

Saved “Out,” Sanctified “Out,” and Souled “Out”: A Critical Analysis
of Disgust and the Prophetic Immanence of James Baldwin’s Gender Sexual Politics

By

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To my ancestors and angels who have watched over me and cleansed me: Ashe.

And, to my amazing family, friends, and loved ones, I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: JAMES BALDWIN AS PROPHETIC IMMANENCE

—THEN AND TODAY

Introduction

This dissertation explores the concept of *prophetic immanence* in James Baldwin's racial and gender sexual politics as they relate to his experience with the Black Christian church and the Civil Rights freedom struggle. Baldwin's racial and sexual identities were often contentious with the ideologies of heteronormativity, the Black Church, the Black Power Movement, and white hegemonic power; consequently, an exploration of his multiple identities potentially offers insight into black gay men's experiences with the Black Church's rhetoric of disgust for homosexuality. Black religious discourses on sexuality have made black gay men unwelcomed, and thus ostracized "out" of their churches (e.g., "Saved 'Out'"). Religious dogma, replete with messages of damnation, disinheritance, and separation from God, often leave black gay men feeling isolated from their churches, families, and communities (hence "Sanctified 'Out'"). And, finally, being excluded from conversations about morality ultimately informs and shapes black gay men's social lives (leaving them "Souled 'Out'"). In this dissertation, I argue that the black religious rhetorical discourse on black sexuality so greatly impacts the spiritual and religious lives of black gay men, and black gay men's gender sexual politics are so relentlessly scrutinized within the Black Church that, in many instances, these men are positioned *out* of the Black Christian community.

This project seeks to understand black gay men's experiences with the Black Church and the Black Church's religious rhetoric on homosexuality. The scope of the dissertation is limited to research conducted in Nashville, Tennessee, among black gay men, whom I examine within the context of their religious and spiritual beliefs, in hopes that their narratives are vocalized and facilitate discourse within the Black Church so that these men are no longer ostracized, marginalized, and oppressed.¹ This dissertation frames the discourse of black gay men in relationship to both the Black Church and their families, and it does so in ways that affirm, accept, and acknowledge them within these paradigms.

Furthermore, this dissertation explores the *prophetic immanence* of James Baldwin and his gender sexual politics. Relying on Baldwin's background as a young teen preacher, I examine Baldwin's continued use of his religious influence in his writings, a usage that is most evident in his references to scriptures and biblical stories. As Baldwin himself has admitted, "I hazard that the King James Bible, the rhetoric of the store-front church, something ironic and violent and perpetually understated in Negro speech—and something of Dickens' love for bravura—have something to do with me today."² With that in mind, this dissertation identifies and interrogates a form of prophetic immanence in Baldwin's use of his own personal life to speak to America's—as well as his own—gender sexual politics. In particular, I interrogate what this means for black gay men's lived experiences, and the ways in which these men seek affirmation and equality in

¹ My focus is on black gay men and their experiences with black religious discourse (preaching/sermons/rhetoric) that has either made them feel unwelcomed, unsafe, or ostracized because of their sexual identities. Due to the vast number of sexual identities housed under the umbrella of LGBT queer definitions, it will be too vast and cumbersome to approach each letter for this dissertation with intentional care, concern, and the necessary critical analysis needed to adequately explore them. Thus, as a self-identified black gay man, I attend to the conversation and discourse of black gay men's lives, their experiences, and their concerns with intentionality.

² James Baldwin, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison, (New York, NY: The Library of America, 1998), Pg. 6.

the Black Church. During his lifetime, Baldwin's gender sexual politics often located him at the periphery of society. His sex and sexuality were often on display, scrutinized, and used against him. This is one of the reasons he left both the pulpit and the church. According to Baldwin, as he became aware of his sexuality as a teenager, he felt conflicted when preaching, and he knew he had to leave:

It was incoherent, adolescence is a peculiar time but certainly it had something to do with it, but it wasn't conscious. That became conscious when I became aware that as I stayed in the pulpit, against my will, perhaps. As I learned more and more about my congregations, and how little I could really console them. I was much young, with any kind of wisdom. I was learning more and more about myself and I began to see, in a sense, I was hiding in the pulpit. And, if I kept on doing that I would become a liar. Lie to my congregation, lie to myself, and whatever faith, whatever possibility of faith and love in my life I would destroy it, so I left.³

This powerful testimony is Baldwin's truth, which was important to him as well as to his congregation. Thus, rather than destroy their faith, hope in salvation and deliverance, and love, Baldwin left his church. Yet, he continued to preach his own gospel of oppression and marginalization to the world, and this new mission was arguably his salvation. As such, examining Baldwin's words and messages allows us to see how best to make use of this resurgence of his work, and how that work posits a unique message of salvation that can help black gay men find both liberation and hope.

As James Cone claims, "Many people now are reading Baldwin's work with new interest. His influence seems to be everywhere—even on a U.S. postage stamp. His books and essays are taught in public schools, colleges, and seminary classrooms. People talk about him in churches and on the streets."⁴ Indeed, the spirit of Baldwin's words has become a fixture in the discourse

³ YouTube, "James Baldwin Talks about Love, Sexuality, and Race" an interview with Mavis Nicholson, February 12, 1987, <https://blackthen.com/james-baldwin-talks-about-love-sexuality-and-race-in-must-see-video/>.

⁴ James Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody – The Making of a Black Theologian*, (Orbis Books; Maryknoll, New York, 2018), Pgs. 150-151.

of the day because many people are searching for meaning in a world filled with racism that has persisted since the Civil Rights era. Black and white relations remain strained in the midst of increasing police brutality, poverty, and unemployment among people of color—and especially among black people.

In 2011, philosopher, political activist, and social critic Cornel West began a “Poverty Tour” with the author and talk show host Tavis Smiley. The Poverty Tour took West and Smiley to eighteen U.S. cities, primarily black urban and inner city communities, to talk with Americans living in poverty and get a sense of what it means to be poor in this country today.⁵ Throughout the Poverty Tour, and in books such as *Race Matters*, *The Future of the Race*, and *Black Prophetic Fire*, West evokes Baldwin’s sensibilities in an effort to remind us that “black people forged ways of life and ways of struggle under circumstances not of their own choosing.”⁶ Baldwin’s life and ideas form a crucial component for West in helping many black people understand the brilliance, tenacity, and grit of their resiliency in harsh situations as contributions to both the race and the nation. West reminds black people of their legacy in America, and he does so by relying on Baldwin’s words, which serve as an essential reminder of black humanity and black dignity. In an interview with Christopher Lydon for *Lit Hub*, West eloquently explains why he still considers Baldwin and his work relevant (I quote West at length here, as he provides an impassioned response to why Baldwin remains pertinent in the twenty-first century):

Baldwin today. Well one is that we live in an age in which there is such a paucity of eloquence. Baldwin exemplifies eloquence at its highest level. Now, when Cicero and Quintillian define eloquence as “wisdom speaking,” I think we’d have to add it’s “wisdom speaking” that’s rooted in a courage that refuses to sell out. We live in an age in which

⁵ See, *Cornel West and Tavis Smiley on ‘The Poverty Tour,’* website New York Public Radio: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/163681-poverty-tour-examines-poorness-america>.

⁶ Cornel West, “Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization,” in *The Future of Race*, eds. Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York, NY: Knopf, 1996), Pgs. 53-112.

everybody's for sale, everything is for sale. Baldwin would never have sold out. He was true to himself. He was true to his soul. This is in many ways the Baldwin moment, and it's primarily because we know here's somebody who's committed to intellectual integrity, committed to a moral honesty. Remember what he says at the end of *Notes of a Native Son* in the introduction: "All I want to be is an honest man and who, like Hemingway, endures in my work." Now you see, in an age of mendacity and criminality, which is our own, just telling the truth and having integrity is revolutionary. It's subversive. It's countercultural. So, Baldwin comes back bringing this rich tradition of eloquent, truth-telling, witness-bearing, soul-stirring writing, and he's got the black church as a backdrop. He's listening to Bessie Smith. He's listening to Mahalia Jackson when he's writing, so you could feel the vibrations and the vibes on the page that are connected to the sonic expressions of geniuses like Bessie Smith and like a Ray Charles, of course, was probably his favorite. They were together at Carnegie Hall. That was a very historical moment at Carnegie Hall with the two of them. All that to say is what? In this Trump moment, Baldwin comes back with tremendous power, potency, vitality and vibrancy, in part, because he's willing to speak the truth not just about the country in the abstract but the truth about legacies of white supremacy, the truth about indifference, the truth about callousness, the truth about the spiritual blackout, which is the relative eclipse of integrity, honesty and decency in public life in the country. That's true for Democrats, true for Republicans, true for right-wing, true for left-wing. It cuts across the board. But Baldwin is one of the few black intellectuals who was the darling of a slice of liberal elites for a while, and then, becomes demonized by them later on. That's why you get the narrative of "the early Baldwin" and "the later Baldwin" as this decline, you see. Baldwin went his own way. He was Emersonian, he was Socratic and in some ways he was Jesus-like even though he left the church in order to preach his own gospel.⁷

West makes note of Baldwin's "truth," "soul-stirring writing," and, "wisdom speaking."

Baldwin neither minced words, nor was he afraid to speak truth to power, or write about his own truths. He was also not a member of any organization, so neither he nor his work could be bought. He remained his own man, but spoke *to* the people and *for* the people, black and white. West himself makes a significant move in this excerpt, stating that Baldwin was "Jesus-like," preaching his own gospel. In this way, West immortalizes Baldwin as a figure with almost religious or transcendental status—an icon beyond human ideology.

⁷ Christopher Lydon, "Cornel West On Why James Baldwin Matters More Than Ever: In Conversation with Christopher Lydon," March 2, 2017, online: LitHub: <https://lithub.com/cornel-west-on-why-james-baldwin-matters-more-than-ever/>.

I do not disagree that Baldwin was a powerful figure, who helped transform political, social, and communal discourses on race, poverty, gender, sex, and sexuality. He was certainly one of the most influential voices of the Civil Rights Movement, and he did preach a gospel that shaped the landscape of America. However, as I will demonstrate, I suspect that West's argument is that Baldwin is more in line with the idea of *prophetic immanence*. Baldwin exuded a truth and honesty through wisdom speaking, and he was profound as he worked to unhinge systems of oppression. As he once stated, "A day will come when you will trust you, more than you do now. You will trust me, more than you do now. When we trust each other...I do believe...I really do believe in the New Jerusalem...I really do believe that we can all become better than we are. I know we can. But, the price is enormous, and people are not yet willing to pay it."⁸

Baldwin put his life on the line, and he knew others were not willing to do as much. Trust was needed of black folks, and too many had sold themselves at the cost of black life. Thus, I agree that West understands the importance of Baldwin in this era, where our world has been ineffectual in its efforts to come to terms with the unequal politics of race, gender, sex, and sexuality. We live in a period where everyone and everything is for sale. As such, perhaps West is correct in his assertion that we need more truth tellers, truth seekers, and truth liberators. This is why Baldwin can serve us today; we can remember his example as we continue to fight for liberation and equality, especially for black gay men.

In January 2019, I was invited by the Belcourt Theater in Nashville, Tennessee, to conduct a post-film discussion on famed-director Barry Jenkins' adaptation of Baldwin's popular novel, *If Beale Street Could Talk*. The movie garnered a great deal of attention from various

⁸ Karen Thorsen, *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

awarding academies, particularly the Academy Awards, due to breakout actor performances and the adaptation from novel to film. For example, Regina King won the Oscar for best supporting actress for her portrayal of Sharon Rivers, the mother of the main character, Tish Rivers. My talk at the Belcourt was titled: “James Baldwin: Black Love in the American Imagination.” In my discussion with the audience, I emphasized the importance of recognizing Baldwin’s sexuality, because I noticed a reluctance among the general and broader community to acknowledge and engage with his sexual identity.

The conversation also centered on Baldwin’s racial discourse and his ideologies on race. As I made my way through the crowd, answering questions and addressing comments, a black male guest raised a question about Baldwin’s quest for white legitimacy. The guest noted that, because Baldwin had a number of white male lovers, he questioned Baldwin’s authority to speak on behalf of the black race. As I searched for words to express the complexity of Baldwin’s intimate life, I wondered: *what did Baldwin’s sex life have to do with his advocacy for black life and the black race?* Turning to the guest, I said, “Love is love. No matter if you’re black, white, or whatever sexuality you identify; wherever you find love, then love is all that matters.” The audience erupted in cheers and applause, and I knew that I had, in some small measure, captured what I thought was the essence of Baldwin’s prophetic immanence.

This was not the first time I had been asked to present on Baldwin’s work. In 2017, I held a conversation at the same theater for *I Am Not Your Negro*, directed by Raoul Peck. This documentary film explored Baldwin’s life and his close relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers. In conversation with the audience, I discussed the power and legacy of Baldwin’s work in the twenty-first century. We explored recent interest in Baldwin’s legacy and words in today’s tumultuous sociopolitical climate: President Trump, the Black Lives

Matter Movement, police brutality against black persons, and continued racial disparities. In the midst of all of this, there seemed to be an explosion, a resurgence of Baldwin within the past decade—from film and television to the theater and online—and perhaps this is because Baldwin’s words continue to speak to people. As Hortense Spillers states: “What we miss today is not only the clear and compelling force of his arguments, but moreover the long view that he took of human history that envisions struggle against the clotted darkness of our common ignorance as the redemptive element of both our individual and our collective habitation.”⁹

In 2019, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning black gay writer Hilton Als produced a gallery installation titled, “*God Made My Face: A Collective Portrait of James Baldwin*” at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York City. The featured exhibit included works by James Welling, Kara Walker, Diane Arbus, and Beauford Delaney.¹⁰ For the past several years, openly gay, Grammy-nominated recording artist Me’Shell Ndegeocello has created yearly musical theater tributes, *Can I Get A Witness?*, and, *No More Water/The Fire Next Time: The Gospel According to James Baldwin*, based on Baldwin’s seminal text, *The Fire Next Time*. Ndegeocello stated that Baldwin’s writings spoke to her as a lesbian, and she wanted to find a way to bring him to life for others. “Baldwin was a game changer in creating a language for the marginalized,” she said. In her descriptions of the musicals, Ndegeocello has said: “There’s a sermon and music, and I fit my ideas into that framework. We read his text as if it were his gospel, full of proverbs.”¹¹

⁹ Hortense Spillers, “Afterword,” in *James Baldwin – America and Beyond*, eds. Bill Schwarz and Cora Kaplan, (Dearborn, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), Pg. 242.

¹⁰ Coralie Kraft, “Hilton Als on Giving James Baldwin Back His Body,” in the *New Yorker Magazine*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/hilton-als-on-giving-james-baldwin-back-his-body>.

¹¹ Geoffrey Himes, “Me’Shell Ndegeocello gives a reading from the scripture of James Baldwin,” *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/music/meshell-ndegeocello-gives-a-reading-from-the-scripture-of-james-baldwin/2018/12/13/8c60e91c-f7e4-11e8-8d64-4e79db33382f_story.html?utm_term=.a9406b944a1d.

Ndegeocello captures the essence of Baldwin and how he wrote for the marginalized and oppressed. She hones in on Baldwin's prophetic voice, and how the preacher in him never really left, but shows up in his writings and lectures. It is no wonder that we are witnessing (and re-witnessing) Baldwin's legacy and prophetic words prompt a new life for the prolific writer. Black gay men and lesbians are recovering his work to help them affirm their sexual identities. In this way, he has become a hero, a prophet, guiding many to self-love and self-worth. But, why Baldwin? What is it about Baldwin's words in the twentieth century that continue to resonate with us in the twenty-first?

The House That Baldwin Built

In 2002, I founded two not-for-profit organizations: *Men's Empowerment, Inc.*, and *Young Men's Empowerment, Inc.* These organizations were spaces of access and resources for black men young and old, heteronormative and gay, to discuss issues and experiences centered on spirituality, black masculinity, family, and black gay identity. I conducted ethnographies and gathered narratives to gain a better understanding of black gay men and black heteronormative men's identities, consciousness, and development, as well as their political, social, and economic relationship with the Black Church. I considered these inquiries especially important since the Black Church was once considered an epicenter for black identity and social justice during the Civil Rights Movement. However, the Black Church is no longer significant for many black gay men, or, for that matter, black heterosexual men.

Over the years, I engaged many black gay male friends, including the gay members of my organization, to find out why they left the Black Church. I wanted to learn more about their experiences with the Black Church and its anti-gay rhetoric, particularly as young men

discovering their sexuality, and how their experiences affected their journeys into manhood. I also wanted to know if the Black Church was no longer a place where they felt safe.

Additionally, I wondered, for those who left the church as teens, why they never returned as adults. As adults, how did they identify with faith traditions, either religiously or spiritually? I inquired whether those who remained in the church felt affirmed. Did they feel the need to hide their sexuality? Moreover, why did they stay, and how did they reconcile their choices?

In many regards, the Black Church has served as a *House of Salvation*, a *House of Hope*, and *House of Love* for lost, disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed peoples. Yet, many black gay men have been ousted from God's House and consigned to the *House of Disgust* because of their sexuality. Nevertheless, they have found refuge and a place of truth-living and truth-telling in the *House of Baldwin*. It is here that they have found space and opportunity for being, living, and sharing their life experiences with other like-minded individuals, and without judgment or condemnation. In Baldwin's prophetic immanence, black gay men have found a resource for empowerment after being preached *out* of the Black Church and souled *into* the *House of Baldwin*. Similar to Baldwin, black gay men have discovered that the *House of God*, the Black Church, was neither a home nor a welcoming sanctuary for their sexual identities. It was not even a place of safety for black gay men. In fact, what binds them together in the *House of Baldwin* is their phenomenological senses of loss, ostracization, belonging, and even not-belonging. Black gay men may not have a place in the Black Church, but they have discovered something of their own. They have found refuge in the *House of Baldwin*, and it is in Baldwin that they reimagine liberation, freedom, and salvation.

Within my many interactions with black gay men, either through Men's Empowerment; through my popular writings, such as *Hiding In Hip Hop: On The Down Low in the*

Entertainment Industry from Hip Hop to Hollywood; and through my participation as a board member with Brothers United, an openly gay organization for black gay men in Nashville, Tennessee, I have studied and written about black gay men for many years. I first became interested in Baldwin because, through my various iterations of writing and meeting with black gay men, Baldwin's writings have always permeated the discussions. Baldwin is a staple, a hero of sorts, whom many recognize as a kindred soul, someone who appeared to make sense of his sexuality while being critical of the Black Church and holding it accountable for its commitment to Christian stewardship. With this in mind, this dissertation examines the ways in which James Baldwin's prophetic voice and his spiritual awakening situate him and other black gay men's sexually gendered politics within a framework of sexual liberation, religious salvation, and reimagining their own freedoms in hope, love, acceptance, healing, and salvation.

Gilles Deleuze on Immanence

I make use of the term "immanence" from the essay, "Immanence: A Life" by Gilles Deleuze. The term refers to Deleuze's notion of the "plane of immanence," which includes life and death. Immanence is substance, and it is subject to itself. The concept of the plane itself is significant, as it implies that immanence cannot simply be conceived as the *within* but also as the *upon* and the *of*.¹² As Deleuze states, "We will say of pure immanence that is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss...it is an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers to a being but is

¹² See, Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2001).

ceaselessly posed in a life.”¹³ For Deleuze, this immanence is not grounded in an idea or thought that works to position itself in relationship to life. Immanence *is* life. It is the *presencing* and total being of bliss, of knowing self in relationship to self in life as life.¹⁴ Deleuze continues, “It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life.”¹⁵

Baldwin is important, not only for black people, but for black gay men. Baldwin’s life, including his voice and his words, can be crucial for black gay men as testament to an immanent prophetic presencing their own sexuality in relation to the Black Church. Baldwin’s spiritual awakening and consciousness renders *as substance* an affirming life, exemplifying beauty, grace, dignity, and love. This is the primary thesis of this dissertation. Baldwin finds himself in the discourse of a racialized heterosexual society, which, through heteronormativity, views his sex and sexuality as counter-normative. Baldwin writes of his spiritual and religious salvation as a rebirth or “second coming” in order to reclaim and reimagine himself within the kingdom and discourse of Christianity. As prophet, Baldwin emerges for black people and black gay men as a voice in the wilderness, speaking on race, gender, sex, and sexuality in ways that expound on what it means to be human and spiritually free. He immanently maps his environment, discovering his own dynamic powers and kinetic relations to heteronormative systems of power

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, Pg. 27.

¹⁴ My use of immanence is metaphorical and not an exact use of Gilles Deleuze’s concept of pure immanence. The prophetic immanence of James Baldwin relies upon the metaphorical concept of the term.

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, Pg. 29.

and their limits. Baldwin is a result of, a construction within, and a response to these racialized, sexualized, and gendered power systems. In and through his writings—or, rather, preaching—Baldwin saves himself in order to save others. His is a path of self-discovery for locating love. Throughout his writings, Baldwin illustrates and relies upon scriptures, stories, and songs to tell his story about his struggles relating to race, sexuality, and gender identity. Like many black gay men, Baldwin has a complicated relationship with the church, and this dissertation examines his writings, exploring the ways he wrestles with faith in relation to his racial and sexual identities. In these writings, Baldwin seeks salvation for his soul. In so doing, he is doing what I call *soul writing*.

In short, this dissertation explores Baldwin as a metaphysical symbol, foregrounding his prophetic voice and messages of hope, freedom, redemption, and liberation, as well as his presence itself, which lives on today. Prophetic immanence provides a unique way to think about the ongoing efficacy of Baldwin’s spiritual awakening in relation to his race, gender, sex, and sexuality. From this perspective, Baldwin’s language, writings, and words linger throughout the spiritual realm, never faltering or dissolving from the past, but always and already present, offering salvation, redemption, and reclamation for black gay men.

In the 1960s, Baldwin rose to become one of the most prolific writers and speakers, helping to mark and shape the Civil Rights Movement. The prophetic immanence of Baldwin sought to disrupt the binaries of good and evil, right and wrong, and black and white in order to resolve all things in love. Baldwin once said: “In order to avoid confronting love, and love involves the terrors of life and that involves the terrors of death. And, faith is for many people a kind of hiding place in which you won’t be heard, in which you won’t have to think about

yourself, but won't have to change, and you don't have to be responsible for your neighbor.”¹⁶

Baldwin understood that the failure to resolve love, or to be in love, would come at a detriment to society and the world, and he wanted black and white people to understand this in order to save humanity. If white and black people could not think of the “Other,” could not see the “Other,” or even acknowledge the “Other,” then, the world would destroy itself, and this was not the world he wanted to leave behind. Baldwin wrote tirelessly on this matter, and his ideals of race, identity, courage, responsibility, and love made him a prophetic voice calling from the wilderness.

According to Hollie West, Baldwin's writings catapulted him into black national literary heroism. He became a force in helping to thrust the needle of racial discourse toward the plight of black people in America. West argues, “When the Civil Rights Movement was in high gear and people were marching and demonstrating against racial discrimination, Baldwin had become a literary force. His fiction and essays stamped him as the chief black literary spokesman of his generation.”¹⁷ He pushed the proverbial racial buttons of his day, sparking debates on race relations, poverty, and identity. West continued, “Robert Kennedy conferred with him on race relations, and Baldwin spoke to audiences of thousands, passionately arguing for black-white understanding to head off a race war.”¹⁸ Nothing was off limits or taboo for Baldwin. He stepped brazenly into the racially charged hostile climate that had long plagued America since slavery. He also wrote incessantly, examining black life, which was intricately intertwined with the

¹⁶ YouTube, “*James Baldwin Talks about Love, Sexuality, and Race*” an interview with Mavis Nicholson, February 12, 1987, <https://eddirockez.com/2018/11/22/james-baldwin-talks-about-love-sexuality-and-race/>.

¹⁷ Hollie West, “*James Baldwin: No Gain for Race Relations*,” in *Conversations with James Baldwin*, eds. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), Pgs. 173-174.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 174.

founding of America, and which many white Americans were unwilling to admit. According to Baldwin, “The story of the Negro in America is the story of America—or, more precisely, it is the story of Americans. It is not a very pretty story: the story of a people is never very pretty. The Negro in America, gloomily referred to as that shadow which lies athwart our national life, is far more than that. He is a series of shadows, self-created, intertwining, which now we helplessly battle. One may say that the Negro in America does not really exist except in the darkness of our minds.”¹⁹ White Americans wanted to keep black Americans in the recesses of their minds, and they were committed to rendering their transgressions of slavery and the oppression of black people—treatment that has served as an un-amended bridge to nowhere.

