violated inheritance" of black people is "handed down." The black church carries the unwritten negative symbolism of puritanism. This can be seen in the sexisms and homophobias that are prevalent even today. The black church has been used to dispense puritanical

proscriptions against black bodies. Homophobia and sexism are two primary examples of depravity and puritanism found in the black church. Most if not all critiques of Baldwin's work centers on the issue of his embrace of homosexuality and the black body. The black church is a site of internalized oppression buried beneath black Christian church claims and symbols of respectability. In this sense, the black church signifies the "hyperproper" identity of black Christians: a "standard of sexual conduct" meant to *suppress and control* the contagion of black sexuality.[36] This means that the black church and its use of the Christian Gospel are symbols of redemption from the contagion of black sexuality and proclaiming proper sexual conduct. Salvation, at least in this context, is from sin, sin imposed by puritanism. The black church is also a reminder of the violated inheritance of black people and more importantly the inheritance of the violated message of the Christian gospel. Baldwin notes that black people's attempt to use "Christianity to meet the needs of his brutal situation . . . was a disaster. In no way whatever has it replaced . . . what it destroyed."[37] What was the destroyed is the gateway from black depravity to black liberation, which is the use of the blues in the church.

Kelly Brown Douglas's use of a *blues* methodology is quite helpful here. First, Brown Douglas says the black church itself is a semiotic signification that "reflects the rich complexity of the black community itself."[38] She says there are "three aspects of the blues body: it is nonbourgeois, sensuous, and rejected."[39] She argues that the nonbourgeois body represents the black underclass. In a similar fashion to Baldwin, Brown Douglas suggests that blues "is more than a music form; it is a story of black living. The blues emerged from black people who existed on the edges of life."[40] According to her, the nonbourgeois bodies "reflect not simply a social condition of status but also a choice about one's identity and accountability."[41] In this way, she says a "black middle-class body can be a blues body."[42] My use of Brown Douglas's

assertion is not expressly concerned with who can be called blues people, but with how it supports Baldwin's paradigm shift in how the politics of sexuality should be talked about in relation to the black church.[43] She argues that the sensuous body (especially pronounced in the blues sung by women) is a body "seemingly without shame or restraint, about their sexual needs, desires, and preferences."[44] Brown Douglas goes on to say "Blues bodies are of black people who are not embarrassed by their bodies and what their bodies feel."[45]

Second, similar to Baldwin, Brown Douglas points out that the problem of the black church can be found in its "attitudes toward issues of sexuality . . . particularly homoerotic expressions of sexuality."[46] A rejected body is one whose blues message is rejected because it "speaks the language of the devil and is not welcome" in the black church.[47] Brown Douglas says "Blues-singing men and women are, therefore, as unwelcome in the church as the blues they sing—at least as long as they continue to sing the blues."[48]

James Baldwin notes, "What the blues are describing come out of all of this."[49] Baldwin sums all of these up when he locates the blues at a point beyond "more than you can take . . . the days when everything has gone wrong."[50] The non-bourgeois, sensuous, and rejected nature of the black experience can only be expressed as blues: it "sums up the universal challenge, the universal hope, the universal fear . . ."[51] In the final analysis, the blues is a reflection of socio-sexual-religious black wholeness, which is the desired outcome of liberation.

James Baldwin's concern for the black church in particular and the Christian church in general centers on how both deal (quite negatively) with "sexual potential."[52] Sexual potential is the desire to explore sexual curiosity, erotic thoughts, and the sensuousness of the spirit. Sexual potential as an expression of the human potential to engage other humans—to touch and be touched— "roams everywhere."[53] A blues body is a body that willingly expresses its sexual potential. Brown Douglas states "Blues bodies are of black people who are not

embarrassed by their bodies and what their bodies feel."[54] It is a body that is everywhere in the sense that a blues body is not limited by gender or class. As Brown Douglas rightfully points out, "... blues resides in the bodies of those in the pews, even in the most sanctified of people."[55] Sexual potential is therefore an innate human characteristic: in fact it is what makes us human. Rejecting sexual potential is a rejection of the thing that makes us human; because through sexual possibility we come to know how to receive and to give love. Brown Douglas concludes "it follows then that blues bodies stand in stubborn opposition to a culture that is ashamed of or disapproves of the body and all of its needs."[56] This blues is a language of wholeness. Blues embraces the good and the bad—the facts of life—the sensuous and the rejected. Yet, it is the blues' embrace of sexual potential that holds the most promise.

Neither Baldwin nor Brown Douglas sees the black church as a safe haven bent on redeeming the black body or liberating it. Instead the black church, according to Brown Douglas, reflects an "anxiety with human bodies in general, whether they are LGBT or not."[57] Brown Douglas goes on to say that "the black church cannot accommodate what we call here a 'blues' body": bodies that express evidence of sexual potential (sexed and sexy people).[58] The reason the black church cannot accommodate blues bodies is because it has no language—psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—to express the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies. The black church and black religion are not dead or meaningless as some would argue, but disembodied because of its inability to accommodate blues bodies.

In response to the anxiety created by blues bodies, the black church is constructed as a site of conscious avoidance of the "Facts of Life" of black authenticity, which is inclusive of nonnormative sexual identities such as pregnant teens, sexually active singles both straight and LGBTIQ, unwed couples both straight and LGBTIQ, (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender, Intersexed, Queer) and HIV positive blues bodies both straight and LGBTIQ. Blues people and the blues reflect the anxiety associated with those who openly embrace their sexuality as an act of the moral authority to be fully human (sexed/sexy people) in the presence of God. The blues is a paradigm shift away from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness toward black bodies having the moral authority to openly embrace their sexual identities and have this moral identity expressed and reflected by the church.

Jimmy's Blues Project: Toward a Use of the Blues as a Liberation Methodology

James Baldwin says the blues and the spirituals are about the "ability to look on things as they are and survive your losses, or even not survive them—to know that your losses are coming. To know they are coming is the only possible insurance you have, a faint insurance, that you will survive them."[59] Is the blues a language of survival or a language of liberation? According to Baldwin, blues chronicles disaster and the acceptance thereof, and it is also about "going beyond it."[60]

The blues helps to tackle the ethical dilemma posed by black bodies within the black church and community. The blues reintroduces the poor, sexualized, and rejected black bodies of the community back into the calculus of salvation. As mentioned earlier, the black church is not dead, but disembodied. This disembodiment centers on a lack of acceptance of a blues body that is nonbourgeois, sensuous, and rejected. It is important to note here that it is the element of the sensuous that holds the nonbourgeois together with the rejected elements of the blues body. In other words, you cannot talk about the socio-political-economic-religious aspects of the black body apart from its sensuousness—its sexuality.

However, as Kelly Brown Douglas notes, the "black church's sanctioning of a hyperproper standard of sexuality makes it virtually impossible for it to accept, let alone be a sanctuary

of support and empowerment for, blues bodies—which, as earlier described, are invariably sensuous bodies."[61] This fact leaves blues bodies—sensuous, sexualized bodies in a state of exile. I am using the term exile in relation to the failure of the exodic sojourn into the Promised land of the Northern ghettoes to accommodate, explain, or liberate blues bodies from the dystopia they experience. In this sense, Baldwin's self-imposed exile from the black church is based on the black church's inability to accommodate him both spiritually and sexually. Baldwin does not see the possibility of reconciliation between sexuality and the sacred occurring within the confines of the black church as it is so he goes in search of a place and people—not a God—where he can "preach" the black religious vernacular of the blues to blues people waiting to hear the gospel truth that will heal their souls.

Blues language/poetics (understood as black religious vernacular) and blues bodies reconcile sexuality and the sacred. Blues bodies are a literal and physical force reconciling sexuality to sacredness. Blues bodies become a revelation of the moral authority within the black church to speak a blues language that can overcome a puritan-based aberration of love, which denies the power of bodies loving bodies. By denying bodies loving bodies the black church through its holy narrative and hyperproper standard of sexual conduct denies the incarnational dimension of black humanity and the blues revelation of moral authority that comes along with it. Brown Douglas points out that the hyperproper standard "desexualizes black men and women…based upon what is acceptable according to the standards of mainstream white society."[62]

The desire to maintain a hyperproper sexual standard within the black community and black church means that blues bodies, sensuality, and sexuality remain left out of the discourse of wholeness, liberation, and reconciliation. However, reconciliation and ultimately salvation meet in the body and sexuality through the blues. The sensuousness exemplified by blues bodies is used by the black church to

maintain a public standard of hyproper conduct. Because of its inability to reconcile sex with body, sacred with sensual, and carnality with the incarnate, the black church remains locked in a state of irreconcilable claims of freedom and liberation. Baldwin admits "I left the pulpit [and church] upon the realization that *my* salvation could not be achieved that way."[63] Blues leads to reconciliation of sexualized bodies and the sensuous spirit and therefore salvation. Baldwin understands the blues and blues bodies help create a new paradigm that accounts for sexuality in the space where it ought to be: the black church. Baldwin writes,

> Nowhere, in the brief and extraordinary passage of the man known as Jesus Christ, is it recorded that he ever upbraided his disciples concerning their carnality. These were rough, hard-working fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Their carnality can be taken as a given, they would never have trusted or followed or loved a man who did not know that they were men and who did not respect their manhood.[64]

Baldwin is showing us that if Jesus respected the carnality of his disciples, he is in fact embracing their sexual potential. As Baldwin claims, Jesus accepted their sexual potential as given, meaning sexual potential is not a source of judgment. Sexual potential is not seen as the potential for sin/depravity of his disciples or some sort of oversight on the part of Jesus. His acceptance of them required an acceptance of their sexual potential, whether that potential is expressed as love for other men, women, or both. Baldwin reminds us that Jesus required the men to follow just as they were and to love one another as they loved themselves.

Of course carnality, like sexual potential, is impossible to understand using the hyperproper narrative and "violated inheritance" handed down to the black church. Yet, when seen through the blues, sexual potential is not merely carnal or solely related to sin. Sexual potential when seen through the

blues is incarnational: this is its power. The sexual potential of blues bodies is incarnation, meaning that it reconciles the spirit with black bodies, bringing them *into the condition* of power, ability, and generative capacity. In her embodied view of the Incarnation Kelly Brown Douglas says, "The body is the physicality of sexuality, that which signals the potential for one to be authentically human and hence to reflect the image of God in the world."[65] In this sense, sexual potential understood as incarnality *is* divine embodiment: "God's disclosure in Jesus." [66] Brown Douglas helps to explain how Baldwin's assertion of Jesus's acceptance of carnality can be used to construct divine embodiment as sexual potential—his incarnation as a blues body.

Yet, going forward the language of black sexual potential found in black liberation remains consistent with the "black church narrative" which is an inherited "body-negating sexual ethic" that also has its "religious counterpart to the black community's sociocultural sexual narrative."[67] According to Brown Douglas, "nonconforming black [blues] bodies" are subject to the sacred authenticity of the black church.[68]

> The black church narrative is perhaps more troubling because it claims sacred authenticity. It is, in other words, a "holy" narrative – a phenomenon that has a long legacy…It provides a sacred cover for the black community's hyperproper sexuality, making violation of this hyperproper sexual standard not simply a social breach, but also a sin against God. Ironically, the black narratives of hyperproper sexual standards validate the same white cultural narrative they attempt to contest.[69]

Incarnality as sexual potential bridges the chasm between white and black, sin and salvation, and heterosexuality and homosexuality reconciling them into a relationship of continuously new meaning—allegorical extension—via the body and incarnality. In this way Incarnation is made whole and "relative" in the sense that sexual potential brings the

body—black (and queered) bodies into relationship with "God the Creator."[70]

In other words, incarnality in blues bodies is a reflection of sacredness and therefore a sign of the Incarnation of Jesus: the revelation of God to humanity. Baldwin's and Douglas's uses of the blues and blues bodies coincides with Baldwin's assertion of Jesus's acceptance of sexual potential and affirms sexualized bodies as a condition for God's revelation in the world. It is the source for a "sexual discourse of resistance," which according to Brown Douglas "heeds the testimony of ordinary men and women who struggle daily for survival and freedom."[71]

In this sense, the Gospel is a discourse of sexual potential, which *is* the good news. Its primary location is the space where sex ought to be—good news—and ultimately where it is most needed: the pulpit and the pews, which Baldwin left in search of a radical oppositional blues interpretation. Biographer Herb Boyd notes that Baldwin "left the pulpit to preach the [g]ospel."[72] Baldwin identifies his leaving the church as a response to the irreconcilability of his sexuality, race, and black male responsibility to divine law and natural order to a history meant to "keep" him in place.[73] Baldwin finds the blues expression of sexual potential as a source for new meaning: the good news of sexual oughtness in the space where rage and violence kept him from the gospel.

As such, the sexual potential of the gospel—its blues—becomes a new revelation of God within the church whereby the closet door of sexuality is swung wide open and all are welcome incarnationally. Saying *yes* to Jesus means accepting sexual potential and to the blues of life. Baldwin says,

> One must say Yes to life and embrace it wherever it is found – and it is found in terrible places; nevertheless, there it is: and if the father can say, *Yes, Lord,* the child can learn that most difficult of words, *Amen.* For nothing is fixed, forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is

> always shifting, the sea does not cease to grind down the rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have.[74]

Baldwin's blues—*Jimmy's blues project*—relatively speaking, is making sense of scripture as source of revelation for black life and sexual truth within the context of the black church in America. According to Baldwin, the Gospel begins with Jesus's acceptance of the sexual potential of the men who would be closest to him. Through the lens of the blues the Gospel is a sexual parable in which understanding the deeper meaning of sexuality reveals the deep meaning of the power of our own embodiment.

Baldwin is able to speak of incarnality in the form of homosexual love and sexuality from the perspective of its acceptance as a sexual potential within the context of the Gospel, which is for him a source of Divine revelation and for those who read him. Through the blues James Baldwin unveils the sexual potential of the black church, thereby returning the Incarnational power of love to the Gospel and the "revelation" of black moral authority to blues bodies.

3

Living Exiled in the Promised Land

Chapter 1 dealt with Baldwin's prolonged religious crisis. I framed the crisis as the inheritance of a religious tradition that is shaped by puritanical influences, which demonize black bodies. I showed how Baldwin's understanding religion exposes the influences of puritanism in black religion and how what he offers creates a sexualized discourse that defends against the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness: the psychological collision between the images created by Protestant Puritan ideology and black bodies. In chapter 2, I wrote about how the sexualized discourse emerging from Baldwin's interpretation and experience of religion is a form of blues. I wrote about how puritanism forces Baldwin to signify—an act of verbal indirection that exploits the gaps between the denotative (indication) and figurative (semiotic) expression of a word that creates a strategy for reclaiming black moral authority: the power to define the (blues) self on its own terms (righteousness expressed via black religious vernacular) for blues bodies in the black church. I showed how blues bodies are a site of revelation wherein Jesus's acceptance of incarnality and sexualized bodies reveals God to be found among those who are not only marginalized racially but sexually as well.

In this chapter, I write about the ways in which Baldwin's blues perspective emerges from the blues condition of the blues community exiled within the oppressed space of the

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

Promised Land. I give examples of how the work of Baldwin and Womanist's approaches coalesce in the psychosocial resistance to inept models of god and black manhood formed by the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness and challenges the limitations of the (holy) narrative of black Christianity and the exodic model of liberation used to address a hierarchy of (heteropatriarchal male) racial oppression in the context of exile. Finally, I write about how the psychic resistance contained in black religious vernacular employed by black mothers used as a tool for survival informs Baldwin's own resistant to the trauma experienced by blues bodies exiled in the oppressed space of the Promised Land.

Constructing the Experience of the Blues Body: Exodus from Oppression

The blues body is a shared body meaning that it is a coconstituted body shaped by the experiences of rejection based on race, sexuality, gender, and class. It is also a language (black religious vernacular) producing the black moral authority enabling raced, sexualized, and gendered bodies to define their social and sensual selves beyond the psychological trap of black oppression—the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies—experienced within the context of religion, church, and community: the latter of which is the focus of this chapter. What then is the experience of the blues body in the community and why is it important?

The blues body is a rejected body. The blues body is rejected in the church and in the community because it signifies depravity. However, denotative acceptance of blues bodies used in the construction of liberation discourse for the oppressed reveals the factual aspect of blues bodies to be an experience of chronic traumatization fueled by the rejection of its racialized and sexualized self. Webster defines trauma

as "a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury."[1] The experience of trauma is consistent with the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies—experienced within the context of religion, church, and community. The experience of trauma/traumatization is made opaque by the hyper-proper standard of blackness established by the exodic model of liberation.

The exodus account of the children of Israel is used to formulate the exodic-oriented trope of black liberation.[2] This is what (African-American) systematic theologian James H. Evans describes as the "Hebrew model of interpretation."[3] This model connects the experience of enslaved Africans in America to the biblical story of the Israelite's experience of deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Evans says the exodus story not only reflects the experience of enslaved Africans, but it also gave enslaved Africans an "acceptable expressive vehicle for the slaves' yearning for political emancipation" and a theological location as "insiders in the scriptural drama."[4] These last two elements are extremely important because they are used to construct the concept of the Promised land: the place where those who were once enslaved then liberated reign with God. It is also, in the case of black people, where the unwritten, dispersed, and violated puritanical inheritance of black people is "handed down." Because of this, I contend that exodus is the condition wherein the "original energy" as Baldwin says to "plead the blood" and have power over Pharaoh is lost.[5] In other words, black religious vernacular lost its liminal functionality: the ability to invoke the power God to dismantle oppression and relieve trauma. The concept of God becomes, as Evans notes, a theological "abstraction" and the theodical notion of God's power and presence in the minds of black people a "speculative conceptualization" in relation to the Promised Land.

The electability of black people to be liberated by God into the Promised Land causes the marginalization and condemnation of blues bodies in exodus. The attainment of the Promised Land requires the rejection of blues bodies. This choice reinforces the oppression liberation seeks to undo and obfuscates the trauma of those made opaque by making such a choice. Charles Long's concept of the "opacity of reality" is helpful here.[6] Long explains the opacity of reality as the denial of the authority of the "white world" in this case to define blackness and deny the "methodological and philosophical meaning of transparency as a metaphor for a theory of knowledge."[7] While "theologians of opacity" make evident the condition of suffering and oppression in their writing, the presence of blues bodies reveals that opaque theologies do not as Long cautions "move beyond the structural power of [white] theology as the normative mode of discourse."[8] Long states further that theologies opaque must be able to "contemplate a narrative of meaning that is commensurate with the quality of beauty that was fired in the crucible of oppression."[9]

Exodus as a normative mode of discourse informing black (opaque) theology does not adequately contemplate the meaning of trauma experienced by blues bodies within its narrative or the beauty of its expression—the blues—found in the black religious vernacular "fired in the crucible" of oppression.[10] Finally, Long writes that the "deconstructive task" for opaque theologies is to "make common cause with folklorists, novelists, poets, and many other nontheological types [blues bodies] who are involved in the discernment of [blues] meanings."[11] Because blues bodies are rejected, racialized, sexualized, gendered, and classed bodies, they are "nontheological bodies" in the sense that they are considered unfit for the construction of liberation. However, Long helps me to identify blues bodies as the archetype for theological opaqueness, whereby the "twilight zones of half-light and quasi-physical infection…and semi-realities…" deconstruct the

exodic narrative of black liberation theology and the condition of oppression to expose the experience of trauma in the Promised Land. Long's signification of theology that exposes black theology to be a prime example of theologies opaque runs parallel to my signification of black theology's scheme of liberation, as it is constructed, and exposes the gap signified by oppression that makes blues bodies and the experience of trauma opaque.

The experience of rejection forces blues bodies to live in a constant state of trauma from which there is no relief found within or without the church. It is important to understand blues bodies in relation to trauma as a means for accurately locating the experience of blues bodies within the context of oppression. The thematization of "the oppressed" in the application of the exodus narrative in relation to black liberation makes trauma and traumatized bodies opaque. As a religious theme, oppression creates a hierarchical model of liberation. By aligning black liberation with exodus, the hierarchy is a limiting force with regards to color, sex, gender, and power. Liberation based on exodus is not to be found in the hierarchical construction liberation, but in the particularity of the multiple expressions of trauma of those bodies unable to perform or reflect the kind of color, gender, sexual respectability an exodic scheme of liberation a hierarchy of oppression demands. In this sense, exodus is itself oppressive in that the traumatization of blues bodies is perpetuated by a liberation trope that is not constructed to address trauma related to sexuality, but to silence it. I claim that Long's observation reveals that (black) liberation theology does not move beyond the normative mode of puritanical discourse or the structural power of Puritan Protestantism, and its Calvinist underpinnings. The exodus narrative focused on liberation from oppression does not account for the trauma experienced by blues bodies.[12] In order to move toward liberation a narrative must be established that accommodates the worth and meaning commensurate with the quality of beauty, unique

to blues bodies' experience of trauma fired in the crucible of oppression located in the Promised Land.

Again, black liberation theology privileges the hierarchical condition of oppression versus responding to the particularity of blues bodies' experience of trauma. My development of the distinction between understanding oppression as an exodic condition and trauma as an experience within the exodic is important, because blues bodies signify on the fatal inattentiveness paid to the experience of traumatization within the condition of oppression when exodus is used as a model for black liberation.

Trauma, postenslavement, is never adequately addressed: neither black religion nor Christianity as it is practiced mostly in the black church has a concrete response. The exodus motif reinforces the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies—experienced within the context of religion, church, and community, which perpetuates the "lasting trauma" experienced and represented by blues bodies.[13]

Howard Thurman's understanding of religion in relation to the oppressed is helpful for explaining the experience of the blues body. Thurman believes that the meaning of religion is not found in what it says, but in what it offers "the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed . . . to meet their own needs."[14] The dispossessed identified by Thurman are akin to the blues bodies identified by me, in chapter 2, employing Baldwin's use of the blues to do so.[15] The ability of blues bodies to meet their own needs is the (black) moral authority (incarnational power) identified by me at the end of chapter 2. Therefore the search for black moral authority by blues bodies using Thurman's parlance is "perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life."[16]

Thurman reveals that the meaning of religion is determined by how well it meets the needs of the disinherited. This is similar to Long's assertion that theologies opaque

must move beyond the normative discourse of theology to address the condition of oppression in order to meet the needs of the oppressed. Also, the religious inheritance described by Baldwin as a "violated inheritance" assumes disinheritance in the sense that the symbols of religion and Christianity were stripped of their original energy when they were handed down to black people, which also means the quality of beauty and the power of the black experience were lost in the privileging of the normative discourse of (white) Christianity by black Christianity. Second, Thurman shares a moment of signifying on religion similar to Baldwin, in that he identifies the gap between what religion indicates verbally and what it reveals figuratively about blues bodies existing with their "backs constantly against the wall."[17] Third, Thurman asks the question "What does our religion say to them?"[18]—The ability of blues people to define their reality—versus it being defined for them, is indicative of the capacity—moral authority—blues and blues bodies have to answer the question posed by Thurman and to adequately represent Long's definition of theologies opaque. Thurman locates the dispossessed spatially: with their backs against the wall. This is indicative of someone who is vulnerable, exposed, left out, and exiled: the poor, disinherited, dispossessed, *and* exiled blues bodies. As such, blues bodies, those with their backs against the wall are in a state of survival. Therefore the blues body is first and foremost an exiled body concerned with survival.

I have already noted that the blues experience of trauma is made opaque within the exodic condition of oppression. However, once trauma is brought into the light within the exodic condition of oppression, it exposes, borrowing a phrase from Long, the "twilight zones of half-light" inhabited by the "semirealities of the modern Western World."[19] This is the space of exile in which blues bodies are located. Exile is the opaque signification of exodus within the trope of liberation. It is the ghettoized space in which survival is a perpetual state of being and where the effects of trauma

create a maze of "purgatories and hells"—the ghetto full of the quality of beauty of the blues expressed by the "poets, proletarians, colonized peoples, the colored races" who survive in the ghettoized space and condition of exile.[20]

The experience of trauma reveals the exilic condition to be one of survival. This fact does not do away with oppression and does not diminish the fact that oppression is a reality. However, I see oppression as an ontological argument rather than an existential reality, which I equate more with survival. I do not intend to argue for or against oppression but seek to privilege survival as a pragmatic choice by blues bodies who readily experience traumatization as exiles in the Promised Land.

Constructing the Condition of the Blues Body: Surviving Exile

As I stated earlier, the blues body is a rejected body. The blues body is rejected because it signifies depravity. The factual reality of blues bodies reveals that they exist in lasting trauma (chronic traumatization and depravation) that exposes a parallel condition of exile existing within the context of the Promised Land. Liberation from oppression and depravation is secondary to surviving the trauma associated with its inescapability. The lasting trauma of blues bodies is captured in the ways blues bodies, understood as the Negro in Baldwin's parlance, has "affected the American psychology."[21] Blues bodies represent a social problem codified in "statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence…analogous to disease…which must be checked even though it cannot be cured."[22] The intractable condition of the Negro (blues bodies) identified by Baldwin is consistent with the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness—the collision between the metaphorical images (of blackness) created by Protestant Puritan ideology, Christianity, and black bodies—experienced within the context of religion, church, and community.

Blues bodies carry the psychic weight of black depravity into their exile where they are quarantined within oppression, but unable to access the cure of liberation: this is the source of the lasting trauma. While blues bodies wait for liberation from oppression, they find ways to survive trauma in exile.

Survival is an important strategy for blues bodies in exile because it destabilizes the God of exodus and the heteropatriarchal hierarchy of racial liberation. First, survival raises theodical questions about God's presence and power in the condition of exile. Of course I am presuming that God is present, but destabilized by the experience of lasting trauma by blues people exiled within the condition of oppression in the Promised Land. The quadruple canopy of oppression, exile, depravity, and trauma experienced by blues bodies calls the presence and power of the God of exodus into question. One response to the theodical destabilization of the concept of the God of exodus is summed up in Baldwin's statement that a valid concept of God must be able to make "us" (blues bodies) freer and more loving; and if God cannot do that "we" (blues bodies) must get rid of "Him" (God).[23] Another response to the theodical destabilization of God is found in systematic theologian James A. Evans's assertion that God is ungiven. I say that the destabilization of God leads to the ungivenness of God in the black experience of exile.

According to James Evans, the ungivenness of God is grounded in the African-American Christian's "history of victimization and despoilment" associated with their European encounter with extant understanding of god expressed by African people.[24] Evans explains further that it was the "… sheer brutality of the colonial conquest that rendered the idea of God problematic in African experience."[25] According to Evans, the results of the ungivenness of God in the African American is seen in the impact of racism on the extant theology of Blacks and the opacity of the black experience in relation to the appropriated Christian God of colonialism.[26] In the process of colonization, the African "sense of both the

presence and absence of God" is made theologically unstable within the Puritan Protestanism's resistance to syncretism. This leads Evans to agree with what religious scholar Albert J. Raboteau describes as "the death of the African Gods."[27] The racialization and sexualization of African bodies are the precursors to the construction of racialization and sexualization of the Negro (blues bodies) in colonial America.

The opacity of the black experience identified by Evans echoes a similarity to Charles Long's construction of theologies opaque that is used to produce a relevant (black) theology to counter the condition of otherness and the theodical ungivenness caused by Puritan Protestanism.

I make the assertion that the not readily apparent (ungiven) God of exodus identified by Evans is the destabilized concept of the God of exile captured in the othering of black bodies suffering from lasting trauma induced by the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness created by Protestant puritan ideology. In this context, the ungivenness and destabilization of God produced by exile is a signifying event whereby what the God of exodus denotes figuratively (liberation) is inconsistent with the factual condition of survival that persists in the exiled community. The ungivenness of God and the condition of black people constantly with their backs against the wall in a posture of survival is more consistent with exile, making survival the pragmatic choice for blues bodies in exile coping with trauma.

Survival also destabilizes the hierarchical construction of otherness in which there is a privileging of oppression in relation to the patriarchal privilege that occurs most often in the construction of liberation that begins with exodus. The idea of God as unstable and ungiven is helpful for understanding the difficulty of locating God in exile. I think the exilic sojourn of Hagar helps to explain it best. The Hagar story is a story of survival where the one who is banished (exiled) experiences, firsthand, the absence/ungivenness of God within the promised space of God after being a sexualized surrogated servant with the chosen people (man) of the God.

Delores S. Williams's Womanist explanation of the survival tradition is helpful here. Williams identifies two traditions within black theology: one that has emphasis on liberation in relation to black males and one which places emphasis on female "activity." Williams says the first tradition "…emphasized liberation of the oppressed and showed God relating to men in the liberation struggles."[28] Systematic Womanist theologian, JoAnne Marie Terrell, helps to further explain the problem of privileging male otherness in relation to liberation. Terrell makes the assertion that the focus on manhood in connection to exodus and liberation disregards the "ontological implications of black women's suffering."[29] The connection between exodus, liberation, and the issues associated with the hierarchical heteropatriarchal privileging of black male otherness identified by Williams and Terrell is directly relatable to Baldwin's concern with the implications of black male sexual otherness within black theology and religion.

Williams questions whether or not this paradigm best relates to those in the community seeking liberation that do not fit the acceptable model relative to gender and sexuality and class.[30] Williams explains that exodus does not account for inconsistencies associated with liberation. In other words, exodus does not account fully for those who are situated like "Hagar, the female slave, and her progeny outside the promise of freedom…"[31] In this sense, exodus does not account for the traumatized (female/feminized, sensuous, and non-bourgeois) blues body.

The second tradition identified by Williams "…emphasized female activity and deemphasized male authority."[32] This second tradition identified by Williams is a female perspective focused on the "…survival and quality-of-life tradition of African-American biblical appropriation," which I identify as a competing narrative with the exodus tradition of biblical interpretation.[33] Williams points to the story of Hagar as the starting point for the construction of black women's experience in the tradition of African-American

biblical appropriation.[34] More important is that Williams can be used to define the rejected blues body as a female (or feminized or weak male) body, Hagar and her son, who do not experience liberation from their condition, but are given resources for survival within it.

According to Williams, survival is a defining element of black female bodies. In this sense, a female or the feminine body is associated with survival. It is also the prevailing characteristic of exile, wherein the act of survival is a pragmatic choice taking the "human initiative" to "make a way out of no way" with the help of God.[35] Hagar is representative of the blues body in that she is a nonbourgeois, sensuous, and rejected slave body. Hagar is rejected because of her sensuality and sexuality, and summarily exiled as a response to its exposure/celebration. Survival is the emphasis here: it is Hagar's choice. The choice to survive is a first-step toward liberation from trauma. Survival is not trauma itself, but a psychological turning point toward the determination to believe in the life-giving spiritual resources of the God of exile, which can be used to resist the alternative that is death. Terrell affirms this point when she writes that the presence of God "effected through the [spiritual] resources God grants and empowers" those who choose to survive.[36]

It is important to note that Hagar's choice for survival is inclusive of her son. Hagar's son is the heir to God's promise to provide the spiritual resources needed for survival in the midst of rejection and exile. This mother/son dynamic is the starting point for understanding the experience of rejected and exiled bodies (both male and female) in the Promised Land. In other words, the Hagar narrative of trauma and survival in exile reveals the actualities of the experience of the traumatized exiled blues bodies who search for safety and resources for survival in America. It also reveals that there is a psychological dimension informed by the spiritual resources of God used as a defense against the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness faced by blues bodies. Even

more important (for this project) is the fact that it is not only Hagar, the woman who is rejected, but also her son who is rejected and exiled. In this sense, the black mother along with her son embody a shared sense of rejection and suffer the same fate of exile. The mother/son connection is a blues connection reflective of the nonbourgeois (nonnormative), sensuous (sexual), and rejected (depraved outcast) experience of blues people seeking to survive exile in the oppressed space of the Promised land.

Constructing the Psyche of the Blues Body: Survival Mentality in Exile

The Hagar narrative reveals the importance of the mother in the scheme for survival. The Hagar narrative reveals a psychological turning point toward the acceptance of the spiritual resources given to her by the God she encounters in her exile. It stands to reason that the most important part of her son's (Ishmael) inheritance is the psychological skill needed to recognize the spiritual resources of God needed to survive in exile. The Hagar narrative is a story of inheritance from mother to son in which the psychic power to belief in the spiritual resources of God allows sons to "see" a way to survive as exiles in the oppressed space of the Promised Land.

In the absence of the protection and companionship of the father of her son, Hagar substitutes God for man and finds the ability for both her and her son to survive exile. This skill exhibited by Hagar—one in which physical circumstance must bend toward spiritual possibilities—is shown through what Delores Williams identifies as "psychological substitution."[37] Williams explains "many antebellum mothers had as their helpmate not the black man but black religion."[38] In the absence of black male authority, psychological substitution meant that black "mothers and nurturers depended on their religion for psychological and emotional support."[39] According to Williams, the unstable external reality of the

black world of oppression wherein God (of exodus) is readily overwhelmed, led to the creation of an internalized "fixed psychic point" that operated to fulfill "some very basic needs that could not be fulfilled by the slave community or the black man."[40] This "internalized process" also allowed black women and mothers to maintain a "vigorous spiritual self-confidence, even though their sexuality has been completely brutalized and exploited by white men of every social class."[41]

William further states that many found this problematic because such a "consciousness and dependence created needs that could only be fulfilled within the limits of the black mother's religion."[42] Williams's assertion offers a partial, but important explanation of the power dynamics between black women and men within theological discourse and the black church: in order to create a dependable model of black manhood, black males overcompensate for a weak male identity by replacing black mother's religious survivability with a hypermasculine religious dominance that is patriarchal, hegemonic, misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, and violent. Yet, psychological substitution, at least for Baldwin, is the only thing that makes sense for blues bodies, both female and male, seeking to survive in the oppressed space of the Promised Land.

Williams gives a solid positive example of psychological substitution found in James Baldwin's novel *If Beale Street Could Talk,* in which Fonny (the son) relays to Tish (his love interest) the account of his mother's psychological substitution of God for his father during sex.[43]

> Oh Lord, help me. And he'd say, The Lord's going to help you, sugar, just as soon as you get to be a little child again, naked, like a child. Come on, come to the Lord… And she'd say, Oh Lord help me to bear my burden. And he'd say, Here it is baby, you going to bear it all right, I know it. You got a friend in Jesus, and I'm going to tell you when he comes. The first time… And the bed would shake and she would

> moan and moan and moan. And, in the morning, was just like nothing ever happened. She still belonged to Jesus and he went off down the street, to the shop.[44]

It is important to note that Fonny is telling this story to Tish while he is incarcerated for a murder he did not commit. Tish is also pregnant with his child. The psychological substitution of God in the place of Fonny's father by his mother relayed in his account is quite possibly the tool Fonny uses to survive the triple irony of his imprisonment, the suicide of his father, and the lack of power expressed by exile in prison while awaiting release back into exile where Tish and her unborn child fight for survival in the Promised Land.

I think the story of Hagar is an appropriate example of the narrative of the human initiative of survival similar to what is represented in the example Fonny and Tish in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Many sons lost in the destabilized spaces of exile often succumb to the inability to psychologically substitute the Love of God for the violence they are often forced to choose. Faced with the hard rabble life of blues bodies exiled in the Promised Land, the psychological turning point for many black sons away from God and the substitution of violence for love occur when black males experience the inability of black masculinity to ensure safety and/or justice. In response to trauma, black males fall victim to violence and to the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness rather than substitute the weak form of masculinity they inherited with the spiritual resources of the God of exile found in the black mother's religion in order to survive. What Williams says about Hagar helps not only black women and black mothers but also black fathers, black boys, girls, and black men who are trying to survive a concept of black masculinity perverted by puritanism.

Williams acknowledges that examples of black mothers in Baldwin's work exhibits an "antebellum and postbellum blues consciousness that shows a "care and love" for black

men. I say a black mother who chooses to teach their sons the art of psychologically substituting God in the place of a model of manhood perverted by Puritanism is a mother concerned with the long-term survival of their sons, daughters, and communities.[45] In the face of trauma (a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury), Williams's shows that black women and mothers fight (psychic) fire with (psychic) fire by deploying a fixed psychic point that substitutes a violent, patriarchal, homophobic, sexist patriarchy with a God who provides the spiritual resources to survive.

Baldwin's own response to trauma reveals that he too has a "fixed psychic point" that operates to fulfill his very basic needs to be a man who can give and receive love in a fashion he learned from black women like Hagar and found in the mother/son relationship fostered by black mothers exemplified in his works. Baldwin deftly uses a model of psychological substitution, what he describes as a gimmick, in order to survive the trauma of the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness he encountered as an exile in the oppressed space of the Promised Land.[46] The psychological process of substituting powerless black males for God, which Williams says, allowed black women and mothers to maintain a vigorous spiritual self-confidence even though their sexuality had been completely brutalized is similar to what Baldwin employs to maintain his spiritual self-confidence, even though his sexuality and manhood remained threated by a homophobic church and community. As someone exiled because of his sexuality Baldwin learns from his mother the art of psychological substitution whereby the God of exodus exemplified in black patriarchal masculinity is replaced by a God of exile who is able to fulfill the basic needs for survival and protect his ability to love and be loved in the oppressed space of the Promised Land. This is a hallmark of Baldwin's life, work, and genius.

Baldwin's rejection of black patriarchy and the use of the black mother's "gimmick" of psychological substitution as

a means for surviving trauma induced by the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness *and* black patriarchy further the destabilization of the God of exodus and expose a God of exile that might make liberation and love possible for blues bodies exiled in the oppressed space of the Promised Land. Heeding the caution of Williams, I make note that the act of psychological substitution occurs most often in cases where black masculinity falters and is often conquered by the weight of trying to survive exile. Black women are challenged by this as evidenced by Williams, Terrell, and the account of other Womanist thinkers. Baldwin writes black women are forced to "accommodate this indispensable [male] creature, who is, in many ways, more fragile than a woman."[47] Masculine fragility (the unmasculine) is problematic in exile in the sense that it is counterintuitive to the construction of black manhood and the role men are to play in the scheme of survival, safety, and liberation. The notion that a man is more fragile than a woman is a humiliation he cannot bear: it "obliterates him."[48] A valid if not dangerous question to ask is *can black males who refuse to employ the mother art of psychological substitution survive exile in the oppressed space of the Promised Land?* If black males are unable or unwilling to do so, black males must continue to be substituted with God while women try to alter and conquer reality alone. According to Baldwin, it is because of the survival skills of black mothers and black women that "the race has managed to survive so long."[49]

This is a kind of forced surrogacy found in exodus, whereby women, in most instances black mothers, especially and unfairly carry the burden of ensuring the survival, success and are blamed for the failure of black boys and men in the Promised Land. However, in exile, blues bodies must shift from being male centered to blues centered, which carries both masculine and feminine identities equally. I find Baldwin's idea of androgyny interesting here, especially in the sense of psychological substitution. Baldwin sees androgyny

as a spiritual state of being that is the "truth concerning every human being" and is "recognized when the chips are, brutally down—when there is no longer any way to avoid this recognition." Baldwin says the androgyny is everywhere, "whether you were alone or with another…this is true for the last time you broke bread or, as I have tried to suggest, the last time you made love." This captures the psychological substitution employed by Baldwin in that it highlights how he substitutes the model of powerless black maleness for an androgynous spirituality indicative of God that gives him the power to survive.[50] It is the secret within the secret to black survival.

Baldwin uses the black mother's art of psychological substitution to replace the God of exodus (the god of his father) with the God of exile (the god of his mother), to substitute race with sex, and to substitute violence with love.[51] Baldwin's reliance on the psychic experience of women in the construction of his blues narrative allows for an easy fit into an exilic narrative that uses Hagar's story and Williams's example of black mother's psychological substitution as effective examples of surviving the trauma of being exiled in the oppressed space of the Promised Land. These examples do not privilege "Manhood first!" nor do they employ a "hermeneutic of sacrifice" which, according to Terrell, emulates "…the idolatrous values of the dominant (puritan) white culture."[52] The focus on survival carries with it the need for liberation exemplified by the blues bodies of Hagar and her son or in the case of Baldwin's life and work, black mothers and their sons. The blues experience and condition found in exile connect Hagar and her son to mothers and sons (blues bodies) exiled in the Promised Land. The destabilized and ungiven nature of God in exile is revealed in the choice and experience of survival. An example of this can be found in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

In *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* the character John Grimes describes the inescapable dirt in his home in Harlem by

saying that the dirt "triumphed" in its ubiquity, overcoming the walls and floorboards; beneath the sink and the pots hanging above the stove; even the mop that he used to remove the dirt was overcome.[53] In the midst of the shame and horror, John Grimes thought *He who is filthy, let him be filthy.* This paraphrasing of Revelations 22:11 reveals a sense of a God (Christian inheritance) that is not present and therefore unable to undo the uncleanliness of Grimes's world. The dirt also represents his inability to meet the model of masculinity and God represented by his stepfather. John Grimes resisted the God of his father and in his hardheartedness laments "He would not be like his father, or his father's father. He would have another life."[54] Accordingly it is the omnipresence and omnipotence of the dirt that John must first learn to live with and employ a gimmick to have a revelation of the God of exile whose presence is completely covered in the dirt in his home, the streets, and the very floor in front of the alter where he later experiences conversion. The inability of John Grimes to see the God of exile or male possibilities for liberation from exile is due to the "darkness of his sin," the "darkness of his father's church," and the dirty veneer overlain onto everything around him that his father through prayer, faith, labor, or believe in God was never able to gain enough power to change the circumstances of his family. John's heart is hardened against the God of exodus exhibited by his father and the black church because neither had the power to offer relief from the dirt (messiness). Both show an unwillingness to embrace the dirt (messiness) or accept the spiritual resources that explain or liberate John from the dirtiness he found in and around himself.

In the midst of the dirt, John Grimes locates the presence of God in the face of his mother: a blues body. In the midst of the dirt and the scriptural disconnection from God carried with it, John Grimes sees God in the face of his mother and the key to survival she represents. In her face (the face he gave her in his dreams/psyche), John saw someone he knew

"no evil could undo."[55] The God of exile becomes apparent in the presence of his black mother. Through his mother's prayers, the God of exile comes to substitute for his father and the God of exodus and John begins to understand the "gimmick" his mother calls God's "…bewildering method of answering prayer."[56] Baldwin says that the world existed only because of his mother and she becomes the source of survival in the midst of the inescapable dirtiness of his world. At first John Grimes finds it hard to imagine that the women understand there is no safety outside of the Lord.[57] I attribute this to the God of exodus and powerless black masculinity exemplified in the character of his father. However, the prayers for safety from the terror of the South become prayers of safety from the trauma experienced in the North. Black boys escape remaining boys in the South to find themselves unable to become men in the North. Yet, it is prayers of mothers for their sons and the women who love them that is the first choice for survival available to them.

John's conversion experience is itself a type of psychological substitution that, when accepted, allows him to take the first step toward reconciling his faith to his sexuality. The God of exile is in the dirt (the messiness), using the dust to mold a blues body that is strong enough to hold the breath of the (blues) spirit it needs to survive exile in the Promised Land. John Grimes's mother "made real" what he read in the Bible about God and a life he "found so hard to imagine."[58]

In this way John's mother becomes the god-like embodiment of the Christ: a blues Christ who dwells with those exiled in the oppressed space of the Promised Land. However, John's mother Elizabeth is not an ontological creation, she is an existential reality. Neither God nor Jesus have to become black, because they already exist as such in the bodies of black mothers—black women. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* reveals a threefold relationship by which the feminine—via motherhood—is a source of incarnation, salvation, and redemption. For the women in *Go Tell It*, the starting point is "the altar of

the Lord" where the knowledge of how to pray and survive is learned and passed on from generation to generation.[59]

The mother/son orientation of exile differs greatly from the Father/son orientation I associate with Exodus. The starting point for men finds them engulfed in lust-filled guilty love where they "tarry" in sin.[60] The men are not bequeathed the inheritance of the altar, but must show proof they are worthy.[61] This differs from the black patriarchal notion whereby black males are primary de facto (unmerited) choice of black religion to be the first adopted by God and saved by his ontologically created son: the Black Christ. This disconnection is amplified by the condition of blues bodies. In this sense, it is heteropatriarchy undergirded by the God of exodus that creates the theodical distortion of the presence of the divine in exile and the devaluation of black women's strategy of psychological substitution, which ensures survival in exile. The question arises about how bodies that have been racialized and sexualized respond to a theological paradigm that is nonpatriarchal or nonracial, but matriarchal, sexual, or queer?

In the context of mother/son relationship in exile, James Baldwin can be seen as its defining figure born to survive and to contest the patriarchal and sexual limitations placed on blues bodies. The powerlessness of the God of exodus and violent models of manhood Baldwin experienced as an exile in the Promised Land are (psychologically) substituted for the God of exile—the God of his mother—and a model of black manhood empowered to love himself and love other selves sexually and nonsexually.

Baldwin's acceptance of his sexual and loving self is also the acceptance of his feminine self as part of what makes him wholly masculine and this liberates Baldwin from the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness. Baldwin destabilizes the fixed psychic point of racial rage used to inform black manhood and shifts liberation away from heteronormative strategies used to manufacture power, which places

(homophobic) violence in the space where sex ought to be, toward a man that is liberated, freer, and better able to love. By doing so Baldwin becomes a powerful reflection of manhood within the context of black religion, black theology, black church, and black community.

4

Queering and Theological Signification

In chapter 1, I established that Baldwin's understanding of religion is synonymous with safety. I further explained that Baldwin's concern for safety presents a prolonged religious crisis is brought about by the awareness of his sexuality, the dangers sexuality presented him with, and the fact that religion would not make him safe in the church or on the street. I wrote about how the underlying element of puritanism that demonizes blackness as the source making religion unsafe. Toward the end of the chapter, I wrote about how Baldwin overcomes the puritanical metaphors of black oppression through sexualizing black religious discourse. In chapter 2, I explained how puritanism forces Baldwin to signify—an act of verbal indirection that exploits the gaps between the denotative (indication) and figurative (semiotic) expression of a word—as a strategy for reclaiming black moral authority—the power to define the (blues) self on its own terms (righteousness). I further explained that Baldwin's use of the blues is a form of signification used to create a black religious vernacular of sexualized discourse that reconciles racialized and sexualized bodies with black Christian faith. In chapter 3, I explained that Baldwin's blues perspective emerges out of his experience of being exiled in the oppressed space of the Promised Land. I gave examples of how Baldwin's work and Womanist's approaches using the story of Hagar coalesce to form a psychic-social resistance to the psychological trap of

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

metaphorical blackness faced by blues bodies. Toward the end of chapter 3, I wrote that it is the black mother who passes on to her son the psychic-social-spiritual tactic of survival needed to survive the trauma the God of exodus and the choice of powerless exodic model of manhood that cannot ensure safety or survival in exile. I concluded by stating that Baldwin uses this tactic (gimmick) not only to survive exile but also to create a model of manhood that is powerful enough to be liberated from exile. In this chapter, I speak further about how the puritanical "essence" of Christianity poses problems for the exodic masculine orientation of black liberation theology.[1]

James Baldwin says nothing specific about black theology. Baldwin confronts the history of color symbolism and the unrecognized influences of puritanism informing theology in general. More than anything he identifies theology as a "moral choice" between whiteness and blackness.[2] He argues that "changing one or two pronouns" simply transfers the "whole legend of theology—and its entire theology" of this system onto another system.[3] As such, any theology based on either white or black moral choices that does not examine the puritanical religious influences on the American system of theology simply transfers oppression via the metaphors informing the history of survival of whiteness and the concomitant struggle of blackness from one system to another. Therefore, instead of being liberating, black theology reinforces its own oppression by its insistence on rooting its survivability in a moral choice grounded in the very system of theology that creates and sustains oppression.

As we saw in chapter 1, Baldwin points to the oppressive aspects of black religion vis-à-vis black bodies, sexuality, and masculinity founded on puritanism. So it stands to reason that for him the crisis in theology emerges on the same grounds, meaning the rage against racism found in black theology in particular is based on a moral choice influenced by

puritanism. This has the effect of limiting liberation initially to a search for an ideal model of black masculinity.[4]

The history of this epic struggle plays itself out between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, between James Baldwin and Richard Wright, and between James Baldwin, James Cone and to a lesser degree Joseph R. Washington.[5] In each case, the solution to the coconstituted effects of race, society, politics, education, poverty, religion, and sexuality of the Negro man determines the calculus of masculinity framed by each historical instance.[6] To understand Baldwin's critique of theology and how it relates to black theology, we need to start with W. E. B. Du Bois. It is Du Bois's initial concern and challenge that lays the framework for what determines, as a primary concern, the spiritual striving toward black masculine selfhood. I make the assertion that this model of black masculinity undergirds the Negro problem and helps make sense concerning how Baldwin's perspective on sexuality and Cone's perspective on race are understood and deployed in the context of the church, the community, black theology, and African-Americanist discourse writ large.

For Our Souls: Toward a Theology of Black Masculinity

In order to go forward, it is important to establish an understanding of Du Bois's importance in the construction of the ideal of black masculinity that both Baldwin and Cone contend with in their work in the context of race, sex, God, *and* violence. Du Bois's concern for black masculinity is a somewhat hidden and extremely important force in the development of black masculinity, the role it plays in black culture, black religion, and theology. It is especially important for this project in that once race and black power is deessentialized, a move toward the issues associated with sexuality and the problem of effeminization, herein understood as the "compromise," can be dealt with.

Hazel Carby's explanation of Du Bois's assessment of Booker T. Washington's ideology of compromise helps to illustrate the concept of a black man who does not meet the "measure of black masculinity."[7] In *Race Men,* Hazel Carby identifies *The Souls of Black Folk* as a "canonical text in America culture" because its "theory of double-consciousness has been so widely adopted to explain the nature of the [Negro] soul."[8] More importantly Carby identifies that "Du Bois constructed particular, personal, political, and social characteristics of a racialized masculinity to articulate his definition of black leadership."[9] According to Carby the leadership identified by Du Bois is "gender specific" and it "encompasses only those [Negro] men who enact narrowly and rigidly determined codes of masculinity."[10]

This stands in stark contrast to the perception of black manhood and black leadership exemplified in the person of Booker T. Washington. Rather than challenging the power of white Southern males Washington seems willing to maintain a subordinate position, which is perceived to hold no power. Washington's decision that is seen as a compromise of Du Bois's idea of black masculinity is what renders Washington too weak and unfit to lead. Though Washington's choice is not a willful act of submission to segregation and the power of Southern white men, but a strategic decision meant to delay integration with Southern white men and retain black power; it is still read as being antithetical to what Du Bois understands as manhood. Washington's choice to "cast down your bucket where you are" is seen as an indirect challenge to white Southern male authority. As such, Washington is perceived to take on a black matriarchal form of leadership whose position allows for a nonthreatening coexistence with white Southern males without posing a direct threat to their dominance and power.