Baldwin, however, was vicious in his condemnation of America, especially white America and its refusal to see the injustices they had inflicted upon black Americans. Situated in the company of Civil Rights giants such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, and Malcolm X, Baldwin was a methodical writer, a scribe like his colleagues, who all wrote with tenacity and a sense of urgency. There was King’s eloquent books and essays, such as *Stride Toward Freedom*, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *Strength to Love*, and “Where Do We Go From Here?” There were Malcolm X’s fiery writings, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” “Letter From Mecca,” “A Declaration of Independence,” “The Black Revolution,” and “God’s Judgement of White America.” There were also Medgar Evers’ racially and politically charged writings and speeches, such as “Why I Live in Mississippi,” “Our Need for Political Participation,” and “Until Freedom Comes.” Baldwin himself saw his work as prophetic, calling out the injustices of white America, including racists and the brutality they enacted upon black people. “I find myself, not

¹⁹ James Baldwin, “*Many Thousands Gone*,” in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison, (New York, NY: The Library of America, 1998), Pg. 19.

for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah,” Baldwin writes in his essay, “The American Dream and the American Negro.”²⁰

Like Martin, Malcolm and Medgar, Baldwin’s pen was his weapon, a sword slashing through the disparaging and harmful discourse that plagued black people in the United States. However, Baldwin wanted more from black and white people alike. He wanted both unity and consideration of the “Other,” and he wanted white Americans in particular to acknowledge the ways in which blacks suffered under oppression. He often spoke on this matter. In a panel interview with the television program, *Florida Forum*, which aired in 1963, Baldwin was invited to discuss his views on the topic of racial violence, and specifically acts committed by Governor George Wallace of Alabama, who tried to bar the admittance of two black students to the University of Alabama. The moderator wanted Baldwin to discuss racial violence in Alabama and Mississippi and to speculate on whether this racial violence would spread to Florida. Baldwin stated that violence could spread wherever there was a significant Negro population. As Baldwin posited, “Until today, all the Negroes in this country, in one way or another, in different fashions, North or South, are kept in what is, in effect, prisons. In the North, one lives in ghettos, and in the South, the situation is so intolerable, it has become sinister not only in Mississippi, or for Alabama, or for Florida, but for the whole future of this country. White people are surprised, I think, at the vehemence of Negro feeling, and the depths and the danger, and I don’t think it’s caught the Negro by surprise. One has been in a terrible situation for a very, very long time.”²¹

²⁰ James Baldwin, “*The American Dream and the American Negro*,” in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison, (New York, NY: The Library of America, 1998), Pg. 19.

²¹ YouTube, *James Baldwin: Interview* (Florida Forum, Miami), WCKT, 1963, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpRziHGxeEU>.

Baldwin also advocated for atonement on behalf of black America. He demanded that white people atone for the sins and atrocities they inflicted on black people from slavery to the present day. He says, “For so long, for four hundred years, the American public, in general, has ignored and denied the whole situation that Negroes have operated within. To be the souls of cheap labor, for example, north or south, is to be in effect to be oppressed. Now the oppression is bad enough, but the myth that the country has created about the object of the oppression, the myth about the Negro being happy in his place is something that the republic has managed to believe.”²² Baldwin was unafraid of calling out America’s racial issues directly and publicly, and whites’ unwillingness to acknowledge their role in the oppression of the black people. In response, he used the world as both his stage and pulpit, and pointed a damning finger at the systems of oppression—economic, social, and political structures—by preaching a gospel of liberation, using both scripture and texts masked in black colloquialism.

Additionally, Baldwin wrote about race, sex, and sexuality in ways that challenged America’s ideal of heterosexual and heteronormative hegemonic patriarchy. Baldwin confronted American blacks and whites, including the church, and attempted to reimagine black gay and queer sexuality. Like a sacrificial lamb, he used his own lived experiences to embark on the treacherous road of condemnation and judgment. According to Baldwin biographer David Leeming, “He [James Baldwin] once said that he left the pulpit in order to preach the gospel, and in a certain sense that was true. This was something he could do. You can say this was God’s gift to him, and this was what he made use of.”²³ From Leeming’s perspective, Baldwin used God’s

²² YouTube, *James Baldwin: Interview* (Florida Forum, Miami), WCKT, 1963, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpRziHGxeEU>.

²³ *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

gift bestowed on him to venture into public arenas, ready for battle. His voice and writings were explicitly about black people, racism, white power, black sexuality, black liberation, and black celebration of life.

Baldwin used the gift of the preacher within him, the gift of voice, to write about black life, black sexuality, black comeuppance, black experiences, and his own life. He said, “I’d been a boy preacher for three years, and at those three years really in a sense, those three years in the pulpit, I didn’t realize it then, that is what turned me into a writer, really. Dealing with all that I wish and the despair...the beauty, that those three years...I left because I didn’t want to uhm, to keep that obligation. I knew that I didn’t know anything at all. I left the pulpit and I had to leave home. So, I left the pulpit and I left home the same day.”²⁴

Within Baldwin’s prophetic self-consciousness, he was on a mission, and he could not remain in the same home as his father, the man who beat, despised, and tormented him. Baldwin felt called to a bigger purpose, something much larger than himself, and this meant that the pulpit he left in the church would only be replaced by the pulpit of the world. He would preach from the depths of America’s heart, and into the far-reaches of America’s tentacles. He was called to do the bidding and prophesying of racial injustice, a call for the resistance to oppression, and for the atonement and reconciliation of humanity. Baldwin once said: “Be careful what you set heart upon, someone once said to me, for it will surely be yours. Well, I had said that I was going to be a writer, God, Satan, and Mississippi notwithstanding, and that color did not matter, and that I was going to be free. And, here I was, left, with only myself to deal with. It was entirely up to me.”²⁵ Baldwin would make use of his ability to write the words set upon his heart. The words

²⁴ *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Film, August 14, 1989.

²⁵ James Baldwin, “*Nobody Knows My Names*,” in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, Pg. 136.

that would send the world into a tailspin confronting its past and its present. Baldwin would take this mission up until his death. He never faltered or waived from it, speaking truth to racism, homophobia, and hatred.

At the end of Baldwin's life, his brother David said, "He said, 'I pray I've done my work so that when I've gone from here, and all the turmoil through the wreckage and the rumble and through whatever...when someone find themselves digging through the ruins'...he said 'I pray...that somewhere in that wreckage they'll find me...somewhere in that wreckage that they can use something that I left behind, and if I've done that then I've accomplished something in life.'"²⁶ Baldwin's plea is to be remembered, especially his fight for justice for black America and his love of humanity: the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Baldwin wanted us to remember him, to find him, and to continue to use what he said. His prophecy rings true for the twenty-first century because we have recovered him from the wreckage. We have found him, his words, writings, speeches, and lectures. Baldwin's immanence endures in part as a legacy; his words serving as a living witness to the historical past, yet, prophetically foretelling our future. Henry Louis Gates has argued: "An influential intellectual avant-garde in black Britain has resurrected Baldwin as a patron saint, and a new generation of readers has come to value just those qualities of ambivalence and equivocality, just that sense of the contingency of identity, that made him useless to the ideologues of liberation and anathema to so many black nationalists. Even his fiercest antagonists seem now to have welcomed him back to the fold. Like everyone else, I guess, we like our heroes dead."²⁷ The Baldwin of the twentieth century is relevant and

²⁶ *The Price of the Ticket*, Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

²⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Welcome Table: James Baldwin in Exile," in *Exile and Creativity – Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman, (Charlotte, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), Pg. 319.

pertinent for the twenty-first century black men and women because they are still fighting for freedom against oppression and the injustices of poverty, job discrimination, and the judicial system. As Cornel West states, Baldwin spoke the truth about racism and oppression, and he was unafraid to do so. He used wisdom when speaking, and this speech is of the prophets: Jesus-like. At Baldwin's funeral on December 8, 1987, Amiri Baraka—ironically, one of Baldwin's harshest critics—eulogized him. Baraka, a star of the Black Arts Movement, had not been a fan of Baldwin, often poking fun at his sexuality, and once referring to him as the “Joan of Arc of the cocktail party.” So, it was surprising to see Baraka front and center, speaking about Baldwin's prophetic identity. Baraka said:

He lived his life as witness. He wrote until the end. We hear of the writer's blocks of celebrated Americans. How great they are, so great indeed that their writing fingers have been turned to checks. But, Jimmy wrote. He produced. He spoke. He sang. No matter the odds he remained man and spirit, and voice, ever expanding, and ever more conscious. Let us hold him in our hearts and minds. Let us make him part of our invincible black souls. The intelligence of our transcendence. Let our black hearts grow big world absorbing eyes like his, never closed. Let us one day be able to celebrate him like he must be celebrated, if we are ever truly to be self-determining. For Jimmy was God's black revolutionary mouth, if there is a God and revolution is righteous, natural expression.²⁸

Like Cornel West, Baraka made use of ethereal descriptors to frame Baldwin: ‘spirit,’ ‘intelligence of our transcendence,’ and ‘God's black revolutionary mouth.’ He situated Baldwin as a figure beyond human measure. Even Baraka saw in Baldwin a man who was used by God to speak against the atrocities enacted upon the marginalized and oppressed. Not only was Baldwin able to speak on behalf of black people, he was gifted with the necessary oratory skills to be God's black revolutionary mouth. Baraka recognized this blessing, this sanction, this gift. In fact, at Baldwin's funeral, Baraka stood at the helm of Baldwin's casket, eulogizing him with the

²⁸ See, *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary.

reverence Baldwin so deserved. He was indeed the prophet, God's black revolutionary mouth, spewing prophetic words of fire.

Not only was Baldwin God's revolutionary mouth, but he also represented many things to many people. On December 20, 1987, a few weeks after his death, Toni Morrison wrote a public eulogy in the *New York Times*, "Jimmy: You Crowned Us." The essay has been reprinted in 2019 as "Eulogy for James Baldwin," in her text, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. The eulogy illumines Baldwin's prophetic immanence. Morrison paints him as an illustrious phenom who reverberates the spheres of love, truth, and humanity. In what I imagine as a creative use of analogy, Morrison juxtaposes Baldwin's friendship with that of the Three Wise Men, who came bearing gifts to the newborn king, Jesus. As Morrison writes, "Well, the season was always Christmas with you there, and like one aspect of that scenario, you did not neglect to bring at least three gifts."²⁹ Like the Three Wise Men who each brought a gift for Jesus at his birth, an event that we celebrate as Christmas Day, Morrison uses this trope to highlight Baldwin's gifts as a prophet, a king unto us, who also had three gifts, according to Morrison: language, courage, and tenderness.³⁰

With each of these gifts, Morrison frames Baldwin as a man who loomed larger than life. He enveloped those he encountered, and their worlds were forever changed. These gifts transformed people, because Baldwin gave them selfishly, unyieldingly. She writes, "The difficulty is your life refuses summation—it always did—and invites contemplation instead. Like many of us left here, I thought I knew you. Now I discover that, in your company, it is myself I

²⁹ Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard – Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*, (New York, NY: Knopf, 2019), Pg. 229.

³⁰ See, Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*, Pg. 229.

know. That is the astonishing gift of your art and your friendship: you gave us ourselves to think about, to cherish.”³¹ Morrison also highlights a Baldwin virtue that Cornel West revered: truth. “In place of intellectual disingenuous and what you called ‘exasperating egocentricity,’ you gave us undecorated truth,” she says.³² It appears that Baldwin’s truth, his willingness to bare, expose, and illumine the truth, exemplified his prophetic immanence. He relied on the truth of the world, America, black people, and white people. The truth of love and hope. The truth of righteousness and justice. Morrison continued: “You replaced lumbering platitudes with an upright elegance. You went into that forbidden territory and decolonized it, ‘robbed it of the jewel of its naiveté,’ and ungated it for black people, so that in your wake we could enter it, occupy it, restructure it in order to accommodate our complicated passion.”³³ Baldwin restructured the hierarchy of white dissonance, and held white America accountable for its role in a distorted history that many refused to admit ever happened. Baldwin replaced the jewel of naiveté with the ruby of truth. And, as Morrison ended her eulogy, alluding to Baldwin’s insistence that black America’s crown had already been bought and paid for, and all we had to do was wear it, she writes, “And we do, Jimmy, you crowned us.”³⁴

As Morrison’s final words make clear, Baldwin shaped a discourse that helped the world see itself as it should be, and to bear to itself what was possible in love, justice, and righteousness. If the world were able to remove the blindfold, shake the distorted lies of its fictive history, Baldwin’s message of black liberation—dripped in Christian rhetoric, biblical

³¹ Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*, Pg. 229.

³² *Ibid*, Pg. 229.

³³ *Ibid*, Pg. 230.

³⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 232.

language, stories, and texts—would be heard clearly. Baldwin the preacher used his gifts to deliver a prophecy to the people of America.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I engage the personal narratives of black gay men and their experiences with the Black Church. Drawing upon conversations, discussions, media, and written texts, this chapter contextualizes the issues and challenges black gay men face in the wake of being displaced *out* of the Black Church, *out* of their communal and familial communities, and *out* of society. This chapter explores the ways in which black religious rhetoric spouted by black preachers has ostracized, marginalized, and oppressed black gay men in the church, and, as a result, has impacted their mental, emotional, and social well-being. The rhetoric and discourse within the Black Church has marred their lives from young boys to adult men, often causing them to experience unhealthy self-esteem. The men also share how their relationship with the Black Church not only impacted their religious and spiritual lives, but severely damaged their communal and familial relationships.

Chapter Three examines the moral campaigns of the Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and Jr., who launched attacks against homosexuality in the black community. They both preached from the pulpit of Abyssinian Baptist Church the need for upstanding morals and values among black people, morals that included maintaining puritanical values regarding sexual practices and behaviors. Both men's attacks on homosexuality included the outing of black gay preachers like Prophet James Francis Marion Jones, and the dismissal of Bayard Rustin from Civil Rights leadership. This chapter also closely examines religious rhetoric, coded language in the media, and public discourse that helped to signal gender stylizations of gay men. The chapter

also explores the lives of Prophet Jones and James Baldwin. Both men were ostracized and demonized for their sexuality, but also publicly scrutinized for their gender performances. In response, I turn to thinkers such as Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, Cheryl Sanders, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Victor Anderson, who critically dissect black sexuality and black homosexuality, providing powerful responses to anti-gay rhetoric in the Black Church. These scholars establish black cultural narratives that help readers understand the effects of homophobic rhetoric disseminated in and through the Black Church, and the effects of black churches' social teaching on black sexuality. With this in mind, the chapter analyzes a sermon and the coded language therein by Pastor Jamal Bryant on the feminization of the Black Church—a sermon that demonizes black gay men because of their sexual identity. Thus, his sermon on “sanctified sissies” and the feminization of the black church is critically examined. Finally, this chapter points towards the ways in which the Black Church strategically preaches black gay men *out* of the church and relegates them to the margins of their communities.

In Chapter Four, I explore William Ian Miller's theory of *disgust*. Using this concept, I critically investigate the emotional and visceral responses of disgust as they relate to sex and sexuality, particularly to bodily orifices and the use of orifices in sexual acts among black gay men. I also critically undertake the concepts of race and disgust, and how black sex and black sexuality are contentious markers within the sexual behaviors of black gay men. Looking at black identity as disgust, I interrogate Immanuel Kant in order to inspect the ways race is marked as “Other,” and the ways that blackness is seen as disgust in relationship to whiteness. I also engage Mary Douglas' cultural anthropology of danger and purity in the effort to explore the complexities of race, gender, sex, and sexuality. This chapter works through a genealogy

regarding the views of black sexuality within black identity, and how those views misconstrue black gay men as a disgrace to the race.

Chapter Four also explores black sexuality and how the discourse around black sexuality is equated with disease, undesirability, and puritanical ‘correctness.’ The sex and sexuality of black persons is policed through the black family, the black community, and the Black Church. This discourse has persisted since slavery; false narratives of the black body as vile, disgusting, and diseased have long plagued black people, who have, in turn, inherited these ideologies about themselves. Additionally, I examine how black respectability politics shape the ideology of black respectability in regard to sexual habits and sexual identity. Black respectability does not consider black gay men, and, as such, these men are marginalized within the black community and the Black Church. Indeed, black gay men’s sexual behaviors situate them *out* of both the community and the politics of black respectability.

Finally, Chapter Five analyzes the prophetic immanence of James Baldwin’s gender sexual politics as a black gay man. Drawing upon the work of black queer theory and black cultural studies, I analyze the theory of disgust in relation to Baldwin’s race, gender, sex, and sexuality. Gilles Deleuze’s concept of immanence is employed to examine the prophetic immanence of Baldwin and the complexities of his soul-searching efforts to reconcile himself to his faith, community, and the world at large. I make use of Baldwin’s essay, “Here Be Dragons,” as it illustrates his ostracization from his own family, especially his stepfather, who was disgusted by his perceived unattractiveness, dark skin, and effeminate and queer mannerisms. Baldwin was also displaced or “removed” from his black community in Harlem. As a result, he sought refuge in Greenwich Village, a white community that housed many gay clubs and bars primarily frequented by white gay men. Even here, Baldwin faces being isolated, neglected, and

eliminated, not only for his gay identity, but for his black skin. He encounters white men who fetishize him for sexual pleasure (e.g., the black phallic). However, they still find him disgusting outside the bedroom. On the streets of Greenwich Village, white male lovers disassociate themselves from him. In public view, Baldwin is unacknowledged because of his black gay identity; as an out gay man he is rendered ‘waste’ or ‘shit’ to be flushed *out* of society, *out* of sight, and he ultimately became an expatriate, searching for a place to call his own.

Like many black gay men who have been expelled from their homes, communities, and churches, Baldwin emerges as a light, a journeyman who has forged new trails of hope and possibility for others who have been treated similarly. Searching for a place of their own, black gay men have been *outed* from the *House of God*, the *House of Love*, and the *House of Salvation*, but have found sanctuary in the *House of Baldwin*. The prophetic immanence of James Baldwin’s racial and gender sexual politics helps provide insights into black gay men’s experiences with Black Church rhetoric of disgust about homosexuality. This dissertation works to critically explore and extrapolate the discourse in black religious rhetoric on black sexuality, which impacts the spiritual and religious lives of black gay men such that their gender sexual politics are scrutinized within the Black Church and, in many instances, are used to push them *out* of the Black Christian community. The prophetic immanence of Baldwin speaks to the lives of black gay men and revives their souls. It allows them to revision themselves in community and in love with their families, loved ones, and society. Moreover, they are empowered and inspired to engage the Black Church on their terms: liberated, saved, and whole.

CHAPTER II

SPEAKING AND AFFIRMING THEIR BLACK GAY IDENTITY: BLACK GAY MEN'S VOICES EMERGE AND TELL THEIR STORIES WITH THE BLACK GAY CHURCH AND BEING SAVED "OUT"

Introduction

It has often been argued that black gay men are invisible and have no voice in the black community. It has also been argued that their sexuality hinders them from fully participating or contributing to either the black community or the Black Church. Indeed, both entities claim to be inclusive and affirming of homosexuality; these institutions hold fast to the belief that "God calls Christians to love the sinner and hate the sin, to have solidarity with the despised, and to embrace the alien."³⁵ It is also true that, despite their sexuality, black gay men's contributions have directly benefitted black communities and their churches through these men's talents, gifts, and leadership. Nevertheless, as the religious critic Victor Anderson notes, "That many black gays and lesbians are members of church choirs, church musicians, soloists, and ushers, that their gifts are used and exploited by their churches and their communities, ought not to be confused with genuine acceptance and love."³⁶

And yet, in spite of community sentiment or the church's doctrine on homosexuality, black gay men have voice and are not invisible. They are centered within the church and

³⁵ Victor Anderson, "Deadly Silence: Reflections on Homosexuality and Human Rights," in *Sexual Orientation & Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*, eds. Saul M. Olyan & Martha C. Nussbaum, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), Pg. 194.

³⁶ Ibid, Pg. 194.

community, where they are sorely needed. However, this acknowledgment exists in tension with their racial and sexual identities. It is here that black gay men negotiate between these two dichotomies, and, oftentimes, it is their sexuality that they, along with the church and community, fail to acknowledge. Anderson argues, “If our intellectuals, politicians, ministers, and lawyers are gays and lesbians—and many are—their sexual identities too often remain of secondary importance in their public discourses, owing to the often discriminatory and alienating experiences that homophobia creates.”³⁷ Even black gay men themselves will mask their sexuality in an effort to maintain allegiance with the black race. They continuously work to come to terms with this tension, and subsequently live out their lives oscillating between their racial and sexual identities. In the church, black gay men are expected to leave their sexuality at the door unless, as I stated previously, they are contributing to and sharing their talents with the church. Pastoral theologian Horace Griffin speaks to this, saying, “Many people, both within and outside church communities, have struggled to accept lesbians and gays as moral and equal human beings within a predominately heterosexual society.”³⁸ The Black Church is a heterosexual space, where non-conforming identities must either adapt to prescriptive statements or protest in silence by refusing to attend services that do not affirm their identities. As such, many black gay men sit in silence in these spaces, thus conforming to their church’s heteronormative theologies and rhetoric, seeking acceptance, love, and inclusion.

This chapter seeks insight and understanding into the lives of black gay men, how they see themselves in the world and the Black Church, and how their experiences in the Black

³⁷ Anderson, *Deadly Silence*, Pg. 188.

³⁸ Horace Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), Pg. 110.

Church have affected them. Moreover, this chapter uncovers a discourse of black gay men who provide insights into their personal experiences with the Black Church as they work through the tension of their racial and sexual identities. This chapter includes the voices of black gay men from the Brothers United Network, an African American and same-gender loving organization³⁹ located throughout the state of Tennessee, with chapters in Nashville, Chattanooga, Memphis, Knoxville, and West Tennessee. The testimonies below hail from individuals in the Nashville chapter.

Below, I include critical analyses of my discussions with the men from Brothers United by engaging scholars and thinkers such as Horace Griffin and former gay activist Essex Hemphill. Using both authors' texts, I bring into focus the ways in which black gay men's identities have been critically explored within the church, and the church's response to black sexual identity. This conversation helps ground the discourse of the Black Church's doctrine on homosexuality, inclusion, and acceptance. Finally, I provide an analysis of the emergent data from the Brothers United group meeting. The attending men shared keen insights into their experiences within the Black Church, including how they view their spirituality and religiosity, and the next steps they envision for black gay men. The findings from this discussion help to elucidate how black gay men see themselves in the church, their communities, and their families. More important, the emergent data is a key resource in the exploration of black gay men's perceptions of community, acceptance, and affirmation in the church.

³⁹ Website, Brothers United Network: <http://www.brothersunited.com/nashville.htm>.

Methodological Approaches and Concepts

The Brothers United network provides services such as “continuous psychosocial, life coaching, affirming pastoral care, and healthy social supports to the African American LGBT community to enhance their life.”⁴⁰ The organization is “the only Black gay owned and volunteer based 501c3 non-profit organization in the state for promoting personal growth, community building and positive self-actualization through the efforts of the statewide Brothers United chapters, as well as the Young Brothers United, Sisters United and Nashville Black Pride groups.”⁴¹ Brothers United operates in the space of Nashville Cares, its mother institution, which offers services for all persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). Nashville Cares provides HIV/AIDS services, support systems, mentorship, housing referrals, job training skills, and other resources for LGBTQ Nashvillians. It is one of the programs listed under the Nashville Cares umbrella as a resource specifically created for black gay and bisexual men. Membership for Brothers United only requires that men identify as gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.⁴² They are not required to make payments or attend mandatory meetings; all meetings, resources, and visits to the organization are free. Voluntary group meetings take place once a month.

Due to my longstanding relationship with Brothers United as one of its board members, and as a frequent attendee at events, social gatherings, and group meetings, I was privileged to observe a session of a support group meeting where ten members discussed their faith tradition

⁴⁰ Brothers United Network website: <http://www.brothersunited.com/nashville.htm>.

⁴¹ Ibid, Brothers United Network website: <http://www.brothersunited.com/nashville.htm>.

⁴² The terms “gay” and “bisexual” as defined by Brothers United include “gay”: a male who is attracted sexually, romantically, and emotionally toward some other males and “bisexual,” which refers to people who have the capacity for sexual, romantic, and emotional attractions to some males and females in various degrees.

and their church experiences. (When I use the term “faith tradition,” I am referring to various denominations within Christianity; i.e., Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of God, Catholic, Methodist, and African Methodist.)

The group members’ ages ranged from 25 to 52, and all identified themselves as Christian. They also identified as openly black gay men whose families, communities, and, in some instances, churches knew of their sexuality. The men shared the importance of their religion, but also how the Black Church and their families have marginalized and ostracized them because of their sexuality. As a result, few felt affirmed in either space, because homophobia prevented them from acknowledging their intimate and personal relationships, and perceptions of their sexuality were often misunderstood or misinterpreted. Even so, the men were interested in restoring and stabilizing their identities in spatial safe places of freedom and liberation. They desired to be free and accepted within Black churches, and they sought to be visible and affirmed in their spiritual and religious pursuits. The support group members were interested in having positive and inclusive dialogues with the Black Church and in their families.

One goal of this chapter is to uncover how the men experienced homophobia in the Black Church and how it *isolated* and *marginalized* them within the church. The men shared how they often felt *ostracized*, *marginalized*, and *demonized* because of their sexual identities. As a result, these experiences shaped and informed their lives, including how they engage their spiritual identity within the Black Church, and how they have reconciled their religious faith.

To interpret the experiences and narratives of the men in the group meeting, I utilize a multi-method research approach that includes “orientational qualitative methodology,” which relies on “an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what conceptual

framework will direct fieldwork and the interpretation of findings.”⁴³ This allows for questions and themes broached by the subjects, and, as an observer, I analyze emerging themes from the conversation in order to interpret these findings for readers. I also make use of hermeneutics, which “offers a perspective for interpreting legends, stories, and other texts, especially biblical and legal texts. To make sense of and interpret a text, it is important to know what the author wanted to communicate, to understand intended meanings, and to place documents in a historical and cultural context.”⁴⁴ With this in mind, I use both the personal stories and narratives from the men along with critical texts to interpret and illumine the language, experience, and stories provided by the men. Finally, I include auto-ethnography that takes “one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture and its many variations.”⁴⁵ I interrogate and critique popular culture, black gay culture, and black culture as one who has given considerable attention to these topics as a journalist and author, writing and reporting on black life, black gay life, hip hop culture, the Black Church, and other topics related to the black experience.

In 2002, when I founded the non-profit organization support group called Men’s Empowerment, I wanted to provide a space of access and resources for all black men, regardless of sexuality, to discuss issues and experiences centered on spirituality, black masculinity, family, and black gay identity. My ethnographic work therein foregrounded my experience as scholar, writer, author, and community leader who interprets and analyzes the Brothers United group meeting and discussions below.