Booker T. Washington's compromise is an example of psychological substitution: a threatening black presence and agency is replaced with a compromising one used to

survive in the white Southern world. However, the idea that Washington's choice compromised black manhood is "evoked by Du Bois's figure of the black mother" and Washington's matriarchal position in relation to white male power. The compromise puts Washington in a position that is "separated and excluded from the black masculine world" created by Du Bois and "juxtaposed with a feminized symbolic territory of illegitimate and negative sexuality."[11] This has the effect of identifying, segregating, and excluding the feminine and "deformed manhood" that is also effeminized as "incompatible with the incorporation of the race into the modern nation state."[12] This compromise helps to create various levels and forms of homophobia with which Cone and Baldwin later contend. The compromise complicates the possibilities for any form of effective black maleness beyond the Du Boisian figure of black power in a raced society.

Dubois's color line creates the linear world of black power—black and white—establishing the archetype of black masculinity, a type of new Negro-Adam, whose task is to carry out the work of "our spiritual strivings" in the new world of post-Emancipation America: the Promised Land. The Promised Land is situated on the intersecting axes of South/North and White/Black; at the epicenter of which the soul of black folk rests. In this sense, the Promised Land is not a geographical location, but a spiritual one that harbors the sociocultural, historical, and religious consciousness of black people. It is a liminal space that is available wherever blackness occurs as a powerful oppositional force. I explain more about this later.

More importantly, the Negro-Adam is a social construction contracted to carry out the African/Negro heteromasculine agenda from within this space. Carby states, "As the readers are gradually drawn into the center of the spiritual and cultural life of Du Bois's black folk, that life becomes increasingly African in its soul and masculine in its body."[13] This agenda also represses "images of sexual desire . . . with

evocations of a New England work ethic" that is consistent with puritanism.[14] Here again the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness (or what Du Bois calls pagan contagion) can be found in the new world created by Du Bois, which leads to understanding how Du Bois is also affected by puritanism.[15] In other words, for Du Bois, the Negro of the Enlightenment should not repeat the error of his African brethren of refusing the opportunity to "enter into the economy of salvation" in favor of his "pagan mentality."[16] Seen in this way the Negro problem is the pagan contagion: a mentality that refuses the economy of salvation and divine election in favor of its own pagan depravity. Du Bois offers a puritan solution to the Negro problem. Roger Bastide's analysis of the "frontier complex" helps to further explain this link between Du Bois and puritanism.

> The "frontier complex" or restricted-group feeling rests, therefore, in the final analysis upon the Calvinist idea of predestination and visible signs of divine election. In this way, dark skin came to symbolize, both in Africa and in America, the voluntary and stubborn abandonment of a race in sin. Contact with this race endangered the white person's soul and the whitening of his spirit. The symbolism of color thus took on one of the most complicated and subtle forms, in both Protestantism and Catholicism, through the various steps through which darkness of color became associated with evil itself.[17]

The economic success of the small flock is "proof of divine grace," in the same way the Negro problem is the "sign of their rejection" of the "economy of salvation."[18] Bastide's analysis helps to locate the ramifications of color symbolism between whiteness and blackness first formed within Christian thought and carried over into puritanism. Puritan thought is effective because it remains disconnected from color symbolism and unrecognized as the source for the problem of race, gender, and sex in American Christian culture.[19]

Du Bois correctly identifies the problem of color symbolism in relation to the Negro but does not recognize the source of that problem being puritanism in the work ethic, theology, and thought of American culture.

The "visible signs of divine election" experienced by Du Bois as the "color" line reflects the restricted group feeling of segregation, inferiority, and rejection based on the puritanical metaphors of our oppression: the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies. The priceless value Du Bois places on the small flock of black leaders from the North, the "talented tenth," is charged with resisting the pagan contagion of "greed for gold entwined with a narrative of sexual lust" embodied by the new Southern Negro.[20] The influences of the New England Puritan work ethic, Enlightenment thought, and his encounter with the Negro of the South creates a mimicry of Calvinist election in Du Bois: one that is grounded in color symbolism and the "talented tenth" of Northern, Christian, puritan Negroes. Du Bois's double-mindedness comes to consciousness first as a puritan experience and second as a Negro experience.

The Enlightened Noble Negro—Du Bois—emerges here as an intellectual heteromasculine self that is able to resist economic malaise, the Negro contagion of sexual debasement, and ameliorate what he sees as a race problem. The best possibility for the small flock—talented tenth—to liberate themselves and other black people from the dilemma of a raced world is to resist an "attitude of adjustment and submission" to racism and color symbolism without a critique of its unrecognized source: puritanism. And so I argue that the problem with which black theology contends is not simply the veil of race, but the problem of the unrecognized puritan influences embedded in color symbolism which complicates the way toward divine election or what is understood here as liberation. Because the influence of puritanism is unrecognized, a black male liberator runs the risk of reimposing the very evil of the color symbolism this liberating figure is

created to overcome. This means that the role of the Negro man *Adam* to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion" is compromised because of the unrecognized puritan influences that created the racial world in which he finds himself planted.[21] For Du Bois the question within the question of *how does it feel to be a problem* is *how can black men be redeemed from the fallen state of race*? In this sense it is not merely a problem of performing masculinity, but performing it in a way that mirrors the work ethic that produces the visible (economic and sexual) signs of divine election.

The quintessential black identity identified by Du Bois—what I call the Negro of the Enlightenment—is a heteropatriarchal Christian-oriented heroic masculine-self that must contend with the "contradiction of double aims" that frames his identity.[22] Out of the "history of strife," the "longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self"—electability—undergirds the purpose of black manhood and masculinity as a spiritual striving toward divine election.[23]

Carby says that Du Bois is "particularly concerned about the *moral uplift of a people* and after "weighing the political and social needs of what he imagined to be the race, he judged the worth of black male intellectuals and would-be race leaders according to those needs."[24] Meeting those needs requires a work ethic and sexual attitude that is based on puritanism and a Negro Enlightenment mindset meant to overcome the problem of race and the psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies, which impede divine election. The adoption of a puritan-based work ethic and attitude toward sexuality that ensures divine election is for Du Bois a method for moving beyond the mentality of slave labor and Booker T. Washington's proposal for Negro uplift. In other words, the attitude toward work *and* sex must be one that strives toward divine election via puritanism versus one compromised by slavery. This approach assumes divine judgment against the sexual sinfulness of blackness.

Therefore the Enlightenment Negro is charged with protecting blackness against lasciviousness in the form of a slave mentality toward labor and irresponsibility toward sexuality and sexual reproduction. In this sense divine election is contingent on the control of sexual desires and sexual outcomes. This requires a robust heteronormative masculine selfhood whose dogged strength enables him to contain the contagion of black sexual debasement and depravity in order to spiritually strive (work) toward divine election.

However, the fragile nature of Du Bois's model of Negro puritanism is exposed by his own experience of masculine impotence formed by a sexuality compromised by color as evidenced in the rejection of his romantic advances involving a white girl experienced in his youth on the one hand and the sexual dominion of white men over black women experienced as an adult on the other. The inability of blackness to suppress and control the contagion of sexuality becomes a sign of rejection of the "economy of salvation" afforded within Christianity and the Calvinistic understanding of divine election brought forward in puritanism.[25] This is complicated further by the conundrum of a puritan work ethic that is founded on chattel slavery producing the economic capacity of white slave owners to have control over the bodies and sexual reproduction of black women and also incapacitates black men's ability to protect black women and children (sexual production and reproduction).

Du Bois explains a respectable manhood is one that is able to control "female sexuality and sexual reproduction."[26] In this sense, puritanism enables this ability and the spiritual striving toward divine election. Sexuality becomes a battleground for masculine respectability, control of the feminine, and ultimately divine election. Puritanism remains unrecognized behind the symbolism of color and its effect on black sexuality. As such, black sexuality and not puritanism begins to become the focus of the problem and source of rage.

According to Carby, Du Bois bases masculine self-respect, black masculine potency, on a violent conflict between white males and black males for the control of black female sexuality and sexual reproduction. The perception of an easily compromised—impotent black masculinity requires a contrasting redemptive figure of manhood that can withstand the challenges presented by the color line and forcefully take the opportunity to enter into the economy of salvation known as democracy. Therefore Du Bois requires black masculinity to perform as an uncompromised, often violent hegemonic social, political, cultural, sexual, and religious possibility.

In godlike fashion, Du Bois creates a world and worldview, a mythic "genealogy of race, nation, and manhood," the spirit of which is poured into the mind, body, and souls of black folk: Negro Enlightenment. Du Bois says "that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of them that live within the veil."[27] Carby says "From *Genesis* Du Bois takes the words of Adam transforming them to mark his own body as an essential part of that wider community he imagines."[28] This new world, a Promised Land bounded by the linearity of race, is where race spirituality is wedded to black masculinity and black manhood is understood here as the Negro of the Enlightenment. In this movement, black manhood becomes the spirit of black identity and takes on the specter of sacredness: a Theo-Christological tragic-heroic revolutionary figure prone to violence. The creation of a neoprimordial or postprimordial heteronormative revolutionary American Negro male identity is the result of Du Bois's puritan paradox.

The American Baptismal Inheritance: John Begets Bigger Begets John

I assert that *John,* the tragic hero in "The Coming of John" in Chapter XIII of Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, is in many ways the literary archetype of the revolutionary model of Negro puritanism. Carby suggests that the story "The Coming of

John" embodies the "issue of who shall inherit the mantle of intellectual leadership" and represents the "tension and anxiety about a lack of viable future for the race" occurring in the midst of a violent struggle resulting in the mutual destruction of both its white and black male combatants.[29] The figure is important because it establishes a precedent, which Carby says is "a model of manhood for future generations."[30] John is an example of the artist who Du Bois claims was made a "poor craftsman" by the "contradiction of double-aims" and "soul-beauty of a race that his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people."[31] John provides the template for how black masculinity is presented in a raced American culture and African-Americanist discourse in particular. John is the model of a black messiah, the fearless intellectual with the dogged strength needed to overcome racism, foreshadowing what is to come and how we are to recognize him.

Richard Wright's Negro male characters, such as Bigger Thomas, continue with Du Bois's model of masculinity: John begets Bigger. What the latter inherits from the former is rage. The simplicity of what is inherited from Du Bois by Wright and presented to Baldwin is complicated by Baldwin's unwillingness to uncritically embrace the prevailing concept of race and masculinity established by this inheritance and the masculine embodiment of unexamined rage. Baldwin refuses the inheritance of masculinity whose rage can be simply explained as being caused by race and aberrant sexuality set forth by Du Bois and carried forward by Wright. Baldwin says he does not want to become a "kind of theologian" whose search for "identity and freedom" was overtaken by an unattainable "equality" in a world constructed completely on the unequal footing of black power and race-based heteromasculine bias.[32] Baldwin understood this would lead to a deadly blind rage.

Two of the issues Baldwin has with Wright are Wright's use of a demoralizing feminization of the Negro male on the one

hand and "gratuitous and compulsive" substitution of violence in "a great space where sex ought to be" on the other.[33] In the case of the former Baldwin cites Wright's male character in "Man of All Work" who dresses in his wife's clothes, poses as a women and "hires himself out as a cook."[34] This dovetails with Carby's assertion that a major concern of Du Bois is that black males will compromise their hopes of a dominant masculinity—prostitute it—for "American Mammon" or sell their masculine soul for the "ideals of commercialism," which is one of Du Bois's primary complaints against Booker T. Washington and the "Atlanta Compromise."[35] In the case of the latter, Baldwin cites Wright's "The Man Who Killed a Shadow," a story of rape and murder" in which "neither the murderer nor his victim comes alive."[36] Baldwin says, "The violence, as in so much of Wright's work, is gratuitous and compulsive…The violence is gratuitous and compulsive because the root of the violence is never examined. The root is rage."[37]

The root of the rage identified by Baldwin can be traced directly back to Du Bois. The sexual myth of black masculinity becomes a violent reality where violence itself is a rite of passage and brutality a defining characteristic of black male sacredness. Baldwin says,

> It is the rage, almost literally the howl, of a man who is being castrated. I do not think that I am the first person to notice this, but there is probably no greater (or more misleading) body of sexual myths in the world today than those which have proliferated around the figure of the American Negro. This means that he is penalized for the guilty imagination of the white people who invest in him with the hates and longings, and is the principal target of their sexual paranoia. Thus, when in Wright's pages a negro male is found hacking a white woman to death, the very gusto with which this done, and the great attention paid to the details of physical destruction reveal a terrible attempt to break out of the cage in which the American imagination has imprisoned him for so long.[38]

Baldwin's shows that when black men follow Du Bois's model of black manhood, that manhood collapses onto itself. Imprisoned by social, economic, and political impotence, black masculinity turns toward and becomes dependent on unexamined (blind) rage. We come to recognize manhood and act it out through rage and the fear of unmasculine or effeminate behavior, which is seen as an affront against the spiritual striving of manhood and therefore against God's (his) self.

James Baldwin's critique of Wright's substitution of violence in the space where sex ought to be means that when rage is left unexamined the question of sex remains a hidden element in black masculinity: it is the greatest misstep in relation to understanding the trope of rage in Baldwin's work. The lack of examination leads to rage explained in terms of violence and sexuality in terms of fear understood here as homophobia. However, unexamined rage produces fear and fear begets violence. Baldwin's observation leads me to believe in the end that the theology of dominant Christianity—the moral choice of blackness or whiteness—is built on unexamined rage, which can only lead to violence: both racial and sexual. In the "great space where sex ought to be" in the theology of dominant Christianity, the only possibility for something akin to free expression within the trap of metaphorical blackness is violence: violence against whiteness, black women, each other, and othered black males as a means of compensation for a compromised masculinity and lack of access to black power.

One of the problems that Baldwin inherits from Wright is a male figure compromised by the unrecognized influence of puritanism—Negro puritanism—which leads to his rage being left unexamined. Here is where Bigger begets John. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John Grimes is a revelation in that he reveals that the only way not to succumb to the violence of the struggle for black power is to examine sexuality as a spiritual striving. John Grimes represents sexual oughtness—the restoration of sex in the place of violence—which

is the act of bringing a *thing into the condition* of power, ability, and generative capacity, in the black church and in the ghettoized space of the Promised Land.[39]

The sexual oughtness—the restoration of sex in the place of violence—identified by Baldwin exposes the unexplained root of rage found in the work of Wright and the masculinity created by Du Bois. Du Boisian blackness substitutes violence in the place of sex. Baldwin restores sex to its proper place—in place of violence. Unexamined rage becomes the seed for theological possibility for liberation and foreshadows a male model of liberation that is compromised by the unchecked violence that is produced by it.[40] Bigger is the symbol of rage, revolution, and liberation—the "ultimate concern"—for black manhood and the community in which all these men are engaged in a violent struggle between life and death initiated by the choice to follow Du Bois's strivings.[41]

Baldwin as James H. Cone's Theological Muse

James Cone has said informally that James Baldwin taught him how to write. In a recent interview, Dr Cone furthered explained himself saying that Baldwin is a writer whose rhetorical style is able to bring together Malcolm X's concern for blackness and Martin Luther King's emphasis on love together "in one person."[42] For this reason, Cone modeled his style after Baldwin. A close read of Cone reveals, however, that he quotes Baldwin quite sparingly and what he quotes centers on Baldwin's critique of white supremacy. This merely confirms Cone's claim that it is Baldwin's style that shapes the structure of his black theological project; his limited use of Baldwin's corpus lends itself to Baldwin's ability to teach another generation of theologians how to write about issues beyond race. Before reading Cone, read Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. The onus is on the reader of Cone and not Cone himself. What must be understood is that Cone's project is not concerned with developing Baldwin's contributions to the

development of black theology, but with reconciling black power and black Christian faith. Cone clearly is responding to the concerns of the day in his development of black liberation theology. Going forward, limiting the problem of race to what Baldwin says about whiteness leads to a narrow reading of Baldwin's importance to Cone in the development of black liberation theology. The implications of the rhetorical limits Cone sets forth are quite clear not just in his development of black liberation but also the ways in which Baldwin, masculinity, and homophobia are understood in relation to black theology and how issues of sexuality are addressed by black theologians and the black church going forward.

Whiteness is just one aspect of the spectrum of Baldwin's critique of race in America. As we have seen, Baldwin refuses to think about race apart from the problems of the American idea of masculinity and puritan distortions of sex. The outcome of a narrow reading of Baldwin leads to omissions related especially to sexism, a problem that Cone himself identifies thanks to Womanist critiques in subsequent editions of his *Black Theology of Liberation* and other works.[43] Again, this is understandable given the parameters of Cone's theological project.

Sexuality is what Baldwin writes about and examines this is the way I understand him best. As such, Cone's choice to use Baldwin to teach him *how* to write is curious, given Cone's own omissions related to sexuality. However, this does not preclude Cone from revealing that he feels both Baldwin's and LGBTIQ's open embrace of homo-bi-queer sexuality makes them "more Christian" than Christians who deny (homo)sexuality. Cone believes (as do I) that sexuality is an "embodiment of Christian love…not a challenge but an expression of the love of Christ."[44] Yet, the lack of access to Cone's position leaves black theology and the black church with more questions than answers. For black theology to not understand Cone's position and Baldwin's importance and place in relation to Cone's work means that black

theology misses the opportunity to create safety for LGBTIQ and unmasculine bodies. This underscores the notion that a theology based on a religion that cannot offer safety for all bodies, especially racialized and sexualized blues bodies runs the risk of not being seen as a religion or theology.

I suggest that black theologians can learn how to write about sexuality from James Baldwin.[45] Learning from Baldwin "how to write" means attending to how puritanism and Christianity are used to construct sexual depravity and the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness. It also means attending to the root of the forms of homophobia undergirding African-Americanist discourse both inside and outside the church.

> I am making the claim that homophobia has plural forms and can no longer be seen simply as a "fear of homosexuals, but a deeper fear of being *unmasculine*." Two of these forms are phallic and black homophobia. "Phallic homophobia is circumcised onto the bodies (via most penises) of (black) males and circumscribed into the minds of black males. It is a [phallic]-oriented consciousness which is something black males are often accused of possessing as a preoccupation or for some an occupation . . . Black homophobia is a fear associated with not being able to live up to the societal demands [phallic prodigiousness] of American democracy and to not be able to uphold the [phallic prodigiousness] of black patriarchal *and* matriarchal demands of race, heteronormativity, the black family, the black church, and black Christianity. This form of homophobia is a psychological circumscription coconstituted by race, sex, gender, culture, and religion."[46]

Of course, it is quite impossible to read Baldwin without recognizing the importance of sexuality in relation to puritanism that teaches him not just what to write about—to witness—but also how to write about it. Therefore how Baldwin talks about race has been perceived as useful for black theology's discursive of black power, but what he says about sexuality

has been perceived as counterproductive to the construction of black masculinity.[47] Baldwin presents a paradox in that his critique of race, which Cone and others have seen as essential for combatting white supremacy and establishing black power, is consistently compromised by his open embrace homosexuality. This is problematic for the construction of Du Boisian black masculinity and the patriarchal dimensions of black Christianity, black church, and black theology. In this light a full embrace of Baldwin has not occurred, not because of who he is in relation to Christianity and black theology, but because of who he is in relation to his open embrace of sexuality and his representation and critique of black masculinity. Sexual oughtness is a liability for establishing black power and the sanctification of black masculinity. However, this to not necessarily true in today's world. In this sense sexual oughtness—the restoration of sex in the place of violence—is a racial liability because it is perceived as a threat to the construction of black masculinity, patriarchy, and black power. Sexual oughtness permeates Baldwin's corpus. By limiting his voice to a narrow critique of race, liberation remains trapped in a moral choice predicated on color symbolism and the psychological collision between puritan ideology and that reinscribes a slave mentality and pagan contagion used to demonize black bodies.

Black theology and black power is a reflection of the historical moment in which it emerges. The historical moment is defined by racism, the quest for black power and the establishing of the hegemonic masculine patriarchal paradigm it represents. It is in effect a response to the *next fire* Baldwin predicts will happen if "the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks" did not "end the racial nightmare" of America.[48] Black power and black liberation are not inclusive of sexual oughtness, but sexual uniformity. In this sense, sexual uniformity means that sexuality must serve the purposes of respectability needed to enter into the struggle for black power and racial equality. Therefore

Cone's black theology of liberation is constructed to reflect the tenets of black power and a form of hegemonic heterosexual homophobic-heroic black masculinity essential to striving for divine election into the economy of salvation we call American democracy.

In conclusion, Baldwin's problem with theology is its uncritical investment in a perspective of black religion in America that does not account for the unrecognized influences of puritanism in the color symbolism guiding the moral choices of whiteness and blackness. Rather than opposing the puritanical demonization of blackness, the moral choice of blackness, when left unexamined, reinscribes it via the valorization of a particularly oppressive idea of black masculinity constructed on Du Bois's model of Negro Puritanism. James Baldwin's concern for theology is how it might be constructed to move beyond moral choices based on color and the puritanical oppression hidden therein.

> I really begin to look on the 2,000 year reign of the theology of this system, which is coming to its end as a long aberration in the history of mankind, which will leave very little behind it except those people who have created an opposition to it, if that makes sense.[49]

In rejecting the puritanical metaphors of our oppression—psychological collision between puritan ideology and black bodies—that create an "entire frame of reference"—a moral choice—guiding the history of black people and theology Baldwin exposes the root of the crisis and creates a safe space in religion and theology where sexuality ought to be.

5

Conversion: Queer Theory and Black Theology

In chapter 1, I wrote about Baldwin's prolonged religious crisis being shaped by the puritanical influences that demonize black bodies and black sexuality. Baldwin reveals that for him safety reveals the real meaning of religion. Yet, his religious inheritance does not combat the puritanical influences—the metaphors of oppression—that demonize black bodies or offer safety for his sexual self. What emerges for Baldwin is a religious crisis caused by the inability to reconcile faith with sexuality. Baldwin seeks to expose the puritanical barrier of depravity placed between black bodies and moral authority. I concluded chapter 1 by saying that Baldwin uses sexuality to break down that barrier to create a means of resistance to puritanical metaphors of oppression.

In chapter 2, I wrote about how the effect of puritanism forces Baldwin to signify on black religion and the black church as an act of reclaiming black moral authority. I established how Baldwin understands and use of the blues creates a language of liberation for blues bodies. I showed how the blues is used by Baldwin to signify on Christianity, which means that he exposes the gaps between what Christianity denotes (puritanically) about black bodies is figurative rather actual. I showed that Baldwin uses the blues as a way to reclaim black moral authority and black bodies from depravity. I concluded with making a connection between blues bodies and Christ via the acceptance on carnality leading to

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

incarnality: sexual potential. Blues and blues bodies revealed that sexual potential to be an incarnational power and therefore a site of divine revelation that places moral authority in the hands of blues people who need liberation the most.

In chapter 3, I developed the concept that blues bodies are exiled by prevailing narratives of liberation that rely on theology that overlooks the puritanical influences shaping concepts of feminine and masculine identity. I talked about how the blues condition of the black community exposes the gap between the promise of liberation and the outcome of liberation that privileges the exodic paradigm foundational to its method of ending oppression. I compared the black womanist critique of black liberation theology's use of the exodic motif with my understanding of the blues to show that it does not account for blues bodies. I showed the blues is a way of creating a new way of thinking about black bodies in the context of exile rather than Exodus. I talked about how the blues creates a radical strategy androgyny employing the spiritual resources of men and women, where blues bodies are reincarnated as righteous bodies.

In chapter 4, I developed a concept that further exposed the puritanical "essence" of Christianity and the problems it poses for the exodic masculine orientation of black liberation theology. I established the fact while I do not consider Baldwin a theologian or attempt to make him one, the way in which he signifies on (black) theology—exposing the gap between what it is figuratively and what it actually is—helps to establish it a moral choice between blackness and whiteness. I talked about how the moral choice of blackness over whiteness poses limitation on how black masculinity is constructed in relation to theology. The development of a racialized masculinity leads to the acceptance of a Du Boisian model of irreconcilable twoneness, which I called Negro puritanism that is violent and homophobic. I wrote about how Baldwin reveals this as a flaw (violent homophobic masculinity) caused by an unexamined rage that puts violence in the place where

sex ought to be. I concluded by writing that sexual oughtness as a moral choice creates a safe space in religion and theology for blues bodies exiled in the Promised Land.

In this chapter, I talk about how the shift from exodus to exile and Baldwin's contributions to black religion and black theology actually queers conversion in the black experience. I claim that the black experience is a condition of queerness in which the "deployments of power" through puritanism and depravity creates the "social construction" of black (blues) bodies.[1] This means that everything that comes in contact with blackness is itself queered: this includes black theology and conversion. This makes queer theory important to my overall project.