⁴³ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), Pg. 129.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Pg. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid, Pg. 85.

The Narratives and Personal Stories of Black Gay Men of the Brothers United Network and
Their Experiences with Black Churches and Black Religious Leaders

It was the monthly Saturday meeting for the Brothers United organization. I had been asked to join the meeting because the group had planned to discuss the role of the Black Church and the black LGBT community. I had attended previous group meetings, serving as a facilitator due to my expertise on black gay men and community activism. My work in the community of Harlem and with black churches had afforded me skillsets that the Brothers United organization felt would be helpful in their cause, as well as in their work with faith-based organizations and religious institutions. At this particular meeting, the men were interested in providing solutions for mediating a conversation with several key black preachers in Nashville. Their goal was to help mediate between the black gay community and Black Church community to develop inclusive and affirming communities within various black churches, as well as to create alliances with these churches and their members.

As the facilitator for the conversation, I asked the men what outcomes they were expecting from the black preachers and the churches they were approaching. As the list grew longer, I noticed that many of the items seemed more personal. Some revealed that, if they could speak one-on-one with their pastors, without judgment or feeling guilt for their sexuality, they would ask for sermons and services that addressed black gay men's relationships, health, and self-improvement. At this moment, the conversation turned toward black gay men and their religious experiences. Participants shared how they had been *isolated*, *ostracized*, and *preached out of the church*.

Their personal experiences resonated with stories of many black gay men across the country, stories I have heard in various forums, including my own non-profit group. Years ago,

in Harlem, my organization held community forums with the Harlem YMCA and Abyssinian Baptist Church, addressing issues of interest related to black gay men in the church and discussing ways to build affirming and inclusive spaces in the church, including working with local preachers and pastors in the community. There was also an organization called Many Voices: A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice, whose objective was to “envision a Black Church and community that embrace the diversity of the human family and ensures that all are treated with love, compassion, and justice.”⁴⁶ Their website provides resources and information for how black churches can foster inclusivity and affirm black LGBT persons. It also includes the personal narratives and stories of black gay men and women who have been ostracized from their churches.

The members of Brothers United were now part of this growing number of men who felt they had no place within their churches. One participant stated that he had recently left his church because he posted on his social media page that, for the season of Lent,⁴⁷ he was giving up black men, and was only going to date Laotian men. He initially stated it as a joke; however, his church’s Minister of Music, who follows his social media page, called to tell him that the post was inappropriate and disrespectful. He expressed concern that other congregants would see it, and questioned the man’s suitability as leader of the church’s praise team. In many churches, the praise team consists of a group of singers who perform various musical numbers that include

⁴⁶ Website, *Many Voices: A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice*, <https://www.manyvoices.org/about/>.

⁴⁷ See, website: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lent> for Lent. Lent in the Christian church is a period of penitential preparation for Easter. In Western churches, it begins on Ash Wednesday, six and a half weeks before Easter, and provides for a 40-day fast (excluding Sundays), in imitation of Jesus Christ’s fasting in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. In Eastern churches, Lent begins on the Monday of the seventh week before Easter, and ends on the Friday nine days before Easter. This 40-day “Great Lent” includes Saturdays and Sundays as relaxed fasting days.

singing, dancing, and other artistic forms of expression during worship services. The leader of the praise team helps to coordinate and choreograph these various musical acts throughout the service. The participant shared that the Minister of Music issued him an ultimatum: in order to remain in his position as praise team leader, he could not continue living the lifestyle he was promoting. As the participant recounted, he responded by declaring that “he would prefer to be himself rather than being confined behind four walls trying to serve some master who had a problem with who he was because God didn’t have an issue with what he said; it was they who had an issue.” The participant ultimately left his post.

Another participant quickly chimed in, describing an occasion on which he was playing the piano for the choir, and the Holy Spirit started “moving throughout the church.” On such occasions in many black churches, such spirit-filled moments are described as ‘having church!’ The participant was so moved by the Spirit that he began “jamming on the keys.” Suddenly, the sweater wrapped around his shoulders fell off while he continued playing in the Spirit. As soon as his sweater hit the floor, his pastor stood up, silenced the music, and admonished the congregation, charging that some of the brothers were trying to “entice other men” with their sweaters falling off their shoulders. He knew the pastor was referring to him, and he wanted to speak up, but felt that the entire congregation would have attacked him, and he did not want to risk further humiliation. Consequently, he sat at the piano, straining to hold his head up while forcing back tears.

An older man responded to these two stories by saying that, although many churches may claim that they are inclusive, they do not affirm black gay men, their presence, or their contributions. They want gay men to direct and sing in their choirs, play their music, and serve in the church, but to leave their sexuality *outside* it. This participant opined that most black

churches in Nashville may also claim inclusivity, but the pastors will preach sermons about the sin of homosexuality, and the sexual deviancy of homosexuals against God's creation of male and female complementarity. They preach about marriage between a man and woman, and that God did not create "Adam and Steve." They will stand in the pulpit and deliver these sermons while "one would see gay men all in the church, and it will be a whole choir full of them." This participant said he had once been part of a choir, and struggled to make sense of what his pastor said about acceptance and affirmation in private while preaching another message when it was time for Sunday service. His conflict was exacerbated because, after the choir finished singing, the pastor or church leader would commend them and "thank [them] for being part of the choir ministry." But, nevertheless, they wanted black gay choir members to remain quiet about their sexuality. As he stated: "They will include black gay men and accept them in the choir and will pimp their praise. They will pimp them in worship, but they won't affirm them, ever."

The experience this participant shared was similarly illustrated in the dramatic television series *Greenleaf*. The show, which airs on Oprah Winfrey's OWN Network, follows the fictional dynasty of a Black Church family, the Greenleafs, who have a mega-church called Calvary Fellowship, located in Memphis, Tennessee. The main characters include Keith Greenleaf (father and Bishop of the church); his wife, First Lady Daisy Mae Greenleaf; and their three children, Pastor Grace "Gigi" Greenleaf, Pastor Jacob Greenleaf, and the youngest sister, Charity Greenleaf.

In one episode, Charity Greenleaf, who is the Minister of Music for the church, is responsible for hiring her replacement, because she wants to pursue her own musical career. Charity meets and interviews an openly gay man, Carlton Cruise, who, because of his sexuality, has recently lost his position as Minister of Music at another church. At the time, Cruise is

engaged to another man. Impressed with his credentials, Charity hires him, but, unfortunately, she offers him the position before consulting with her parents. Once Cruise begins working at Calvary, church members complain to First Lady Daisy Mae about “an openly gay man directing the choir.” More important, they are offended that he would “flaunt his sexuality and engagement with another man” in front of the church.

Some members began leaving, and Cruise’s appointment affects both the attendance and the weekly church tithes. However, many others compliment him and enjoy his enthusiasm. Nevertheless, Daisy Mae never approves of the fact that Cruise was hired without her being consulted. She tells her daughter that she is disturbed by his presence and “flamboyancy.” “We are losing members because he wants to flaunt his lifestyle in front of the church,” she tells her daughter. Thus, Cruise must either “tell his partner to stay home,” or Charity must fire him. Conflicted, Charity tells her mother that she does not feel comfortable telling Cruise that he and his fiancé are not welcomed at Calvary, and she refuses to terminate him. Ultimately, Cruise is fired by Daisy Mae under the guise of “budget cuts,” but Cruise knows it is because of his open engagement to his fiancé. However, he is later reinstated by Bishop Greenleaf, who states, “I don’t care what he does or who he does it with, just as long as he can get people back in the seats.” Bishop Greenleaf goes against his wife’s decision, not because he feels she is wrong, or because he feels empathy for Cruise, but because the bishop knows that Cruise’s firing affected church revenue. He would rather benefit from Cruise’s gifts with music than have his church suffer from financial devastation.

This conflict in the series is a missed opportunity. A pivotal moment could have happened if Bishop Greenleaf had preached a sermon on inclusion and allyship of the LGBT community. However, nothing was stated or discussed. Cruise simply resumed his position and

no further discussion was broached; he was simply told that he could bring his fiancé to church with him. This silence illustrates how the participants in the Brothers United group often feel unwelcomed or unappreciated in the Black Church. Pastors and preachers miss the mark with opportunities to engage their congregations in alliance, inclusion, and acceptance. Black gay men know that their talents and gifts are being used, while their sexuality is either thinly tolerated or required to be left at the church door.

One after another, the men looked hurt while reporting their experiences of being used and having to repress their sexual identity in order to be accepted in the church. With pain straining their voices, each man nodded in affirmation as they heard these stories. Some of them responded, “Yes, that happened to me,” and “This happens all the time to us.” Some even clapped and raised their hands in the air. The men were having their say.

Suddenly, there were two stories that caused all of the men to settle down and pay close attention. Two young men told similar stories about different churches. The first revealed that, while in college, he attended a black Baptist church, where he was subjected to homophobic rhetoric. He stated that the preacher and deacons would tell all the gay people to come to the front of the church, down to the altar. In such churches, it is customary for persons afflicted with a sickness of body and/or soul to make their way to the altar for prayer and healing. On this occasion, persons were being summoned so they could receive the laying on of hands, as a rite of exorcism, to free them from “the spirit of homosexuality” afflicting them. This participant, along with his friends and other young persons, would flock down to the altar because, as he described, “They didn’t want it, that spirit of homosexuality.” This participant felt as though he was being offered “a way out of his struggle.” He came down for prayer because he had been shamed by the preacher and others in the church. He also looked up to the minister and his wife, and wanted

a chance to be healed of his affliction. He “jumped at the opportunity.” He would make his way to the altar Sunday after Sunday, and yet, “the prayers and hopes didn’t take.” He would feel horrible.

The second young participant conveyed how he had spent years in the Black Church hearing that “Jesus didn’t love him.” His pastor would preach that “homosexuality is a sin,” and that “homosexuals deserved to be in hell.” And, like the other young black gay man’s pastor, his pastor wanted all the gay people to come to the front of the church so that the church could pray for them and lay hands on them as well. This participant said that he felt so bad when he walked back to his seat because they did all that praying and laying of hands, yet, he still wanted to have sex with other men. Often, he wondered what was wrong with him. From his teen years into adulthood, he spent years in the church, trying to fix what was “wrong” with him. Upon hearing these stories, many in the support group were tearful, empathetically nodding, and remembering how they too had been told that “something was wrong with them.” Both of the young men admitted to the group that they often wondered why God hated them, and whether homosexuality was their sin and burden to carry.

These narratives of the men who were isolated *out* of the church and forced to leave their sexuality at the door; who were used for the talents and gifts in the choir, but not affirmed by preachers or congregations; and whose pastors called for those ‘struggling with their sexuality’ to publicly *out* themselves and seek repentance in front of the church, are neither uncommon nor unfamiliar. Far too often, black gay men have communicated in print, text, media, and group sessions their experiences of being mistreated and targeted in the church.

In 2015, at the Church of God in Christ Annual Holy Convocation,⁴⁸ a young man named Andrew Caldwell ran to the front of the assembly. Before a large audience, he declared, “I’m not gay anymore!” He testified before everyone that he was wrestling with the “homosexual demon,” but that he would no longer succumb to homosexual desires; he would “love and date women!” While testifying, the men standing behind him, along with convocation conveners, erupted into orgiastic cheers at this word of demonic deliverance and the healing “miracle” of Caldwell’s rescue from homosexuality. Indeed, Caldwell’s public renunciation of his homosexuality in order to seek acceptance into the church is a clear demonstration of how many black gay men struggle with their sexuality, religious beliefs, and their attempts to reconcile their sexual identity with the Black Church in order to be *saved in*, *souled in*, and *sanctified in*. However, the real test arises when one is *out* of the public view, and left to deal with their same-sex desires while working to maintain personal commitments and faithfulness to the church. In Caldwell’s case, despite testifying that he is no longer gay, his social media antics put him on full display, illuminating his lavishly flamboyant “lifestyle” and his queer aesthetics. As such, Caldwell’s deliverance appears to many observers to have been short-lived. Nevertheless, Caldwell has openly denounced his sexuality, and shared in many interviews that he knew he was “living in sin,” and wanted to change because he did not want to “go against God.” He also said that many had ridiculed him in his home church: “They questioned my sexuality and I prayed for God to deliver me.” Oftentimes, pastors and church members’ questioning, probing, and telling black gay men

⁴⁸ See, website: <http://www.cogic.org/holyconvocation/information-center/holy-convocation/> for Church of God in Christ Holy Convocation, the official annual convening of delegates of the Church of God in Christ. The Holy Convocation is the meeting where the Presiding Bishop delivers his official annual address to the delegates of the Church of God in Christ. The Holy Convocation is the only convention the Church holds where delegates are provided the unique opportunity to interact with delegates from every corner of the globe.

that they “will pray for them,” makes many men uncomfortable. They are made to feel guilty and sinful for who they are.

Many of the discussion group’s participants told stories of verbal, emotional, and mental abuse. None had shared any physical and sexual abuse they had experienced, but the toll of the verbal and emotional abuse had traumatized them, and they were afraid to speak out against forces that subjected them to such abuse. As Horace Griffin posits, “There may be no greater challenge than to speak against unjust attitudes of one’s blood family, church family, and primary social community.”⁴⁹ Griffin frames the black gay men participating in the support group in terms of fictive kin. Scholar Melissa Harris-Perry terms these types of relationships as “connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships.”⁵⁰ The Black Church is scripted as a family, and one uniquely kindred to a biological family. As Harris-Perry states, “This imagined community of familial ties underscores a voluntary sense of shared identity that maps onto the historical construction of race.”⁵¹ For many of these men, their biological families have strong roots in and ties to the church and community. In many instances, participants cannot dissociate their biological families from their church families. The historical connections of the Black Church with that of the black community, and its linkage to black families make it difficult for black gay men to unhinge themselves from one or the other. To remove or disconnect, and even speak out against the Black Church or its institutions would feel like speaking out against one’s family. And, as such, many black gay men will not risk losing this connection, despite the fact

⁴⁹ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, Pg. 111.

⁵⁰ Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), Pg. 102.

⁵¹ Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, Pg. 102.

that the ties are only social, and, in some instances, personal but not familial. Nevertheless, the connections of many black families to the Black Church are far too wide and deep between them, thus forming one's fictive kin.

As I mentioned earlier, many men will remain in the church, choosing to repress their sexuality, if only for those few hours, and bearing the brunt of being demonized because of that same sexuality. They become the forbidden, taboo fruit which deserves no bearing on the tree. Such fruits come with a heavy toll, says Griffin: "In the name of God, black ministers denigrate gays and lesbians with little regard for their feelings, arguing that they are called to preach a gospel that may hurt others."⁵² Many black gay men internalize this hate speech, and work hard at conversion, as evidenced by the two young men in the support group. These young men felt targeted, and instead of leaving the church and refusing to further participate in the public *outing*, the young men stood and made their way down to the altar. This show of solidarity demonstrated to the entire congregation that they were willing to adhere to the church's doctrine of living a heterosexual lifestyle by renouncing their gay sexuality.

In order to not be designated as an "Other," or ostracized out of the church and their biological families, some black gay men struggle internally to reconcile their bodies and souls, the split that they feel keeps them in sin. According to Griffin, many will "live a lie with the opposite sex as a means for religious and social reward and damage the soul."⁵³ The late Bishop Eddie Long, an apparently heterosexual pastor, who lived in Atlanta, Georgia, and presided over the mega-church, New Birth Ministries, in nearby Lithonia, was found guilty of soliciting and engaging in sexual relationships with young male members of his congregation. In 2010, four

⁵² Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, Pg. 112.

⁵³ *Ibid*, Pg. 117.

young men came forward and admitted their illicit sexual affairs with Long. The young men sued Long, stating that he seduced them and then coerced them into intimate relationships in exchange for trips, money, clothes, and cars.⁵⁴ Long denied these allegations, although he eventually settled with the four young men, paying them nearly one million dollars total. Even though the case against Long was dismissed, the damage against him and his reputation was already done. Long was openly and staunchly opposed to homosexuality, often preaching against it, while amply promoting masculinist ideologies and heteronormative sexuality. As a result, his church was split, with many members standing by his side, including his wife, who remained married to him. Like the fictional *Greenleaf*, this moment presented itself as a perfect opportunity to discuss one of the most taboo subjects in the Black Church; namely, black sex and sexuality. Still, many were unprepared to take on their pastor, this “man” of God.

In the support group, some participants spoke of abuses they experienced in and through the ant-homosexual rhetoric permeating their church families. As an observer, I was forced to question what this anti-homosexual rhetoric has done to the souls of black gay men. One participant opined that the church does not want its congregants to talk about sex with anyone, and that they regarded sex as a private matter and a taboo topic. “It is something to be frowned upon,” he said. According to him, the black community and the Black Church’s teachings on sexuality for black men touches only on norms of masculinity and shame; that is, “being ashamed of one’s body” in sex acts.

Another participant explained how he had grown up in the Catholic Church. There, if one’s sin were to be absolved, one had only to make confession to the priest and “do a few Hail

⁵⁴ See “*Men Who Sued Eddie Long Address Bishop’s Death*,” Atlanta Journal Constitution website, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/men-who-sued-eddie-long-for-sexual-misconduct-address-bishop-death/A1E6CzW4Ehd1RkJsVsKGsM/>, accessed February 26, 2019.

Mary(s)—then you'd be okay.” However, when he became older and converted to Baptist, he stated that “one is never washed *clean*.” There is no confessional, no “Hail Mary(s).” He questioned what one does with the stain of homosexuality and all the baggage that comes along with it when atonement is foreclosed upon, since, in his new faith, Jesus is the atonement for all sin. This participant reasoned that, if one's sins are washed clean through baptism, but one continues in one's sinful acts and sexual behaviors, to whom can one make confession? There is no priest or “Hail Mary” to make them whole again—“only Jesus Christ.” And, without Jesus, one becomes an *outsider*, excommunicated from the Christian family. Griffin argues that “Baptists, in particular, emphasize the notion that ultimate authority resided in ‘God's word,’ the Bible, which is unlike Catholic Christianity, where “neither the Bible nor the sermon played as important a role.”⁵⁵ This disconnect between faith traditions can create confusion with someone who goes through a conversion from one faith to another, and is unsure of what to do, not only with their faith practice, but with their sexual identity. For this participant, the Black Church's sexual teachings in the Baptist faith estranged him from his Christian family, and placed him *out* of the reach of redeeming love.

Soon, another man chimed in, saying that, when someone wants to talk about sexuality, “the church does not know how to handle it.” And, when they talk about sin in the church, “gay is *the sin*.” However, he noted, that there are other sins, such as “heterosexual persons committing fornication, drinking, adultery, and murder.” Of course, he was pointing to the double ethical standards pertaining to sin. As Griffin himself points out, “In most black churches, parishioners experienced sermons identifying homosexuality not only as a sin but with a rage

⁵⁵ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, Pg. 59.

that placed it as an even greater sin, as a monstrosity, a part of a wicked spirit.”⁵⁶ The participant continued, saying that church folks will find Scriptures, such as “the Leviticus scripture telling black gay men that God hates them because they are nasty and perverted. But, the church does not use that same language when someone is adulterous, or [for] heterosexual people who are promiscuous.” But, “if someone is gay, then, they will hold it against them.” Going to church for many black gay men meant that they were taught to repress their sexual identities. *They go to church, listen to the sermon, praise God, and then leave. Their sexuality is not present.* There is no mixing and mingling with others, nor developing interpersonal relationships because they have been so hurt by the church that they create self-protecting boundaries. This final participant said that he “does not mix his sexuality with religion,” because he has been hurt badly by doing so, and does not want to put himself through that pain. Griffin marks an important argument in regard to why black gay men feel isolated and must protect their sexuality while engaging in religious spaces. He argues: “The opposition to homosexuality and gays in black churches is largely an opposition led by black men. Studies show that antipathy toward homosexuality is primarily male driven as a result of male socialization and the machoism and sexism learned by males at a young age.”⁵⁷ The singularity of this matrix of thought helps to provide insight as to why many of the participants felt they had to leave their sexuality at the front door of the church in order to rescue and save their manhood. It was the churches that forced gay men to separate themselves from themselves, and that is impossible to even consider. The conflict was not the men’s burden, but the churches’ burden.

⁵⁶ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, Pg. 59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, Pg. 76.

Next, our conversation within the support group took a critical turn from the previous discussion of estranged relationships with churches and filial bonds. Soon, the men began talking about their estranged bonds with their biological families. Some winced and groaned when the issue turned toward the black family. It was apparent to me as an observer that this topic was an area of great pain and suffering for them. In addition to the churches, it was in their own homes and by their own loved ones that they had experienced torture and ridicule because of their sexuality. Family members, whom they believed they could lean on for support, had turned on them, producing in them feelings of being unloved and unwanted. A participant who had recently come out to his family reported that he asked his mother, while at the dinner table, “What was her issue with him in being gay?” At first, she refused to talk about his preference and lifestyle. He reported to the group that, after he had “worked up his nerve” to confront his mother, she told him that being gay was a problem because of how he would be seen and treated in society. However, the son retorted that she was not being truthful because, prior to his coming out of the closet, she had treated him worse than anyone he had ever known. He assessed that what she was really saying was that “other people will treat him as she had treated him.” In response, his mother referred to his sexuality as a weakness, telling him that it “sets him apart and makes him different, and not in a good way.” According to the participant, his mother said that “she loved him though he is gay,” whereby he responded that “he loved her though she is straight.” He wanted his mother to be aware of how absurd it was to insist on loving him despite his sexuality. This participant understood that his sexuality had nothing to do with a mother’s filial bonds. He understood that a mother’s love ought to be unconditional.

This participant offered a complex assessment of black families and their sexual politics. Another participant chimed in that he grew up with a mother who was “saved and very holy.” He

described her as never smoking, drinking, or cursing, but when it came to “the *fag*” (referring to him), she would talk down to him. By the age of thirteen, he had enough of being mistreated. Confronting her, he told her, “This shit ha[s] to end!” He said to her that “she could not keep dogging him for something that he had no control over.” He told her “it was abuse,” and that “she was killing him mentally.” The room fell silent as he told his story. Then he dropped his head and let out a deep sigh. Tears formed in his eyes, and the group of men shook their heads, some nodded, and others stood around him while two men wrapped their arms around him. This show of affection illustrated the emotional and mental bond these men shared through the discourse of religion and sexuality. The young man’s testimony brought the room into a deep reflective silence.

From the testimonies of the participants in the support group, it was apparent to me that many of these black gay men have owned these stories on a day-to-day basis for decades. The participants shared how they had been *isolated*, *ostracized*, and *preached out of the church* because of their sexuality. They experienced being confronted by church leaders and pastors about leading deviant lifestyles that threatened the sanctity of the church community. The men were given ultimatums to either step down from their roles as leaders or to leave the church because what they did outside of the church was still in public view, and such was a reflection of their affiliation with the church. Their pastors and preachers confronted them for being too enthusiastic in the spirit, arguing that their sexuality was a distraction or temptation for others in the congregation. The men shared their stories of internalized hate, which impacted them emotionally and mentally, forcing many to see themselves as unlovable, unworthy, and sexually debased.

These men's church communities told them that they were affirming and accepting spaces for them to exist, but the men realized that it was because of their talents as choir members, ushers, and other roles in the church. The churches were not affirming, but were instead profiting from those gifts. The men soon realized that their bodies and identities were, in fact, sites and sights of disgust and derision for decades. As a result, they were there at the support group meeting, struggling for healthy ways of understanding and appreciating themselves in and through their sexualities. These men also shared how their filial bonds were disrupted and damaged because of the fictive kinship relationships with the Black Church. Their relationships with family members were strained, and such strains were extensions of their tenuous relationships with churches. Many of these black gay men could turn neither to filial bonds for support nor to nurturing and protecting *Houses of God* from which they had been disinherited. These black gay men had been preached *out* of the Black Church.

This conversation helped these men recognize that their pain and struggles were much deeper, much more far-reaching than they had initially thought. It would take hard work to unpack the roots of the impact of race, sex, sexuality, and religion on their lives, and how those roots expanded through multiple institutions, including the closely related ties between family, community, and church. However, the conversation also revealed key insights into the intersections of race, gender, sex, sexuality, and the Black Church. The experiences shared by the men proved beneficial in providing supportive data and new insights of the Black Church's views, and the discourse that keeps black gay men *out* of rather than *in* the church.

The findings from this discussion are helpful in understanding how black gay men see themselves in the church, in their communities, and in their families. The emotional and psychological damage these men have experienced in these concentric communities impacts

them both socially and privately. Much of this pain lives with them from childhood into adulthood. Listening and watching each other share their stories brought to the surface deeply rooted torments that have afflicted all of them. A forum like Brothers United is only one source for the men to share their stories. There are many others, and they have proved beneficial. However, the emergent data illustrates why more work needs to be done in addressing race, gender, sex, and sexuality within the church. Developing and restoring healthy, loving, inspiring, and empowering relationships between black gay men and the Black Church will take the work of all institutions, including the family, community, and the Black Church.

Black Gay Men and Compulsory Heterosexuality: How Black Gay Men's Sexual Identities are Shaped and Perceived in the Black Church and Beyond

One forum for further exploration into the lives of black gay men and their experiences with family, community, and the Black Church is that of personal narratives in literature. Here, black gay men document their lives in an effort to shed light on their interpersonal relationships with family and community, and how these encounters impact them emotionally and psychologically. Black gay author and activist Essex Hemphill understood all too well the significance of the exilic existence of by black gay men as illustrated in their stories, including his own. Hemphill knew that if his sexuality was discovered within his black family or black community, he would be ostracized and marginalized, thus marking him in ways similar to the group participants, as expressed in their exilic stories.

In his essay, "Mask Maker, Mask Maker, Make Me a Mask," Hemphill reflects, "I couldn't shame my family with behavior unbecoming to an eldest son. I had the responsibility of setting an example for my younger siblings, though I would have preferred an older brother to

carry out the that task, or a father to be at home.”⁵⁸ The shame these men endured from their pastors, churches, and families marked them an “Other,” thus leaving them alone with no one to turn to for solace. Such black gay men are pushed into homelessness, to the streets, and, sadly, into unhealthy sexual labor that endangers their lives. Hemphill’s work resonates with these tragic consequences:

Surely it is one kind of pain that a man reckons with when he feels and he knows he is not welcome, wanted, or appreciated in his homeland. But the pain I believe to be most tragic and critical is not the pain of invisibility he suffers in his homeland, but the compounded pain and invisibility he suffers in his own home, among family and friends. This occurs when he cannot honestly occupy the spaces of family and friendship because he has adopted—out of insecurity, defense, and fear—the mask of the invisible man.⁵⁹

Black gay men are ostracized by their communities, families, societal spaces, and other institutional locations in which they engage. Black gay men hide and live in silence, their same-sex desires repressed in order to be seen as equal or law-abiding members of society.

It is important to note that Black gay men are subject to the same social laws that lesbians endure, in what Adrienne Rich describes as “compulsory heteronormativity.” According to Rich, this is “the idea that heterosexuality, particularly in females, is both assumed and enforced by a patriarchal society. Heterosexuality is then viewed as the natural inclination or obligation by both sexes. Consequently, anyone who differs from the normalcy of heterosexuality is deemed deviant or abhorrent.”⁶⁰ As a result, women are expected to perform and adhere to heteronormative ideals via emotional, sociological, and physical bonding in heterosexual relationships. In other

⁵⁸ Essex Hemphill, *Brother to Brother – New Writings by Black Gay Men*, conceived by Joseph Beam, (Boston, MA: Alyson Publications, 1991), Pg. xv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. xvi.

⁶⁰ Adrienne Rich, “*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*,” in *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality (University of Chicago Press Journal, Summer, 1980), Pg. 650.

words, women are socialized through patriarchal power to perform as heterosexual women, whereas men deny them sexual agency and expression, and enforce sexuality upon them.

The displacement of women's sexual identities, or the reluctance to acknowledge their sexuality, force many women—especially lesbian women—to perform as heterosexual women in an effort to avoid sexism and other forms of discrimination.⁶¹ Rich argues that this sometimes happens both in the workplace and in pornography. Lesbian women may wear clothing such as dresses, skirts, and heels (as well as make-up), and perform femininity to ensure patriarchal identity. As Rich explains, “The fact is that the workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of our psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival; where women have been educated—no less than by romantic literature or by pornography—to perceive ourselves as sexual prey. A woman seeking to escape such casual violations along with economic disadvantage may well turn to marriage as a form of hoped-for protection, while bringing into marriage neither social nor economic power, thus entering that institution also from a disadvantaged position.”⁶² Although Rich coined “compulsory heteronormativity” with lesbian women in mind, the concept has been easily translatable to gay men faced with societal and familial pressures to conform to patriarchal sexual-gender norms.

Hemphill explains the force of compulsory heteronormativity over black gay men's sexuality as follows: “The male code of the streets where I grew up made this very clear: sissies, punks, and faggots were not ‘cool’ with the boys. Come out at your own risk was the prevailing code for boys like myself who knew we were different, but we didn't dare challenge the

⁶¹ See, Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*.

⁶² *Ibid*, Pg. 654.

prescribed norms regarding sexuality for fear of the consequences we would suffer.”⁶³

Challenging these norms puts black gay men’s lives at risk, for it requires their confronting and challenging families and loved ones, as well as their churches. This is risky business, as evidenced by the men participating in the support group. How does one push back and against a pastor who confronts a person in front of the congregation?

As the young men shared their experiences of pastors calling out those struggling with sexual demons—and especially those with homosexual spirits—to come before the church and “pray away the gay,” the young men felt they were being targeted and unable to confront those pastors. Being made to feel voiceless and powerless left them adhering to the norms of the church’s dogma. In one instance, a participant (the former praise team leader) was confronted by a church leader about the statements he made on his social media page. Although he made comments about his dating and intimate relationships, which is his personal life, the church leader felt that they conflicted with the participant’s *church* life. In this way, the policing of black gay men’s lives renders them powerless, forcing them to mute their sexualities and identities for the greater good. Arguing and confronting hate, homophobia, and compulsory heteronormativity means waging a spiritual and religious warfare against the toxic sexual teachings of the churches from which many of these men come. Engaging in such a fight is not without great risk for black gay men and women, who have become, borrowing Audre Lorde’s phrasing, brother and sister outsiders⁶⁴ to their own families, communities, and religious institutions.

⁶³ Hemphill, *Brother to Brother*, Pg. xv.

⁶⁴ See, Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (New York, NY: Crossing Press, 2012).

Hemphill affirmed this reality even as he stood resilient against the social law of compulsory heteronormativity over black sexuality,

The black homosexual is hard-pressed to gain an audience among his heterosexual brothers; even if he is more talented, he is inhibited by his silence or his admissions. This is what the race has depended on in being able to erase homosexuality from our recorded history. The 'chosen' history. But these sacred constructions of silence are futile exercises in denial. We will not go away with our issues of sexuality. We are coming home.⁶⁵

The black sexual redemption envisioned by Hemphill will require that black gay persons demand and shape their own identities on their own terms, working within the Black Church's religious discourses, such that sexuality, sex, and gender become celebrated shapes of empowerment, freedom, and liberation. Such a reclamation is the challenge and burden of this dissertation, just as it is for the participants in the black gay men's support group.

Conclusion

Much of the discourse on black homophobia circulates through black religious rhetoric. In language and in acts, black religious leaders have turned spiritual and religious texts into weapons of warfare against black queer persons. Disregarding and disowning people because of their sexual identities and expressions of love, joy, and liberation brutally negates their human self-worth. This was greatly evidenced in the findings from the support group, wherein the men questioned whether God loved them, or if they were destined to *hell*. Their families ridiculed them and their mothers berated them, making them feel unwanted and unloved.

The harms and damages and, in some instances, destruction to the souls of many black gay men leave them yearning for ways to make wholeness out of ruins, and find meaningful

⁶⁵ Hemphill, *Brother to Brother*, Pg. xxix.

ways to fill internal voids. The men participating in the support group describe both an unwillingness and a disinterest in the black community in discussing issues of sex and sexuality, much less in interrogating its own sense of biblical holiness surrounding homosexuality. This reluctance is in part owing to many black gay men's and women's internalized experiences of being stifled and pushed too far beyond the periphery of their churches to contribute to open discussions about sex and sexuality. It is for them a detrimental taboo to address either concept in their confrontations with compulsory heteronormativity and its sacred canopy covering the black family, the black community, and the Black Church.

It is to this end that the discussion from the Brothers United discussion group revealed several emergent themes. The first is the power of shared narratives about the Black Church, the black family, and the black community. The stories and experiences shared by the men provided great insights into ways they could reconcile their religious and spiritual faith and their sexuality. Tactics include forming community with other black gay men and creating spaces where they feel included, empowered, and inspired. Such a process reveals how the men found strength and encouragement in an effort to create peace within themselves and their faith. This dynamic also allows for the opportunity to help theologians and religious persons understand the dynamics and importance of spiritual identity and sexuality for black gay men, and how they seek spiritual gratification and nourishment from the church.

A second theme emerged when some of the men shared why they left the church when they encountered homophobic religious rhetoric that marginalized, ostracized, and oppressed them, and later shared the impact that this had on their social and intimate relationships. These personal narratives prove insights for theologians and religious leaders, as they are allowed to

hear and see the whole person, and the spiritual nurturing needed to create inclusive congregations.

Another emergent theme was that the men felt that the Black Church needed not only to be inclusive, but affirming. They felt that, although the church may be inclusive, it is affirming of neither their sexuality nor their identities within the church. The men felt they were ignored and not allowed to participate in leadership roles as deacons and preachers. Although some were accepted in most churches, they were limited to highly policed spaces, such as choirs, usher boards, and praise teams. The men felt that the church used their services, but did not make them feel visible or affirmed in the sermons. As a result, they wanted the pastor to preach on how churches can be more affirming, and to positively acknowledge the black gay men in them.

The emergent theme regarding family was another key component, which the men noted was essential for them. They agreed that the black family must work toward healthy and loving acceptance and affirmation of their sexuality. For many of the men, however, their families had issues with their sexuality, and often regurgitated religious rhetoric they heard in the church about homosexuality as a sin against God. This further ostracized the men from their families, and they wanted to be acknowledged in both the Black Church and in their families. They wanted to be included and affirmed as part of the larger contextual family of the Black Church because the Black Church is an extension of the black family, which I noted earlier as fictive kin. Some believed that, if the Black Church affirmed and accepted them, their families might also affirm and accept them. The men wanted the Black Church as well as their families to be proactive in outreach, extending and creating opportunities and spaces for interpersonal dialogues and relationship building. They wanted more mutuality in relationships, rather than

unidirectional ones, where they were always reaching out, conforming, and adjudicating themselves.

Many had left the Black Church in search of a place to worship and feel accepted. This led me to intervene, wondering if, due to their feeling un-affirmed in the Black Church, they should found their own churches of constructions essential to their spiritual health. I asked the men if they felt the black gay community needed their own black gay church. The men unanimously replied that they did not want nor did they feel the black gay community should have its own black gay church. They did not want to separate themselves from the Black Church because the Black Church is where their families are located. Regardless of past traumas, they were still connected to their families. This connection still allowed them access to the church and, by separating themselves, they might lose the black community as well as their black families. Instead, they felt they had a right to be in the Black Church, and the church should do more in reconciling and remedying the broken relationship.

Interestingly, many black gay preachers have created churches and affirming spaces for black gay persons to worship. Although members of the Brothers United group were not interested in having their own space, others who have been displaced from churches across the United States have realized a need for one of their own. Black gay preachers and pastors have responded to those displaced persons, and their churches are not spaces reserved specifically for LGBT persons, but for all persons. Realizing a need to create spaces of worship that do not isolate or negate one's experience or identity, these black gay preachers and pastors have opened doors to spaces where all are welcomed.

One of these spaces is The Vision Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The presiding preacher is Bishop Oliver Clyde Allen, an openly black gay man. He and his husband, referred to First Man

of the church, work tirelessly to affirm the presence of black LGBT people within their church. In many traditional churches, women who are married to the preacher or pastor hold the title of First Lady. Bishop Allen's disruptive use of the term is a way to dismantle the presumptuously gendered role of a pastor's partner.

Another church is Tabernacle Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Bishop Dennis Meredith leads the church and focuses relentlessly on equal rights for same-gender loving people and couples. He is married to Lavar Buckett Meredith. Next, there is Bishop Yvette A. Flunder, who is the senior pastor of the City of Refuge United Church of Christ in Oakland, California. Flunder is also the Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. Flunder has been one of the most celebrated preachers for black gay, lesbian, and transgender persons. Her work and leadership have been a critical part in the advocacy for displaced and marginalized persons. As an openly lesbian woman, Flunder has also worked tirelessly to engage Black churches, preachers, and pastors in preaching inclusivity, affirmation, and love for black gay persons.

These are but a few openly black gay and lesbian preachers who have refuted the claims that black gays have no place in the church, and are deviants with no salvation. Many others have opened and operate Black churches from the South to the Midwest, from the east coast to the west coast. These black preachers and pastors have positioned themselves as well as the voices and presence of gay persons at the center of their churches. They are working to reimagine the discourse of religious rhetoric, which has negatively impacted black gay persons and positioned them *out* of the church.

The emergent data from the Brothers United discussion is but one resource for gaining an opportunity to explore some common themes shared among participants, such as feeling isolated,

ostracized, and marginalized because of their sexuality. It also explores the notion of race, gender, and sexuality. The men shared how their racial identity and being members of the black community often conflicts with their sexual identity. The tension between these markers also makes it difficult for them to navigate their maleness or their interpersonal relationships with manhood and masculinity. These tensions remain intact, and it will take critical and important work to unhinge these symbols and markers through open conversations that challenge all hegemonic patriarchal institutions—including the Black Church.

To gain a better understanding of the religious rhetoric and pious attitudes toward homosexuality within the Black Church, and especially toward black gay men, the following chapter will explore how Black preachers play a key role in shaping the perceptions of church members—as well as those in the black community—and their attitudes on homosexuality. Black preachers hold an essential role within the community, and, in the twentieth century, two powerful Black preachers, father and son Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., played critical roles in public discourse on homosexuality within the black community. They were unrelenting in their denouncement of sexual immorality amongst middle- and upper-class residents in Harlem, New York. Even worse, their rhetoric was not isolated to the confines of the church; it spread throughout the community, and permeated the Civil Rights Movement. It would critically affect three key persons: Prophet Jones, one of the most popular preachers in the Detroit area; Bayard Rustin, key organizer of the March on Washington with Martin Luther King, Jr.; and, James Baldwin, one of the most prolific writers of the Civil Rights Movement. Attacks on their sexuality are no different from the men from the Brothers United Network. All three of these men maintained a relationship with the Black Church, yet, each of their

relationships was hugely impacted because of their sexuality. Additionally, their social and political roles within the black community became tumultuous and, at times, fractured.

CHAPTER III

BLACK GAY MEN PREACHED “OUT”: HOW BLACK PREACHERS HAVE USED BLACK RELIGIOUS RHETORIC TO PREACH AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY

Introduction

There is much to say about preaching in the Black Church. Ministers, pastors, and reverends have an innate ability to invoke a word that inspires, uplifts, and empowers a congregation to look forward to hope, freedom, and liberation from oppression, racism, marginalization, and poverty. As homiletician James Harris argues, “If the preacher is able to preach liberation and transformation then he or she will have to use language that conveys the idea and practice of freedom.”⁶⁶ The preacher’s discourse is able to help the oppressed community articulate the injustices that impact their lives, and call out the racist and oppressive systems that marginalize them to the periphery of society. Moreover, according to Harris, “It has to be preached, and the language has to make people feel that freedom is an end that can be achieved in our lifetime.”⁶⁷ Thus, the black preacher must be able to articulate with power and conviction the aims and dreams of the congregation. By doing so, they are able to reach deep into the psyches of the souls of black folks, delve into the abyss of a known struggle, and tap into an unrequited spirit, giving new life and purpose to black people. However, what happens when the message is targeted toward those who are different, and for those who share the black lived experience of oppression and marginalization, yet are ostracized because of their sexuality?

⁶⁶ James Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), Pg. 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, Pg. 13.

What is at stake when black sexual identity is on the line, and the preachers' words become hate speech, especially toward a loved one or a member of the congregation?

This chapter examines the moral campaigns of the Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., who launched attacks against homosexuality in the black community. They preached from the pulpit of Abyssinian Baptist Church the need for upstanding morals and values among black people, including values regarding their sexual practices and behaviors. Their attacks on homosexuality included the outing of black gay preachers such as Prophet Jones, and the dismissal of Bayard Rustin from Civil Rights leadership. This chapter also looks closely at religious rhetoric and coded language in the media, and the public discourse that helped to signal gender stylizations of gay men. The chapter also explores Prophet Jones and James Baldwin, both of whom were ostracized and demonized for their sexuality, but also publicly scrutinized for their gender performance.

Critically, the chapter turns to thinkers such as Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, Cheryl Sanders, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Victor Anderson, who dissect black sexuality and black homosexuality, providing critical responses to anti-gay rhetoric in the Black Church. These scholars establish black cultural narratives that help readers understand the effects of social teaching on black sexuality as well as homophobic rhetoric disseminated in and through the Black Church. With this in mind, the chapter analyzes a sermon by Pastor Jamal Bryant on the feminization of the Black Church, and the ways that sermon's coded language demonizes black gay men. Bryant points an accusing finger at the black family unit for maintaining a narrative predicated on patriarchal failures in their homes and communities. Finally, this chapter examines how the Black Church strategically preaches black gay men *out* of the church and ostracizes them to the margins of their community.

The Moral Case Against Prophet Jones and James Baldwin: Black Preachers
on Sexual Morality and Religious Values in the 20th Century

The Black Church has historically been a staple of the black community, from slavery to the present. It is, part and parcel, an extension of the black community: a shelter for the homeless, a soup kitchen for the hungry, and a crisis center for the disadvantaged, the needy, the chemical addicted, the recovering, and the wayward. In all its iterations, the Black Church is an extension of the black family, where members are extended cousins, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. According to sociologists C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, “For many decades, the form of the Black Church has been described primarily as those churches whose worship life and cultural sensibilities have reflected, historically and traditionally, a connection to the larger African American community.”⁶⁸

In the Black Church, members meet and families converge to celebrate, inspire, and encourage one another, often sharing news of births, marriages, graduations, hospitalizations, illnesses, and death, as well as celebrating the buying of homes and cars, and job promotions. Lincoln and Mamiya argue that, “for Black people, the church was their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, their conservatory of music. It was lyceum and gymnasium as well as sanctum sanctorum. In that spirit, the Black Church functioned as the center of Black life, culture, and heritage for much of the history of the African American experience in North America.”⁶⁹ Thus, the Black Church is a communal source for social cohesion, gatherings, and information.

⁶⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), Pg. 93.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 93.

When I use the term “Black Church,” it is important to note that the term includes—but is not limited to—the following major black Protestant denominations: The National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Church of God in Christ.⁷⁰ More than half of all black adults in the United States—fifty-three percent, to be exact—identify as members of the historically black Protestant tradition.⁷¹ And, according to Robert Putnam and David Campbell, political scientists who study religion in America, Black Protestantism has a long history in the United States, particularly as it relates to race and racial segregation: “Black Protestants generally blend an evangelical focus on personal piety with a strong dose of Social Gospel. Just as importantly, the Black Church is an inherently racialized institution—race is integral to Black Protestants’ theology, iconography, and worship.”⁷² With this in mind, race, religion, theology, and the ways in which black people worship are closely tied to social justice, racial justice, and civil rights. Along with these matters, religion becomes an important component in the ways black people live their lives on a day-to-day basis, and religion becomes infused in their lives in ways that it does not for white persons. Yet, oftentimes, issues and topics related to sex and sexuality are not inherent to the social gospel for Black Protestants. Putnam and Campbell state,

African Americans are far more religious than whites, or any other ethnic or racial group in America. Nearly 60 percent of blacks report attending religious services “nearly every week,” compared to 39 percent of whites; 84 percent of blacks say that religion is very or extremely important to them, while 56 percent of whites do. Seven in ten African Americans report that their religion is very important to them when making personal

⁷⁰ See, Marilyn Mellowes, “The Black Church,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/black-church/>.

⁷¹ See, Pew Research on Religion, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/23/black-americans-are-more-likely-than-overall-public-to-be-christian-protestant/>.

⁷² Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace – How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2010), Pg. 15.

decisions, twice the level for whites (35 percent). Eighty-two percent of blacks in America report saying grace at least daily, compared to 38 percent of whites.... Religion infuses the lives of African Americans in a way it does not for most whites.⁷³

If black people are far more religious than whites, and black people infuse religion in their lives in ways that white persons do not, what then can be included concerning the ways in which black gay men make use of religion in their everyday lives? As stated in the previous chapter on the black gay men of the Brothers United group, religion is a key component for them too. In fact, it is an essential part of their experiences, especially in matters of racial and social justice, including their personal and intimate relationships with their families and the black community. Sadly, however, for many black gay men who are members of any of the Black Protestant faith traditions, the Black Church is a space that sends their spiritual identities into tailspins of *disgrace* and *dismemberment* from the church. Their tumultuous relationships with the Black Church oftentimes calls into question their sense of belongingness to the black community and to their families. In too many instances, the Black Church disowns them; and, in other cases, black preachers emphatically discourage black gay people from participating fully and authentically in the church. For instance, on its website for the Assemblies of God, several position papers outline the denomination's stance on various issues, including homosexuality. Dated August 4-5, 2014, the latest position paper on homosexuality states:

It should be noted at the outset that there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual activity, same-sex marriage, or changes in sexual identity found anywhere in Scripture. Male and female genders are carefully defined and unconfused. The consistent ideal for sexual experience in the Bible is chastity for those outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage and fidelity for those inside such a marriage. There is also abundant evidence that homosexual behavior, along with illicit heterosexual behavior, is immoral and comes under the judgment of God.⁷⁴

⁷³ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, Pg. 26.

⁷⁴ Pentecostal Church, Assemblies of God position paper, "The Official Statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God." Website: <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity>, accessed February 18, 2019.

Although this is the official position of one denomination, black gay members of this denomination find themselves *ousted* and *disowned* from their faith tradition. Also, black gay members who are Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic must contend with the fact that their denominations have taken similar stances on homosexuality.⁷⁵ Black gay members of many churches are forced to remain in churches only to suffer in silence, to leave their faith traditions in search of ones that will affirm them, or to never return to any fellowship. While the Black Church has been a safe refuge for members of the black community, for far too many black gay men, it is a site of their disgrace. This narrative is most acute in the moral campaigns of the Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr.

It is the 1920s, and Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.,⁷⁶ pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church,⁷⁷ begins a campaign titled, "Lifting Up a Standard to the People." The campaign denounced what he perceived to be an increased presence of homosexuals in pulpits and congregations. On Sunday, November 3, 1929, he preached to congregants about the morality and manners to which his middle-class black members were to adhere. The full text of the sermon is no longer available; however, its contents are reported and commemorated by Powell, Sr. in his autobiography, *Against the Tide*.⁷⁸ The sermon was based on Isaiah 62:10: "Go

⁷⁵ See, Southern Baptist official stance on homosexuality, "On Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Rights Rhetoric," <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1224/on-samesex-marriage-and-civil-rights-rhetoric>; See, also, the United Methodist Church stance on homosexuality, "Social Principles: The Nurturing Community – Human Sexuality," <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-nurturing-community#human-sexuality>; See also, American Baptist Churches USA stance on homosexuality, "Responses/Action pertaining to Homosexuality," <http://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Homosexuality.pdf>; See also, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stance on homosexuality, "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination," <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/index.cfm>.

⁷⁶ See Appendix, Figures 24 & 25, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.

⁷⁷ See Appendix, Figures 29 & 30, Abyssinian Baptist Church.

⁷⁸ Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. *Against the Tide: An Autobiography*, (New York, NY: Richard R. Smith) 1938), Pg. 254.

through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.”⁷⁹ His sermon utilized multiple meanings of the word “standard,”⁸⁰ but eventually settled on its more common meaning: a code of conduct. Powell, Sr. denounced the “moral degeneracy”⁸¹ of adultery and bribery, which he considered rampant in the church, while giving particular attention to the “abnormal vice”⁸² of homosexuality. The sermon was not only intended for members of his congregation, but for those beyond the walls of Abyssinian Baptist. Although it discussed the need for lay people to adhere to a strict moral code of conduct, Powell, Sr. targeted his harshest criticisms at homosexual ministers, whom he claimed continued to be given a place in pulpits in Harlem.⁸³

Powell Sr.’s sermon inaugurated a campaign for sexual purity, and it resonated throughout the country, well beyond churchgoers and Harlem residents. Powell, Sr. describes his motivation for preaching the message:

Why did I preach against homosexuality and all manner of sex perversions? Because, as every informed person knows, these sins are on the increase and are threatening to eat the vitals out of America. Homosexuality is causing men to leave their wives for other men, wives to leave their husbands for other women, and girls to mate with girls instead of marrying. The lives of girls and boys are being blighted before they reach the age of sex understanding. All of these facts were laid bare that Sunday morning and illustrated by cases brought to my

⁷⁹ Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. *Against the Tide: An Autobiography*, (New York: Richard R. Smith) 1938, pp.209-220

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 216.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 216.

⁸² *Ibid*, Pg. 216.

⁸³ See, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. *Against the Tide: An Autobiography*, (New York: Richard R. Smith) 1938, pp.209-220; George Chauncey *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Harper Collins) 1994, 254-256; “Dr. Powell’s Crusade Against Abnormal Vice is Approved,” *The New York Age*, November 23, 1929.

attention by deans of boys, matrons of girls, and by these unfortunate people themselves.⁸⁴

Powell, Sr. targets not only members of his church, but also the unchurched residents of Harlem who were, in his imaginary, preying on morally innocent, outstanding black folks in both the church and the community. He was *disgusted*. These filthy *deviants* were *infesting* sacred space, and he demanded that they be called *out*. Powell, Sr. tactically situated children in the sermon, using them as scapegoats to *demonize* homosexuals. By invoking their innocence and vulnerability in the hands of *sexually perverted* homosexuals, Powell, Sr. sought to excite moral panic among sexually decent churchgoers and fellow Harlemites. According to him, children were at risk of *sexual perversion*—of being lured into homosexuality—by homosexual preachers in pulpits.

As mentioned above, Powell, Sr. saved his harshest criticism for those homosexuals in pulpits who were leading folks astray and using the church as their sexual playground. He continues, “I called attention, without calling names, to several preachers who had been publicly accused of abnormal sex practices. Some of these were in prison, and some were still in the pulpit.”⁸⁵ Although Powell, Sr. did not disclose these preachers’ names during the sermon, he nevertheless eluded to them in details within it, citing: “One of these was sent to the penitentiary two weeks after preaching for me.” This reference could be easily decoded by keen listeners, who just happened to be present at church at the very time the sermon was preached, and who were familiar with the incident reported by Powell, Sr.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Powell, Sr. *Against the Tide*, Pg. 216.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 216.