Queering Black Theology

The importance of queering to my project is not centered on Baldwin as a queer subject. However, Baldwin understood his own queerness as the condition "that is now called gay."[2] Baldwin goes on to say that being queer "had nothing to do with the question of sexual preference: You were being told simply that you had no balls."[3] My use of queering in relation Baldwin is to establish the fact that he has "balls." My use of queer theory is for the explicit purpose of exposing the big balls needed to give voice, a means, and authority for true liberation.[4]

As I stated earlier, everything that comes into contact with blackness is queered: what does this mean for black theology? Black theology begins as a radical discourse of liberation that contends with the oppression suffered by black people. According to James Cone black liberation theology arises out of a crisis of faith that was induced by his need to reconcile the tenets of black power with his Christian beliefs. In this existential crisis, where the need for being radical and black is in tension with being Christian, Cone finds himself in a moment definitional indeterminacy. With black liberation

theology, Cone is attempting to reconcile the social and religious mismatches between black power and Christian faith and black Being and segregation. In order to fuse the seemingly intractable claims of black power with black Christian faith, Cone systematically employs definitional and methodological elasticity to classical (normative) theology to create black liberation theology.

The definitional elasticity of black liberation theology makes Christ black. Here again Cone addresses the mismatch between belief in the goodness and power God and the suffering of black people, which goes unanswered. God's self-disclosure to humanity comes in the form of Jesus who is historically located with the oppressed. Cone correlates this to the present and says that Christ is black.

The methodological elasticity of black liberation theology locates the revelation of God to be on the side of the black oppressed. Cone says that the reality of God is presupposed in Black theology and that God's self-disclosure at that particular time in history occurs with the black oppressed. Cone says the point of departure for black theology from classical theology's approach to the doctrine of God is directly related to the black struggle for liberation. This God participates in liberating the oppressed, which is a decisive moment in history. Both the definitional and methodological elasticity of black liberation theology allows Cone to claim black power is Christianity and in doing so create a new way of adhering to the faith without losing his black radical identity.

What Cone does, in effect, is akin to queering systematic theology, because it is concerned with the deployments of power through the social construction of race and begins with hermeneutical position outside the norm: the black oppressed. By annexing the systematic approaches of European theologians like Barth and Tillich, James Cone queers black theology into existence. This annexation (as I outlined) allows him to address his concerns surrounding the inequities caused by the mismatches created by the social construction of race/

racism and remain unapologetically Christian. This is what I think makes black theology queer by definition.

However, Black theology has yet to accept its own queerness—at least openly—which has the effect of limiting its ability to recognize its current historical context. Black liberation theology is just now beginning to offer a sustained critique of sex/sexuality and gender. However, many of those forays into issues of sex/sexuality and gender have not as yet fully embraced the methodological tenets of queer theory. Black liberation theology and Womanist theology continue to rely on race and black Christianity as the normative pole against which to critique current issues of sex/sexuality, gender, class, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity. Because of this, theological narratives that continue to support the sacred constructions of silence continue to maintain their oppressive hold on black people.[5] What makes Baldwin's work important is that he *queers* queer by exposing it as having the "ballsiness" to transform liberation and conversion.

Queering Conversion

I have already stated that everything that comes in contact with blackness is itself queered. This is no different for conversion: when blackness meets with conversion, it becomes a queer act of signifying on the gap between what conversion is figuratively and what it actually is. In Christianity conversion signals the beginning of a commitment to Christ: the author and finisher of our Christian faith. Baptism is therefore a first step toward salvation with obedience to Christ's teaching and life the standard of faith. The history of Christian conversion for enslaved Africans reveals something quite different: Christian conversion led to a baptism of obedience to slave masters.

Jon Butler's assessment of the development of slave obedience and planter authority through Christian baptism is

quite helpful here. Butler says that the conversion of slaves had a "utilitarian value" for slave owners.[6] Butler points out that Anglican ministers like Thomas Secker promoted that "Christ's principle teaching concerned the subjection of subordinates" and that Christian slave conversion would make slaves' "Tempers milder, and their lives happier" by relieving "slaves of their rebellious instincts" and that slaves would "imbibe 'an everlasting Motive to civil Unity.'"[7] Jon Butler also points out that this conversion led to slaves having to "obey commands that forced them into illegal and immoral acts" and that "obedience [to slave owners] took precedence over moral courage."[8] Seen in this way Christian conversion meant slaves were literally baptized into depravity. Baptism is the actual imbibing of the psychological trap of puritanism and metaphorical blackness. Christianity actually converts black bodies into immoral bodies devoid of moral courage and imbibes the black psyche and spirit with the rejection of the moral courage (not queer enough to have the balls to take moral authority) to challenge Christianity.

In the works of James Baldwin, conversion can be likened to transformation, in that the primary outcome of any cultural-religious endeavor should transform the person and their god(s) into becoming larger, freer, and more loving.[9] It is therefore a way of signifying on conversion: exposing the gaps between what it means figuratively and what it actually is. As such, Baldwin writes in (queer) ways that incite the conversion of blues people into something larger, freer, and more loving than a nonqueered understanding of black Christian conversion allows: this is his use of the blues, and at least a partial outcome of black theology when it is queered in this way.[10]

Though conversion is a stratagem used for safety, it resists pragmatic resolution to the messiness of black life. Therefore Baldwin's understanding of conversion widens the road of faith and changes human messiness into a liberating force yet unseen in black religion and theology.

Baldwin understood how problematic religious conversion is to a people impacted by the specter of depravation and the poverty of the ghetto. Baldwin understood that Harlem in particular and America in general were unsafe for whores, pimps, racketeers *and* the born again. Being born in a Christian nation and believing in "this Deity as the only one" would not be enough to protect him. Baldwin says he supposed *that* God existed "only within the walls of a church—in fact *our* church."[11] He also supposed "that God and safety were synonymous."[12] But Baldwin recognized early on the paradoxical trap of blackness in American democracy, and so saw the impossibility of safety for black Americans and the ineffectiveness of "God, His saints and angels, and [the threat of] His blazing Hell."[13] According to Baldwin safety is the "real meaning" of the word religious, which means, for him, that black Christianity is in fact not religious. Its ineffectual god, saints, create Hell: they neither save nor offer safety from the multiple assaults to black/blues bodies in America. The question for Baldwin therefore is where the religious—where safety for black bodies—really lies.

In 1962, at the age of 14, Baldwin experienced being afraid for the first time in his life. He feared the "evil within" and the "evil without" and was menaced by the "whores and pimps and racketeers on the Avenue."[14] In this coming of age moment Baldwin recognized that in spite of what he had accepted about *God, His saints and angels and His Blazing Hell,* he could still be converted into one of the people on the Avenue. In fact, he saw for the first time that all of them—saints and sinners—"had been produced by the same circumstances" and that each one, the whore, the pimp, the racketeer, were all stratagems in the fight for identity and the struggle for safety.[15] What is most evident to Baldwin is that they all know and call on the same Christian deity to keep them safe. Seeing those people "on the Avenue" and realizing their shared struggle for safety (which Baldwin begins to see as a synonym for real religion), the world was suddenly

made "unutterably different and fantastically *present*!"[16] This "metamorphosis," is having the balls, the conjuration of a moral vision of the world and god beyond the puirtanical confinements of inherited belief, the doctrines of church and man, and the blazing architecture of Hell on the Avenue, is what being converted means to Baldwin.

Baldwin as a Source for Queering Black Theology

In the writings of Baldwin, conversion represents the first step in his search for a safe space for his identity to flourish in this world. In the context of the black community, the conversion experience is an unnamed rite of passage. Children, like Baldwin, upon coming of age are faced with the communal rite of church membership. The "ritual of the church" signals to the world to whom they belong. Of all the rites of passage that have been set aside, undone, and all-together forgotten by black people, the grand theatre of conversion held within the church remains identifiably solid as a ritual and a rite for black identity. When Baldwin faced the youthful reality of breasts, penile erections, and hips inciting lustful curiosities required him to make a choice that ensured safe passage through it all. Baldwin writes,

> My friends began to drink and smoke, and embarked—at first avid, then groaning—on their sexual careers. Girls, only slightly older than I was, who sang in the choir or taught Sunday school, the children of holy parents, underwent, before my eyes, their incredible metamorphosis, of which the most bewildering aspect was not their budding breast or their rounding behinds but something deeper and more subtle, in their eyes, their heat, their odor, and the inflection in their voices. Like the strangers on the Avenue, they become, in the twinkling of an eye, unutterably different and fantastically *present*![17]

This sense of being present in the body, between knowing what you owe to the way one is raised and your capability as

a human on the Avenue is for Baldwin where depravation is first considered. Baldwin says,

> Owing to the way I had been raised, the abrupt discomfort that all this aroused in me and the fact that I had no idea what my voice or my mind or my body was likely to do next caused me to consider myself one of the most depraved people on earth.[18]

His sense of the erotic capacity of the body and the messiness that it produces meant that it is time to start "thinking about your soul!"[19] All of these things coalesce into a religious crisis for Baldwin with Christian conversion a first response to the condition of the body both its internal awareness and external changes. Does this religious crisis arise from the sense that desire is inescapable, meaning that a body that is desirable, that knows its own erotic and sexual nature is the (some)body most coveted on the Avenue *and* God?

Understanding how Baldwin uses conversion and how it is queered when it comes in contact with blackness is important for understanding how to queer black theology. As with conversion how Baldwin signifies on theology helps to reveal the colonial abnormalities made opaque by the traditional understanding of the Christian experience of conversion. It is a response that finds redemption in the dust, the dirt, and the messiness of black bodies. It is a response that reconciles the body to the spirit: the masculine to the feminine. It is here that the presence of the divine manifests in the "dusty space before the altar."[20] The dirt is a signification of God: God uses the dirt to create humanity. The dust is seen as a remnant of the presence of God. The dust in his nostrils was raised by the "feet of the saints" —the women—and gathered in small clouds that "[filled] his mouth."[21] Saints and dust/depravation are inseparable in this act of conversion. John Grimes experiences the divine in the dust as he swallows and wallows "across the dusty floor, as though God's toe had

touched him lightly."[22] The dust in John's nostrils and mouth is breath of God's spirit: his toe evidence of John lying at his feet there on the threshing floor akin to Ruth with Boaz. The sexual innuendos filtering through this makes it seems that the divine will not let John go until it is done "having his way" with John. God rises to meet John there in the dust and enters into a covenant with John, converting him into a new creature—a new man. The dirt is no longer a sign of sin, but salvation.

Not only do the whores and pimps and racketeers on the Avenue recognize John's body, so does the divine. In this sense, the divine only wants those who are attuned to their own sexual nature. Then and only then can the convert be mounted, ridden, touched, and filled by the spirit of the holy. Dirtiness is what attracts the convert to the divine and the divine to us (and us to others). Once the Lord has *His* way it is *He* who defends the converted against the Avenue, its people and its gods who also want to have their way with convert (make the convert abdicate his/her balls) as well.[23] In fact, for Baldwin, being sexually aware is what lets the world and God know we are available for this conversion. I say conversion can also, at least in this sense, be seen as a sexual act. How so?

The altar is the place where folk go to lay the burdens of their sins down before the Lord. It is a space where others who have gone before to do the same. It is the awareness and sexual inauguration of the body that drives one to kneel at the altar. "Raising a dust" is a term often used to describe the invocation of trouble. However, in the theater of the church, on the stage that is its altar the dust represents God and sensuousness a sacrament. John Grimes reveals that the messiness of life requires him to seek safety. The dust of (carnal) experience is the remnant of the dirtiness, the depravity discarded at the altar. The altar like the Avenue, is therefore a dirty space, impossible to make or to keep clean. The altar, like the threshing floor, is covered with the dust of sex acts.[24]

It is a place overrun with sexual encounters. In the space of the altar the divine actively communes with sexualized selves. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John Grimes sees the gods as a part of the dirt: God created the dirt and humanity from the dirt. The altar is the bed of the divine where the convert becomes God's consort. It is where the convert lets the divine have *His* way with the convert. As the convert remembers all that he/she is sexually, the divine revels in those memories, washing over the convert *fucking him/her* with it.

The shouting and singing of the saints is a cacophony of sexual remembrances that in *Mountain* becomes the dust that transforms everyone into human beings and the church into what Baldwin calls a "gimmick" to escape danger, both sexually and socially.[25] A gimmick can also be understood here is a "thing" as in your thing or a "bag" as in your bag which is another way of identifying a stratagem, "a hustle," for living. All these words signify tools for survival used by those who "could have been polished off with no effort."[26] Baldwin says that "Every Negro boy—in my situation during those years, at least—who reaches this point realizes, at once, profoundly, because he wants to love, 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."[27]

In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John chooses a gimmick or at least it seems the gimmick chooses him. Baldwin understands that his choices are limited by the world around him. The choices before him: the gimmicks of athletics, entertainment, and the pulpit all impossible possibilities, that left him questioning his self-worth and identity, because they did allow him to be a man. Knowing that those roles were ill-equipped to fulfill his idea of manhood left Baldwin with the "only other possibility" which was to become "one of the sordid people on the Avenue…" which only served to confirm his own "sense of depravity."[28] The extremely explicit overtures of both Avenue and the church echo the siren sound of seduction for bodies locked in the unsolicited, yet inherited

choice of black depravity. The seductive forces of the altar/bed of the threshing floor become the safest route to a way out of no way. Such is the way for anyone who after assessing their capabilities realizes they have almost none. Both the church and the Avenue harbor the idea of seduction saved in the dirt: his own and those of all those who have been saved in the same space. The raising of the dust of their experiences mingles with our own and the gods who are its settling presence. Baldwin describes John's conversion experience being where the "light and the darkness had kissed each other, and were married now, forever, in the life and the vision of John's soul."[29]

Baldwin and Exilic Conversion: Queer Methodology for Understanding Theology

Through his autobiographical sketch of himself via John Grimes in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and his conversion experience retold in *Fire*, Baldwin notes that human relief from the "guilty torment" of harboring our own messiness reveals that the "rites and customs" of the church, require us to take on the principles of "Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror, the first principle necessarily and actively cultivated in order to deny the other two."[30] Queerness exposes the blind spots of black theology and it is Baldwin who contends with the Loneliness of the closet, terror of exposure of our messiness, and the Blindness of homophobia. Baldwin says that being "saved" works on these principles and not the Christian principles of Faith, Hope, and Charity.[31] Being saved creates two gateways: blindness, loneliness and terror or faith, hope, and charity. Conversion is a logonomic system of psychological substitution used to contest the intersecting ideological complexes of race, sexuality, and religion that make conversion—being saved—a problem for black bodies.[32]

I stated the appearance of the divine is predicated on messiness. It requires us to see messiness and to not turn a blind

eye to the presence of the divine in the midst of human messiness. Messiness then is the catalyst that incites the immanent presence of the divine. Blues people look to the divine for safety, to be saved, from trouble of the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness. To be saved, to acquire safety, is the revelatory moment of the presence of the divine with blues bodies. Baldwin reveals that blues bodies are not saved by casting a blind eye on their messiness: they are saved by accepting it.

Safety as an outcome of conversion is a complex movement. It is a present tension and not a hoped for future state of perfection. Therefore it is not a sentimental notion or an attainable ideal. But the *hope* for safety fuels growth and the acceptance of our humanity. It is a means of surviving, and then ceasing to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring. Baldwin says,

> That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth – and indeed, no church – can teach.[33]

In fact, from this perspective it can be said that any theology that deals with the condition of black bodies (queered by contact with blackness) is itself a queer method for explaining black life and creating a safe space, a refuge against human cruelty, in which it can thrive. Theologies queered by contact with black bodies must consider how Christian theology constructs black bodies using concepts of depravity, messiness, and theodical concerns that arise from that. The depravity and messiness—the dirt—driving these theologies are the coconstituted issues of race, sexuality, sexism, patriarchal privilege, and homophobia. Dealing with these issues creates a theodical dilemma, meaning that the outcomes of these theologies raise more questions than they answer about

the pragmatic capacity of an unchanging, pure, unadulterated concept of God that limits versus liberates human freedom. As such, the depravity, messiness, and dirt of black bodies imposes restrictions on the theological outcomes of these methods. In other words, black ontology loses its pragmatic responsibility to transform the way in which god is in relationship to those trapped by theological analyses, which limit messiness and strategies for (w)holiness. The queerness of black life requires a queer theological perspective to free it. What makes blackness queer is its archetypal Otherness (otherness by way of Christian conversion), which is based on examples of human qualities not to be emulated.[34] It is therefore pragmatic for theological interpretations concerned with blackness to contend not simply with racism as an ideological complication based on a color line, but blackness as the sign of racial, sexual, social, economic, and religious abnormality. Blackness is queered when it meets the normal poles of whiteness, heteronormality, and Christianity; or better stated normal is queered when affixed to blackness. In both cases, what is considered normal becomes abnormal when applied to black identity. As such, queering conversion becomes a method or system for normalizing blackness: racially, sexually, religiously, and theologically. In the case of Baldwin, normalization is an act of removing the concept of depravity as an abnormal condition for himself in particular and black people in general. Normalization for blackness is not coterminous with whiteness, heteronormality, or Christianity: truly embracing the messiness of black humanity is normal. As such, Baldwin via his full-on embrace of his own messiness—bluesiness—is able to interrogate coconstitutively the intersecting matrices of race, religion, and sex which make blackness abnormal.

Conversion is revealed here as an act that does not separate meaning from concept. In other words, conversion as a sign of change does not separate the convert (carrier of sin) from the concept (sin itself). In fact, conversion in this sense

requires the convert to be reconciled to his or her own messiness—to live with it and to live beyond the often terrifying specter of eternal damnation. In a world where inner change only prepares one to face the trauma of an unchanged outer-world conversion has to relate to these circumstances in order to make it something real. This blues movement is a rite of passage in exile whereby the messiness of life is converted into joy.

Therefore conversion can be characterized as a queer movement: It is a way of reclaiming the sacred egalitarian nature of the spirit and the body that changes the connection of the body and the idea of dirtiness with the sacred.

Sexuality and the Body as the Site of (Naked) Sacredness: Queering Communion

> So then, for the first time, I wondered about love and wondered if I would find in myself the strength to give love, and to take it: to accept my nakedness as sacred, and to hold sacred the nakedness of another. For, without love, pleasure's inventions are soon exhausted. There must be a soul within the body you are holding, a soul which you are striving to meet, a soul which is striving to meet yours.[35]

For Baldwin, the body is itself a site of the sacred. Queering conversion liberates black bodies from depravity. As such, black bodies are stripped naked and cleansed of the baptism in the puritanical constraints of race, Christianity, and sexual depravity.

One thing most important to Baldwin was being completely naked in the company of others. Nakedness here is not intended to be simply bare-skinned, but uncovered in the sense that labels, the shadows of race, sexuality, and gender, are set aside allowing for uninhibited interaction between humans. This interaction was most sacred to Baldwin and central to his sense of identity as a human being. As such,

nakedness or becoming naked is itself a necessary component of interaction/communion "both human and divine."[36] In this sense, nakedness is a means of wholly communion; a way for bodies to interact as bodies. In other words nakedness symbolizes a divestiture of the social signifiers, ideological complexes, and logonomic systems that control behavior and disconnect bodies from one another. This creates liminal space between and among bodies: it allows for communion. This is not a symbolic communion in the sense of the breaking of bread or the drinking of wine, but a true communion where *I am because you are* is captured in the gaze, the smell, the sound, the feel, the sweat, and the heat of what God has created and presented before our eyes. In the midst of this act, god is revealed in God's pristine form. If Eden is to be recaptured then it is found in these moments before the first leafy barrier to our sexuality was applied—before nakedness, before sexuality, before *knowing* another sexually was deemed a sin.

Self-discovery happens in nakedness. In *Just Above My Head,* Baldwin, writes about how nakedness is transformed when nakedness as a presentation, an offering of an unclosseted, unclothed body coupled with sexual desire is an invocation of the sacred. For example, Baldwin identifies nakedness, via the initial sexual interaction between the characters Crunch and Arthur, as a "confession" or a "vow."[37]

In this (homo)sexual encounter nakedness becomes a confession of desire and vow of love. Amidst the "miracle of air, entering, coming out, into your face, mixed with Pepsi-Cola, hamburgers, mustard, whatever, was in the bowels…" the revelation of God's creation, God's life-giving divine nature is made evident. Baldwin conveys via the love-making between Arthur and Crunch the freedom, as well as the terror, that nakedness brings. However, this terror lurks in the shadows, which wants us to cloak our nakedness and retreat from the communion that can only be produced between bodies. The terror is not caused by the body itself, but the inheritance

of the racial, sexual, and religious prohibitions against black bodies, which makes us see our own nakedness as an exposure of our depravity. Baldwin makes this interaction a sacred act and the body a vessel for the revelation of the sacred. He deftly collapses notions of the sacred and profane when he writes:

> Arthur's tongue licked [Crunch's] sacred balls – *you can't get under him*. Arthur rose, again, to Crunch's lips. *So wide. You can't get around him*.[38]

Baldwin takes what is deemed depraved—the body and sexuality, more pointedly homosexuals *having* sex—frames and pairs it with a Negro spiritual thereby infusing it with spiritual messiness, *the blues,* to expose a spiritual humanness that is a direct reflection of the image of god. *Imago Dei* becomes exposed in the worship, communion, with the "sacred balls" (and/or sacred pussy walls) of another. *The act of fucking is sacramental!* What stands in between us and the divine is the idea that our bodies are depraved; when in fact the acts themselves are where the revelation of the divine occurs. Separation from the idea of the sacredness of our flesh severs our connection to god. Restoring the sacredness of our flesh, the very act of having sex itself restores that relationship and the full power—the anointing—of the Spirit of God with us and with all creation. In other words separating us from the knowledge of our sacred nakedness is a separation from the divine. Sexual intercourse becomes the conduit for divine revelation and access to the power of God. Having sex is the highest form of communion and becomes the act that leads us back to the sacredness of our bodies and into our Power (control of our bodies), which are both given to us by God. This is the true revelation of the divine whereby that which created us in its own image is reimagined/recreated in the sexual intimacy between bodies. Therefore recreation and not simply procreation is what procures

revelation: revelation being the presence of God in the sacramental intimacy that happens in the presentation of one body to another in the name of love.[39]

Converting Masculinity: Queering the Cross

> At bottom what I learned was that the male desire for a male roams everywhere, avid, desperate, unimaginably lonely, culminating often in drugs, piety, madness or death.[40]

What has same-sex intimacy have to do with the rite of masculinity? What does it have to do with the Cross? *Not my Jesus?!* I think that at the center of masculinity is the *male desire for another male*. Even though I privilege the sexual aspect of Arthur and Crunch to speak of bodily sacredness and communion between bodies, I do not privilege it in the same way when I speak of same-sex intimacy. Same-sex intimacy is both homosocial as well as homoerotic. It is homosocial in that the male desires companionship, dare I say *needs* the companionship of males. This fraternal aspect whereby we are accepted by our own roams everywhere. Baldwin says men need each other "in order to deal with women," their feminine side, and I say this need for one another extends to dealing with their dreams and their desperation.[41] Dreaming of love and desperate for wholeness men are drawn to one another. This is the homosocial aspect of masculinity: the desire of men to be with men sexually and nonsexually. It is the need to establish an intimate bond that is both sacred and sacramental. The social aspect of homo-socialism must be understood here to be inclusive of the homoerotic. In fact the homoerotic might be considered the ideal. How so?

What is the Cross if in some way it is not a rite of masculinity, or representative of such? The presentation of the (male) body sacrificed for love's sake drives the male desire for a male. I say this in the sense that we seek out conversion within this ancient paradigm without much of a critique of the events leading up to Jesus on the Cross. In the Passover

events before his abandonment and death by crucifixion, Jesus conducted an intimate homosocial/homoerotic rite with a group of men who professed an undying love of him. Jesus disrobed and performed a ritual of washing the feet of those men and presented his naked body as an object of communion: sacrament for the eternal remembrance of his body. This is at the core of the ritual myth of the rite of masculinity: a search for acceptance of naked flesh as a sign of fraternity with the divine. In this sense Jesus on the Cross becomes a symbol of that homosocial and homoerotic rite of masculinity, which signifies that men can love one another and others both socially and erotically. Jesus' naked body, bruised and battered unto death is a symbol of how "men can treat each other with such vile, relentless, and endlessly inventive cruelty" for the purposes of indicting nakedness, denying love, and denying god.[42] Jesus on the Cross, crucified, is a site of exchange whereby the burden of masculinity is lifted away from us revealing a feminine/androgynous Christology as the way to conversion and liberation.[43]

The rite of masculinity as a "counter tradition" not only subverts gender but also corrects and balances it. In *The Man Jesus Loved,* Theodore Jennings points out the role reversal captured in the washing of feet. Jennings says, "In every case in biblical literature, the person who washes the feet of another is a woman."[44] He goes on to say, "Jesus' washing of the feet, his performance of women's work is to be imitated in his memory and in obedience to his command. In this way through an act that transgresses gender categories, the community is to acknowledge him as teacher and Lord."[45]

The idea of Arthur's tongue washing of Crunch's "sacred balls" is indicative of Jesus' example of subverting the power of hegemonic masculinity. What Jennings proposes affirms my development of a feminine/masculine spiritually androgynous Christology and brings into focus the subversive nature of Baldwin's identification of the body as a site of sacredness.