⁸⁶ See, Powell Sr., *Against the Tide*, 216; David Levering Lewis; Stokes, Pgs. 63-75.

Some two decades after Powell, Sr. began his campaign against homosexuality, his son and successor, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.⁸⁷ wrote an article in the December 1951 issue of *Ebony* denouncing homosexuals in the black community. Both his essay and his father's public denouncement of homosexuality offer unique insights into how black religious leaders have long viewed sex and sexuality, and how their rhetoric became part and parcel of Black Church rhetoric on homosexuality across America. Controls over sex and sexuality discourse by black religious leaders solidify their power to assert authority over the sexual conduct of their congregations and the broader black community.

Using their religious training, and turning to the available information on sex and sexuality at the time, Powell, Sr. and Jr. believed that they were fulfilling their moral responsibilities to heteronormatively guide and model for the black community what strong black heterosexual families must be like when led by married couples who rear their children to continue the tradition of racial uplift and respectability in the African American community.

Powell, Jr. specifically addressed the need for sex education in the African American Church. He evoked a story about an unidentified pastor grieving over the death of his handsome and talented personal male assistant. He described the elaborate and decorative funeral that entailed a lavish spread of flowers and a very expensive coffin. However, Powell, Jr. found most disturbing the preacher's shaky voice and stream of tears flowing as he delivered the eulogy. He reports, "The pastor even attempted to leap into the casket!" He described the minister's uncontrollable sobs as reminiscent of someone who has just lost a lover. Powell, Jr. did not mince words in condemning the preacher for his public affections and sorrows. He claimed that the two men had been involved in an *unnatural relationship* for a number of years, and that the

⁸⁷ See Appendix, Figures 26, 27 & 28, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

entire congregation knew about it. He stated that the “man of God” was one of the most powerful and respected Negro pastors in all America, and his behavior needed calling out. The preacher in question was the popular and famed Prophet James Francis Jones of Detroit, Michigan, and the deceased was his longtime companion, James Walton.

Notably known as one of the most influential preachers of his day, Prophet Jones had a “religious awakening” in 1914 at six years of age in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. Jones left home five years later for an evangelical tour from Chattanooga to St. Louis to Atlanta, and eventually headed north in 1938 with his private secretary, James Walton, arriving in Detroit as missionaries for Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ. Historian Tim Retzlloff writes:

By the end of 1939 he was sufficiently savvy at attracting media attention to have the *Detroit Tribune*, one of two local African American newspapers, report on his birthday party, completed with guest list. A year later, at the time that Father Coughlin was driven off Detroit’s airwaves, Jones began broadcasting over Canadian radio station CKLW, whose fifty-thousand-watt signal reached several Midwestern states. His live weekly radio hour was soon the “most talked about and perhaps the most popular church sponsored program” among the city’s African American population.⁸⁸

Prophet Jones⁸⁹ quickly rose to fame due to his flamboyancy, displaying his riches with fancy cars, homes, and clothes. He preached with fervor and played up his abilities of being able to prophesy. He was noted for preaching God’s favor on wealth, sparking the religious movement of ‘prosperity gospel.’ He also strayed from traditional religious rhetoric that spewed that “Adam

⁸⁸ Tim Retzlloff, “Seer or Queer?” Postwar Fascination with Detroit’s Prophet Jones,” *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8, No. 3, (2002), Pgs. 271-296.

⁸⁹ See Appendix, Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7, Prophet Jones.

and Eve had sinned by mating out of season, and the prediction that “death and labor will vanish from the earth” in the year 2000.”⁹⁰

Prophet Jones’ flamboyant personality and mannerisms drew crowds to his church services. In November 1944, *Life* magazine played up his elaborate lifestyle, including his devout followers who admired him. “When he appears in public they try to touch his car. When he requires something for his opulent house, his parishioners meet the need.”⁹¹ Prophet Jones was a superstar preacher. The *Life* article solidified his popularity when it featured a profile of him in its prominent “African Americans” issue, which not only helped to make Prophet Jones a household name, but made him one of the most watched and scrutinized preachers of the African American community.

Prophet Jones never shied away from rumors about his sexuality. He was flamboyant, indeed, and exhibited feminine tendencies. He even admitted that he lived differently from other men. According to Retzliff, although Prophet Jones never explicitly stated that he was a homosexual, or that he desired the companionship and bed of another man, he nevertheless surrounded himself with young handsome men and flagrantly flashed his lavish jewels, which he wore on his fingers and around his neck. He had custom-made clothing of fine silks. He wore elaborate fur coats and lived in an exquisite mansion in Detroit’s affluent neighborhood, Boston-Edison.⁹²

However, drawing so much attention to himself through his fashion and his associations with handsome young men ultimately led to Jones’ arrest on February 20, 1956, for *gross*

⁹⁰ Retzliff, “*Seer or Queer?*” Pg. 274.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 275.

⁹² See, Retzliff, *Seer or Queer?*

indecenty.⁹³ In the 1950s and 1960s, gross indecenty was a criminal charge code for men and women who were known to or suspected of engaging in same-sex sexual acts. According to reports, “The police alleged that the preacher had made an “indecent proposal” to an undercover vice officer, thus charging him with gross indecenty and attempted gross indecenty, which were felonies under state law.”⁹⁴ The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* documented the arrest of Prophet Jones without discussing the charges.⁹⁵ However, the senior inspector, who was interviewed for the story, stated that police had been “working on the case five to seven months.”⁹⁶ This suggests that they had credible sources reporting on Prophet Jones’ alleged activity.

Interestingly, Prophet Jones’ arrest was the result of a police sting in which an undercover officer infiltrated Jones’ camp to investigate him on numbers gambling.⁹⁷ This underground network operated in the African American community as a street lottery, in which persons could illegally play lottery numbers. The newspaper mentioned that, when the police came to Prophet Jones’ home to arrest him, he refused to open his bedroom door. According to the police, “He was said to be clad in red pajamas, alone with two teenage youths.”⁹⁸ The account, reported by the newspaper, brought light to Prophet Jones’ sexual deviancy as well as

⁹³ Website, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*:
<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1755&dat=19560221&id=oCEhAAAIAIAJ&sjid=7mQEAAAIAIAJ&pg=3087,5519735&hl=en>.

⁹⁴ Retzloff, *Seer or Queer?*, Pg. 282.

⁹⁵ See Appendix, Figure 2, Prophet Jones.

⁹⁶ Website, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*:
<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1755&dat=19560221&id=oCEhAAAIAIAJ&sjid=7mQEAAAIAIAJ&pg=3087,5519735&hl=en>.

⁹⁷ Retzloff, “*Seer or Queer?*”, Pg. 282.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 282.

his penchant for young boys. It failed, however, to note the distinction between homosexuality and pedophilia.

The police officer who infiltrated Jones' camp told Jones that he suffered from a back injury. In order to be healed, he was instructed to pay Jones ten dollars a visit, which involved several encounters. On the last visit, which occurred after midnight in the prophet's private quarters, the officer shared with Jones that he had been healed, in which Jones responded that he was not a fake. Then, Jones instructed the gentleman to expose his penis. He obliged. Jones pulled the officer toward him, played with his penis, blew on it, and the gentleman informed him that it was no use because he would not get hard.⁹⁹ Jones was arrested after this incident, and would stand trial for the charges of gross indecency and attempted gross indecency. The newspaper highlighted these charges along with speculation on Jones' sexuality, which many in the black community had begun to question.

For purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note how the media—and especially the newspaper—documented Prophet Jones' arrest with codes, signs, and symbols infused throughout the story that alluded to Prophet Jones' sexuality. The newspaper used various innuendos about Jones' gender performance and sexuality by mentioning his choice of jewelry and fashion. This tactic of coding and signifying was not uncommon with newspapers or radio. And, with the advent of television, media outlets could use a visual aid through which viewers could see and identify homosexuals or those who were suspected of homosexuality in real time.

According to Retzliff:

In the 1940s and 1950s suggested homosexuality, under the guise of an entertainer's flamboyance, was permissible. It also sold magazines. Overt homo- sexuality was tainting, though it, too, sold magazines—albeit less reputable ones. Jones's 1956 arrest allowed the

⁹⁹ Retzliff, *Seer or Queer?*, Pgs. 282-283.

formerly sympathetic press finally to name the trait intrinsic to his fame. Coded references to flamboyance became uncoded and labeled “deviance.” The pulp pages of *Whisper* asked if Jones was “seer or queer?” As long as Jones’s queerness was a social performance, confined to the role of the freakish man, he appealed to a mass print audience. Once he was arrested and his queerness was explicitly connected to homosexual practice, tagged criminal and perverse in the language of courts and commissions, he was unfit for print. By condemning his sexuality, the media stripped him of control over his own portrayal. As a national novelty act during the decade following World War II, Jones depended for his fame on his oddness, his queerness. At first the press, especially the white-dominated mainstream press, was fascinated by Jones and put out its welcome mat for him. Once it knew just how queer he was, it slammed the door in his face.¹⁰⁰

The media tactic of using coded references to identify homosexuals helped draw attention to a national discourse on homosexuality and on issues and concerns for which good citizens must be on the lookout.

Prophet Jones was, perhaps, strategic in how he used the media by playing up to the innuendos about his sexuality. As Retzloff reports, “The self-styled preacher’s rise to prominence was partly due to a strong homosexual subtext. His congregation and his community knew about, or at least suspected, his same-sex desire. Jones used the tensions surrounding his near-public sexuality to gain access to the white and African American press.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, Prophet Jones never admitted to being homosexual, despite swirling rumors and the media’s fascination with his sexuality.

Similarly, such tactics of coding homosexual and sexual-gender performance were also used against James Baldwin. Literary scholar William J. Spurlin notes that the press honed in on Baldwin’s sexuality in an effort to locate his homosexuality and situate him outside of masculine discourse, which was crucial to the Civil Rights Movement and its leadership. Spurlin notes how

¹⁰⁰ Retzloff, *Seer or Queer?*, Pg. 289.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 271.

“he [Baldwin] was read and interpreted as queer by critics and by the media, and how readings of queer desire and queer identity in his work and in him made use of and extended dominant social practices, cultural conversations, and institutional discourses on homosexuality in the early 1960s.”¹⁰² His literary works, *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*, fueled fascination with Baldwin’s sexuality, and both works explore homoerotic relationships between men—topics from which Baldwin did not shy away.

Retzloff and Spurlin admit that newspapers and media sources used coded language and symbols to direct their audiences’ attention to Prophet Jones’ and Baldwin’s sexuality and gender performance; i.e., their effeminate mannerisms. These types of languages, symbols and codes were made use of at the time because homosexuality was considered a new concept in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰³ Many news sources published exposés to conceptualize homosexuality, as well as to assist with providing clues to the public for identifying homosexuals through stereotyping gender performances that purportedly discriminated homosexual men from heterosexual men.

Spurlin argues that these tropes of signs and symbols that signaled someone’s sexual identity through coded language in media and newspapers were extensions of the cultural and historical rhetorical strategies used in “reading the cultural lenses and rhetorical practices that informed interpretations of queer and African American identity.”¹⁰⁴ Spurlin notes that the cultural lens used to identify homosexual men also helped to construct an ideal masculine

¹⁰² William J. Spurlin, “*Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity – James Baldwin and the Identity Politics of Race and Sexuality*,” in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride, (New York, New York: New York Press, 1999), Pg. 106.

¹⁰³ See, Time magazine, “The Homosexual in America,” June 26, 1966, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835069,00.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Spurlin, *Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity*, Pg. 104.

identity, and this method was perpetuated in media and newspaper accounts. The 1960s U.S. culture was contiguous with the emergence of the homosexual. Where did homosexuals situate themselves in a society dominated by white heterosexual patriarchy? And who is a homosexual? The culture was both fascinated with and disturbed by homosexuality. Homosexual men looked like other men, yet they were engaged in what were considered deviant and lascivious behaviors—unlike their heterosexual counterparts. With this association, the media created such mania that this new homosexual ‘phenomena’ now required naming and identifying.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, this tactic was used against Baldwin in an effort to contrast his sexuality to other black men involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

Spurlin notes that, in the May 1963 article by *Time Magazine*, which featured Baldwin on the cover, the article focused on the members of the Civil Rights Movement and the dynamic powerhouse voices who shaped it. However, the article undercuts Baldwin by drawing readers’ attention to his sexuality. Spurlin comments:

In less-than-subtle contrast to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom the entire article masculinizes as a black leader, *Time* immediately proceeds to claim that Baldwin “is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a Negro leader. He tries no civil rights cases in the courts, preaches from no pulpit, devises no stratagems for sit-ins, Freedom Riders or street marchers.” The story goes on to speculate that Baldwin’s sexuality, marking his homosexuality, as if it threatens to “pass” un(re)marked, not only through its comparison of Baldwin to King and Malcolm X but through its obviously coded description of Baldwin as “nervous, slight, almost fragile figure, filled with frets and fears. He is effeminate in manner, drinks considerably, smokes cigarettes in chains, and he often loses his audience with overblown arguments.”¹⁰⁶

The article compares Baldwin with other Civil Rights leaders, namely Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, and their leadership abilities. It focuses on Baldwin’s aesthetics,

¹⁰⁵ See, Spurlin, *Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity*, Pg. 104.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, Pg. 105.

characteristics, and behaviors. However, despite featuring Baldwin on the cover of *Time* for his poignant text *The Fire Next Time*, and hailing him as one of the most prolific voices of the Civil Rights era, none of the attributes listed in the magazine, such as trying cases in courts; preaching from the pulpit; and organizing sit-ins, freedom marches, and street rallies have anything to do with Baldwin's abilities. Furthermore, Baldwin's mannerisms were on display, and the magazine attempted to encode identifiable markers that pointed toward an already-identified aesthetic among homosexual men.

In 1962, the year before Baldwin's *Time* profile, noted psychiatrist Dr. Irving Bieber published an explosive *Life* article after completing a "ten-year investigation on the etiology of male homosexuality."¹⁰⁷ The study, comprised of 206 men—106 of whom were gay and 100 heterosexual—made Bieber the leading authority on male homosexuality. Bieber "promulgated the by now all-too-familiar view that a high proportion of gay men had 'close-binding mothers' who emasculated their sons and thwarted the development of their heterosexual drives, and detached, hostile fathers."¹⁰⁸ Spurlin, reporting on Bieber's study, says researchers found:

...effeminacy, to be a distinguishing trait of the 106 gay male patients, compared to the one hundred heterosexual men in the control group. Examples of effeminate behavior in men were identified as exaggerated shrugging, "wrist-breaking," lisping, hand-to-hip posturing, and, interestingly effusiveness, the last being a trope of which the *Time* article made explicit use in mentioning how Baldwin often loses his audience with overblown arguments.¹⁰⁹

Although Bieber's study consisted of 206 men, race appears not to have been included as a controlling variable in "identifying homosexuality." The study makes claims of 106 gay men,

¹⁰⁷ Spurlin, *Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity*, Pg. 107.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 108.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, Pgs. 108-109.

but how many of those men identified as black, white, Latino, or Other? Such is particularly important, as sexuality within minority and marginalized groups compounds their experiences significantly. Those who are white do not face the same oppressions as those in minority groups: racism, job discrimination or unemployment, housing discrimination, and a lack of educational resources. Also, homosexual behaviors are not always easily identifiable via markers such as lispings, wrist-breaking, or hand-to-hip posturing. Many gay men do not exhibit these markers at all. Conversely, some men who do exhibit such mannerisms are not homosexual. Thus, these markers can be deeply misleading. Since Bieber's study, scholars have explored the varied and layered identities of masculinity and homosexuality, as well as addressed the varied ways in which masculinity is expressed, including how homosexuality is viewed and identified.

According to Spurlin, another facet of note in the *Life* article was descriptors to clothing and identity. Spurlin argues that, not only do these descriptors signal a specific homosexual identity, but "the *Life* articles are an early attempt to read queer identity as a public position."¹¹⁰ In other words, homosexuals were living in plain sight among heterosexual people. If not careful, the public might find itself engaged in personal relationships with known homosexuals. In order to identify homosexuals on sight, Spurlin posits, "The article also contends that most gay men in 1964 are easily identified by their "fluffy" sweaters, tight khaki pants, and tennis shoes. Though the article acknowledges that not all gay men are effeminate, it maintains the discourse of deviance in its descriptions of the leather bars in San Francisco, commenting on the "obsessive" effort of gay leathermen to appear masculine and tough "in the rakish angle of the caps, in the thumbs *boldly* hooked in belts."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Spurlin, *Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity*, Pg. 106.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, Pgs. 106-107.

According to conventional wisdom of the day, identifiable clothing styles, aesthetics, and appearances could be read as deceptive, and unless one had a keen eye to spot the homosexual among them, one could be easily fooled into thinking someone could be heterosexual instead of homosexual. Unfortunately, this was oriented towards stereotypical panic among the public. If people were unaware of the deceptive homosexual wearing everyday clothing, one could be easily tricked, and find themselves socializing or fraternizing with a homosexual. In this discussion, Spurlin identifies how the media, along with cultural and public rhetoric, conspired in encoding and signifying homosexual men.

Reading the newspaper article on Prophet Jones, one could interpret that the crafted language signaled to readers that they must remain vigilant in spotting homosexuals in their midst. Using coded language, the newspaper reported on the clothing and jewelry Prophet Jones was wearing when he was arrested. It reported, “He wore earrings, had an expensive looking pearl entwined in his hair, wore a loud sports jacket and sported ornate cuff links in a flashy green shirt.”¹¹² At the time, wearing earrings indicated that someone could perhaps be “queer,” because what “straight” man adorns himself with jewelry deemed appropriate for a woman? Only a man who identified or wanted others to know he was “queer” would publicly wear women’s jewelry. The paper then notes that Prophet Jones wore a pearl entwined in his hair. Flagging a hair design stylized with a pearl was yet another signal for readers to note the prophet’s difference. Earrings and pearls typified a specific man: an effeminate one.

The newspaper further mentions Prophet Jones’ fashionable style; namely, his “loud” sports jacket and “flashy” green shirt. Those words were also signifiers for the reader’s attention.

¹¹² See, “Prophet Arrested on Morals Charges,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, February 21, 1956: <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1755&dat=19560221&id=oCEhAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=7mQEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=3087,5519735&hl=en>.

Spurlin points out that descriptions of clothing with certain adverbs—or even descriptions of certain types of clothing—were indicators of one’s sexuality. The story was written to signify Prophet Jones’ effeminacy, and to mark for the public fashionable codes for spotting a queer or gay man. Prophet Jones certainly had embellished styles in dress and jewelry, and, like many gay and queer men of his time, he added flare and flash to his dress.

According to Retzloff, Prophet Jones was meticulous in his appearance, often taking fashion risks: “Jones’ first appearance in *Life*, in 1944, had clear homosexual undertones. A full-page photograph presented Jones, draped in a shimmering robe, lounging on a sofa in his sunroom, ‘gorgeously at ease.’”¹¹³ Retzloff adds that Prophet Jones’ style and wealth attracted naysayers and scrutiny from many middle-class African Americans, including pastors not impressed or enthralled by his flamboyant lifestyle and behavior.

At one point, critiques about his behavior and grandeur surfaced as Prophet Jones spoke to Marguerite Cartwright, a *Negro History Bulletin* correspondent. He said to her: “People talk about me—‘old, foolish, ignorant Prophet Jones, a raggedy boy from Alabama.’ But now I am famous all over the world... Many say ugly, mean things; a lot of people make fun of me. It makes me sad, and I go to my upper room and cry. I know how wrong they are, so I just powder my face and try to forget them.”¹¹⁴ Not many men, especially preachers and pastors, have an upper room in their houses in which to cry and powder their faces. However, Prophet Jones lived and loved grandeur and opulence. He designed his own path. In so doing, he drew attention to himself, thereby marking him as “Other”, a man living on the margins of the heterosexual gaze.

¹¹³ Retzloff, *Seer or Queer?*, Pg. 277.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 279.

The sexual identity of Prophet Jones and his gender performance appeared outlandish to the mainstream media and even to some members of the Black community. However, much of his fashion choices—including his flamboyancy—were not unusual to many black Americans, and many of them were drawn to him because of them. He was a black man who liked to dress well and look good, and there were many pimps, hustlers, and other black middle-class black men who also enjoyed fashionable choices and may have exhibited effeminate mannerisms, such as sitting with their legs crossed at the ankles, talking expressively with their hands, and walking with a slight swish in the hips. However, these traits do not define one’s sexuality, and this is why it is important to consider racial and sexual identity in media portrayals fixated on men’s sexuality.

The cultural lenses for identifying homosexual men conflated all homosexual mannerisms with white gay men, not taking into account how black gay men may fall victim to a monolithic construction of homosexuality. There are particular nuances that black gay men articulate in style, dress, behavior, and mannerisms that are particular to black culture and black environments. Thus, it is important to consider how the media purports symbols, codes, and language covering black homosexual men. Stylizations of dress, body, appearance, and manners particular to black men are important significations that require attention.

Public Opinion on Black Sexuality: Cornel West

on the Taboo Subject of Black Sexuality

Cultural critic Cornel West discusses the nuances of black male stylization in his essay, “Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject.” He argues that black male stylizations are predicated on power and resistance to whiteness, and it expresses black men’s ownership of their own sexual-

gender politics. Black men's bodies are a means toward protecting and exerting their sexualities. According to West, black men's sexuality in general has long been a threat to white hegemonic power over black men. This fear extends from slavery to the present time, in which black men are desexualized and subverted under white patriarchy. Access to black men's sexuality and bodies falls under the policing and control of white bodies and sexualities. Thus, black men assert themselves through a cultural aesthetic that is mitigated by a black stylized masculinity. This, in turn, allows black men access and ownership over their bodies. As West argues, "For most young black men, power is acquired by stylizing their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others."¹¹⁵

This stylization is access to power in such a way that black men maintain ownership and power over the use of their own bodies. Black men have stylized their bodies under white patriarchy and in white spaces in an effort to appear non-threatening or intimidating. West continues, "This young black male style is a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture; it also is an instance of machismo identity ready for violent encounters."¹¹⁶ By violent encounters, West has in mind the criminal justice system and police authority. If black men are not tactical in how they exude or control their styles, they are apt to come up against white male authority and systems that will subjugate them to fearful images of predatory black men.

West provides an insightful critique of stylizations of black male sexuality and access to power. These insights situate the ways in which black men are viewed, and how they view themselves in relationship to the white gaze. However, there are limitations in this ideology on

¹¹⁵ Cornel West, "*Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject*," in *Race Matters*, (New York: NY, Vintage Books, 1994), Pg. 128.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, Pg. 128.

black masculinity, sexuality, and black men's access to power. It appears that West predicates his notion of stylization on the idea of male heteronormative norms. I, on the other hand, would extend this to consider how black male stylization is an act of black political resistance, particularly how black men use their bodies socially, politically, and sexually beyond the gender norms of heteronormativity. I would also push against West's claims in order to redefine what power means to black men. West argues that black men's access to power is through black male stylizations, or black sexuality, and their access to sex/sexuality. However, what I offer here is the consideration that black gay men and non-gender conforming black men use their identities in ways that push beyond masculine heteronormative norms and widen the spectrum of masculinity. Power is not a direct result of how they stylize their bodies, or the ways in which they access their sex/sexuality. This also means that black masculinity must reimagine itself *out* of the normative gaze of heteronormativity. However, such would not position black gay men and gender non-conforming black men as "Others," but as partners in the success of black male expression and identity.

On the one hand, black men should not be relegated to their sexual prowess, nor to the ways they express their sexuality over and against white conceptions of manhood. Black men are far more than merely their sexual identities or their access to sexual agency. The full range of black male expression extends beyond sexual expression, to talents in the arts, literature, music, dance, and other forms of expression using the body. Sex is not an identifier of how masculine one can perform, or of how many women or men that one can bed. Black men are full-bodied humans with intelligence, aptitude, and creativity.

On the other hand, one cannot think that the only way black men can access power is through black male stylization, or in the ways black men obtain or imagine power for

themselves. There are many powerful black men in their communities who work as leaders, business owners, blue collar workers, and laymen. The span of black men's power is not confined to their sexuality nor to their stylization. We cannot suggest that the ways in which black men stylize their bodies in opposition to the white gaze or to white authority will somehow grant them a power that they did not already have. To limit black male masculinity and stylizations to a heteronormative position, including being reduced to powerlessness, would be to suggest that black men have no power at all and that power can only be accessed through style. At any rate, all of these forms of expression are in response to whiteness, or to ways that replicate white male patriarchy in an effort to garner and access power and autonomy over oneself.

West's notion of black male stylization does not consider black gay men and how they take ownership of their bodies and sexuality. He argues, "This situation is even bleaker for most black gay men who reject the major stylistic option of black machismo identity, yet who are marginalized in white America and penalized in black America for doing so. In their efforts to be themselves, they are told they are not really "black men," not machismo-identified."¹¹⁷ West does not consider the spectrum of black male sexuality or masculinity within the binary of machismo and effeminacy.

Black gay men are neither tragic nor powerless humans with no access to the full expression of black machismo. Prophet Jones' and James Baldwin's sexual gender identities were neither tragic nor bleak. Both expressed and exhibited power-making use of black male stylizations, which garnered them access to power that many black straight men desired. They owned their black sexuality, and for it they mediated a new perspective and insight into

¹¹⁷ West, *Black Sexuality*, Pg. 129.

exploring black male sexualities across a wide spectrum that became more nuanced as they reimagined black men's sexualities and gender performances. West frames black masculinity as a power relation to white patriarchal notions of masculinity. Yet, black gay sexuality remains *out* of bounds, *out* of the discourse of masculinity, and relegated by West to dire bleakness.

Prophet Jones and James Baldwin could not be seen as black men under West's description, capable of power because of their sexuality. Viewed through a cultural lens that aesthetically conflates all homosexuality, they were limited in power, being stereotyped under homosexual identifications with white homosexuality. The media and newspapers, in conjunction with the cultural lens of morality and heteronormative aesthetics, position them under public scrutiny and public discourse. For instance, Baldwin was scrutinized because many observers and leaders in the black movement felt he could not lead the black Civil Rights Movement with force or vigor when compared to his machismo-driven counterparts Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. He did not display the hyper-masculine stylistics capable of moving people and guiding them through the travails of white hatred and patriarchy. Similarly, the scandal of Prophet Jones' arrest and the moral campaigns of Powells Sr. and Jr. rendered a man like Baldwin unbecoming of a religious leader and black preacher. Powells Sr. and Jr. typified and marginalized homosexual men in society and in the Black Church, and they were able to use their pulpits to publicly denounce homosexuality in the name of the Christian piety on which their crusades were grounded.

Examining how black preachers and the media articulate ideas of sex and sexuality has been endemic in the Black Church and the black community for decades. Discourses on sex and sexuality have shaped, formed, and adversely convoluted how black people live sexually in and through their bodies. These discourses have hampered black lives and sexual identities with

detrimental outcomes. Black religious rhetoric aids and abets the normative ideologies of heteronormativity and heterosexuality within the black public sphere, which dictates public discourse on black sexual behaviors and ideologies. This rhetoric shapes how and what black people think about sexuality. A major contention in this dissertation is that a *radical change is necessary in discourses on black sexuality in the Black Church if the black community and families are to set a robust, sexually emancipatory discourse on sex and sexuality*. One critical place to begin is by genealogically critiquing black sexuality in the Black Church.

From Africa to America: Examining the Black Religious Experiences
of Black People and the Shaping of Black Sexuality

From their first arrival from the shores of West Africa to the Americas, African slaves were marked sights and sites of indecency and immorality by white colonizers and the slaveholding class. Their bodies were machinery used for economic growth. Historian Nathan Huggins writes that: “Africans engulfed in the slave trade and transported to the Americas experienced a physical, psychological, and culture ‘rupture’ from their known universe. They were ripped out of the ‘social tissue’ that gave meaning to their lives and converted into ‘marketable objects.’”¹¹⁸ The slave trade and all its horrors undermined the identity of millions of Africans, taking away their humanity. Once in America, white slaveholders beat and worked African slaves in cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane fields, torturing them for their own economic and desirous interests. As historian David Blight poignantly states, “The slave trade has to be assessed for what it was: a massive economic enterprise that helped build the colonial Atlantic

¹¹⁸ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey, The African-American Ordeal in Slavery*, (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1990), Pg. 27.

world, a story of enormous human cruelty and exploitation that forged one of the foundations of modern capitalism, and a tale of migration and cultural transplantation that brought African peoples and folkways to all New World societies.”¹¹⁹ The institution of slavery turned Africans chattel into machinery and product.

White slavers capitalized on the European concept that Africans were primitive—without culture, identity, or civility. They were designated as “Others”: in need of cultivation if they were to be humanized. Cultural theorist David Theo Goldberg posits that “primitive societies were theorized in binary differentiation from a civilized order: nomadic rather than settled; sexually promiscuous, polygamous, and communal in family and property relations rather than monogamous, nuclear, and committed to private property; illogical in mentality and practicing magic rather than rational and scientific.”¹²⁰ Defined by white, European standards, Africans were sub-human “Others,” merely property belonging to white slave masters. The totality of black life had no place or space in a world ordered by white hegemonic power. Shackled, chained and delivered into the hell of slavery, African peoples no longer had autonomy over their bodies. They were tortured, mutilated, raped, and beaten at the hands of white slave masters.

Black feminist cultural theorist bell hooks notes:

If black women were raped in slavery it was because they were licentious and seductive, or so white men told themselves. If white men had an unusual obsession with black male genitalia it was because they had to understand the sexual primitive, the demonic beast in their midst. And if during lynchings they touched burnt flesh, exposed private parts, and cut off bits and pieces of black male bodies, white folks saw this ritualistic sacrifice as in no way a commentary on their obsession with black bodies, naked flesh, sexuality.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ David W. Blight, “*If You Don’t Like It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be*,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, (New York, NY: The New Press, 2011), Pg. 22.

¹²⁰ David Theo Goldberg, “*Racial Knowledge*,” in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Black and John Solomos, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), Pg. 160.

¹²¹ bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), Pgs. 67-68.

Recounting one horrific incident, historian C. L. R. James captures the atrocities of slave traders through the Atlantic slave trade: “One captain, to strike terror into the rest, killed a slave and dividing heart, liver and entrails into 300 pieces made each of the slaves eat one, threatening those who refused with the same torture.”¹²² Against this history, black slaves consistently worked to re-imagine themselves against white hatred, abuse, and mistreatment. Despite brutal beatings, vicious rapes, and horrid mental and emotional abuse, they were resilient. And it was the religious spirit and souls of African peoples that helped them to reimagine themselves in a new world.

African peoples brought their religiosity with them to the Americas, and their gods, spirits, and ancestors traveled with them. The ways that African American peoples experienced and expressed religion in the United States is, in large part, due to African retentions of their cultural practices, which African slaves made use of even after converting to Christianity. According to African and African-American religious scholar Albert Raboteau, “African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief, and fundamental perspectives have remained vital on this side of the Atlantic, not because they were preserved in a ‘pure’ orthodoxy but because they were transformed.”¹²³ These African religious practices survived through slavery to the present, and with these practices, African American people reimagined and redesigned faith traditions rooted in African religions.

In *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, black feminist and religion scholar Kelly Brown Douglas argues that “sexuality is that fundamental dimension of human

¹²² C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), Pg. 9.

¹²³ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), Pg. 4.

beings that governs intimate, sensual, affective, emotional, and sexual relationships. Human sexuality and spirituality are inextricably linked because both involve a person's relationship to God."¹²⁴ Black slaves had a fundamental relationship with a High God even before they were introduced to Christianity. They were a religious and spiritual people who maintained their faith traditions and practices well after the transatlantic slave trade ended.¹²⁵ Raboteau asserts:

Common to many African societies was belief in a High God, or Supreme Creator of the world and everything in it. It was also commonly believed that this High God, often associated with the sky, was somewhat removed from and uninvolved in the activities of men, especially so when compared with the lesser gods and ancestor-spirits who were actively and constantly concerned with the daily life of the individual and the affairs of society as a whole.¹²⁶

African peoples were not primitive savages without culture, identities or religion, as according to white slaveholding mythology. They maintained relationships with a Higher God, deities, spirits, lesser gods, and the ancestors, who were critical to their everyday lives as slaves, especially upon arriving to the Americas, and despite white slaveholders' endeavors to erase African slaves' identities, cultures, and religions. White slavers did this through torture, rape, and mutilating the bodies of African slaves. Using those bodies for their own personal use, especially through rape and sexual abuse, white slave masters attempted to erase their culture, identity, and history as a people.

However, when it came to sex and the use of African slaves for sex acts, "The Western Christian tradition opened wide the door for possibility of utilizing sexual practices, or alleged sexual practices, as a means for devaluing and demonizing human beings," says Douglas.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), Pg. 84.

¹²⁵ See, Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Pg. 4.

¹²⁶ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Pg. 8.

¹²⁷ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, Pg. 29.

Slaves were both sexually devalued and made to feel sexually inept. The emotional and mental abuses on their bodies impacted how they regarded themselves, especially how they engaged discourses around sex and sexuality. White slave masters enforced on their slaves Christian notions of sexual purity, thereby operationalizing sexual discourse with hegemonic powers to justify keeping their slaves in bondage, all the while legitimating whites' perceptions of black sexuality well into the twenty-first century. Slaves would come to emulate their white counterparts regarding these things, especially through the eyes of white Christianity. They would value sexual purity and chastity; however, this is not to say that black slaves had no sexual ethics. According to Raboteau, many young slave women had premarital sex and did not regard it as evil, but "once they joined the church, however, they stopped 'promiscuous intercourse with men' and 'very few lawful married women' engaged in extramarital affairs."¹²⁸

Where black people did not live up to or maintain these Christian sexual values, they fell tactically under narratives of barbaric insatiable animals. Black identities and sexualities were related to and described in various animal tropes that included monkeys and apes. Thomas Jefferson similarly addressed his constituents in his infamous *Notes on the State of Virginia*, describing black people's sexual appetites as bestial, claiming that black men in particular harbored "...the preference of the Oran-ootan for the black woman over those of his own species."¹²⁹ Jefferson continued by comparing the beauty of blacks with that of whites. He stated: "The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worth attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?"¹³⁰ Jefferson took liberties in

¹²⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Pg. 301.

¹²⁹ Thomas Jefferson, "The Difference Is Fixed in Nature," in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), Pg. 98.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 98.

describing the genitalia of black people as synonymous with these animals. He even argued that black people's behaviors and personalities were signified by animalistic characteristics.¹³¹

According to bell hooks, Jefferson and his contemporaries characterized black women as loose and described them as temptresses, preoccupied with fulfilling their sexual desires and imaginations. Black men, on the other hand, were sexual deviants and rapists who preyed on women, especially white women.¹³²

As stated above, African slaves were forced to take on the Christian religion of their white slave masters. They faced brutal beatings, whippings, and even death if they did not practice the faith in the United States. However, in the hush arbors, African slaves continued their religious traditions out of clear sight, fusing their African traditional religious practices with Christianity. This syncretism allowed the slaves to continue worshiping the spirits and gods of their ancestors under the umbrella of the Christian faith tradition. However, under this sacred canopy, slaves adapted much of their religious practices to puritanical Christian values and norms regarding sex and sexuality, which became grounds for a "politics of sexual respectability" which, from slavery to the present, has been tethered to the social teachings of the Black Church.

The Problem of Black Sexuality and Black Identity: Addressing Puritan Values and Attitudes in the Black Religious Experience

¹³¹ See, Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Pg. 98.

¹³² See, hooks, *We Real Cool*, Pgs. 67-68; Also, see, Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2005), Pg. 27. Collins argues and introduces the terms, "the jezebel, the mammy, and the welfare queen," pg. 28. These terms would come to derogatorily signify black women's sexuality, and, identity.

In *When You Divide Body and Soul, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sex*, religious cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson argues: “Because of Western beliefs about the connection between moral and aesthetic beauty, the belief in the ugliness of black bodies carried into attitudes about black souls.”¹³³ This transference became spiritual and religious fodder for reflection on black souls, which were perceived to be born in sin and ugliness. James Baldwin wrote about his personal experience with religious dogma, which frightened him regarding the state of his soul. For a time, he considered himself a sinner not worth saving, and feared that his black skin destined him to indentured servitude. In his acclaimed text, *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin challenges Christianity’s allocation of black people to lives of servitude and second-class citizenship. There, he argued that Christianity had been neither a source of salvation for him nor for other black people, but a hindrance. He revealed his own struggle to reconcile his religious faith, stating: “I realized that the Bible had been written by white men. I knew that, according to many Christians, I was a descendent of Ham, who had been cursed, and that I was therefore predestined to be a slave.”¹³⁴ Not only did Baldwin explain that his destiny was that of a slave, but that, as a descendant of Ham, he was cursed. Under Christianity, his racial and sexual identities marked him undesirable.

As Dyson attests, sex and sexuality are taboo topics in the Black Church. Too many black preachers assign shame, guilt, and judgment to members of the black community who engage in sexual relations before marriage. And yet, even in that condemnation, the discourse favors heteronormativity and heterosexualism. Baldwin wrote of how, not only the church, but also

¹³³ Michael Eric Dyson, “When You Divide Body and Soul, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sexuality,” in *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), Pg. 223.

¹³⁴ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963), Pg. 36.

congregants pushed this discourse by adhering to the tenets they learned. Black preachers used damning religious rhetoric in order to police the bodies and sexual activities of their congregants, especially wayward youth in need of salvation and protection, lest they fall into the perils of a corrupt community filled with sexual deviants. According to Baldwin, members of his congregation “...understood that they must act as God’s decoys, saving the souls of the boys for Jesus and binding the bodies of the boys in marriage. For this was the beginning of our burning time. “It is better,” said St. Paul—who, elsewhere, and with a most unusual and stunning exactness, described himself as a “wretched man”—“to marry than to burn.”¹³⁵

As such, Baldwin and his constituents were to be sexually circumspect. They were to adhere to Christian norms regarding sex and the body, relying on the charge of St. Paul to remember that their bodies were “not their own, but belonged to Christ.” Sexual desires, lust, and any form of sexual expression were to be repressed outside of marriage, and only then expressed between a man and a woman. Baldwin’s insights provide a critical explanation of black sexuality and Christianity. On the one hand, black sexuality is repressed, and one is to manage one’s sexual desires and not fall into lust, lest one fall into sin. On the other hand, Christianity’s hold over black people, their bodies, and sexuality keeps them bound and unexpressive. Their bodies are always under constant policing, both by themselves and by God.

Dyson admits that black people lead complicated lives regarding their bodies and what they do in and through them. The Black Church exacerbates this complexity, either avoiding or agitating their theological understandings of sex and sexuality. The discourse, coming from the pulpits of black churches, tends to cater to dominant male leadership, which privileges

¹³⁵ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, Pg. 18.

heteronormative discursive power over sexual politics, gender inequality, and, repugnance towards homosexuality. Dyson argues:

In sharp contrast to the heat of most black worship experiences, there emerged almost immediately in black churches a conservative theology of sexuality. In part, this theology reflected the traditional teachings of white Christianity. Out of moral necessity, however, black Christians exaggerated white Christianity's version of "p.c."—Puritan Correctness. Later, many black Christians adopted white Christianity's Victorian repression to rebut the myth of black sexuality being out of control.¹³⁶

Though created by the white imaginary, this discourse significantly impacts how black people view their own bodies, sexualities, and gender identities. Black people often police and discipline their own sexual desires as well as those of others. And black preachers direct this discourse with the Bible in one hand espousing it to congregants, while pointing a damning finger with the other, one that reminds black congregants that they are to be sexually chaste in all sexual relations.

When black preachers use the Bible to attack black identities or invoke the "Word of God" to demonize black sexual acts, the Bible then lends itself towards black sexual self-loathing and self-hate, albeit within the construct Dyson calls "Puritan Correctness." This egregious narrative archetype assaults black bodies and identities, and has become a rhetorical trope that marks black people "as ugly, disgusting, and bestial."¹³⁷ Of course, black people were keenly aware of these disgusting and nasty descriptors. This narrative had been ascribed to them since slavery. How and what black people did with their bodies—e.g., expressing desire, experiencing sex, and engaging in any form of sexual expression—had always been underwritten by the white gaze and the white narratives of sexual purity and morality. Dyson attests that black

¹³⁶ Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pgs. 224-225.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, Pg. 223.

Christians inherited this narrative, which has lingered in the psyche and culture of the black community. As Dyson posits, “For the most part, black sexuality was cloaked in white fantasy and fear.”¹³⁸ White fears of black sexual expression reached deep into the minds of black people and impacted how they expressed their identities and sexualities.

According to black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins, this fear was further compounded by tropes in which white people described black people as rapists, sexually promiscuous, sexually dangerous, hypersexual, and animalistic. She states: “For both women and men, Western social thought associates blackness with an imagined uncivilized, wild sexuality and uses this association as one lynchpin of racial difference. Whether depicted as ‘freaks’ of nature or the essence of nature itself, savage, untamed sexuality characterizes Western representations of women and men of African descent.”¹³⁹ Despite white Christianity’s pietistic and moralistic views, which positioned white purity over black impurity, the Black Church adapted the theological implications of white Christianity’s indignation of black sexuality. The negative discourse on black sexuality marks black bodies with a certain peculiarity and determinacy from which black people have been unable to escape.

On Dyson’s argument, black people have not been able to undo the emotional, mental, and physical suffering of slavery. These effects fester, making “black” synonymous with evil, demonic, cursed, vile, and worthless—even in the minds of black people themselves. Dyson contends, “The value of black slave bodies were determined by their use in furthering the reach of Western colonial rule; expanding the market economies of European and American societies;

¹³⁸ Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pg. 224.

¹³⁹ Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2005), Pg. 27.

institutionalizing leisure for white cultural elites; deepening the roots of democracy for white property-owning gentry; and providing labor for the material culture that dominates the American landscape.”¹⁴⁰ On Dyson’s account, black bodies have been nothing more than tools of production for white political and economic domination. However, black people have not been without recourse for re-imagining Christian sexual discourses oriented towards rescuing their souls and emancipating their spirits, even if the liberation of their bodies and sexualities remained in liminal space.

Victor Anderson observes the split between soul and body that controls Dyson’s discussion above. He also acknowledges that Dyson provides critical insights into various black churches’ stances on sexuality, and especially homosexuality. Anderson agrees with Dyson that the dualistic assumptions of the body and soul in the early Christian churches severely impacted black preachers and black people. However, he cautions that this dualism may not be wholly attributable to black theological indebtedness to a soul/body dualism, but sees as factors the complexity of the Black Church with its progressive liberalism and evangelical inheritance to biblical holiness. That is, the Black Church tends to be progressive on political and social freedoms pertaining to economic, judicial, and civil rights, but conservative on issues of the family and sexuality, especially in its widespread disavowal of homosexuality. Although Dyson brings to the center the Black Church’s resistance to addressing black sexuality and black homosexuality in emancipatory ways, he remains hopeful that, as a social force of civility in social and political justice for all black people, the Black Church can extend this power to promote justice for black gay men and women. But he also insists, as a condition, that black gay

¹⁴⁰ Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pg. 223.

men and women come out of their proverbial closets to live their truth and abandon “lifestyles” detrimental to their health.¹⁴¹

In his essay, “The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual,”

Anderson argues that this is potentially dangerous for black gay men and women:

Among the many cultural institutions and organizations responsible for the moral well-being of the Black community despite claims to the contrary, Black churches remain a major institution that promotes forms of homophobia that keep Black gays and lesbian silent and make them particular objects of the community’s disdain and violence. I think that Dyson’s portraiture of the Black Church and clergy and their relation to sexuality greatly distorts the experiences of Black gays and lesbians in the churches. He exhibits a confidence in the Black churches and clergy that, I suggest, many Black gays and lesbians have good reasons to radically call into question.¹⁴²

Indeed, the Black Church has been and remains hostile toward black gay men and women by enacting rhetorical violence on their consciousness and being. In short, coming out in the church is dangerous to both the mental and emotional well-being of black gay men and women.

Professor of Christian ethics and pastor Cheryl Sanders is an ordained minister in the tradition of the Church of God, which has remained adamant in their stance against homosexuality. She does not stray from her faith tradition’s position and considers herself an ally, but has noted that, when the general assembly of members from her church met to vote on a resolution articulating the church’s opposition to homosexuality based on a commitment to biblical holiness, she was present, but “did not vote, [because] I am in agreement with this position.”¹⁴³ Sanders affirms: “We are called to practice lifestyles that are consistent with our

¹⁴¹ Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pg. 235.

¹⁴² Victor Anderson, “*The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual*,” in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, eds. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2004), Pgs. 302-303.

¹⁴³ Cheryl Sanders, “*Sexual Orientation and Human Rights Discourse in the African-American Churches*,” in *Sexual Orientation & Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*, eds. Saul M. Olyan & Martha C. Nussbaum, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), Pg. 179.

communities' highest moral standards for personal piety, ecclesial authenticity, and prophetic social response."¹⁴⁴ Her idea of community includes heterosexual people who operate with the idea of black respectability rooted in Christian dogmas of purity and chastity. All who do not conform to these standards are marginalized, and some are ostracized. Sanders herself does not advocate ostracizing homosexual members from fellowship, but does advocate limiting their roles within the church.

Anderson recognizes in Sanders' position that "black homosexuals (gay men and lesbians) as departing from the moral consciousness that values the health, well-being, empowerment, and survival of the black family."¹⁴⁵ However, he highlights Sanders position only to acknowledge how Black gay men and women fall out of this discourse of biblical holiness. Sanders' position with respect to Christian dogma and heteronormative, able bodies does not consider the disabled, or women who are unable to have children, or other marginalized groups who are unable to contribute to the survival of the black family. Her rationale for the well-being, empowerment, and survival of the black family falls in line with white patriarchal thinking and norms, and, this further demonizes black homosexual people, keeping them on the periphery of the black community. Even so, the role of the black preacher continues to perpetuate this discourse; they see themselves doing "God's work."

According to Sanders, in her role as pastor, her "policy [is] not to seek out and condemn gays and lesbians, but rather to advocate and encourage heterosexual monogamy as the optimal

¹⁴⁴ Sanders, "*Sexual Orientation and Human Rights Discourse in the African-American Churches*, Pg. 180.

¹⁴⁵ Victor Anderson, "*Deadly Silence: Reflections on Homosexuality and Human Rights*", in in *Sexual Orientation & Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*, eds. Saul M. Olyan & Martha C. Nussbaum, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), Pg. 190.

structure for family life both inside and outside the church.”¹⁴⁶ Sanders’ position does not allow for the possibility of black gay men coming out in the church. Like many black preachers, she maintains a stance of keeping black gay men *out* of sight and preferably *out* of the church. Unless they adhere to the church’s dogma of heteronormativity and convert from their sexual deviancy, they are not welcomed. As a result, many suffer in silence as children, struggling to make sense of their identities. Anderson posits that, although other black institutions and organizations contribute to the moral well-being of the black community, “black churches remain a major institution that promotes forms of homophobia that keep black gays and lesbians silent and make them particular objects of the community’s disdain and violence.”¹⁴⁷ With the onslaught of insults hurled at them in society, their communities, homes, and in the church, including being damned to hell for their sexual identity and desire, many leave the church seeking to escape the abuse. And yet, Anderson does not believe that the burden should be solely put on the Black Church as the only direct link to homophobia. Although the Black Church is a contributing factor to homophobic discourse that has been adapted by the black community, it is only one link in the multitude of matrices extant in homophobic rhetoric.

Anderson highlights this multiplicity of systems when addressing and defending black gay men’s sexual identities. He looks not only at the Black Church, but at organizations and cultural institutions. Within the Black Church, Anderson considers not only the preacher, but the entire church body and culture, including the design of the worship service and liturgy. Dyson, in contrast, points solely to the Black Church, rather than to preachers and their inability to address black sexuality. Though he does consider the liturgy and worship service, he notes that it does

¹⁴⁶ Anderson, *Deadly Silence*, Pg. 181.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Pgs. 190-191.

not explore or open the door for discussion regarding black gay men. Dyson acknowledges the worshipping moment when congregants are taken up in the spirit of ecstasy, filled with the Holy Ghost, and their bodies possessed, highlighting this moment because it is the part of the service where one is freed up in bodily expression and performance, and it alludes to the sexual liberation this moment allows.¹⁴⁸ He also references masculine performance by preachers who mimic popular culture and hip hop machismo. Such preachers stylize a ministerial Casanova who exudes erotic expressions of male posturing, believing that they merit sexual pleasure because of their sacrificial leadership of the church community, according to Dyson.¹⁴⁹ However, these hidden codes to which Dyson points are not key opportunities in making plain the myriad ways of speaking about black sexuality. There are possibilities for exploring black sexuality and sexual discourse throughout the church services, but many churches do not see themselves as the resource centers or health institutions suited for such conversations. And yet, the worship experience and preaching moment become a central-foci for discussing and addressing black sexual morality.

Anderson evokes wide-ranging factors, such as social and cultural dogma and the political climate, to consider how black gay people are ostracized and marginalized within society and the Black Church. He notes that it is not only the black preacher and the black community, but institutional matrices that impact black gay men and women, including the Black Church. Thus, black gay men are up against a collective consciousness and not just an inherited bad idea such as “Manichean dualism,” that marginalizes them from the Black Church. Anderson posits that “homophobia is not the unique characteristic of European thought and

¹⁴⁸ See, Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pg. 226.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 227.

culture. It develops in complex matrices of cultural experience that are experiential, social, and political. Therefore, homophobia cannot be reduced to any one matrix. It is related to social taboos, associations, and cultural conditions that cultivate both negative and positive effects throughout the culture.”¹⁵⁰

These matrices confine, silence, and deaden the sexualities of black queer people bound up in communities, social taboos, thoughts, and ideologies that extend far beyond the Black Church. Indeed, every aspect of black gay men and women’s lives is intertwined in a heterosexist and white patriarchal society which bleeds into black life, experiences, and ideologies. Anderson proffers a remedy for the inclusion of black gay people who are positioned out of the Black Church’s discourse of sexuality. He is worth quoting at length:

The answer lies in the internal logic of the Church itself. It lies in the moral self-realization of the liturgy. The answer lies in the self-realization of the welcome, the passing of the peace, the blessings, the celebration of new life at baptism and in birth. It lies in the moral self-realization of congregational prayer where all present their thanksgiving and needs before a merciful and gracious God. The paradox is transcended in the moral self-realization of the communion table where all are welcomed not because they are straight, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, or transsexual, but because all who eat and drink at the table are God’s children. The paradox is transcended when the right (or left hand) of fellowship extends beyond the two-hour service on Sunday but symbolizes the social reality of our life together in the Black community.¹⁵¹

Anderson puts the onus of reconciliation on churches and their liturgies for transforming the theologies, worship, and spirituality of the congregants as well as the preachers. It is top-down and not ground-up work, work that needs a re-evaluation and self-efficacy of the community’s values, morals, and ethics. This calls for black gay men and women to be present in these conversations. They must be included in order to address the very issues that keep them

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, *The Black Church and the Curious Body*, Pg. 303.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 311.

outside and on the margins. However, liberation comes with a cost, and one is required to consider the cost for black gay men liberating themselves from Black hegemonic, heteronormative religious discourse. Anderson advocates pushing the black community, black faith traditions, and the black queer community toward working together to foster shared understanding and discourses that empower and uplift marginalized members. However, this will take the work of reimagining language and understanding and appreciating diverse sexual identities to make this a reality.