A similarity can be drawn between Jesus washing the "feet" of the Twelve—the anointing of their sacred balls—and Arthur's licking (tongue washing) of Crunch's sacred sack. At first glance, it goes against religious convention and Christian conviction.[46] However, we see repeatedly the homoeroticism of the black church being outed as religious leaders are caught in the crosshairs of homosexual intimacy, which they themselves attack and deny. Therefore many men languish *desperate, unimaginably lonely, culminating often in drugs, piety, madness or death . . . just as with Jesus*. It is why Jesus suffers in such a horrifying fashion. Jesus's suffering is an example of what can happen to men who privilege the feminine: this is the seed of homophobia. Therefore the sign of the Cross (with Jesus' body removed) is also the sign of homophobia. The bare Cross is a not a reminder of the risen savior or atonement: it is a sign of hegemonic masculinity's power to brutally subdue and erase the feminine/androgynous as a gateway to the divine. Empire becomes the kingdom and its line of god-kings becomes its/our saviors.

In Mark 8:27 Jesus asks Peter "Who do people say that I am?" In v29 Peter answered "You are the Messiah."[47] In v31 Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be killed . . ."[48] Peter rebukes Jesus for his remarks and responds with a rebuke of Peter, saying in v33 "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."[49] I say that this is the initial moment wherein Jesus queers the Messiah and the Cross. Jesus problematizes the rite of masculinity upheld by the Davidic model of messianic masculinity and its supportive role in the maintenance of the Roman Empire. I say more about this in chapter 6. Jesus defies masculinity as it is given to him, inherited by him. I assert that Jesus is crucified not merely for the sins of the people, which is the Christian claim: he was crucified for defying hegemonic masculinity upheld and signified in the form of the synagogue and Roman

Empire.[50] The Cross as a sign of empirical power and male domination is also a sign of homophobia in both ancient and modern/ postmodern contexts. As a sign of power of the Holy Roman Empire, the Cross embeds homophobia into the bowels of Christendom.

What Jesus subverts in *his* rite of masculinity is seen as an attack on the empirical brutality signified by the Cross of the Roman Empire. He was executed for this subversion of empirical hegemonic masculinity. Because of homophobia, the Empire identified this as a treasonous act and his death, in this sense, occurs because he defies the model of hegemonic masculinity upon which it is founded. The Last Supper *is* a rite, a covenant between men to act righteously and without fear. Jesus takes the burden of masculinity upon himself and in doing is abandoned in the end. What is most interesting is that it is the women who stay to see the cost of masculinity and who eventually pick up that Cross and carry it themselves.[51]

The account of James Baldwin's last days is similarly situated with that of Jesus' last days and the rite of masculinity understood here as the Last Supper. David Leeming writes,

> Caring for Jimmy in his sickness was a logical extension of this ritual [of men loving one another]. He was insistent on not going to a hospital or having a nurse. He wanted men to take care of him – not, I was sure, because he disliked or mistrusted women, but because it was important to him that men express the feminine within themselves, that they adopt the kind of tender nurturing usually associated with women. We became "disciples" of his gospel, "gentle" men of the welcome table. To put is another way, we ritually experienced the stink of Giovanni's room. Even as he was dying Jimmy insisted on his role as a witness and lived his prophecy.[52]

At the "welcome table", in his pass(ing)over Jimmy sets the table with the rite of masculinity done in remembrance of what Jesus calls us—calls men—to do. Until the last he defies

hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. Therefore his death is reminiscent of Jesus' own death and defiance on the Cross of Empire. *Do this in remembrance of me…*

The mention of *Gionvanni's Room* can be read in light of hegemonic masculinity's place in the construction and maintenance of Empire, which requires brutality and the sentimentalization of love. David's inability to love another man, Giovanni, turns him into a "sacrificial victim" who is eventually executed upon the guillotine by the state. Leeming says "David's denial of love is horrendously expensive" and that his inability to "accept the taste, the smell, the touch of love, merely because Giovanni is a man and he is a man" dooms Giovanni to suffer death by the hands of the state.[53] Arthur in *Just Above My Head*, Rufus in *Another Country*, and to a certain degree Wayne Williams (the Atlanta child murders) in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* all suffer a fate similar to Giovanni *and* Jesus. By exposing the effects of denying love Baldwin deftly exposes the xenophobia of the sexual other and the homophobia of the Cross of Empire and Christendom. I do not speak of the latter two in terms of mutual exclusivity for they are one in the same.

Baldwin boldly puts himself on this Cross where the quest for identity—nakedness beyond the labels—is brutally stretched and nailed to the narrow intersection where the vertical way of Christendom and the vastly sprawled horizon of Empire meet. James Baldwin is a true disciple, choosing to travel the road to Galilee—beyond home and all that made him—to following his call to embrace the rite of masculinity given to us by Jesus in the name of love thereby making his conversion complete.

6

Desire: Queering *in* the Black Church

In chapter 1, I wrote about Baldwin's prolonged religious crisis being shaped by the puritanical influences that demonizes black bodies and black sexuality. In chapter 2, I talked about how the effect of puritanism forces Baldwin to signify on black religion and the black church as an act of reclaiming black moral authority via the language of the blues. In chapter 3, I developed the concept that blues bodies are exiled by prevailing narratives of liberation that rely on theology that overlooks the puritanical influences shaping concepts of feminine and masculine identity. In chapter 4, I developed a concept that further exposes the puritanical "essence" of Christianity and the problems it poses for the exodic masculine orientation of black liberation theology. In chapter 5, I suggested that the shift from exodus to exile and Baldwin's contributions to black religion and black theology actually queers conversion in the black experience. I concluded the previous chapter with a bold queer signifying of salvation through which I identify a blues Christology that emerges from Baldwin's life and death.

In this chapter, I write about how James Baldwin's open embrace of his sexual desire liberates sexualized bodies from puritanical notions of depravity and uses bodies that are able to express sexual desire as a source of redemption for black religion, theology, God, and the black church.

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

Baldwin and Sexual Desire

Sexual desire is a powerful element in the life and work of James Baldwin. The denial of sexual desire is at the root of puritanism. In restricting sexual desire, puritanism restricts sexualized bodies in relation to race, gender, and religion.[1] Sexual desire is a dilemma for bodies restricted and defined by puritanism. Desire while evident as a force of nature with which all of us contend, is closeted within the social and religious space occupied by bodies labeled as depraved because of their sensuality (blues bodies).[2] It is important for me to establish here at the beginning of this chapter that I am interpreting Baldwin's understanding of sexual desire to not be limited to the physical fulfillment of a sex act, but as a spiritual call to accept the truth and to as Baldwin writes "to be honest about concerning one's nature."[3] Baldwin redirects the idea of sexual desire as impossible to reduce to "overt sexual activity," but a revolution the truest sense of the moral daring of making the blues body the site for growth beyond the social-sexual-racial-religious-theological barriers of containment, which is a cause of "spiritual famine" in America.[4]

Baldwin reveals that his call and witness are in the fulfillment and expression of sexual desire.[5] In this way, the fulfillment of sexual desire more than race is what defines Baldwin's humanity: it is a spiritual commitment emanating from the core of his soul to find a path to liberation of bodies from all forms of oppression.[6] Baldwin notes with shock and fear when desire is first met with the opportunity for sexual fulfillment (versus racial fulfillment), reconciliation with one's self and between other selves occurs: you are truly liberated.[7] Therefore fulfilling sexual desire is more important than maintaining racial solidarity, because the former requires the body and the mind, while the latter requires the mind and a (psychological) mask.

The desire to be seen sexually—to be seen honestly—and the accountability that comes with sexual desire places

Baldwin on the cross of the church and the street (the Avenue) where the former represents spiritual seduction and the latter carnal knowledge in a theological context.[8] It also places him on the cross of race and sex. Baldwin is mostly crucified religiously and theologically for his choice to leave the church and abdicate racial allegiances in favor of his pursuit of sexual desire as a means of liberation.[9] This is caused by the misgivings presented within sexual discourse, which do not see sexuality as a concern for honesty, but an expression of depravity and direct challenge to black respectability. However, Baldwin embrace of sexual desire as a moral revolution troubles the foundations upon which this black (community) respectability is built: black masculinity, black religion, the black church, and the containment of sexuality in phobic silence. Sexual expressiveness is trouble for a people, community, and church whose concern for their nature calls for the containment of their sexual nature. To speak honestly about the nature of the breadth of sexual diversity in the black community and church is a problem.

Judith Butler's understanding of trouble is helpful with identifying what I mean when I say Baldwin's choice is trouble for the continuum of black community respectability. According to Butler "[sexual] desire, problematically presumed as heterosexual and masculine" is "defined as *trouble*."[10] The trouble of heterosexuality and masculinity for Baldwin is that it produces the problem of violence where sex ought to be. My intention is not to develop a critique of gender using Baldwin per se, but to highlight sexual desire in relation to Baldwin's prolonged religious crisis and what can now be understood as his fight against the metaphors of black oppression: the "psychological collision" between the images created by Protestant Puritan ideology and black bodies. This shows how Baldwin's desire for sexual honesty is meant to end violence against and between bodies.

Baldwin's need to understand, to locate and to engage sexual desire spawns a fear at first of God, His saints and angels,

and His blazing hell. This is the catalyst behind his quest for safety, intimacy, and acceptance of his faith, manhood, and sexual self. Desire is therefore based on the honest acceptance of his sexual, social, and religious self. Sexual desire is also the catalyst for the initiation of Baldwin's honesty: sensuous connection to his own body and the bodies of others.[11] In this sense, sexual desire is a revolutionary expression of an honest need or request to touch and be touched. The value of sexual desire as the revolutionary act of touching is found in the fact that it propels bodies, (sometimes violently when misunderstood), toward one another in a sociosensual and sexual-sensual barrier breaking need to touch ourselves and other selves. This is most evident in *Another Country* where Rufus is the hub of desire linking white and black, men and women, class and culture together into an intricate web of sociosensual and sexual-sensual collection of bodies and desire.[12] Leeming writes that Rufus Scott "is the embodiment not only of the collective tragedy of racism but of the personal crisis James Baldwin left America to escape."[13]

However, love is the prevailing revolutionary dynamic creating the matrix within which the story is developed. *Another Country* is an example of a sexual revolution in which sexual desire spawns a social critique of the boundaries of race, gender, and sex in America and how treacherous breaching those boundaries can be for people daring to attain the successful execution of their dreams. David Leeming writes that Baldwin describes *Another Country* as "an attempt to break through cowardly and hypocritical morality."[14] Leeming also writes that *Another Country* is about the acceptance of "the deeper call of life beyond prejudice through relationships [between the main characters] with each other."[15] The alchemy of sexual desire—touching another in spite of the preventative masks of race, sex, gender, culture—becomes the force liberating bodies to love one another. In the book *The Alchemy of Touch,* Fritz Frederick Smith's exploration of "zero balancing" as a "healing modality" is useful to me

here.[16] Smith writes that zero balancing is predicated on the alchemy of touch. According to Smith touch is alchemical because it alone has the ability to "translate an intellectual or esoteric concept or idea into an actual experience for someone else."[17] In his explanation of alchemical fulcrums, Fritz Frederick Smith notes first that a fulcrum acts like an "eraser" that applies a force stronger than the force holding that which is being erased in place. This can be applied to touching as a ritual of sexual desire used to replace love where violence used to be. Smith writes that this requires "a force (love) that is stronger than the force (violence) holding the injunction or belief system in place . . . second something needs release something needs to die . . . third [touching] needs to be a moment when the participant transcends normal consciousness, breaks accustomed boundaries, and goes beyond their normal identity."[18] Touching is an alchemical fulcrum through which love becomes a force stronger than violence and the social forces that pervert sexual desire. Through his novels Baldwin reveals sexual desire—touching—to be an incarnational act in which racial inhibitions are transcended, rage subsides long enough to relieve human pain and expose the universal need for love, safety, and acceptance.

Baldwin's sexual exile in America presses him into an exilic sojourn in search of the alchemy of sexual desire—touching another in spite of the preventative masks of race, sex, gender, and culture. An example of this is found in the relationship between Rufus's sister Ida and his white friend/sex partner Vivaldo that in the words of Leeming represents the "meeting of anger and guilt, knowledge and innocence, honor and safety . . . basic to the American dilemma as Baldwin sees it."[19] James A. Dievler says that through the "infliction of great pain and suffering on each other . . ." Ida and Vivaldo overcome the preventative masks "cultural categories" to attain a level of understanding of one another that "their love survives."[20] What Baldwin forces his reader to face in the relationships between Vivaldo, Ida, and Rufus

represents the fixed psychic point(s) of race, gender, and the production violence in relation to them is substituted for sexual desire and the attainment of love. The love scene itself is representative of the difficulty associated with the erasure of the fixed psychic point(s) of race, which produces gender and sexual violence in relation to blues bodies both male and female, while reminding the reader about how difficult it is not merely to remove, but erase the masks that *we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within* (social, cultural, religious, racial, and gender investments).[21]

In *Another Country* sexual desire is the gateway to understanding what Baldwin means by the word love and what it takes to be human. Rufus is a Christ-like embodiment whose sacrificial death causes everyone who loved him to confront the masks hindering their ability to love one another and how that inability limited their gifts and their humanity: love removes the masks to expose desire and only when desire is faced can we dare to grow into human beings able to share our gifts, love, and be loved.[22] Love seen in this way helps with understanding the difference between sentimental love and love according to Baldwin which is a state of toughness and daring required for living with the masks (race, sex, sexuality, and gender) removed we *fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within*, and the grace needed to accomplish it. In other words love is the ability to act on our sexual desire—without the masks—and this determines our somebodiness or beingness: being *unutterably different and fantastically present* in our bodies and available for other bodies.[23] Baldwin reveals that what remained certain is sexual desire drives bodies to love and love requires that bodies be liberated from the masks of race, sexual orientation, gender, and religion.[24] *Another Country* is representative of a new culture in which sex trumps race as a paradigm for liberation. However, a sexual culture still faces categorical rigidity of how love gets understood in relation to religion, sexuality, and gender.

James A. Dievler's identification of Baldwin's problem with New York's sexual culture is helpful here.[25] Dievler says that Baldwin view of the sexual culture of America (most notably New York City) was "defined by rigid categories" that prevented attainment of Baldwin's idea of "mature love" and resulted in the "inability to apprehend the humanity of others."[26] Another helpful analysis of New York's sexual culture is found in the work of Michael Warner. Warner notes that the loss of gay sexual culture in New York City's West (Greenwich) Village also meant the loss of the ability to belong to a "sexual world, in which one's sexuality finds an answering resonance not just in one other, but in world of others."[27] The rigidity identified by Dievler and the loss of ability to belong identified by Warner can be directly attributed to puritanism: it creates a line or border of sexuality behind which sexual desire is detained. The exogenous (produced inside) and endogenous (produced outside) boundary of puritanism means that it is present both inside and outside of any given culture that is expressly sexualized because of it. Marlon B. Ross's reflection on the development of American urban black and gay sexual culture is helpful here.

> Given the ways in which European-America [puritan] society has projected its own anxieties about sexual pathology [depravity] and conformity [politics of respectability] onto African American culture, it is not surprising that issues of sexual diversity would be intimately tied to matters of racial community within the United States. The legitimate theoretical link between racial liberation and sexual liberation immediately became confused by the American tendency to associate sexual license with African American culture.[28]

This means that racialized and sexualized (blues) bodies in the black community are unable to escape "puritanism and commercialism of middle-class white society" within or without the community.[29] In other words, the concept of black depravity produced by puritanism that limits black

bodies is the source of the very same sexual freedom that white homosexual and heterosexuals experience within that space or are at liberty to create outside of it.[30] Ross reveals that the relative sexual license of white men like Vivaldo and safety of white homosexuals, like Eric experienced within the black community, cannot be achieved by black homosexuals in particular and black heterosexuals in general within the same space or outside of it.[31] Sexual autonomy gave sexual license to one group while further separating another group from their autonomy, ability, and moral authority to love. In response to the exhibition of homosexual freedom in the larger community and white sexual license in relation to accessing homosexuality occurring within the black community, black heterosexuals both male and female become overtly homophobic and carceral about black sexual practices.[32] I attribute the rigidity of the sexual culture within the black experience to puritanism that creates the problem of violence that leads to the inability to love and apprehend the humanity of others. This is what makes it difficult to achieve maturity be it a man or a woman.

Black Man's (Rufus's) Venom

James Baldwin helps to reveal that fulfilling desire as a process confirming manhood creates a great problem for how to be "…in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word—a man," who is able to love.[33] This goes beyond argument related to "phallic relations to power" to the root of the problem of puritanism, which stunts the capacity of bodies shaped by narratives of depravity to love freely. [34] Seen in this way issues related to homosexuality and heterosexuality, whiteness or blackness are not pitted against one another according to the fulfillment or defilement of the American ideal of manhood per se, but against puritanism that is itself the source that perverts the duty of fulfilling desire and the ability to love oneself.

Baldwin understood that the ideal of manhood in America is rooted in sexual desire that is perverted by puritanism.[35] By coupling sexuality to the (American) ideal of manhood, which is the idea of masculinity that places violence where sex ought to be, Baldwin reveals that the American ideal of manhood is predicated on violence: this its puritanical perversion and constitutes black man's venom. Venom here is the release of racial anger, fear, *rage* compensatory poison meant to destroy the innocence of whiteness propagated by puritanism.[36] The release of venom is symbolized in Rufus's highly eroticized sexual stroking and release in Leona and Ida's alchemized stroking (touch) of Vivaldo, which Baldwin describes as being " as close to hatred as it was to love(making) released the "innocence out of him."[37] Venom represents a remembrance of and rage against the pain experienced by racialized and sexualized bodies who are victimized and the victimizer from the puritanical construction of white innocence and black depravity. The venom of black rage does not have the power to unmask white innocence or combat puritanism keeping it in place. The sting of violence remains in the place where sexual desire ought to be.

Baldwin says the ideal of manhood is an uncomplicated dichotomy of violently contrasting models of masculinity that is "paralytically infantile."[38] As such, violence (understood here to be interchangeable with puritanism) is used to police male desire and is a hegemonic expression of masculinity. Violence becomes synonymous with manhood and heterosexuality with hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. This results in the social and religious implications of the construction of the Du Boisian model of black manhood and sexual desire for the black community being made deadly.

At first glance the tension between puritanism, black bodies and masculinity, might be understood as a heterosexual contract, but it is in fact a puritanical contract: the heterosexist patriarchal policing of black desire via religion and the metaphors of black oppression or more expressly understood

as the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness, which places violence—Rufus's venomous rage—where sex ought to be as the ultimate expression of manhood. The outcome is that violence is often an expression of love and the love of violence the validation of manhood. The adoption of violence (associated here with puritanism) in the place where sex ought to be creates loveless vacuum that becomes something similar to what Dwight N. Hopkins calls a "potentially deadly force."[39] Hopkins identifies the deadly (hegemonic) force as the "larger white male culture" of America. I associate the larger white male culture as being what Baldwin identifies as puritanism. Puritanism is therefore the loveless deadly force—Rufus's "venom"—used to validate black manhood through violent acts within (and without) the community. What becomes evident is that the real problem is violence in the place where sex ought to be. James Baldwin identifies the powerful and often violent hegemonic force of male desire "roams everywhere, avid, desperate, unimaginably lonely, culminating often in drugs, piety, madness, or death."[40] The ubiquity of sexual desire requires that violence is understood to be everywhere and in a world where sexual desire is made opaque by violence, love becomes improbable and safety unattainable.

What remains is the fear of sexual desire. What takes the brunt of that fear is homosexuality and what remains hidden is the role of puritanism in the practice of replacing violence with sex and the escalation of the desire to do violence or to become violent as a means of validating manhood. Homophobia is therefore a sign of the puritanical practice of placing violence where sex ought to be and the denial of the ability to love oneself and other selves.[41] The challenge is to overcome violence with love and to use sexual desire to do it. Baldwin points out the fear of fulfilling the desire to love openly as the "male prison" which all men, heterosexuals and homosexuals contend with.[42] Therefore homophobia is not a fear/suspicion of homosexuals by heterosexuals, but

a fear of unmasculine behavior, which is the denial of fulfilling the desire of loving oneself, loving others (same sex and heterosexed) openly, and thereby overcoming the "great problem" of violence in the fulfillment of sexual desire as a major component used to define manhood. What makes a man in the eyes of James Baldwin is evidenced by his ability to act on sexual desire. Acting on sexual desire liberates bodies from puritanism and removes the mask (and acts) of violence from the process of becoming a man.[43] Yet, how can a man become a man in a community that does not offer safety? Can a community be called a community if it cannot offer safety?

Sexual Desire and the Black Community: The Problem of Containment

One of the most interesting things Baldwin exposes about sexual desire is that it is inescapable: it roams everywhere. Though sexual desire is inescapable, it is containable. Yet, containment of sexual desire stunts growth and stunting growth leads to immaturity or even worse death. The black community is a site of containment for sexual desire.[44] James Dievler notes that in *Another Country* Baldwin reveals the uptown space of Harlem is the site of containment where (black) sexual desire and those who act on it are "exiled."[45] Dievler notes that Baldwin's exile begins as a sexual one within the ghetto space of Harlem. Dievler writes that Baldwin "is an exile from the world [of Harlem and the Village] around him, but he never actually leaves."[46] Baldwin's escape into Greenwich proves to Baldwin that the nature of sexual desire is as inescapable as race. Dievler characterizes Baldwin's social-sexual-religious estrangement as punishment by "cultural forces that precipitated [Baldwin's] 'homelessness'."[47] As I noted earlier puritanism creates a rigid sexual culture and confines sexual desire in relation to black bodies, wherever they reside, because of the psychological trap of metaphorical

blackness created by puritanism. This means that sexual desire is made a cause for exile and the ghetto space a site of containment for exiles.[48] The physical and psychological violence created by the cultural force of puritanism is inescapable by anyone exiled due to sexual desire. In fact the psychological violence of puritanism that led to Baldwin's exile from his own community and also revealed to him that he remained susceptible to physical violence outside the community: because violence always remains in the place where sex ought to be. I am thinking here of Rufus Scott in *Another Country* and Arthur Montana in *Just Above My Head*. Both characters represent the fate of men whose sexual desire creates a state of exile that makes it impossible for them to love openly. These characters also represent victims of violence as a sexual exile in the space of containment (Rufus) and the other an exile who experiences the inescapable nature of sexual desire outside of the contained space (Arthur). Both die violently with Rufus committing suicide jumping of a bridge in New York City, and Arthur murdered in a men's room in the basement of a London pub.[49] As such, controlling sexual desire—limiting daring and growth—with heteronormative paradigms of marriage, abstinence, the closet, violence, conversion, or salvation do not afford safety for the sexual exile in the street or in the church with very few exceptions.[50]

However, sexual desire does induce fear, homophobia, and a false sense of safety for those who profess and practice heteronormativity. This comes about only when you or I, as did Baldwin understand that homosexuality does not challenge heterosexuality: it amplifies the fear (homophobia) and danger of violence associated with fulfilling sexual desire. Baldwin says when it is "impossible to have either a lover or a friend, where the possibility of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased…so has the possibility of growth."[51] Baldwin understood that the fulfillment of sexual desire required daring and such daring leads to growth. This growth can be interpreted as daring to act on the moral

authority to be fully human. Human growth in this sense is predicated on the moral authority to act on sexual desire: the desire to function as a human who has the strength to love or otherwise run the risk of falling in "an underworld in which he never meets either men or women . . ."[52] This means that if desire is not fulfilled heterosexually or homoerotically it will be fulfilled autoerotically and/or and violently if need be.[53] What Baldwin helps me to identify is that the black community is a site of containment that is homosocial in the sense that homosocialism and the homosocial space is a nonloving violent hegemonic masculine space in which sexual desire is everywhere men can be found and in every relationship men might have.[54] This produces homophobia, sexism, sexual violence, and an irresponsible attitude related to the fulfillment of sexual desire: all things antithetical to liberation and love. In this sense, liberation is found in the decontainment of sexual desire from compulsory heterosexuality and the decontamination of bodies, space, and spiritual salvation from puritanism.

According to Baldwin homoeroticism is a mechanism of sexual desire found roaming "everywhere." The challenge for Baldwin was finding safe space where his sexual desire could be allowed to mature into a love of self, love of others, and have it reflect the love of God. Interestingly, African-American sociologist Robert Staples suggests that when men come in contact with other men "homosexual behavior is a possible outcome" and that such instances of homosexual activity are "time contained" and function in the absence of women.[55] Female bodies and the feminine are sites of containment, physically, mentally, and chronologically. Also in the homosocial space as such, they are sometimes treated as decoys and surrogates. Baldwin states that the girls (women) he knew acted as "God's decoys."[56] The bodies of women perform sexual surrogacy, wherein men are able to legitimate heterosexual desire and in doing so save their souls and their seed.[57] Baldwin says the reason women (girls) intervened as

God's decoys and sought to bind the bodies of "boys in marriage" was to ensure their protection from the lure and danger of the "Avenue."

Baldwin recognized the fear associated with attempting to separate desire from a puritanical sense of depravity emanating from a personal internalized fear associated with his sensual impulses and the external dangers associated with acting upon his sexual desire. The fear of acting on desire is offset by the saving of the male soul by God and/or the binding of male bodies in marriage.[58] The attempt to seek "protection" from the need to fulfill sexual desire in the streets, through the church or through using the bodies of women is not a guarantor of safety for men seeking fulfillment of desire.[59] Being a decoy or a surrogate can be seen as a compromise, in the sense that the fulfillment of sexual desire is often done in order to achieve protection: a woman must accept the possibility that a man's desire roams everywhere and everywhere desire occurs in a homosocial space with homoerotic fulfillment of desire a possibility as a result of it. In this sense the "down low" phenomenon is not a matter of same-sex desire in heterosexual space, but a known possibility as the price of the compromise made by some women *and* some men for social-cultural-sexual protection within the homosocial-oriented space of the black community.[60] This is not the only function of women in a homosocial space nor is it meant to be seen as an essentialist claim about marriage. However, I am drawing attention to how Baldwin interprets the subordination suffered by both men and women to the fear caused by sexual desire in the homosocial space of the black community and the choices for safety each is forced to make in relation to the desire to act on sexual desire. It is also a way of understanding the subjective roles of both men and women to one another in relation to the expression and denial of desire.