What I have shown here is a trajectory of culpability; how the Black Church, the media, black preachers, and society have contributed to the narrative of homosexual discourse. This discourse has harmed black gay men, and in many instances, has isolated them from their families, churches, and society. The next section details how religious rhetoric maintains the negative discourse on homosexuality, using codes, language, and symbols to further isolate and marginalize black gay men in the church. Moreover, turning to a sermon preached by Pastor Jamal Bryant, I provide a close reading of his message, situating it in the discourse of Christian moral piety as advanced by Reverends Powell, Sr. and Jr.

Homophobia and the Black Church: The Problematics of Pastor Jamal Bryant's Ideology of

Black Male Feminization and "Sanctified Sissies" in the Black Church

On May 31, 2014, African-American mega-church Pastor Jamal Bryant of Empowerment Temple AME Church in Baltimore, Maryland, made headlines when he delivered controversial statements in a sermon to his congregation titled "I'm My Enemies' Worst Nightmare." Standing before his congregation, he preached that the westernization of the church worship experience had resulted in the feminization of the Black Church, thereby making it a comfortable place for

women and “sanctified sissies.” Bryant argued that the climate of the culture had increasingly catered to women, while marginalizing the importance of men and their roles in family life. He proffered that this same mindset makes it difficult for men to find their place in the church. Bryant preached, “When the New Deal was offered up, the only way a black family could receive food stamps or welfare—men had to be pushed out of the house.”¹⁵² Bryant used a historical narrative that has long floated in the black community about how the white patriarchal government meticulously worked to destroy the black family at the expense of the black man, citing *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, drafted by Patrick Moynihan, and now known infamously as The Moynihan Report.¹⁵³

According to historian Paula Giddings, the report was commissioned by President Lyndon B. Johnson and his “War on Poverty” campaign. It was designed to address the number of Americans living in poverty, which had, at the time, reached an all-time high. There were disproportionate numbers of both black and white people living in poverty, and President Johnson wanted to pinpoint the root cause. Moynihan found a number of factors leading to poverty, but much of his findings related to the black family; he particularly noted that black men had experienced racism and discrimination at higher rates than white men. As a result of black male unemployment, he argued, black women played a dominant role in the majority of black families, while the opposite was true for white families. Because black men were disproportionately pushed out of the home, unemployed, and undereducated, they were

¹⁵² YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ, Pastor Jamal Bryant, *I'm My Enemies Worst Nightmare*, 2014.

¹⁵³ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1984), Pg. 325.

unsuitable marriage partners. This led to many out-of-wedlock-born children, which resulted in black women's welfare dependency.¹⁵⁴

Many critics called out Moynihan for the inaccuracies of his report, citing the pivotal roles of poverty and racism, which were prevalent at the time of publication. Particularly, Moynihan cited black men and their predicament of unemployment—including their being out of the home—as the impetus for a “tangle of pathology,” which left black women alone to raise families on their own.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, other critics misinterpreted Moynihan's report, failing to accurately assess his findings on black families and poverty. Many took it to be an attack on black men, one that left black women fending for themselves and their children. However, Giddings notes that Moynihan later clarified his report to refute critics. As she reports:

[The report] concerned only a certain segment of the Black community and not the race as a whole. In fact, Moynihan cited evidence in the report that middle-class Black families put “a higher premium on family stability and the conserving of family resources than their White counterparts.” Moynihan also praised the strength of Blacks as a race. Many other groups would not have survived the centuries-long ordeal they had undergone, he declared. As far as matriarchy was concerned, Moynihan's report stated that there was nothing inherently wrong or pathological about a woman-headed household, only that it was not the norm in society and thus subject to disadvantage.¹⁵⁶

Giddings comments that many took offense to Moynihan's crafted narrative, which positioned black men as lazy, shiftless, and uneducated. His report also contributed to the prevailing narrative already floating in the general public: that black men were sexual beasts who went around making babies, leaving their partners behind, refusing to find work, and living off other black women. *Ebony* and other black news outlets attempted to re-craft this discourse,

¹⁵⁴ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, Pgs. 325-326.

¹⁵⁵ See, Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, Pg. 326.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, Pg. 328.

celebrating black men and offering positive stories and images.¹⁵⁷ However, naysayers and critics overlooked one key point: Moynihan used historical data for his research, drawing from black sociologist W. E. B. DuBois' work on Philadelphia blacks; E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family*; and the Chicago School's Robert Parks', St. Clair Drake's, and Horace Clayton's *Black Metropolis*. It is important to note that the foreword to *Black Metropolis* was written by the esteemed Richard Wright. Their social analysis provided the data Moynihan used to write and analyze conditions surrounding pervasive poverty among African Americans.

Nevertheless, it appears that Bryant inaccurately used *The Moynihan Report* (like many others) as a trope when he mentioned the coded language of “welfare” and “pushing men out of the home” to position his claim that the attack on the black family, and especially on black manhood, made for contemporary assaults on the black family and black men. Bryant's sermon targeted his congregation, constituted of primarily black, low-income, single-parent families headed by black women. Though many black men attend his services, many are either partnered but not married to black women, are single men, and/or are young male teens. The point he wanted so desperately to drive home to his members was that many men had not only been pushed out of their homes, but out of the church as well, and this has led to an increase of black women sitting alone in the pews with their young children. According to him, the feminization of the Black Church is thus owing to the large numbers of women who attend services regularly while their men are noticeably absent. Bryant pointed a damning finger at black women for their complicity in driving black men away from their homes and the Black Church. This, according to him, has led to the feminization of the Black Church.

¹⁵⁷ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, Pg. 328.

One might argue that Bryant may, in fact, be right in positing that the feminization of the Black Church is owing to the large numbers of black women who make up the majority of membership in Black Church services. Black male leadership, which has historically catered to patriarchal discourse, predicated elite black men in leadership, which, in turn, does not see how they have participated in sexual-gender discourses that privilege black male leadership and penalizes those who fall outside the heterosexual norm. Class status also plays a role in Black Church dynamics and participation. Many lower class and poor black men do not see themselves as having the same social and political standing as elite male deacons and preachers. On this point, Bryant says emphatically, “It was not that they [fathers] who did not have an affinity or affection for their wives or their children, but the government set up such a structure [stipulating that,] in order for their children to receive aid, no father could be present.”¹⁵⁸

According to Bryant, this resulted not only in a problem for the black family, but a problem for the Black Church. Black families were reliant upon government assistance for food and housing. Bryant surmises that many black men left their homes and families so that their families would not end up homeless and hungry. Tragically, Bryant also surmises,

In the absence of a black male presence, then the family is no longer defended. Why is this a problem? When a black woman comes to church she has, in fact, a fifty to sixty percent chance of the whole family coming with her. But, when a black man comes to church it is an eighty-five percent chance that everybody is going to come. So, now we come to churches that are just feminized with a church full of women, but you got a mosque full of men. It says it’s not that men are not spiritual, they want a place of discipline and order and focus. Men do not want to come to church just for an emotional outpour. But, because we have westernized our worship experience, everybody wants to shout and sashay because we made the church comfortable for men not to be men, but to be sanctified sissies.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ, Pastor Jamal Bryant.

¹⁵⁹ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ, Pastor Jamal Bryant.

As Bryant sees it, the mosque is an exceptional place for black men to be black heterosexual, masculine, and disciplined men. The Black Pentecostal Church, on the other hand, emphasizes emotion, passion, and, above all, unbridled “ejaculation of spirit” (Dyson phrase) in and through their bodies, which are overcome by the Holy Spirit and resistant to a stoical experiencing of the divine. In such spiritual eroticism, the head, arms, hands, hips, legs, and feet all fall under spiritual possession. This is in complete opposition to what Bryant sees happening in mosques with Muslim men. In the Black Church, the black body is a form of expression, particularly through music and spirit-filled possession. Dyson makes a keen observation regarding this, stating: “In the black church, it’s all about the body: the saved and sanctified body, the fruitful and faithful body, working and waiting for the Lord.”¹⁶⁰ However, Bryant has a problem with this type of bodily movement and its being overtly performative and expressive for men. In response, Bryant wants to constrain and keep the body in check like the men in the mosque, because this appears to be more in line with acceptable forms of machismo and masculinity.

After his sermon, many of his congregants whooped and hollered. They praised his discourse on the feminization of the Black Church and the “sanctified sissies” it produces. Feeling the fervor of his words and chants from his members to ‘preach,’ Bryant charged that men should not have to choose between their masculinity and their love for God. They do not have to emasculate themselves in order to receive divine favor, or to be the men they were called to be by God in their homes or churches. He asked: “So, it says to us, *how is it that I can get to a place that you can love God but no longer be a man?* But God says, I’m raising up real men that understand that I do not have to disavow my masculinity in order to embrace my spirituality. I

¹⁶⁰ Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, Pg. 226.

know y'all don't like it. But I'm not supposed to be politically correct. I'm supposed to be biblically correct, and when you know the Word of God, you understand that there is a destroyer."¹⁶¹

What, for Bryant, constitutes a “real” man is a curious question. Who or what the destroyer is is also ambiguous. Is it black gay men, or is it Bryant himself? What is clear is that he sees himself as the bearer of truth about black masculinity and ‘real’ men. That is a lot to put on one person to handle and to be responsible for, especially making himself the signifier or symbol of black masculinity and black sexuality. Nevertheless, Bryant maintains a patriarchal stance, yielding his position as preacher, leader, and self-appointed truth teller of God to guide the black community back to respectability. It is obvious that he holds the position that men should be heads of household, and that women should be subservient to their husbands. He also obviously recognizes the binaries of male and female relationships. Queer men, or men who have sex with other men, have no space in his representation of family or community. In his rhetoric, they are the ones who need to be destroyed.

Conclusion

Bryant’s rant also targets single black women with children and the partners who have abandoned them to raise young black boys alone. He threatens that, if black men do not step up to the plate and become the real men in their households—which is their rightful place—black women will only instill femininity into black boys, who will grow up to be effeminate black men. In many instances, they will become black gay men, and the church will be filled with black women and effeminate black gay men. Bryant has also charged that this is already

¹⁶¹ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ, Pastor Jamal Bryant.

happening, and must come to an end. Sadly, in his message about welfare queens, single black women, no-good men, effeminate black men, and sanctified sissies, he used harmful tropes while addressing black women. At the same time, he targets black gay men, who already bear the stigma, stylization, signs, symbols, and marks that resulted in the arrest of men like Prophet Jones in the mid-twentieth century. Bryant harnessed the same language used by the media and mainstream public to target Jones and Baldwin, highlighting their sexual identity through coded language and other markers. Mass media, the general public, and black preachers have long signified the “destroyer” in need of correction. Both Prophet Jones and James Baldwin were sanctified church sissies, whom preachers like the Powells perceived as “unfortunate” predators of youthful innocence.

Bryant represents many black churchmen who stand guard to protect the Black Church from the threatening black homosexual. Men like him and the Powells are responsible for upholding hetero-norms of patriarchy over the black family and the moral integrity of the Black Church. They feel it is their duty to prevent the effeminizing of the Black Church. As such, black gay men are not allowed to take on leadership roles outside the choir. The erotic spiritual performance of black gay men in worship—whom Bryant describes as “sanctified sissies”—finds itself under a pointing, judgmental finger, condemning the men who perform it to a proverbial hell, thus preaching them out from under the sacred canopy called the Black Church.

Unfortunately, Bryant’s attitude is not monolithic. This chapter has worked to explore a long history of black preachers who are hostile toward black male homosexuality. From twentieth-century preachers such as Reverends Powell, Sr. and Jr., up through preachers of the present day, many black clergymen seek to maintain a standard ethical and moral code of decency in order to preserve morality in the black family. Their attitudes about black sexuality

have been shaped by a history of white patriarchal and white hegemonic ideals of purity and Christian piety. Black people have been unable to reconcile themselves with these ideals, especially those regarding their bodies, sexual identities, and sexual practices; the discourse has been shaped by negative white ideologies of black people's existence since their first encounters of black people in Africa, the Diaspora, and slavery. Black people have been unable to escape the markers and symbols of themselves as diseased, abhorrent, and unworthy, and this narrative has been especially directed toward black gay men. Either black gay men are feminizing the Black Church, or their behaviors are seen as immoral and impure compared to the ideal standards, morals, and values of the black family and the black community.

The following chapter will take up the ways in which black gay men's sexual behaviors and identities are in conflict with those of heteronormative persons, and how the idea of black respectability politics keeps them on the margins of the black community and society. Moreover, I will examine how the Black Church uses black gay men's sex acts to define and mark them as disgusting, and what this means in terms of heteronormative imaginings and perceptions of gay sex acts and black gay men. Exploring the ways in which race and sex are conflating identities for black gay men, the next chapter critically interrogates how this positions black gay men *out* of the Black Church, and *out* of society.

CHAPTER IV

SOULED “OUT” OF THE BLACK CHURCH: THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND THE DISGUSTING AND DISEASED SEX HABITS OF BLACK GAY MEN

Introduction

In the context of describing how the white world looks upon black sexuality, W. E. B. DuBois once wrote: “We are diseased, we are developing criminal tendencies, and an alarming percentage of our men and women are sexually impure.”¹⁶² More than a century later, his judgment reiterates as a striking sentiment among many Black Church leaders, as evidenced most recently by Reverend Dr. James David Manning,¹⁶³ pastor of ATLAH Missionary Church, in Harlem, New York City. ATLAH stands for “All The Land Anointed Holy,” which is Manning’s name for Harlem. He is a black preacher who has been an outspoken critic of former President Obama and his administration, particularly over the progression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights during Obama’s administrations. In February 2014, Manning posted a sign on the church’s billboard that read: “Obama has released the homo demons on the black man. Look out black woman. A white homo may take your man.” The church later replaced the sign with one reading: “Jesus would stone homos,” along with “Stoning is still the law.” For support, Manning included the Bible verses Matthew 5:17-19, Deuteronomy

¹⁶² W.E.B. DuBois, “The Conservation of the Races,” in *W.E.B. DuBois: Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, The Souls of Black Folk, Dusk and Dawn, Essays and Articles* (Washington, DC: The Library of America, 1987), Pgs. 40-41.

¹⁶³ See Appendix, Figures 20, 21, and 23.

17:5-7, Leviticus 20:13, and John 8:11. The posted signs outside of the church went viral. Many commentators, bloggers, and news outlets carried the story.

Manning was not alone in his disgust of homosexuality among black gay men in the Black Church. He might well be considered a successor to the Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., and their sexual morality campaigns during the first half of the twentieth century, which also took place in Harlem (as discussed in Chapter Two). Furthermore, Manning joins a host of black preachers who typically use their pulpits to spew homophobic language that banishes black gay men to self-loathing hells and emotional and mental afflictions to which many participants in the Brothers United support group testified (also in Chapter Two). Manning stands in good company with contemporary preachers as well, including Pastor Jamal Bryant.

Over the years, Bryant has often spoken out against homosexuality, arguing that homosexuals can be changed and delivered from their sexual deviancy through prayer and belief in God. In May 2016, Bryant preached a sermon to his congregants on how they too can be delivered from afflictions that include poverty, drug addiction, homelessness, and homosexuality. But because the church no longer believes in deliverance, he lamented, many of the fallen have given up. “[B]ecause the church no longer practices deliverance,” Bryant preached, “We laugh with the world about it. Sectors of the LGBT community have argued it is scientifically impossible to change one’s orientation. And, I came to tell the LGBT that scientifically it may be impossible.... Supernaturally, man can’t change orientation, but God can.”¹⁶⁴ Bryant obviously believes that, despite homosexuality’s being an orientation of one’s

¹⁶⁴ YouTube, Jamal Bryant sermon, “He’s Not Gay No More,” May 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz6uhfGJy_M.

identity (and not nature), homosexuals can change their sexual orientation with prayer and help from God.

Reverend Dr. Manning believes that homosexuality was forced onto the black man by white “sodomites”: homosexual white men who took advantage of virile, sexually promiscuous black men with large penises. In a YouTube interview with “The Knowledge Beast,” Manning argues: “Fifteen, fourteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen year old boys who are out in the street with a basketball at night are getting talked to by a thirty-five year old white man who takes them to McDonald’s and buys them a hamburger and then takes them home and have sex with them.”¹⁶⁵ In this scenario, Manning is referencing the gentrification of Harlem, which has indeed brought with it white male predators who seek out young black men for sex. And, in luring them from the basketball courts, these white male predators use McDonald’s as a means to entice them into their bedrooms. Manning continues by saying that black men get caught up in the attention and financial lure of the white male sodomite, who wants desperately to be penetrated by black men. Manning extends this argument further, stating that a larger problem is looming in the church. He opines that seventy to eighty percent of black preachers are ‘sodomites.’¹⁶⁶ He believes that they are in the pulpit taking advantage of their church members.

With this in mind, this chapter explores black sexuality and how the discourse around it is often centered on disease, undesirability, and the need for “Puritan Correctness” (to quote Dyson’s term from above). This discourse has persisted since slavery and into the present, as narratives about the black body as vile, disgusting, and diseased have plagued black people and

¹⁶⁵ YouTube, Pastor David Manning on Black Masculinity, The Black Family, LGBT & Trump, interview January 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu8jmNQaWIA>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu8jmNQaWIA>.

they, in turn, have inherited these false ideologies about themselves. I also examine how black respectability politics shape ideologies about sexual habits and sexual identity. Black respectability rarely considers black gay men, and, as such, they are marginalized within both the black community and the Black Church. This is due to black gay men's sexual behaviors, which situate them *out* of community and black respectability. With this in mind, I turn to black gay men and their sexual habits. I critically explore the ways in which the use of bodily parts and fluids mark black gay men as disgusting. I use the work of William Miller, Charles Darwin, and Mary Douglas to examine disgust, purity, and danger in regard to black gay men and black identity as a whole. Looking at black identity as an alleged site of disgust, I interrogate the work of Immanuel Kant to inspect how race is marked as "Other," and, the ways in which blackness is seen as disgusting in relationship to whiteness. This chapter works through a genealogy regarding the views of black sexuality within black identity, and how it extends to black gay men—often held up as a disgrace to the race.

In an effort to disgrace black gay men, many black preachers spew hate speech and coarse language from pulpits all over this nation, using such epithets as: *Homo! Fag! Sissy! Punk! Black Faggot!* These words signify black gay men's deviant and immoral behaviors, which, according to said preachers, are in opposition to God's Word. These signifiers impact black gay men's racial, gender, and sexual identities within the Black Church as well as within the heteronormative gated black community. Many black gay men bear these signifiers as stripes and lashes thrashed across their bodies, and as wounds and scars of battle as they navigate and resist both black and white heteronormative spaces. Black gay men fight daily to be visible in a world that insists on pushing them to the margins and *out of sight*.

Understanding Black Sexuality and Respectability Politics

Within the Black Community

DuBois' descriptive statement, which begins this chapter, became a resounding alarm throughout the first third of the twentieth-century, particularly for sociologists studying the social impact of the Great Migration(s) on developing urban black communities across the United States. St. Clair Drake's and Horace R. Clayton's monumental study, *Black Metropolis—A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* turned to Chicago as a pivotal case study. During the first and second Great Migrations, many southern blacks relocated to Midwestern, Northern, and Northeastern cities in search of better employment and living conditions than the rural south could afford them. In response, Drake and Clayton were commissioned by the government to study and report on black life in the United States, hoping to provide insights into black life in these urban cities.¹⁶⁷

Among the social conditions on which they reported were blighted neighborhoods and slums, single-parent homes led by black women, single black men seeking refuge by living with multiple women, and high unemployment, which led to crime and prostitution.¹⁶⁸ Due to the dramatic rise of the city's population of black migrants from the South, many black men were having sex with multiple women and leaving them either pregnant or alone with multiple children.¹⁶⁹ And, with the influx of black women turning to sex work to make ends meet, Drake and Clayton report, "a city-wide drive against syphilis involved uncritical publication of statistics

¹⁶⁷ See, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993), Pg. 210.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, Pg. 210.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, Pg. 210.

and maps which suggested that the Black Belt (the black neighborhood in Chicago) was a ‘cesspool of disease.’”¹⁷⁰

With this public information being disseminated to presses across the country, black civic leaders worried, said Drake and Clayton, that misperceptions of statistical data on these social conditions might create moral panic about the sexual proclivities of black people. In a footnote, they explain the difficulties that using statistical studies on targeted populations (in this case, blacks) posed for them when measured against whites, and how such stats may be used to stereotype black sexuality. They note: “Negro civic leaders are very ambivalent about the matter of publicizing health statistics of Negro communities. They point out that persons unfamiliar with statistics confuse high proportions with high absolute figures. For instance, only 5 Negroes in 100 may have syphilis, but if the fact is publicized that the Negro rate is 40 times that for white people, the public will begin to view every Negro as a potential parietic.”¹⁷¹

No doubt undergirding the concerns behind DuBois’ descriptive statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter, or those of civic leaders cited by Drake and Clayton (and perhaps even lurking behind their own), stands the “Cultural Politics of Respectability.” African American religious historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined “the politics of respectability” in reference to black Baptist women who were school administrators, journalists, businesswomen, and reformers who served all-black communities.¹⁷² These middle-class, elite black women set out to change negative perceptions and discourses about black people as

¹⁷⁰ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, Pg. 210.

¹⁷¹ See, Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, Footnote – Pg. 210.

¹⁷² Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Pg. 14.

shiftless, lazy, promiscuous, uneducated, and complacent. According to Higginbotham, they wanted to portray black people in a positive light:

Black church women were conveyers of culture and vital contributors to the fostering of middle-class ideals and aspirations in the black community. Duty-bound to teach the value of religion, education, and hard work, the women of the black Baptist church adhered to a politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group. They felt that “respectable” behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the black lower class’s psychological allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.¹⁷³

However, framed in black middle-class elitism, black respectability politics created a burden for lower class and impoverished blacks to adhere to an ideal of morals and values framed to counter white societal perceptions of black people. Black respectability politics also displaced other marginalized groups, particularly black gay persons. And, although there were (and are) black, gay, middle-class, elite persons who uphold the morals and values of the black community, as well as black gay men who contribute through the arts, literature, politics, music, entertainment, and other institutions, because they are framed as impure and deviant beings within religious discourse and dogma, the politics of respectability maintain the exclusion of black gay persons from participating and contributing to black ideals, values, and morals.

Black gay men are already preached *out* of the church because of their sexuality. Their sexual behaviors are in conflict with the norms of the sexual practices of Christian church-folk who practice and maintain the Victorian values implicit in the politics of respectability. Within the discourse of those politics, black people’s sexualities are inherently policed in an effort to control their sexual habits and behaviors. What then does this say for black men and black gay men? As Higginbotham states, the politics of respectability were shaped by black women, who

¹⁷³ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, Pg. 14.

were the purveyors of culture and vital contributors to the fostering of middle-class ideals and aspirations.¹⁷⁴ As such, elite, middle-class black women are also controllers of the ideals of sexual practices and behaviors of black people.

This is not to say that black men have had no autonomy over their sexual desires and behaviors. Surely, they hold power over their sexuality, but the politics of respectability force them to keep in check their private sexual indiscretions while maintaining moral acceptable statuses in public positions. Respectability politics have also allowed black heterosexual men to be complicit in policing the sexual behaviors of black gay men. This has been publicly exhibited from the church pulpit. Pastors preach sexual purity and evoke the Bible, and, as a result, displace many people who do not adhere to the church's sexual ideals. This is especially the case for black gay persons.

Undoubtedly, the enforcement of black respectability politics undergirded not only the scandal surrounding Prophet Jones, but the ousting of Bayard Rustin from the stage of the Civil Rights Movement, which was led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). One of the most prolific voices of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the organizer and creator of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington, Rustin, an openly black gay man, was asked to step down from his role in the march. At one point, Senator Strom Thurmond, a staunch white supremacist who fiercely advocated against integration in the South, approached Reverend Powell, Jr. in an attempt to convince King to disassociate himself from Rustin. Bayard Rustin had been arrested for lewd sex acts in San Diego, California, in 1953, after being caught having sex with two white men in a car. He served 60 days in jail, and his arrest garnered public attention. With this as ammunition, Thurmond

¹⁷⁴ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, Pg. 14.

threatened to leak to the press evidence proving that Rustin was homosexual. Additionally, in collusion with Powell, Jr., Senator Thurmond would spread the lie that Rustin and King were having a secret sexual relationship.

In fear of this untruth, King, under the advice of other council members involved with the march, asked Rustin to step aside, and King would later disassociate himself from him.¹⁷⁵ In this way, Thurmond and Powell used Rustin's sexuality to enforce sexual morality and perpetuate the myth of black sexual deviancy. They also used this as a way to heighten the fear of black sexual immorality, which had already marred black people. Respectability politics not only pushed the likes of Rustin off the stage of Civil Rights activism, they also consigned him to the *House of Disgust*.