Interestingly, the work of Monique Wittig around the "idea" of what it means to be a woman is constructed by men

can be applied here to the idea that in the homosocial space not only is manhood constructed by desire but womanhood as well. Wittig cites Simone de Beauvoir who says "One is not born, but becomes a woman." When applied to the homosocial space becoming a woman is done through seeking and attaining protection from males first, binding their bodies in marriage (God's decoy) second, and third ensuring the heteronormative fulfillment (surrogate) of desire and the release of seed. In this way woman is a powerful time-contained ideology, whereby if she does not fulfill her role as decoy or surrogate who she is in relation to what it means to be a woman within the homosocial dynamic is put in question.[61] What is important to say here is in the context of the black community puritanically induced violence is a coercive force in the containment of sexual desire and safety related to gender roles.[62]

Also, what Staples is saying helps to amplify Baldwin's observations of the problems associated with believing homoeroticism as being time contained. I understand Staples's idea of time-contained instances of homoeroticism to be primarily associated with incarceration. However, this should be extended to include bathrooms, gyms, fraternity houses, bars, and even the pulpit to name a few. These time-contained instances of homoeroticism—the jail house, the gymnasium, the frat house, and the church house—are all part of the socialization of the black male. The everywhere nature of male desire identified by Baldwin coupled with the time-contained nature of homoertocism identified by Staples are susceptible to violence within the community. This means the containment of sexual desire produces a rage against sexualized and feminized bodies within the community, with homosexuals, lesbians, and unmasculine bodies—those with and without penises—receiving the brunt of the rage and violence and blame associated with compromising black manhood.[63] The idea of containment itself produces violence as it relates to sexual desire. Race, heterosexuality, and manhood—black

manhood—is itself a form of containment intended to offer safety in the black community. Because violence is in the space where sex ought to be black masculinity harbors an unexamined rage that produces the violence it is intended to resist. As such there is no containment of violence within the black community and therefore no ability to create safe space in which sexual desire leads to love and ultimately liberation. I understand the source of violence fundamentally as a puritanical containment, the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness, that locates black bodies in a ghetto space and time (of lack/poverty) used to control desire and deny the spiritual force of love Baldwin seeks to liberate.

As such Baldwin signifies on manhood and in doing so exposes the closet of homoeroticsm within the black community and the homoerotic as the open secret roaming everywhere in the homosocial setting of the black community and the ideal of manhood found within it. Male desire possesses an intensity that drives men as in Baldwin's case to leave home, to "cleave" his flesh to the flesh of another naked and unashamed in the sight of God, women *and* other males.[64] However, desire is policed and a sense of shame/depravity established as it relates to homoeroticism. Shame/depravity associated with homoeroticism leads to fear, and fear becomes homophobia. Homophobia requires silence for some and deception for others as a means of protecting the homosocial space in which manhood and male desire roams.

In order to limit the roaming of desire and the duty of desire that defines manhood, it is restricted socially and religiously by heterosexuality. Heterosexuality comes to define the ideal manhood and masculinity. The homosocial space is where desire is controlled through the heterosexual pursuit of manhood and a site of containment in which masculinity is protected against shame/depravity of unmasculine/feminine behavior and bodies. Neither homoeroticism nor homosocial space is mutually exclusive: the former dwells as

an open secret in the latter. Baldwin reveals a gap between the ideal of manhood men chase in the light of day and the "unimaginably lonely" and detached anonymous search for the fulfillment of the male desire often fulfilled in the dark.[65]

This operates as a "male prison" wherein the duty to fulfill desire, the release of seed with whom and where it is released determines manhood and partly explains the desire to control the feminine either as a homophobic closet (down low), heterosexual decoy, or surrogate for the source of sexual depravity and sexual fulfillment.[66]

Desire exposes manhood as the pursuit and fulfillment of the release of seed and masculinity being contingent on the willingness to fulfill desire without a decoy or a surrogate. Protection and safety is directly related to how male bodies respond to the duty to fulfill desire. If a man chooses to fulfill desire with a woman he runs the risk of subjecting her to a time-constrained, decoy, or surrogate role, but reinforces the idea of his masculinity. If a man chooses to fulfill desire via same-sex interaction, he runs the risk of losing the protection and safety of masculinity that is associated with his subjection of woman to a time-constrained, decoy, or surrogate role. If males bodies do not respond to the duty to fulfill desire with a clearly heteronormative sexual ownership (sexist role) identifiable by the time-constrained, decoy, or surrogate role of the woman in relation to him, he runs the risk of not being able to offer protection and safety for the woman, children, or himself. In the homosocial space womanhood and the feminine carries the burden of how men respond to the duty to fulfill desire. The great problem of being a man and the burden of masculinity is placed on the feminine and women. The feminine becomes the decoy for the (secret) weakness of manhood and women (their bodies) become the source (of the closet) of depravity because of it. Sexual desire remains a misunderstood and hidden taboo: a puritanical reduction of desire that is private, pornographic, and secretive.

Baldwin, the Black Church, and Desire

Sexual desire poses a great dilemma for the black church. The prevailing theological discursive found within the black church and black theology continue to talk about sexual desire as a problem versus seeing it as a solution. The black church represents the place where the duty to fulfill male desire is cojoined with a godly desire to fulfill the male duty to his community and to God. Male sexual desire takes on its highest form of fulfillment in this way. It is also a site of correction for male desire and containment of heteromasculine behavior. Containment as I understand it in relation to the black church is not a space that is without a sexual pulse and therefore having an aversion to sex, but harboring an aversion to abnormality that is directly attributable to (homo)sexuality. I suggest that the black church is a site of containment that is an "inversion" of sexual desire. In his essay "Some Glances at the Black Fag," Marlon B. Ross suggests that same-sex desire is a "form of individual behavior dependent upon normal culture for its rationale."[67] Ross writes that, anthropologist Lévi-Strauss's assessment of same-sex "male couples" is that they represent "geographical and human absurdity" that "mock" heterosexual couples.[68] Ross goes on to say that this mocking, according to Lévi-Strauss relies on the importing of "social relations from mainstream culture."[69] I suggest that the black church's aversion to the abnormalization of black identity is caused by the normalization of homosexuality in mainstream culture. This leads to the black church importing homophobia into its religious culture and theology so that its model of manhood and patriarchal heteronormative respectability cannot be mocked. The black church becomes an inverted space that seeks "bonding" of heteronormativity with black masculinity based on "procreation" that is both "symbolic" in the heterosexual dyad and "literal" sense in what it means to be a true black man.[70] The bonding of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity frame the ideal of manhood ensuring that the release of semen into someone

fits a model of procreative respectability that defends against the puritanical concept of sexual depravity and ensures the god-oriented fulfillment of manhood defined by the black church is not mocked.[71] The church as homosocial space is intended to resist sexual shame and feminization of the duty to fulfill desire to be a man and to serve God, but it does not. Instead of a strong model of manhood the church mocks a model of strong manhood because it is compromised by the secret of sexual desire. In other words the *god* of black masculinity will not be mocked.

The black church as a site of heteronormative order that ensures homosocial religious space is safe is compromised when the self-deception that homoeroticism and the male desire for a male roams everywhere, except within the church. Baldwin's rejection of the black church's deception or secret is based on his decision to act on his desire. Baldwin left the black church and its pulpit because it disallowed the removal of masks of heteronormativity and black patriarchy. Even god is hidden behind a mask of race "god is black," gender "god is male," and sex "god privileges heteronormativity." Baldwin does not leave the black church because of his sexual orientation: he leaves the black church and the pulpit because it did not allow him to be a man and allow the daring, and growth required to become masculine. Most importantly the black church, the pulpit, and the god he encountered there did not allow him to be a man who is able to love. The inability of all of God's children to give and to receive love within the black church reveals it be a place unable to follow the greatest Commandment.

> The first of all the commandments *is* Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Matthew 12:29–31)

That God is one Lord means that God is one thing: God is Love. Baldwin reminds us that if god cannot offer love then that god must be rejected, because it is not God. He reminds us that he left the church because he could serve the God of love with all of heart, soul, mind, and strength. He also reminds us that he could not and would not put any other god, such as the one of race, before the God of Love. Baldwin reminds us that loving himself and loving other selves equally is sacramental: it is the greatest and the only commandment that matters. He reminds that if we are unable to do these things, we will not only destroy ourselves, but everyone and everything around us those who deny love (oppressors) and those seeking to love (the oppressed) as well.

Sexual desire as evidenced in the works of James Baldwin helps to reveal the great mystery of the black church, the pulpit, its theology, and its god: the inability to love renders it unmasculine, ungodly and unable to offer liberation or salvation. The suppression of sexual desire by the black church and black theology means that the god its constructs is not itself a god of the oppressed, but a god who is the oppressor.

Baldwin leaves the church because it mocks God: a church that harbors secrets related to sexual desire cannot offer safety or liberation. In this way the black church is therefore unable to be called church and a god that allows sexual oppression a God of Love. In this sense, the church and the preacher represent the pinnacle of unmasculine behavior in the black community and represent its god as one who does violence to Love. Also, a church and god unable to contain violence and offer safety is unmasculine. I call this mocking and inversion: homophobia.

Epistemology of the Closet of Homophobia: Queering Monotheism

Homophobia is a term that reveals a deceptiveness that helps to explain the "open secret" of homoeroticism and the

unmasculine nature of the black church where the outing of homoerotic desire is seen as the church's shame. Because homophobic rhetoric is championed from the pulpit and the pews, preachers and the black church, the denial of homoerotic desire in particular and sexual desire in general is a dangerous self-deception, which Baldwin says causes isolation so dangerous that "men will commit any crimes whatever rather than endure it."[72] As such, HIV/AIDS, other STDS and all forms of sexual abuse go unaddressed in many instances as a means of maintaining the homophobic deception of black masculinity. Homophobia is an expression of masculine impotence masquerading as a type of robust, conquering and potent heteropatriarchal monotheistic or *phallitheistic* worship. In this sense, homophobia cannot be characterized simply as a fear and loathing of effeminacy or homosexuality, but a fear of the loss of masculinity and monotheistic heteropatriarchal privilege.

The church's reaction to unmasculine behavior in relation to homoerotic sexual desire results in the deification and worship of heteronormative masculine behaviors. In the context of black culture and religion, it is the patriarchal model of black male power codified in the form and purpose of the Black Christ: an archetypal image of a "conquering" style of black manhood, a savior, who is able to become redeeming and redeemed god here on earth.

Baldwin refuses to accept the deceptive nature of black Christian theism rejecting it outright. Baldwin's refusal to live a secret sexual life (identified by his confession and conversion to openness and rejection of deception personified in the protagonist of *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* John Grimes) exposes the unspeakable anguish of the black church: homophobia. In fact, much of *Mountain* centers on the deception used to mask the secrets of the past lives of those who seek to convert and make John Grimes confess his own secrets and to live a life of deception, which would require him to closet his homosexuality.[73] Therefore a church built on the rock

of the denial of sexual desire cannot be called a real church and the God worshipped there a God of the oppressed or Christ that is black empowered to cast down the Mountain (of puritanism) and offer liberation from oppression sexual or otherwise.[74]

One of the primary concepts that identifies the black church is liberation. However, the homophobic nature of the black church limits its capacity for liberation in relation to how it deals with issues of gender and sexual equality. The black church and black Christ is itself a response to the limits of a patriarchal alabaster Christ's ability to reconcile the issues constituted by race and faith at the expense of silencing sexuality. However, the limits placed on the use of Baldwin to that of a rhetorical rage also obscures his success in moving beyond the limits of race, sex, gender, and Christianity. As such, the black church and most of its theological critiques are unable to overcome the homophobic limits of Christian monotheism, black patriarchy, and the problem of hegemonic masculinity undergirding the formation of the black church and black Christ. This is a primary cause of homophobia and resistance to the embracing of the feminine.

Kelly Brown Douglas's use of Baldwin's work in relation to what she calls Platonized Christianity is helpful here. According to Brown Douglas "Christianity's potentially *problematic* theological and ecclesiological core is based on Carter Heyward's indictment of the "conceptualization of Jesus as Christ as being pivotal in the production of "wrong relationality."[75] According to Brown Douglas the "reasons for Christianity's dishonorable history" is based in part on Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Brown Douglas notes that this wrong relationality, invariably allows for Christianity's "involvement in human oppression" most notably the oppression of black bodies.[76] Brown Douglas also notes that according to James Carroll after Constantine's conversion "the Christian Church became an entity so different from what had preceded it as to be almost

unrecognizable."[77] As such the cross can be replaced with the lynching tree and the body of Jesus replaced with the bodies of black people. Invariably "Christianity's alliance with Platonic/Stoic thought was the primary troubling alliance that laid the foundation for a terrorizing Christian legacy in relation to black bodies."[78] This terrorizing Christian tradition, "one that would permit if not support lynching, was established during Christianity's formative years."[79] What Brown Douglas identifies as "closed monotheism," I am identifying as homophobia. I say this because both perspectives point to the "unspeakable" puritanical terror associated with Christian monotheism's relationship to black bodies.

According to Brown Douglas the "underpinnings of a terrorizing Christianity is a "closed monotheism" that created a "closed universe" based on a narrow electability bound to a belief in a jealous god that is both antagonistic, polarizing, and "fosters divisions between Christians and just about everybody else."[80] She goes on to say that no one was better able to articulate the white "social, cultural, and even religious destruction of the black body" than James Baldwin.[81] I want to pay closer attention to the latter point.

Brown Douglas uses Baldwin's "literary insights" to unpack how evangelical Protestant theology and white cultural ideology have influenced the alienation of "black men and women from their sexuality." She notes that black men and women's acceptance of the Platonized form of Christianity was a defense against the "white cultural claim that they [black men and women] were irredeemably driven by the passions of their black bodies."[82] Brown Douglas says,

> Baldwin skillfully exposes the subtle interplay between white cultural ideology and Platonized theology as the culprit in denigrating black sexuality to such a degree as to disrupt black life and well-being, if not to distort black spirituality.[83]

Brown Douglas privileges the relationship between Platonized Christianity, "black faith and the black sexually body."[84]

What is most important here is the fact that Brown Douglas identifies platonic thought as the primary factor used to create Christian dualism and James Baldwin as the one who has done the most to "expose the complex and troubling reality of a platonized [Christian] tradition for black people…"[85]

Brown Douglas deepens this complexity when she collapses evangelical Protestantism theology and white cultural ideology with Puritanism. Brown Douglas says (as do I in chapter 1) that Evangelical Protestantism is what Baldwin identifies as "Protestant Puritanism."[86] Brown Douglas highlights the fact that Baldwin associates the "pagan imagination" with white Protestant Puritanism or Baldwin's dark puritan imagination identified in chapter 1 as the root cause for the indictment of the "sexual liberty with which white people invest in Negroes—and then penalize them for…" their (sexual) guilt about black flesh.[87]

Drawing on *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* Brown Douglas identifies the problem as a *theo-historical* dynamic, pitting black bodies and black sexuality against a Platonized Christian tradition "…that is, evangelical Protestantism."[88] According to Brown Douglas the black faith tradition not only pits black bodies against their own sexuality but also subjugates black women and in the case of Baldwin, homosexuality "with a patriarchal discourse of power."[89] Brown Douglas says,

> One of the cruelest aspects of black female reality is pointed out by Baldwin: the complicity of the black faith tradition in instigating and perpetuating black male violence against the bodies of black women.[90]

This is an extremely important fact because it relates to the assertion that monotheism, as it is experienced by Baldwin and black people is not only privileged in the construction of heteropatriarchy, but it is also a construction that commits violence against the feminine in *any* form. What this means is that black women and unmasculine males who express the

nature of the effeminate are victims of homophobia, which is the bedrock of the Platonized influences informing Protestant puritan Christianity ideology.

While Brown Douglas does not identify homophobia as the issue creating the degradation of black women, the feminine, or the unmasculine, she does in fact expose the dualistic nature of monotheism and the *othering* of the feminine it produces. Brown Douglas offers profound insights regarding what she sees as the problem of monotheism: its platonization, its puritanism, and uncritical acceptance of both by black people and the black church. However, Brown Douglas goes only so far and leaves us with more questions than answers to the problems associated with Christian monotheism and homophobia. In other words, she limits her critique of monotheism to outside influences versus a direct critique of the puritanical *essence* of Christianity and the production of homophobia because of it. Therefore, Baldwin can only be used and ultimately understood in a very limited fashion as well. So what is the *essence* of black Christianity? I make the assertion that the essence of black Christianity—understood in this context—is both a form of Roman paganism and homophobic.

As I have stated before, Baldwin is not in tension with Christianity per se, nor is he in tension with Constantinian or Platonic thought. Clearly, these are influences, which help to create the architecture of Roman Christianity of which puritanism finds its lineage. However, the dualism Baldwin is attempting to address is the puritan *essence* of Christian Monotheism, which subjugates and terrorizes the feminine/effeminate and denies sexual desire and love.

Kelly Brown Douglas uses Baldwin to unpack the standard of moral excellence codified by the politics of respectability understood here in the context of Christian virtue. This gets conflated with pagan Greco-Roman culture identified here as Protestant Puritanism coded as Evangelical Protestant Christianity that is understood and practiced as the Black

Faith Tradition. Therefore, the Black Faith Tradition, for example, black Christianity can be seen as an appropriation of an essentially hypermasculine Greco-Roman paganism masquerading as a homophobic Christian religiosity understood here as Evangelical Protestant Christianity.

The moral essence then of the Black Faith Tradition is based on the appropriation of Christian faith that closets homoeroticism codified as effeminate or unmasculine behind the veneer of hegemonic masculine patriarchal ferocity modeled after the "truth which is truer": pagan Rome. The Constantinian and Platonic influences within Christianity identified by Brown Douglas reveal that the problem for Baldwin is not the difficulty the black faith tradition has with properly addressing act of racism, or sexism, or homophobia. The problem is a "false interpretation" of Christianity and form of liberation that mocks the sacredness of the body and sexual desire that James Baldwin develops as the primary way to redeem the black community, the black church and obey the commandment to love yourself and other selves equally. Baldwin's model of black manhood reveals a rage that is directed toward the mocking of God's call to love and for the church to be the incarnational site of daring, growth, and maturation that is the liberation we are looking for. This is what Baldwin desires, and this is how he redeems the black church from its homophobia.

Conclusion: James Baldwin, Queer Theory, and Theological Reflection

As a source for religious and theological reflection, Baldwin's work unearths a deeper level of understanding of the source of racial rage and sexual phobias that are left partly unresolved in black liberation discourse. Baldwin's religious crisis is not a simple case of tension arising between Christianity and sexuality; it is the phalanx of race, gender, sexuality, and theology codified and signified by puritanism; this is the hidden source informing the psychological trap of metaphorical blackness that he exposes. His detection and identification of puritanism as the root cause of his religious crisis is a fertile ground for deeper exploration beyond this project. What this project does in relation to this discovery is to take the coconstituted issues of race, sex, and gender beyond its metaphorical boundaries toward an allegorical rendering of a salient argument that moves the project of liberation forward in the black church and community onto another level that gives more awareness to the puritanical influences shaping notions of black depravity and the homophobic religious responses in relation to it. This paradigm shift redefines the argument of racial and sexual depravity onto a more fundamental analysis of puritanism and puritan ideology. This as yet not fully accounted for influence creates a more usable past for informing how we talk (a sexualized discourse) about race, sex, gender, and religion as millennial people in the new millennium.

E. Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*

This does not mean that black theology or the black church is obsolete. This is far from the truth. Using Baldwin as a primary source in relation to black theology and the black church reveals that the former and current ways of talking about the issues of blackness, sexuality, and gender are in dire need of retooling. Again, I say black theology and the black church are not obsolete or dead as some claim: it is the language itself that is out of step.

Baldwin uses the language of the blues to identify and explain black bodies on its own terms, thereby reclaiming the moral authority stripped away by puritanism and muted by homophobia. The blues as a language of sexualized discourse is able to account for black bodies being in a state of oppression versus being the site and cause of oppression. Blues language breaks the psychological collision between the images created by Protestant Puritan ideology and black bodies thereby liberating the latter to reclaim the moral authority required to see black bodies and sexuality as a source of divine election rather a reason for its rejection. God manifest in Jesus is created, revealed, and sustained in the midst of sensuousness and not marginalized because of it.

On one hand, this might be seen as a challenge to black liberation, when in fact it is an answer. It is a missing link that gives effective redress to the holy narrative of racial liberation that occurs to the exclusion/exile of blues people. Exile is a blues movement within liberation: this is its open secret, meaning blues bodies that underscore the cause for liberation are identifiable, relevant, and truly considered. The bodies of the exiled upon which liberation is crafted find moral authority and voice in the blues. In this way, James Baldwin's use of the blues sheds greater light on the way in which the community sees itself theologically.

The puritanical essence of religion compelled Baldwin to reclaim black moral authority from the clutches of the Calvinist's concept of divine election and the sin of black depravity it produced. What emerges is a blues framework

that exposes the limitations of liberation dogma rooted in moral choices based on the puritanical metaphors of black oppression. As such, puritanism obfuscates the marginalization of black bodies behind metaphorical limitations creating a state of sinfulness associated with color and sex. The result is that theology creates patriarchal–homophobic models of liberation that reify the oppression it seeks to alleviate and leaves the reason for rage, which inspires it unexamined. Baldwin notes when rage is examined, sex emerges as a critical source for answering the problems that resist being answered. Sexual oughtness reconstructs the moral frame of reference of theology and is needed to make religion and the church a safer place for raced/sexualized bodies.

Though raced/sexualized bodies are found in the church, the prevailing language found there poses a dilemma for reconciling sensuality and salvation. The infusion of what Baldwin reveals about sensuality and sexuality into theological discourse proves his voice can be appropriated for the purpose of making the church a safe space for raced and sexualized bodies. Baldwin's work reveals blues bodies are saved through their sensuality and sexuality, making the cross a sign of acceptance not just for raced bodies, but sexualized bodies as well. Baldwin's desire and brave choice to dare to love helps to create a queer signifying of the Cross, wherein salvation is a site of redemption of sexualized bodies from the puritanical notions of depravity.

James Baldwin's open embrace of his own desire is a redeeming force rather than a source of disconnection. Baldwin redefines manhood in terms of the willingness to embrace sexual desire and in doing so exposes the root of homophobia to be a fear of being seen as unmasculine. In the end the church and liberation become the ideal that it seeks to reflect: a language and space where the divine invites all bodies to come as they are. This is the genius of James Baldwin and a clear indicator of the strength of his manhood and humanity. Liberation is still active and at the least requires us

to pay attention to its evolution. Rather than talk about the hurdle or merely stare at it Baldwin chose to meet it squarely; measure its height, breadth, and length; and move beyond it.

A Blues Project

My project reveals at least five major points. First, James Baldwin's religious crisis does not pit his homosexuality against Christianity: it is caused by puritanism and the metaphors of black oppression that creates a language within the church that demonizes black bodies in general and (homo) sexualized bodies in particular. That homosexuality carries the weight of racialized and sexualized oppression forces Baldwin to link its acceptance to what he determines to be the true definition of manhood (acceptance of the sexual-self). Second, Baldwin's identification of puritanism as a root cause of black depravity related to religion necessitates the need for an allegorical defense to combat the metaphors of black oppression. A sexualized discourse emerges that Baldwin uses to signify on black religion, the black church, and Christianity. Sexualized discourse as a blues discourse gives Baldwin a language that helps to reestablish and/or reclaim black moral authority. Third, the blues helps to locate those bodies that are marginalized within the black church and community and prevailing discursive of liberation that speaks about them, but not for them. This assists in isolating further the puritanical influences that shape and set at odds the feminine and masculine within the black church and community. Using the work of Baldwin I offer a model of androgynous reintegration that yields linguistic and moral authority to the black oppressed. Fourth, the patriarchal masculine-oriented model of black liberation theology is exposed as supporting and recreating the oppression it seeks to overcome. The puritanical essence of Christianity is exposed as the underlying source of rage that is used to construct and support a robust masculine model of redemption

that lacks the capacity to embrace sexuality. Fifth, Baldwin's own exilic experience helps to illuminate the need for a blues Christology that redeems the sensuous as sacred. Finally, sexuality and desire become sources for redemption of blues bodies and liberation from the metaphors of black oppression for the church.

Recommendations

This project reveals that James Baldwin as a source for theology is vital to developing relevant discourse for the concern for liberation in the twenty-first century. Baldwin can still teach us how to write and we must begin to engage the exegetical and hermeneutic concepts of theology with the literary criticisms needed to truly benefit from the works of James Baldwin. Theology might be better suited for locating and interpreting the allegorical consciousness and signifying methodology captured in Baldwin's essays and interviews. However, his novels and plays comprise a canon of epistles that yield revelation knowledge to a world seeking answers in a time where identity is in constant violent flux.

The sensuality of Baldwin's language informs his reader of the reality that we do violence to sexuality when we do not speak or act upon it. Manhood and womanhood get swallowed up in sexual silence imposed by the black model of patriarchal masculinity undergirded by puritanism fueled by the metaphors of black oppression. As such the rage evident around race overshadows and mutes the need to talk about and embrace sexuality. Baldwin proves that the problem of the twenty-first century is sexuality.

Baldwin's exploration of the blues should encourage theologians to consider more in-depth analysis of the language of Christ and Cross for the black community. Baldwin reveals that the gospel narrative is itself a blues narrative and that the man from Galilee heard the blues and answered its call. It is not right to collapse the blues into music but to allow

its passion to become the moral authority guiding liberation. This is not black liberation theology as we know it, and James Baldwin is not and should not be considered a theologian. However, what James Baldwin thinks about the gospel lives through (Jimmy's) blues.

Self-Reflection

While my research work meets the basic criteria set forth in my proposal, there are limitations that arose in the completion of this project. James Baldwin is not a theologian, and to frame his work in the context of theology requires a disciplined approach that identifies him as signifying on theology. This requires a great deal of construction, and this project reflects a first step only. One of the primary limitations is directly associated with the sheer size of the Baldwin corpus. His novels, essays, plays, and interviews represent at least 50 years, several continents, and social eras. Rather than limit myself to one novel or one genre, I chose to search Baldwin thematically while keeping in mind that I am reflecting theologically. However, the yield was so enormous it will take me the rest of my life to unpack all of what Baldwin has contributed to black religion and black theology.

This project has challenged me to grow in ways that only occur by reading an author, essayist, thinker like James Baldwin. Baldwin requires me to wonder about what I consider is the strength to give and to receive love and in the process somehow lose the masks preventing either from occurring.[1]

In the process of writing, I have become more vulnerable and open. This project has required me to set aside the masks of masculinity, sexuality, homophobia, and blackness. I have exposed myself and in doing so embraced the strength to stand naked before another. James Baldwin requires you to walk with him and to breath in the spiritual call he lays before you. I have to be strong to express what the spirit exposes to

me and about me. Though I have only scratched the surface, I am forever changed by James Baldwin because he has shown that I do have the strength to love.

James Baldwin arouses me to boldly locate my words and my body in spaces seeking to expand the equation of liberation in our time. In the process this project has emboldened me to embrace the sensuality of my penmanship and the open expression of sexuality that comes with it. My hope is that my project adequately captures the promise and challenge of liberation and love I found between Jimmy's blues (project) and James's gospel (prose).

Notes

Introduction

1. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, *Conversations with James Baldwin.* eds Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1989), 22.
2. This not something that James H. Cone says or infers anywhere within his corpus. In fact Dr. Cone said to me that James Baldwin along with Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, made up the composition of his "trinity." (AAR Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA., November, 2011). What I am referring to is Eldrigde Cleaver's assertion that after an initial lusting for "anything" Baldwin, he developed an aversion he attributed to what he sees as Baldwin's love of whites and his homosexuality as a "racial death-wish" that is a direct cause of it. Eldridge Cleaver, "Notes on a Native Son," in *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 96–107.
3. James Baldwin, "Alas Poor Richard," in *Nobody Knows My Name,* in *James Baldwin: Collected Essay,* ed. Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 251.
4. *The Fire Next Time* is the quintessential model of how to write about race and the problem of racial rage. Baldwin examines the black church, God, Christianity, and the Nation of Islam as sights of resistance to racism in America and "prefigures" Dr. James H. Cone's construction of a theology of black liberation. See Clarence E. Hardy, III, *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), xii.

1 The Prolonged Religious Crisis

1. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* First Vintage International Ed. (New York: Vintage, 1993), 15.

2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid., 17.
4. Ibid., 28.
5. Ibid., 28.
6. Ibid., 15.
7. I loosely consider each of these concerns throughout the book. I only name them here for the purpose of introducing them into the milieu of Baldwin's religious experience. In this chapter, I establish Baldwin's definition of religion as a fundamental resource for understanding not only religion but also the theological, sociological/ racial, sexual, and gendered meanings derived from and supported by (black) liberation theology.
8. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study* (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 50.
9. James Hoopes says, according to Charles Peirce "the meaning of every thought is established by triadic relation, an *interpretation* of thought as a *sign* of a determining *object*. I am applying this concept as a queer semiotic configuration that speaks to the intricate web of psychological complexes, which makes up Baldwin's understanding of black religion, which I say more about later in this chapter. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce,* ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 9.
10. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 16.
11. Ibid., 16.
12. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 47.
13. Argument is defined here as "any process of thought reasonably tending to produce a definite belief." Charles Sanders Peirce, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," in *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Reading & Interpretive Essays,* ed. John J. Stuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 127.
14. Michael F. Lynch, "Just Above My Head: James Baldwin's Quest for Belief," *Literature & Theology* 11 (3, 1997): 284.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 285.
17. Ibid., 287.
18. Ibid., 293.
19. Clarence E. Hardy, III, *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 11.
20. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 24.

21. Ibid., 24.
22. Ibid., 22.
23. Ibid., 23.
24. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 16.
25. Williams James's idea of a genuine option is "when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind." Baldwin understands the "option" available to him. This option is "living" because it is taken seriously; it is "forced" because it is a choice he cannot escape by deciding not to choose; and it is momentous because the stakes are important and the choice irreversible. Finally, it is quite evident Baldwin relies on his "passional" nature because the choice of which "gimmick" cannot be decided on intellectual grounds alone. "The Will to Believe," *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Reading & Interpretive Essays,* ed. John J. Stuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 230.
26. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 24.
27. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 27.
28. Ibid., 27.
29. Ibid., xii.
30. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, 50.
31. Emma Goldman's critique of puritanism is similar to that of Baldwin's in that they both share European understanding of American Christianity as puritanical. Goldman says puritanism "has fought the flesh as something evil; it had to be subdued and hidden at all costs," in "The Hypocrisy of Puritanism," *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Second Revised Ed. (New York & London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 108.
32. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xi.
33. Ibid., xi.
34. Ibid., xi.
35. Ibid., xi.
36. Marlon B. Ross says the "rock is the author's inheritance, one that is both a strength, enabling identity and survival, and a stumbling block, obstructing the way toward uninterrupted human desire by giving the individual a secure place to hide from the nakedness of desire (i.e., an identity)." In a similar way, I am identifying the rock as a source of puritanical inheritance—the stumbling block—of black people seeking security and safety. See Marlon B. Ross, "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality,"

in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 29.
37. Ibid., 28–29.
38. Ibid., 28–29.
39. I am referring here in part to Charles Long's claim that studies of religion do not give "adequate explanation" to the "practical-existential activity of religious communities." Studying Baldwin's religious inheritance is a method for overcoming the inadequacies. "Prolegomenon to a Religious Hermeneutic," Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 1999), 31.
40. Ibid., 31.
41. James Baldwin, "*Nothing Personal*" *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 693.
42. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 92.
43. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations with James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 8.
44. Ibid., 8.
45. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, 34.
46. Ibid., 35.
47. The lack of an account of the influence of Puritanism leads to a misreading of black religion. This is an oversight of black theology, which led to the omission of issues of sex, gender, and class. This also has led to Womanist and now my queer semiotic amending of black theology. I will say more about this later.
48. Ibid., 5. I am making a correlation between the observation between Du Bois idea of double- consciousness, which is "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of another…" and Baldwin's idea of "psychological warfare" relative to the Negro problem. However, the comparison ends there, at least with regards to the different approaches to rectifying the condition of black people and the role of religion in that process. See also, W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, 1996), 5.
49. Sydney E. Ahlstrom uses the term "Puritan Spectrum" as a means of identifying a collection of denominational components—Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists—or "Anglicanism that is "deeply colored by Puritan convictions" which shaped the "early religious life" of Virginia and the other American colonies. I am expanding the spectrum to include the social, economic, and

political influences of Puritanism in the conquest of America and the subjection of black bodies as a part of that as well. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 132–134.

50. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations with James Baldwin.,* 5.
51. Ibid., 5.
52. Charles Long, *Significations.,* 3.
53. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 124–125.
54. Charles Long, *Significations.,* 163.
55. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations With James Baldwin.,* 4.
56. Charles Long, *Significations.,* 163.
57. Dr. Martin Luther, Jr, speaking about how "… Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of 'somebodiness' that they have adjusted to segregation…" The word captures the dichotomy and dilemma of the oppressed. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, "Letter From a Birmingham Jail," *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr,* ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 296.
58. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 29.
59. Ibid., 31.
60. Baldwin agrees with Terkel's assessment that the psychological hazard or collision occurs when the rich heritage of black people meets with the accepted stereotype given to black people by whites. The resulting shame leads to "a kind of psychological warfare in which you may perish." James Baldwin, Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 5.
61. I make the case that the concept of the perpetual unsafe nature of blackness reflects the idea of the "perpetually disobedient black" that is an outgrowth of the conflation of blackness with disobedience fostered by Christian absolutism supporting the Anglican doctrine of absolute obedience for slaves in the American colonies. In becoming perpetually dangerous black people are forced into a position of never being able to find safety as a matter of choice. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 146.
62. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 30.

63. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study,* 31.
64. Ibid., 29.
65. Ibid., 31
66. Ibid., 31.
67. Ibid., 31.
68. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, 30.
69. See Joseph R. Washington, *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 163.
70. Jon Butler argues that we should "attach less importance to Puritanism as the major force in shaping religion in America." "For Baldwin, however, Puritanism's power in shaping American religion—both black and white—has no parallel. Puritanism remains the single most dominant force shaping the whole spectrum of black religion and black bodies in American democracy. This is what shapes that history from a hermeneutical (hermeneutic of queer semiotics) perspective. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, 2.
71. Charles Long, "Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of a Problem," *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 1999), 90.
72. Ibid., 90.
73. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, 29.
74. Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imagining the Divine: Confronting the Backlash Against Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999), 23.
75. Ibid., 162.
76. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 5.
77. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 33.
78. Ibid., 40–41.
79. Ibid., 46–47.
80. Ibid., 47.
81. Ibid., 47.
82. Joseph R. Washington, *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States*, 169.
83. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 25.
84. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel", in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.), 21.
85. Marousis-Bush citing the work Walter Benjamin in Bainard Cowan's article, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory." *New German*

Critique, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism, Winter 1981: p. 109–122, Jeremy Marousis-Bush "Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative as Joban Allegory", http://www.associatedcontent.com/, 1/8/2010, 2.

86. Ibid., 2.
87. Interestingly Michael F. Lynch sees Baldwin's "fundamentally Christian" Harlem experience as defining his perspective. However, for Lynch it is not allegorical but dialecticism that is the outcome. Michael F. Lynch, "Just Above My Head: James Baldwin's Quest for Belief," *Literature & Theology* 11 (3, 1997): 285.
88. Marousis-Bush is using Joban allegory to explain Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative. According to Marousis-Bush, Rowlandson was a "devout Puritan" who "made metaphorical connections between her current life events and biblical texts … setting the tone of the work." Ibid., 1.
89. Ibid., 1.
90. Ibid., 2.
91. Ibid., 4.
92. David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1994), 384.
93. Conceit is defined as an extended or elaborate metaphor most associated with *poetics*: the science of literature, which looks at how language is put together. It is also a means of suspending belief. In this case, conceit as a poetic heuristic device helps to complicate the use of allegory to show it as a tool for radicalizing discourse, suspending belief for the purposes of creating new meaning, while at the same showing the roots for old understanding. For a more conventional application of poetics see, Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Second Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 59.
94. As a hermeneutical endeavor, historical consciousness, the awareness of change over the course of human history, is a means by which I can at least locate Puritanism as an interpretive modality, which is hidden by the subjective nature of the history that it has created, but remains hidden as the source of the prejudice to which black people are subject.
95. Eddie S. Glaude Jr, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 68.
96. James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.), 163.
97. Ibid., 163.
98. An interesting insight (offered by Dr. Ted Jennings) is that Baldwin's critique of an invented African-ness that seeks to by-pass the

"American-ness" of the black experience recalls what he says about Negro being only an American invention and that an invented "African-ness" seeks to "by-pass the 'American-ness' of the black experience." What Baldwin is saying here is quite the opposite. For Baldwin, the issue is that the white world does not want to accept the fact the black experience is *an* authentic American experience. The desire of black people to manufacture African-ness is in response to the white resistance faced when claiming their American-ness, because it challenges the idea of innocence of white identity. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1962), 81.

99. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, 50.
100. Ibid., 36.
101. Ibid., 162.
102. Ibid., 154.

2 Between James's Gospel and Jimmy's *blues*

1. James Baldwin, "To Crush a Serpent," in *James Baldwin The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 159.
2. Signifyin(g), signifyin' and signifyin' on, signifying on are all expressions used within black vernacular.
3. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1999), 1.
4. Ibid., 1.
5. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Beacon Press, 1955), 30–31.
6. Another interesting aspect of signifying is that its use "by black gay men places their writing squarely within the African-American literary tradition." While I certainly agree that Baldwin might represent a model of signifying defined by Nero, African-American literature that privileges black vernacular in the form of religious and social colloquialisms is a form of signification writ large. Charles I. Nero, ""Towards a Black Gay Aesthetic," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader,* ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 400.
7. Baldwin is talking about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Native Son* written by Richard Wright. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son,* 30.
8. Ibid., 35.

9. Gates identifies the blues and signifying as "two canonical black discourses" that he and Houston A. Baker, Jr, use to "locate black critical difference." I find this especially useful here because I am using signifying and blues to talk about the critical differences—the unique expressed understanding of race and sexual identities that Baldwin is writing about in relation to (black and white) Christianity. While, I am careful to not attempt to do violence to African-American literary theory; it is helpful as a tool for theological discourse, that uses black literature (Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, and James Baldwin) as its interlocutor. Henry Louis Gates, Jr, "'What's Love Got to Do with It?': Critical Theory, Integrity, and the Black Idiom," *African American Literary Theory*, 299.
10. Signifyin(g) and the phrase "signifying on" is a form of black vernacular used in the black community and in the black literary tradition. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr, "Introduction to the *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*"; Ibid., 339–341.
11. James Baldwin, *Just Above My Head* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978), 110.
12. Ibid., 110.
13. Ibid., 110.
14. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 30.
15. James Baldwin, "To Crush a Serpent," 158.
16. I am identifying whiteness as a particular consciousness or state of mind and ultimately a moral choice. See Dorothy Randall-Tsuruta, "In Dialogue to Define Aesthetics: James Baldwin and Chinua Achebe," *The Black Scholar* 12 (March–April 1981): 72–79, reprinted in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds. Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 218.
17. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, Second Ed., eds Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 55.
18. James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work,* in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays,* ed. Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 566.
19. Ibid., 565.
20. Ibid., 565.
21. Ibid., 565.
22. Ibid., 565.
23. This is similar to what James H. Cone identifies in his work when he identifies at least one of the primary characteristics of black power as the ability of black people to define sin [as whiteness]. I like this to

the (moral) authority of black to redefine the Christian symbols—sin being one of them—with their original energy identified by Baldwin. James H. Cone *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 108.

24. Ibid., xii.
25. James Baldwin, "The Uses of the Blues," in *The Twelfth Anniversary Playboy Reader*, ed. Hugh M. Hefner (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1965), 151.
26. Ibid., 151.
27. Ibid., 150.
28. Ibid., 151.
29. Ibid., 151.
30. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 24.
31. Ibid., 24.
32. Ibid., 24.
33. James Baldwin, "James Baldwin, an Interview" with Wolfgang Binder, 1980, in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 198.
34. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 56.
35. James Baldwin "The Black Scholar Interviews James Baldwin," *The Black Scholar*, 5 (December 1973–January 1974): 33–42, in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 162. The Black Scholar interview is reprinted in *Conversations*
36. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 49.
37. Ibid., 63.
38. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 48.
39. Ibid., 49.
40. Ibid., 50.
41. Ibid., 50
42. Ibid., 51.
43. Kelly Brown Douglas does not accept Amiri Baraka's understanding of the blues. It is interesting to note that Baraka had issues with Baldwin's homosexual representation of black masculinity. It is also interesting to note that Baldwin understood that the blues has many uses. Therefore Baraka's and Brown Douglas's use of the blues is valid, if not wholly affirming of Baldwin's understanding and use. (see footnote 6), Ibid., 51.
44. Ibid., 51.

45. Ibid., 51.
46. Ibid., 48.
47. Ibid., 51.
48. Ibid., 52.
49. James Baldwin, "The Uses of the Blues," 152.
50. Ibid., 152.
51. Ibid., 158.
52. Ibid., 160.
53. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American ideal of Manhood," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays,* ed.Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 821.
54. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 51.
55. Ibid., 51. Kelly Brown Douglas also says that a "black middle-class" body can be a blues body." I am saying here that all bodies can be blues bodies because of their sexual potential—their sensuousness, especially the saved and sanctified.
56. Ibid., 51.
57. Ibid., 48.
58. Ibid., 48.
59. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, *Conversations with James Baldwin.* eds Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1989), 22.
60. Ibid., 3.
61. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 57.
62. Ibid., 55.
63. James Baldwin, "To Crush a Serpent," 160.
64. James Baldwin, "To Crush a Serpent," 161.
65. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 116.
66. Ibid., 117.
67. Kelly Brown Douglas, "Blacks and Blues: God Talk/Body Talk for the Black Church," 56.
68. Ibid., 56.
69. Ibid., 56.
70. This is the third and final aspect of the Trichotomy—its thirdness whereby "The Third is that which bridges over the chasm between the absolute first and last, and brings them into relationship." Charles Sanders Peirce, "A Guess at the Riddle," in *The Essential Pierce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume I (1867–1893),* eds Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); Ibid., 251.

71. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, 120.
72. Herb Boyd, *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin* (New York: Atria Books, 2008), 51.
73. James Baldwin, "To Crush a Serpent," 162.
74. James Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed.,Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 705–706.

3 Living Exiled in the Promised Land

1. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma.
2. Exodus is the biblical narrative used to locate black people with liberation from oppression by God. See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Twentieth Anniversary Ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970; Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1990), 2 and James H. Evans, Jr, *We have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40.
3. Ibid., 40.
4. Ibid., 41.
5. I am continuing with the idea I explored in chapter 2 where I stated that the abdication of black religious vernacular for the puritanical rhetoric of Christianity, according to Baldwin, costs black people their moral authority and the spiritual power. See chapter 2, pp. 4–6.
6. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 207.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 210.
9. Ibid.
10. The interpretation of Long's work I am advancing is similar in certain regards to what Delores S. Williams identifies in the work of blues writers. The experience of black women "fired in the crucible" of the antebellum period creates a blues literature that according to Williams portrays black women as weak and needy. However, it is the use of religion by black mothers and its connection to the work of Baldwin that is important for exposing the dilemma of blues bodies to express moral authority outside religion. The poetics of trauma expressed in the blues and by blues bodies can only be adequately understood and made effective as black religious vernacular. See Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 42–48.

11. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 210.
12. I am characterizing chronic poverty, joblessness, inordinate rates of incarceration, acts of violence against women and children, nihilism in the face of HIV/AIDS, diabetes, heart disease, racism, and homophobia, as some instances of trauma.
13. There is an interesting similarity between Edward Said's estimation of the impact of Islam on Europe and the impact of the Negro (blues bodies) on American Christian civilization articulated by Baldwin. Said writes that Islam is a lasting trauma on Europe symbolizing "devastation, terror, the demonic hordes of hated barbarians" and posing a "constant danger for Christian civilization." James Baldwin writes that the Negro (blues bodies) is a "social and not a personal or a human problem" to what is thought of as "statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, and remote violence." Like Islam, the Negro represents a rupture—lasting trauma—in the fabric of Euro-Western Christian morality. This idea in relation to exile is discussed later in this chapter. Edward Said, *Orientalism,* Twenty Fifth Anniversary Ed. (New York: Random House, 1978, 1994), 60; James Baldwin *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 25.
14. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 13.
15. See my development of the concept of the blues as extended metaphor and Baldwin's definition of the blues in chapter 2.
16. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 13.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion,* 204.
20. Ibid., Both Long's and Paz's descriptions of twilight zones of half-light by the former and purgatories and hells by the latter and the bodies that occupy those spaces are consistent with the condition of exile within the space of the Promised Land. Long citing Octavio Paz from *The New Analogy,* The Third Herbert Read Lecture, 25
21. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 24.
22. Ibid., 25.
23. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 47.
24. James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 55.
25. Ibid., 54.
26. Ibid., 55–58.

27. Ibid., 57. Evans uses Raboteau in his development of the first of two fundamental reasons for what he says makes God "not readily apparent" or ungiven in the African-American experience. See also Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 86–92.
28. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 2.
29. JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood?: The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 68.
30. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*., 147.
31. Ibid, 147.
32. Ibid., 2.
33. Ibid., 6.
34. Ibid., 3.
35. Ibid., 6.
36. JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood*., 116.
37. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*., 41.
38. Ibid., 46.
39. Ibid., 46.
40. Ibid., 46.
41. Ibid., 46.
42. Ibid., 46.
43. Ibid., 44–46; I say this is a positive example because Williams's understanding that depiction of black women in the blues is one that weakens "female figures." Williams does differentiate the blues between what she sees as an art form and blues as social commentary, the latter categorization is one into which she places Baldwin.
44. Ibid., 41; It is also important to note that the story is built around the imprisonment of Fonny who is actually telling the story of psychological substitution while behind bars. This double irony reflect what Williams says about the condition of black males being the reason for the reliance on their religion to provide safety and power in the absence of black men. James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1974), 17–18.
45. Ibid., 48–49. I see Williams's assessment of Baldwin's depiction of black women and especially black mothers as something positive, which runs contrary to some critiques that assert Baldwin devalues womanhood. See E. Francis White, "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: The Alchemy of Race and Sexuality," in *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison: Comparative Critical and Theoretical Essays*, eds Lovalerie King and Lynn Orilla Scott (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 252–256.

46. In the *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin writes about (as do I in chapter 1) his choice of religion and the church over the streets and vice as a gimmick he uses in his quest for safety.
47. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 20.
48. Ibid., 20.
49. Ibid., 20.
50. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essay*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 814.
51. One example of how psychological substitution can be found in Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*, where the racial dynamic related to black homophobia is redirected—substituted—by making the protagonists, David and Giovanni, and their context white. In this way, Baldwin replaces race with sex. An example of violence being replaced with love can be found in *the Fire Next Time* in which Baldwin declares a revolutionary love that would end racial violence in America. My mentioning this here is to acknowledge the existence of the multiple ways in which this can be found and/or applied to Baldwin's corpus.
52. JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood.: The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 68.
53. James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1952), 15–16.
54. Ibid., 12.
55. Ibid., 15.
56. Ibid., 77.
57. Ibid., 18.
58. Ibid., 7.
59. Ibid., 60.
60. Ibid., 72.
61. Ibid., 72.

4 Queering and Theological Signification

1. I am using the word essence in the sense that I am clarifying what the essence of black religion is for Baldwin, which is something Cecil Wayne Cone says is important for establishing black theology. Cecil Wayne Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: AMEC, Henry Belin, 1975), 19.
2. James Baldwin, "In Dialogue to Define Aesthetics: James Baldwin and Chinua Achebe" (March–April 1981): 72–79., Reprinted with

permission, eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989.), 218.

3. James Baldwin, "An Interview with James Baldwin: Studs Terkel, 1961," in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 13.
4. I see parallels of the ideal in the black Christ for Cone and black Christopher for Baldwin. Both men present a revolutionary figure who is a redeemer of his people. See Cone's *A Theology of Black Liberation* and James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*.
5. Cone says " The origin of black theology has three major contexts: (1) the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, largely associated with Martin Luther King, Jr; (2) the publication of Joseph Washington's book, *Black Religion* (1964); and (3) the rise of the black power movement, strongly influenced by Malcolm X's philosophy of black nationalism." James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 6.
6. I use the term "calculus" in reference to what a thing equates—the total sum of its parts and how it is derived, in this case as it pertains to black masculinity.
7. Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 38.
8. Ibid., 2.
9. Ibid., 11.
10. Though Carby's project is gender specific, it is helpful for what it reveals about the genesis of the post-Emancipation New Negro articulated by Du Bois and its theological underpinning, which is important to this project. Ibid., 10.
11. Carby points out that the discussion of Washington is "separated and excluded from the black masculine world" by the "female symbolic space" of the white section of the *Souls*. I make the assertion that this extends to the actual realm of African-Americanist discourse described earlier and the reality of the black world in which Cone and Baldwin find themselves struggling to become men. Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 39.
12. Ibid., 39.
13. Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 21.
14. Ibid., 21.
15. James Baldwin sees the problem of race as a bill "America is prepared to pay" while quoting Du Bois's admonition about the problem

of the twentieth century being the color line. I mention this here to underscore that Baldwin is aware of Du Bois's work and is indirectly responding to Du Bois's concept of the problem of race and black masculinity. *The Fire Next Time,* 103.

16. Roger Bastide, "Color, Racism, and Christianity," in *Color and Race,* ed. John Hope Franklin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 44.
17. Ibid., 44.
18. Ibid., 44. Bastide is drawing his comparisons from the Calvinists encounter with the Bantu of Africa and their refusing the "opportunity to enter into the economy of salvation," in favor of retaining their "pagan mentality."
19. Ibid., 45.
20. Hazel Carby, *Race Men*., 19.
21. Wayne A. Meeks, ed., Genesis 1:28, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: NRSV* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1989), 1933.
22. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, 1903), 6.
23. Ibid., 6.
24. Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 11.
25. Roger Bastide, "Color, Racism, and Christianity," 44
26. Ibid., 25.
27. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xxiv.
28. Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 21.
29. Ibid., 24.
30. Ibid., 25.
31. According to Du Bois, the double-aims also affected the "Negro minister, doctor and would-be savant" if only in different ways. Ibid., 6–7.
32. James Baldwin, "Race, Hate, Sex, and Colour: A Conversation with James Baldwin and Colin MacInnes" James Mossman, 1965. From *Encounter,* 25 (July 1965), 55–60 Reprinted with permission, in *Conversations With James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 48.
33. James Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *Nobody Knows My Name,* in *James Baldwin: Collected Essay,* ed. Toni Morrison, (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 251.
34. Ibid., 250.
35. The outcome of this is self-evident in the rapacious commercialism, gratuitous violence, and unchecked rage that shapes much of the modern and postmodern experience of black people. Hazel Carby, *Race Men* 39.

36. James Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," 251.
37. Ibid., 251.
38. Ibid., 251.
39. What I am introducing will be explained further.
40. It is interesting that John the Baptizer is also the victim of compromised masculinity in the form of Herod who is seduced into killing John by Herodias the wife of his brother Philip. (Mark 6:17–29) Black masculinity suffers a similar fate in the sense that Du Bois sees black women (femininity) as a destructive force literally beheading black manhood. See Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 33.
41. I find Paul Tillich's definition of "ultimate concern" similar to Du Bois's concern for black masculinity in that the latter is a spiritual striving that is consistent with the "spiritual concerns—cognitive, aesthetic, social, and political" of the former. As such, it can be understood as an ultimate faith claim and concern, and therefore theological in its orientation. See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 1.
42. Dr. James H. Cone, "A One on One Conversation About Baldwin," interviewed by E. L. Kornegay, Jr, phone conversation transcription, Forest Park, IL, March 21, 2012.
43. Here I am referring to Cone's identification of the "most glaring limitation" in his construction of black theology of liberation being sexism. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), xv.
44. Dr. James H. Cone, "A One on One Conversation about Baldwin."
45. My statement does not account for the work of Clarence E. Hardy, III, Anthony Pinn, and Kelly Brown Douglas. Hardy's work centers on the idea of Baldwin rejection of evangelical Christianity because of his sexuality. Kelly Brown Douglas's echoes a similar concern and use of Baldwin. Pinn is more concerned with what he sees as a humanist ethic in the work of Baldwin. While all three deploy Baldwin in relation to black religion, a thick critique of race inclusive of puritanism's influence on "black Christian faith tradition" is mentioned but not developed by Kelly Brown Douglas. See Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to do with It?* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 153.
46. E. L. Kornegay, Jr, "Beyond Heterosexuality: Towards a Prolegomenon of Re-presenting Black Masculinity at the Beginning of the Post-Civil Rights (), Post-Liberation () Era." *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?* ed. Monica A. Coleman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2013), 166.
47. Eldridge Cleaver saw Baldwin's homosexuality as being antithetical to black masculinity and the tenets of black power. See Eldridge

Cleaver "Notes on a native Son" in *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 96–107.

48. James Baldwin, "Down at the Cross: *Letter from a Region in My Mind*," in *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 105.
49. James Baldwin, "The Black Scholar Interviews James Baldwin," from *The Black Scholar*, 5 (December 1973—January 1974), 33–42., Reprinted with permission eds Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 157.

5 Conversion: Queer Theory and Black Theology

1. See Laurel C. Schneider, "Queer Theory," *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation,* ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 206–212.
2. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998), 819.
3. Ibid.
4. See my explanation of my application and use of queering in "Queering Black Homophobia: Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation," *Theology and Sexuality,* 11.1 (2004): 31–32.
5. These omissions are transferred from the academy to the church. As such, the black church continues to operate with impunity while it marginalizes women, men, and their freedom to love openly and honestly. In this context, "loving openly" encompasses not only same-sex interactions but also those men and women who engage in loving (heterosexually) that do not fit neatly into heterosexist and religious appropriations of loving openly and honestly, for example, living together, common law relationships, living single but sexually active or married without children.

   A way to approach the question of what is and what should be queer about black theology begins with the definition of queer theory itself and a look at how black theology contends with the historical, cultural, racial, sexual, and theological claims of "normal." Of course there is not, to my knowledge, anyone identifying black theology as a form of queer theory. Homophobic discourse would preclude many from making such a leap.
6. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 139.
7. Ibid., Butler citing Thomas Secker's sermon reprinted in Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism,* pp. 213–233.

8. Ibid., 142–143.
9. I am restating what Baldwin says a valid concept of God must produce, *The Fire Next Time*, 47.
10. I say this here because it rounds out the theological dynamics—praxis aside—of Baldwin's use of the word theology in relation to my process of queering black theology using conversion as a starting point.
11. Ibid., 16.
12. Ibid., 16.
13. Ibid., 16.
14. Ibid., 16.
15. Ibid., 16.
16. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Book, 1962), 17
17. Ibid., 16.
18. Ibid., 17.
19. Ibid., 18.
20. James Baldwin *Go Tell it on the Mountain,* (New York, New York: Dell Publishing, 1952), 195.
21. Ibid., 195.
22. Ibid., 196.
23. This is the *He-ness* of God in black religion, which helps to explain the importance affixed to black manhood.
24. I contend that I am using the threshing floor correctly given what it implies for Baldwin in terms of the homoeroticism underlying the narrative of John Grimes' conversion experience and Amy-Jill Levine's assertion that "threshing floors" were a place for sexual activity. Seduction on the altar/bed is analogous to what occurs between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth3: 1–18) and John Grimes and god. This also is an instance where "feet" is used as a euphemism for the male penis. This is something I will take up later in this chapter and my queering of black theology. Amy Jill-Levine, "Ruth," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds Carol A. Newsom, et al., *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 84.
25. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 24.
26. Ibid., 24.
27. Ibid., 24.
28. Ibid., 24–25.
29. James Baldwin *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 207.
30. Ibid., 31.
31. Ibid., 31.

32. According to Hodge and Kress, an ideological complex is "a functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts at resistance in its own interests. An ideological complex exists to sustain relationships of both power and solidarity, and it represents the social order as simultaneously serving the interests of both dominant and subordinate." Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3.
33. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 98–99.
34. Benjamin Bruade's concept of the "archetypal other" is based on how the medieval imagination saw Ham. The application here is relevant from the standpoint of religious inheritance and the conflation of blackness and sexual depravity upon which it is constructed. See E. L. Kornegay, Jr, "Queering Black Homophobia: Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation,"in *Theology Sexuality* (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), vol. 11.1, 32–33.
35. Daniel Montana on the divine nature of love and love-making. James Baldwin *Just Above My Head,* (New York, New York: Dell Publishing, 1978), 318.
36. Building on the definition of sexuality put forth by James Nelson, Kelly Brown Douglas says "Sexuality involves our self-understanding and our way of relating in the world as women and men." Which is her interpretation of James Neslon's definition of sexuality that states "Sexuality is who we *are* as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion—human and divine." I am saying this intimate communion occurs once we have shed the cloak of theology and the church. It is through this event that we become naked and in our nakedness we are enabled to interact with others both human and divine. See *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 6. Of course she is looking to god and the black church for a revelation of sexuality while I say it is sexuality itself that reveals god and that it can only occur beyond race, Christian religion, and the church. Douglas also uses the definition of sexuality put forth by James Nelson.
37. Baldwin via the narration of Hall Montana, says that Arthur, his brother, "hated being naked in front of anyone" and "under another condition, for which [Arthur] had not been responsible, and which he was not compelled to remember made it something less 'than a confession or a vow.'" I am alluding to the fact that we are conditioned

to be ashamed of our nakedness and because of the shame we lose sight of that which bring us closest to a revelation of god when we stand before god and another naked. See, James Baldwin, *Just Above My Head,* 207.

38. Ibid., 211.
39. My use of the word "love" is to be understood as consistent with Baldwin's definition presented on page 28 of chapter 1., where he states love *takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within*. I am using love here to underscore the differences between sex and the ability to engage in love-making (via sex acts), which is at the crux of the capacity to recreate the presence of divine (revelation). As Baldwin says, "It does not take long, after all, to discover that sex is only sex, that there are few things on earth more futile or more deadening than a meaningless round of conquests." This is the difference between having sex which is meaningless and the sacramental intimacy of which I speak. See James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1954), *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998), 234.
40. James Baldwin, "Freaks and American Ideal of Manhood," in *James Baldwin: Collected Works* (New York, NY: Literary Classics of America, 1998), 821.
41. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 20.
42. Ibid., 20.
43. One only has to look at the various rites of masculinity that are available to young (black) males and see the brutal nature of fraternal groups. There is little difference between the brutality and humiliation associated with (black) Greek fraternity "hazing" or (black) gang "jumped in" as rites of masculine initiation. Sports are no different in the sense that being an athlete requires brutishness and a denial of the feminine/androgynous. The brutality mimics the torture and humiliation of Jesus, reminding the initiate to abandon the unmasculine "feminine/androgynous" in favor of a love ethic based on brutality.
44. Theodore Jennings, *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament,* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 164.
45. Ibid., 165.
46. I make the assertion that use of "feet" is used in a similar way to the thigh as a euphemism for genitals in biblical interpretation whereby holding the genitals—sacred sack—"may invoke the presence and power of God…" See Nahum Sarna, Genesis 24:2, note 2, *The JPS*

Torah Commentary: Genesis (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 162.

47. Wayne A. Meeks, ed., Mark8:27–33, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: NRSV* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1989), 1933.
48. Ibid., 1933.
49. Ibid., 1933.
50. Eve Cantarella notes that according to Veyne "… Roman sexual morality had changed from bisexuality, based on aggressive gratification, into heterosexuality based on reproduction" creating the "morality of couples." Add to this the fact that "Plebian self-repression" and "sexual moralising in the style of Juvenal … led to the creation of a different view of homosexuality and heterosexuality (which obviously gave advantage to the latter)." The "morality of couples"; heterosexuality based on reproduction; the limitation of acceptable sexual activity to matrimonial intercourse; chastity outside of marriage; Plebian self-repression; and the privileging of heterosexuality over homosexuality come together to create the determining metaphors of Roman Empirical discourse, which is used in defining a new (pagan) morality and Roman citizenship. I say that the Empirical discourse is also a homophobic discourse, which is exemplified in Jesus being executed for an act of treason against a State-mandated heteroproductivity. The resulting hegemony privileges the role and right of males over women and the suppression of feminine/androgynous behaviors. The new rite of masculinity is based on the suppression and elevation of a new form of masculine respectability, which Jesus defies with a continuance of the "old way" and ritual. See, Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 187.
51. Ched Meyers notes that in the end the "women in the background throughout the entrie story, suddenly emerge as the true disciples (Mark 15:41) is Mark's most radical social reversal." This compliments Jennings' assertion that Jesus' washing of the feet is a form of role reversal of a man performing the ritual task of a woman. Such role reversals signify the subversive nature of Jesus' life and death, and this is at the center of the rite itself as an act of suberversion of the established Jewish patriarchal order of the synogoue/church and treason against the Roman Empire's divine monarchy/state. Because the men refuse to defy neither the synogoue or the state, women are left to carry the burden of the cross of masculinity and are the only ones (as I have stated earlier in the work) who continue to restore that ritual whereby males are reconnected via the feminine to the divine.

Ched Meyers, *Say to this Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 205.
52. David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 382.
53. Ibid., 125.

6 Desire: Queering *in* the Black Church

1. Roger Bastide says that (white) Protestant "placed the bulwark of Puritanism between himself and the temptation of the woman with color-tinted skin." According to Bastide, the culture of the New World is "characterized by strict family morals and a stern Puritanism." The denial of sexual desire that is both color-tinted, located in the bodies of black women—the feminine—and restricted religiously via Protetstant Puritanism is the issue with which Baldwin, the black church, and community contend. Roger Bastide, "Color, Racism, and Christianity," in *Color and Race,* ed. John Hope Franklin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 43.
2. I noted at the beginning of chapter 1 that desire compels Baldwin to make a choice between spiritual seduction and carnal knowledge. See also Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* 15.
3. Baldwin is referring to the "androgynous craze" exemplified in the personae of Boy George and identified as sexual revolution is more of a response to the spiritual famine in America and the world. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," 827.
4. Ibid.
5. Interestingly Clarence Hardy is in agreement with Peter Powers who see desire as a choice that is pitted against Christian duty for Baldwin. Here again is an example of how Baldwin is placed in tension with Christianity because of sexuality versus being seen as someone who seeks to reconcile sexuality to Christianity. Clarence E. Hardy III "James Baldwin as Religious Writer: The Burdens and Gifts of Black Evangelicalism," in *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin,* ed. Douglas Field (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 68.
6. I agree with James A. Dievler who says that Baldwin is "primarily concerned with male identities." I think Baldwin is primarily concerned with how the difficulty of men to love more shapes male identity in relation to other identities. James A. Dievler, "Sexual Exiles: James Baldwin and *Another Country*," in *James Baldwin Now,* ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 162.
7. James Baldwin, "Freaks," 818–820.

8. See Page 1, chapter 1.
9. I am careful here at the beginning of this section to identify my thoughts on sexual desire in relation to James Baldwin as not competing with the existing in-depth analyses of sex/gender/desire as given by Judith Butler. Judith Butler sees the heterosexualization of desire as a force whereby "feminine and masculine" identities are regulated. This is very similar to what I see regarding desire in the work of Baldwin, in that the puritanization of desire has a hidden and even greater effect on sex, gender, and desire than heterosexuality. Also, Baldwin's choice to bracket race sacredness allows for a deeper critique of the policing of sexual desire in relation to the puritanical construction of black racial identity. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 23.
10. Judith Butler citing Jean Paul Sartre. Ibid., "Preface" 1999, xxvii.
11. Anthony Pinn reads Baldwin as being a humanist. However, humanism is something that I read Baldwin as rejecting based on his suspicion of European thought, first because Baldwin might have seen this as a [European] expectation that did not speak to the black experience and therefore no relevance to black matters. This means that it goes against, philosophically, Baldwin's concern to locate and extract moral authority from black religious vernacular. Second, Pinn's explanation of Baldwin as a humanist feeds into the idea that he turned away from Christianity versus the idea Baldwin is a reformer of Christianity and intimately engaged and attached to the faith. Pinn's definition of humanism is somewhat consistent with the moral agency desired of Baldwin and other black writers who privilege black vernacular, but Pinn's own rejection or minimalizing of Christianity seems to limit his view of Baldwin in a way similar to others that find Baldwin rejecting religion outright. See Anthony Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 163–167.
12. Baldwin biographer David Leeming notes that Rufus is "… at the source of all the relationships in *Another Country*." David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 203.
13. David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, 201.
14. Ibid., 200.
15. The primary characters in *Another Country* are Rufus, Vivaldo, Ida, Cass, and Eric.
16. Fritz Frederick Smith, *The Alchemy of Touch: Moving Towards Mastery Through the Lens of Zero Balancing* (Taos, NM: Redwing Book Company, 2005), x.

17. Ibid., 3.
18. Ibid., 125.
19. David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, 203.
20. James A. Dievler, "Sexual Exiles: *James Baldwin and* Another Country", 174.
21. See James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* 95.
22. Rufus's death reveals the danger love exposes about sexual desire when it used to transcend race, gender, sexuality, and class. I am using this as a means of reference for identifying how Baldwin uses the radicalization of love and sexual desire in relation to the martyred body of Rufus. Rufus's death exposes the pain and violence of racism in relation to the (nonviolent) alternative of sexual desire and its liberating capacity. See James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1960), 92–95.
23. I agree with David Leeming's reflection on the theme and reason for love in Baldwin's *Another Country,* saying "Without such [daring] love people are unable to see real human beings behind the categories, labels, and prejudices created by the loveless, and the horrifying results of such blindness are evident in the history of the twentieth century." David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography,* 200.
24. The ideas of being and experience run headlong into theories of phenomenology and ontology as presented by Husserl and Heidegger and others in the field. Even though ontology is a noted concern of black theology, I feel that sexuality as presented by Baldwin and understood in this project is not an ontological argument per se. I admit to the intersections, but more on the side of a deontological perceptivity. Therefore my intention is to "bracket" these concepts here and to (possibly) pick them up in relation to Baldwin at a later time.
25. James A. Dievler, "Sexual Exiles: *James Baldwin and* Another Country," 161–183.
26. Ibid.
27. Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 179.
28. Marlon B. Ross, "Some Glances at the Black Fag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader,* ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 499.
29. Ibid., 499.
30. Ibid., 498.
31. Ibid., 499–500. Ross says that the black community provided a "model of tolerance" of interracial "homosexual relations, which is

the stigma and judgment of middle-class white society." This is quite interesting because it helps to isolate homophobic discourse primarily as something driven by and limited to the black church.

32. Ibid., 498. Ross's contention is that the "consolidation of an openly gay culture had a direct impact on the ways in which black gays and lesbians could position themselves within the African-American community, in relation to the emergent gay community, and in relation to American society at large." In this sense homophobia becomes a particular form of containment, which creates a puritanical line of sexuality below which homosexuality embodies all black depravity and black heterosexual respectability is established above.
33. James Baldwin, "The Male Prison", in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays,* Toni Morrison, ed. (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 232.
34. See Butler's treatment of the phallic economy in relation to Lacan and Luce Irigary's in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 55–65.
35. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essay,* Toni Morrison, ed. (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 815.
36. I am referring here to what Baldwin describes as Rufus's violent orgasm into Leona, a Southern white woman, as a release of "venom … enough for a hundred black-white babies." *Another Country,* 25
37. James Baldwin, *Another Country,* 24, 362.
38. Ibid., 815. This is also consistent with the violent clash between models of masculinity identified in the work of Du Bois that I talked about in chapter 4.
39. Dwight Hopkins, "A New Heterosexual Male," in *Global Voices for Gender Justice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 28.
40. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," 821.
41. There is no greater breach of the Gospel than to not love yourself and to love others likewise. Mark 12:31.
42. James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," 232.
43. Marlon B. Ross cites Robert Bone who "argues [James] Baldwin equates spiritual salvation with interracial homosexuality." According to Ross this "violation" while seen as breaking both a racial and sexual barrier does not according to Calvin C. Hernton offers a solution to Baldwin's agony. According to Ross, Herton says that Baldwin presents [in *Blues for Mister* Charlie] a kind of masculinity that is redeemed via heterosexual aggression. I feel that this is quite the opposite and that Baldwin is showing us the futility of heterosexual masculine aggression in relation to gaining spiritual salvation. Baldwin reveals that the fulfillment of sexual desire (in this case homoertocially) opens the door to love and to spiritual

salvation. Also, I believe Baldwin does find spiritual salvation via the fulfillment of sexual desire homoerotically, but the agony he experiences is associated with puritanism that negates the ability to love oneself, versus race and homosexuality being the primary reason for his agony. See Marlon B. Ross, "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality," in *James Baldwin Now,* ed. Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 16.

44. It is interesting to think that racial segregation was (and is) most concerned with sexual desire, especially when black sexuality is understood as a contagion that had to be guarded against. Also, the fact that the ideas surrounding black sexuality remain inescapable, following black people into the decontained desegregated spaces beyond the black community.
45. James A. Dievler, "Sexual Exiles: James Baldwin and *Another Country*,"172.
46. According to Dievler becoming a sexual exile precipitates Baldwin's departure to Paris. See James A. Dievler, "Sexual Exiles: James Baldwin and *Another Country*," 169.
47. Ibid., 169.
48. In chapter 3, I maintain that the condition of exile is more indicative of black bodies in the Promised Land than the exodic narrative used to articulate black liberation.
49. James Baldwin, *Another Country* and *Just Above My Head* (New York: Dell Publisher, 1978).
50. Baldwin does experience an exception, but only after he is accepted *as* the racial-sexual exception who is no long confronted with violence because of his race or sex. James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," 825.
51. James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," 234.
52. Ibid., 234.
53. Autoeroticism in the form of masturbation as noted in the preceding paragraph is often conducted as time-constrained pornographic interplay between homoerotic and heteroerotic acts in the fulfillment of desire.
54. This might seem to run counter to the work Judith Butler does in relation to gender. However, her early criticisms of gender do not account for race (*Gender Trouble* in particular) and those that consider race do not account for puritanism in the formation of black sexuality and black depravity.
55. Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (San Francisco: The Black Scholar Press, 1982), 96.

56. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* 18.
57. Ibid., 18.
58. See James Baldwin, *Fire Next Time* 18.
59. Baldwin implies that women offer their bodies in return for protection, but this also implies that men seek the bodies of women for protection (against feminization and in the pursuit of the heterosexualized ideal of manhood) as well. This is a form of policing that is similarly identified by Judith Butler. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* xii.
60. The desire for safety makes both women and men complicit in the continuance of violence and homophobia. (EL Kornegay Jr, "Beyond Heterosexuality," 9)
61. Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* eds Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103–109.
62. Butler says that gender is a social construction and is therefore open to challenge as well as to change. She also says that without the various acts of gender there would be no gender at all. In exposing gender as a social construction, Butler is able to critique heterosexuality as a normative identity. Butler's assessments help to clarify the point I am making that desire is the source of gender roles (manhood, maleness, femaleness, and womanhood). When gender is removed what is left is desire: it is the irreducible element with which Baldwin and all of us contend. Second, Butler's assessment of heterosexuality as being normative helps to explain my construction of the homosocial space as a site controlled by heteronormativity.
63. I am referring here to Eldridge Cleaver's statement that black homosexuals bear the "cross" of the racial death of black people and the black community. However as Marlon B. Ross notes, Cleaver's rejection of Baldwin's sexuality requires him to create "a conventionally coded aggressive manliness, ironically bolstered by his bonding with Baldwin's white rival, [Norman] Mailer." Cleaver's rejection of Baldwin's expression of sexual desire actually puts Cleaver—not Baldwin—as the one who commits racial death by "bonding" with Mailer. In this sense, there is still a sexual bond and form of eroticism to be found in how men choose each other based on the preference of sexual desire within the context of homosocial spaces. See Marlon B. Ross, "White Fantasies of Desire" and Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 100.
64. I am taking my cue from Genesis 2:23—25. In this sense, male desire reflects the genesis of the search for a God that will provide safety for flesh and fleshly desire. Desire is also a form of worship and male desire a particular form of worship.

65. James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," 232.
66. Ibid., 234–235. James Baldwin names "Gide's dilemma" as one that is caused by his inability to fulfill the duty to his desire—his manhood—because it exposed his homosexuality. Instead Gide is unable to love anyone and in doing so rejects life itself. Yet Gide's rejection of the love of a woman and closing the door on the opportunity to fulfill the duty (release of semen) of his sexual desire with a woman imprisoned him in "unmasculine pride."
67. Marlon B. Ross, "Some Glances at the Black Fag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging," 500.
68. Ibid., 507.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid. I am inverting Ross's understanding of inversion: queering the queer perspective.
71. Eldridge Cleaver's assertion that the Negro homosexual's, in this case Baldwin's desire for the semen of white men compromised black manhood. However, the black church is often a site where the exchange of semen between men occurs regularly as an open secret. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice,* 106.
72. James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," 235.
73. Kelly Brown Douglas identifies the deception of which I speak as a *hyperproper sexuality,* which is used by black people with the hope for "soul salvation and social acceptance…" Douglas uses Baldwin and his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as examples of the rejection of hyperproper sexuality and the exposure of the oppression of homosexuality and women in *What's Faith Got to do with It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 178–179.
74. In chapter 1, I identified the rock with puritanism. In a similar way Marlon B. Ross says the rock indicates "the relations among faith, obligation, suffering, and eventual overcoming for those tested by the injustices of the white world, along with an appropriate judgment of the world for its sins." The rock can also be understood as the symbolic mountain that is found in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and expressed in Mark 11:23. See also Marlon B. Ross, "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality in *Baldwin Now* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 24.
75. Cater Heyward, "Jesus of Nazareth/Christ of Faith: Foundations of a Reactive Christology," in *Life Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside,* ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 191–200. Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to do with It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*, 6.

76. Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to do With It?: Black Bodies/ Christian Souls*, 7.
77. Ibid., Brown Douglas is noting how Christianity arrives at a point where it can both save and oppress bodies. James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 171.
78. Ibid., xv.
79. Ibid., 9.
80. Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to do With It?: Black Bodies/ Christian Souls,* 10–16.
81. Ibid., 151.
82. Ibid., 167.
83. Ibid., 168.
84. Ibid., 169.
85. Ibid., 168.
86. Brown Douglas also states (as I do in chapter 1) that Baldwin "aptly identifies" Protestant Puritanism as the "prevailing theological influence within the black Christian faith tradition." Ibid., 153.
87. Studs Terkel Interview 1961, in *Conversations with James Baldwin,* eds Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1989), 8.
88. Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to do With It?: Black Bodies/ Christian Souls*, 179.
89. Ibid., 185.
90. Ibid., 188.

Conclusion: James Baldwin, Queer Theory, and Theological Reflection

1. James Baldwin, *Just Above My Head* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978), 318.

Index