Disgust and Bodily Functions: The Sexual Proclivities and "Disgusting" Sex Habits of Black Gay Men

What one does with one's body during sex includes the acts in which a person participates. These acts differ between men and women and their particular sexual proclivities, and in the illicit sexual acts between black gay men who have sex with other men. Sex acts between those men include, but are not limited to, masturbation, anal and oral sex, and rimming. Of course, this is not to say that white gay men do not engage in the same sexual acts, or that their sex acts are not illicit. However, as I further explore black gay men's bodies in this chapter, sexuality and racial identity are policed and critiqued in a manner which upholds the narrative

¹⁷⁵ See, Bayard Rustin, *Time on Two Crosses – The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. by Devon W. Carbado and Don Weise, (New York, NY: Cleis Press, 2003). Rustin writes about his experience in the essay, "*Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement: An Interview with Open Hands*." He further details his relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr., and how they were close friends, including him being an advisor to King. They would later mend their relationship after King asked him to step aside from the March on Washington, and King would share with him that it was one of his gravest mistakes in asking Rustin to step aside.

that black people—and especially black men—are deviant, diseased, hypersexual, and immoral. As a result, the sex acts described above place black gay men in the *House of Disgust*, precisely because of the orifices engaged, as well as the intimate touching of another man.

Scholar and law professor William Ian Miller specializes in emotions and self-attention. He works through the idea of disgust in order to help ground emotional investments and what these emotions do to the body and thought. Miller critically examines disgust through orifices and bodily waste. He argues: “Disgust names a syndrome in which all of these terms have their proper role. They all convey a strong sense of aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect, or pollute by proximity, contact, or ingestion. All suggest the appropriateness, but not the necessity, of accompanying nausea or queasiness, or of an urge to recoil and shudder from creepiness.”¹⁷⁶

In the context of this chapter, disgust frames black gay men’s sexuality and practices, rendering what they do in and through bodily orifices as a matter of contamination, infection, pollution, and danger because of the sexual practices associated with the mouth and anus, which include anal penetration, fellatio, rimming, and any act involving orifices of the mouth and anus for sexual pleasure. Miller states, “I need not spell out just how contaminating, how disgusting, the anus is. It is the essence of lowness, of untouchability, and so it must be hemmed in with prohibitions. The anus is to be properly only an exit for foodstuffs that first entered via the mouth.”¹⁷⁷ The sex and sexuality of black gay men are equally situated in the bowels of society. Men engaging in sex with other men are outside the boundaries of heterosexual norms and are *bottoms* to the hierarchal *tops*. Although sexual desire and pleasure are conditional on culture,

¹⁷⁶ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), Pg. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, Pg. 100.

which constructs and relegates sexual relations between males and females, there exist many men and women who cannot imagine nor participate in same-sex desires or sex acts.

The father of psychoanalysis, Dr. Sigmund Freud, probes deeply into heterosexual and homosexual desire and sex in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. There, he affirms sexuality and sexual desire between men and men and women and women. He asserts that men are attracted to men and women to women. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with same-sex attractions, Western notional binaries such as male and female, or homosexual and heterosexual—and especially normalcies and abnormalities—morally position sexual identities and practices within the spheres of “natural” or “against nature.” As Freud argues, “There is continuity rather than discontinuity between homo- and heterosexual object choice, in that everyone has both homosexual and heterosexual libidinal attachments in his or her unconsciousness, and that heterosexual object is just as restricted in choice and aim as homosexual.”¹⁷⁸ Given the restrictive field of nature, Freud’s claim of libidinal continuity in sexualities comes under the repressive—i.e., restrictive—weight of social and cultural norms regulating proper sexuality by what is deemed natural. Freud helps to move the needle on sexualities from the exclusionary binaries between man and woman, and even man and man and woman and woman. He argues that sexual desire and sexuality are fluid. They are not stagnant in any particular gender expression. Rather, sexual expression and sexuality are non-restrictive and open-ended in both genders. If we free ourselves and explore the realms of our unconsciousness, one can only imagine the sexual freedom of full self-expression. This would not only be liberating to heteronormative persons, but also to homosexual persons. The yoke upon black gay men could also be loosened—at least in terms of their sexuality.

¹⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1962), Pg. viii.

Preaching Against Homosexuality and the Deviant Sexual Behaviors
of Gay Men

In a sermon, Reverend Dr. James Manning preached that he had a word of prophecy for all sodomites and gays; namely, “God is going to put a burden; God is going to put a cancer in the buttohole. God is going to put a cancer in the buttohole of every sodomite. Every sodomite buttohole, everyone that practices sodomy from the day of this message will get cancer in the buttohole. It will burn, and burn, and burn...This the Lord’s Word, this is God’s Word!”¹⁷⁹

Manning, like so many preachers before him, equates homosexuality with a sex act in which men engage, and, unfortunately, he relegates it to the anus. In this way, the sexuality of gay men is reduced to an act, what they do with and through the anus. When black gay men are tied to the anus, they lose their humanity, their identities as black men. Miller argues, “It [the anus] is the essence of lowness, of untouchability, and so it must be hemmed in with prohibitions. The anus is to be properly only an exit for foodstuffs that first entered via the mouth.”¹⁸⁰

Pastor Martin Ssempha of the African state of Uganda made headlines in 2010 when he showed graphic gay pornography to church members during the church service. His anti-homosexual rhetoric was in response to the country’s Anti-Homosexuality Act, which was signed into law in February 2014. During the service, he described to the crowd what gay men do with one another during sex including, fisting and anal licking. Ssempha preached that, “One of the things they do is called anal licking; a man’s anus is licked like this by the other person, like ice cream, and then what happens, the poo-poo [excrement] comes out and then they eat the

¹⁷⁹ YouTube, Pastor David Manning, David Manning and the Buttohole Flames of the Homosexuals, July 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f61zsLFQWRc>.

¹⁸⁰ Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Pg. 100.

poo-poo. The other thing they do is that they have a sex practice called fisting where they insert their hand into the other man's anus, all the way; it is so painful they have to take drugs, but they enjoy it.”¹⁸¹ Ssempha went further: “We do not want this sickness, this is sick, and it is therefore deviant, and that we do not want.”¹⁸² In order to normalize the black politics of respectability over black men's sexualities, black preachers similarly use imagined abominable ideas of sex acts to denigrate and demean black gay men. Black gay men employ what is, to the preachers' minds, horrific ideals of sexual intimacy, in turn making these acts vile, violent, and disgusting, never acknowledging that heterosexuals also practice any or all of these sex acts, including anal sex, fellatio, rimming, and fisting, as well as acts involving orifices like the mouth. Still, disdain and disgust appear most attached to gay men who engage in such practices.

Visibility of homosexual men—or rather, white homosexual men—increased after the 1950s Kinsey study piqued public curiosity.¹⁸³ In 1967, a CBS documentary called *The Homosexuals*, featuring journalist Mike Wallace, aired on network television in an attempt to provide insights and in-depth probing into the homosexual man. On it, Wallace stated, “The dilemma of the homosexual: told by the medical profession he is sick, by the law that he's a criminal, shunned by employers, rejected by heterosexual society. He is incapable of fulfilling a relationship with a woman, or for that matter with a man. At the center of his life, he remains anonymous. A displaced person. An outsider.”¹⁸⁴ One may rightly surmise that, if this was the

¹⁸¹ Huffington Post, ‘Eat the Poo-Poo’ Anti-Gay Pastor in Hot Water for Ironic Reason, February 2, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/25/uganda-anti-gay-martin-ssempha_n_5213571.html.

¹⁸² Huffington Post, ‘Eat the Poo-Poo’ Anti-Gay Pastor in Hot Water for Ironic Reason, February 2, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/25/uganda-anti-gay-martin-ssempha_n_5213571.html.

¹⁸³ Kinsey study and Report, Kinsey Institute, <https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/historical-report-diversity-of-sexual-orientation.php>.

¹⁸⁴ YouTube, *The Homosexual – A CBS Report*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu1r6igCODw>, March 7, 1967.

discourse surrounding white homosexual men—rejected by society, sick, criminal, shunned by employers, displaced, and an outsider—what then of black gay men? These same signifiers have and continue to designate black men; in fact, they are compounded onto them. These men are fetishized en masse, and are mythologized as sexually virile. Allegedly, they have elongated penises, and are denounced as lazy, promiscuous, and irresponsible. They are prone toward alcohol and drug addictions, violence, and crime.

The discourse surrounding black male identity and sexuality heightened in the Civil Rights Era and the post-Civil Rights Era. Most notably, after the infamous Moynihan Report, black men were the feature of the day, the threat of the black family, and the expanding visibility of black homosexuals posed new threats to the black community. The national discourse in the black community centered on saving and respecting the Black man and maintaining the politics of respectability for the black family, with black men leading this charge. In August 1972, *Ebony* dedicated a special issue titled “The Black Male,” which featured articles such as “Man Child in a Woman’s World,” “The Young Black Man,” “The Black Man As Movie Hero,” “The Liberated Black Man,” and, its featured article, “Sex and The Black Male” by noted black professor of psychology, Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D.

Dr. Poussaint demystified and debunked the myth of the black male machismo as a sexual fantasy. He worked to reconstruct a new imagery of black men by unraveling sexual constructs that hampered and belied black men as sexual deviants, with large phalluses and a penchant for white women. Dr. Poussaint writes:

Today, many black men are changing their self-image and their social behavior. Fewer of them are neurotically bound by the need to prove themselves as studs, and blacks who felt a need to suppress their sexuality to avoid appearing like the stereotype are now loosening up. The aspiring black middle-class man who had to give the appearance of a non-threatening eunuch to succeed in white society is rapidly disappearing. Black men are no longer afraid to take a second look at an

attractive white woman in the presence of whites. No more do they fear arrest or castration for the crime of “reckless eyeballing” at white women. Nonetheless, our society’s abuse of black males’ psyche has given them their share of sexual problems.¹⁸⁵

Dr. Poussaint notes the healthy virility of black male sexuality, such that black men are able to reclaim their sexual identities without threat or punishment. In his article, black men are reclaimed from stereotypes as rapists, deviants, or sexual supermen. However, it is noteworthy that they are not reclaimed from a black male sexuality overrepresented by compulsory heteronormativity. Poussaint makes no mention of gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning black men’s sexual identities. The black gay man was not a factor for consideration, being that they were grouped with white homosexual men. They were instead destined for the *House of Disgust*.

Charles Darwin and William Ian Miller on Disgust and the Savagery in Man

Disgust is a feeling of repulsion or profound disapproval about by something unpleasant or offensive. Etymologically, the word originates in the 1590s from Middle French, “desgoust,” meaning a strong dislike, repugnance, and literal distaste. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin expounds on disgust as it relates to the rejection of food and taste:

The term “disgust,” in its simplest sense, means something offensive to the taste. It is curious how readily this feeling is excited by anything unusual in the appearance, odor, or nature of our food. In Tierra del Fuego a native touched with his finger some cold preserved meat which I was eating at our bivouac, and plainly showed utter disgust at its softness; whilst I felt utter disgust at my food being touched by a naked savage, though his hands did not appear dirty. A smear of soup on a man’s beard looks disgusting, though there is of course nothing disgusting in the soup itself. I presume that this follows from the strong

¹⁸⁵ Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., “*Sex and the Black Male*,” in *Ebony Magazine*, special issue, *The Black Male*, August, 1972, https://books.google.com/books?id=VNoDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

association in our minds between the sight of food, however circumstanced, and the idea of eating it.¹⁸⁶

Darwin and his supplement to the etymology of disgust elaborates on bad taste, and, in particular, an unpleasant desire related to food. Moreover, disgust may be also correlated with displeasure relating to sight and touch.

Darwin notes seeing food out of place on one's face. The food is not where it should be, which is in the mouth, but is out of place, in someone's beard. The thought of food not being where it should be creates the sensation of disgust. Visually, the sight of food not being in its proper place disgusted Darwin. When one physically touched his food, as in the case of the "naked savage" who placed his fingers in Darwin's plate of food, this too was repulsive to him. Having one's hands in one's food, not knowing where those hands have previously been, created a physical response: Darwin curled away and frowned upon it. What is clear is that Darwin does not take into consideration that it was the same "savage's" hands that prepared his food. However, Darwin was not merely disgusted by anything that was out of place, but equally by things out of the ordinary, out of sight, or displeasing to the eye; e.g., the food in the beard, the naked savage, and his putting his fingers in Darwin's food. These, too, are disgusting. The naked savage who touched his food was not only repulsive to him, but so was the savage himself—as Darwin literally uses the terms "naked" and "savage." These terms indicate a judgment based on physical appearance. The nakedness of the "poor savage" and his food being touched by the savage signifies the savage's depravity, and Darwin's estimation of his race, origin, culture, and virtue are relative to Western civilization. Darwin could not escape his own modern instincts to remind the reader of the state of the primitive savage.

¹⁸⁶ Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, (New York, NY: University Press, 1989), Pgs. 256-257.

Miller argues that the naked savage falls under “categories of bodily shame, naked vs. clothed, and broader categories of group definition such as ‘Tierra del Fuego vs. England’ and ‘us vs. them.’”¹⁸⁷ The positionality of Darwin over the savage indicates varied categories of status and race, cultured and uncultured, civilized and uncivilized, clean and dirty, and pure and impure. Darwin sat in a position of authority even outside his own cultural and civilized world. He demanded manners and civility despite recognizing his own privileges within the world of the savage. It was not the savage who was out of place, uncivilized, uncultured, or impure, but Darwin, who was, in many ways, a savage to the savage. Miller continues, “For Darwin, it is not just that someone touched his food, but that the person doing the touching was a naked savage who had already offended him.... The native, however, gets too close and gives real offense, and the inkling of threat is enough to transform a complacent contempt into disgust.”¹⁸⁸ The sight of the naked savage is what disgusted Darwin, not the food. Similarly, it was the sight of the soup, smeared and dribbling, on the man’s beard that was disgusting. Thus, these sightings were unpleasant to the eye and ethically offensive.

Like the savage, many early thinkers were steadfast in the notion that enslaved black people were offensive, undesirable, unwanted, and unsightly “Others” in America. They were unpleasing to the fabric and construct of the country. Gunnar Myrdal points out that “The Negro was [considered] a heathen and a barbarian, an outcast among the peoples of the earth, a descendent of Noah’s son Ham, cursed by God himself and doomed to be a servant forever on account of an ancient sin.”¹⁸⁹ The construct of blackness as a despised, grotesque “Other” was

¹⁸⁷ Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Pg. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, Pg. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Myrdal, Gunnar, “*Racial Beliefs in America*,” in Les Back and John Solomos, *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, Routledge Student Readers. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), Pg. 87.

created in comparison to the standards and tastes of whiteness; this is quite evident in descriptive statements on “the negro” by Immanuel Kant, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Thomas Jefferson, and many others.¹⁹⁰ In particular, it was an idea predicated on the notion of white male heteronormative patriarchal thought and imagination, which align with the paradigmatic structure of patriarchy and domination.

Miller likens disgust to an emotion. Like emotions, which are akin to our functions and motives for action, disgust is part and parcel to our character and personality traits, to how we view ourselves and the world in which we live and engage with one another. Miller posits, “Disgust is a feeling about something and in response to something, not just raw unattached feeling... Disgust necessarily involves particular thoughts, characteristically very intrusive and unriddable thoughts about the repugnance of that which it objects.”¹⁹¹ Disgust, as an emotion, entices a sensory response to and feelings about something or someone. Miller concludes that a feeling of disgust, even though highly physiologically effective and visceral, is nevertheless an emotion “connected to ideas, perceptions, and cognitions and to the social and cultural context in which it makes sense to have those feelings and ideas.”¹⁹² According to Miller, “Disgust undoubtedly involves taste, but it also involves—not just by extension but at its core—smell, touch, even at times sight and hearing.”¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ See, Immanuel Kant, “*Of The Different Human Races*,” in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, (New York: NY, Hackett Publishing, 2000). See, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “*On The Natural Variety of Mankind*,” in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, (New York: NY, Hackett Publishing, 2000). See, Thomas Jefferson, “*The Difference Is Fixed in Nature*,” in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997).

¹⁹¹ Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Pg. 8.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, Pg. 8.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, Pg. 2.

Psychologist Paul Rozin defines this as “animal-reminder” disgust. This category of disgust includes violations of the bodily integrity, such as amputations, disfigurements, and injuries, as well as sexual deviations and hygienic concerns. That is, deviations from well-established standards of cleanliness and purity, and the ways in which we perceive our cultural ideals, behaviors, and perceptions of things cause a visceral and emotive reaction when things appear out of order. As Rozin posits, “We fear recognizing our animality because we fear that, like animals, we are mortal. We thus attempt to hide the animality of our biological processes by defining specifically human ways to perform them.”¹⁹⁴ When visceral associations are correlated with the imagination or the ideological cultural formation within a heteronormative and heterosexual narrative, the emotions, thoughts, and ideas about the primal origins of disgust are confirmed in the senses of smell, taste, and touch. The black gay man is associated with all things unclean, immoral, deviant, and unmentionable. He is out of place of heteronormativity and heterosexuality because of his homosexuality and the sex acts he engages in. These acts are considered vile, dirty, and repulsive because they are not sustained within the heteronormative and heterosexual imagination. The black gay man is not only out of place, but also ousted from society and the black community.

Under the guise of heterosexuality, the penis is strictly used for reproductive purposes and for sex acts between a man and woman. However, when the function of the penis falls outside its normative notion, when it is used for male-to-male anal pleasure and desire, the penis is then associated with excrement—the anus and defecation. The homosexual is conflated with the idea, the thought, and the image of defecation. Two men engaged in sex acts that are peculiar

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Haidt, Paul Rozin, Clark Mccauley, Sumio Imada, “*Body, Psyche, and Culture: The Relationship Between Disgust and Morality*,” in *Psychology and Developing Societies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1997, Pg. 113.

and disruptive to heterosexual discourse on normative sex acts are framed in judgments issued by Pastors Manning and Ssempha: Unclean! Deviant! Ungodly! When such judgments are confined to homosexual men, heterosexual people discount their own sex acts and project the idea of disgust toward homosexual men.

There are, of course, heterosexuals who engage in anal sex. Yet the narrative of disgust is usually confined to homosexual men. Furthermore, it is important to note that sexual disgust is not to be noted exclusively among heteronormative and heterosexual people; there exists, even among black gay men, repulsion of the idea of anal sex and the potential of touching excrement during sex. Thus, they may alternatively choose mutual masturbation or oral sex. These sex acts protect them not only from the potential of encountering fecal matter during sex, but also of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Although repulsed by the idea of engaging in anal sex, these men may exhibit homophobic fears, though the term is usually associated with heteronormative heterosexuals.

Examining Heteronormativity and Homophobia: Attitudes on Homosexuality in a Heteronormative Society

Heteronormativity assumes that relationships between men and women are normative. In some heteronormative and heterosexual discourses, many exhibit homophobia or heterosexist stances toward homosexuals. The word “homophobia” was coined in 1972 by psychotherapist Dr. George Weinberg. He defined it as “the dread of being in close quarters with a homosexual—and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing.”¹⁹⁵ Heterosexual- and homosexual-identified persons dread being close to, or even knowing homosexual persons, often

¹⁹⁵ George Weinberg, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1974), Pg. 4.

finding them *disgusting* and abhorrent because of their sexuality and sex acts. According to religion scholar Olive Elaine Hinnant, however, this response toward homosexuals “is an irrational fear or hatred of homosexual people. It includes oneself, and the fear of any behavior in oneself that might be interpreted as homosexual. It is a form of prejudice and discrimination.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, homophobia is not the sole possession of heterosexuals, but may also show itself among homosexual men who fear being identified or closely associated with other homosexuals for fear of being “out-ed” or homosexual-identified.

Scholars have furthered the discourse on homophobia, noting the idea of heterosexism as “a reasoned system of bias regarding sexual orientation. It denotes prejudice against bisexual and, especially, homosexual people. By describing it as a reasoned system of prejudice we do not mean to imply that it is rationally defensible...it is rooted in a largely cognitive constellation of beliefs about human sexuality.”¹⁹⁷ Heterosexism in this regard is about privilege and special provisions that come with being a member of the dominant sexual orientation group.¹⁹⁸ Horace Griffin, whose work has been devoted to the religious lives of black gay and lesbian church members discussed above, extends this description to what he calls, “heterosexual supremacy.”¹⁹⁹ He defines heterosexual supremacy “as any practice that values individuals solely on the basis of their sexual attraction toward the opposite sex and offers them and their relationships merits on that basis over and against homosexuals and their relationships. As white

¹⁹⁶ Olive Elaine Hinnant, *God Comes Out: A Queer Homiletic*, (Cleveland OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007), Pg. 26.

¹⁹⁷ Patricia Beattie Jung and Ralph E. Smith, *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge*, (New York: NY, State University of New York Press, 1993), Pg. 13.

¹⁹⁸ Hinnant, *God Comes Out*, Pg. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Horace Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), Pg. 19, footnote.

supremacy is defined as valuing whiteness over and against blackness, I define heterosexual supremacy as its sexual equivalent.”²⁰⁰ The term “heterosexual supremacy” helps to account for homophobic assaults on homosexual men from heteronormative-inclined heterosexuals based solely on the men’s sexual identities and sex acts.

Homophobia among heterosexist people intensifies based on their perceptions of homosexual men, whom they may see as immoral, impure, and diseased—especially black gay men. Fear of homophobia has increased among black gay men and has been intensified by the media, because black gay men have been painted broadly as carriers of pathogenic organisms, viruses, and diseases, particularly Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). As a result, HIV has become synonymous with black gay men. And, in heteronormative imaginings, HIV equals death. This is part of the reason for homophobia, and why many believe that homosexuals are vile and deviant beings: gay men are presumed to have unprotected sex and will spread HIV to anyone because they engage in unnatural sex acts which involve the penis and anus.

Additionally, there are many black homosexual men who also have a heightened fear of contracting viruses and diseases from other black gay men. Many use protective measures to ensure that they do not fall victim to sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, such fears are not without reason; according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), black gay men have the highest infectious rate in contracting HIV, despite preventative measures many of them take, and the myriad resources extended to black gay men.²⁰¹ However, heterosexual persons exhibit heterosexism against black gay men because they view them as

²⁰⁰ See, Horace Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, Pg. 19, footnote.

²⁰¹ Website, Centers for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/msm/bmsm.html>, Page last updated: February 4, 2019.

unnatural in their sexual behaviors and acts, which, to their minds, are the sites of contact and contraction of deadly diseases—a fulfillment of Pastor Manning’s prophecies.

How does the idea of contamination work itself into our imaginative and visual experiences? Philosopher Aurel Kolnai answers that visual sensation grasps an object more comprehensively and in a more fully constituted way: “It represents the object’s features more clearly and thus it is capable of bringing up the imaginative powers of other sensations.”²⁰² To be repulsed by the mere sight of an object is to be disgusted by it through association with the other senses. Imagining two men engaged in sexual intercourse disrupts the heterosexual ideology of normative sex between a man and a woman. The image arouses an aversion because of the prescribed norms, despite the fact that the senses (smell, taste, and touch) are not involved in such a situation. The visual representation presupposes the imaginative working of the other senses. Experiencing someone openly gay or learning that someone is gay activates all sorts of repulsive and sordid images in the heterosexual imagination about what their sex acts entail. Despite the fact that heterosexuals themselves may indulge in similar sex acts, it is the thought of two men engaged in these sex acts that disgusts them.

Race and Disgust: The Construction of Black Identity

Under White Patriarchy

To move beyond the connection of disgust with that of food and oral consumption, I turn to Immanuel Kant for whom the idea of disgust encompasses ethical conditions. He explicates the concept of disgust in examining its aesthetic implications in artistic representation. Very briefly, Kant gives an analysis of disgust in *The Critique of Judgment*:

²⁰² Aurel Kolnai, *On Disgust*, (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2004), Pg. 48.

Beautiful art shows its superiority in this, that it describes as beautiful things which may be in nature ugly or displeasing.... There is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature, without destroying all aesthetical satisfaction and consequently artificial beauty; viz. that which excites disgust. For in this singular sensation, which rests on mere imagination, the object is represented as it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment while we strive against it with all our might.²⁰³

For Kant, it is the disruption of beauty in art that is a fracture in beauty itself or in nature. And this fracture simulates ugliness, which is displeasing to the eye or to one's sense of the aesthetic. It is an artificial beauty, a duplication that is unlike the original, unlike its natural order, which excites disgust. Kant further argues: "A natural beauty is a beautiful thing; artificial beauty is a beautiful representation of a thing."²⁰⁴ Yet, anything that does not capture the beautiful, in either its natural or artificial state, is an object obtruding, stabbing into the senses of our jointures of pleasure only to have us push against what is displeasing and vile to our senses, or what disrupts our satisfaction. Similar to Darwin and his experience of disgust, vis-à-vis sight and emotion, Kant explores the artistic expression via the visual experience through art and beauty, and its implications of disgust. Disgust, however, is not triggered merely through the senses of taste and smell, but also through visual perception.

In Kant's essay, "On The Differences of Race," one can arguably assess the visual and moral measure of Kant and his account of disgust toward black people. He argues that there are four categories of root genii of races, the first race being the Noble blond (Northern Europeans); the second is the Copper red race; the third as the Black (Senegambia) race; and the fourth is the Olive-yellow (Asian-Indians) race. The "Black" race is third and not in equal standing with the Noble blond race. Kant further argues that all the races have distinct characteristics that are

²⁰³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), Pgs. 194-195.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, Pg. 194.

unique to their kind. What distinguishes the “Blacks” are their traits, such as thick noses and fatty lips, oily skin, and an inclination toward a humid and dry climate. Kant posits: “In short, all of these factors account for the origin of the Negro, who is well-suited to his climate, namely, strong, fleshy, and agile. However, because he is so amply supplied by his motherland, he is also lazy, indolent, and dawdling.”²⁰⁵ We can conclude that, for Kant in his elaboration of the nature of races, and his positioning of the white race over and beyond all others, his idea about the production of beauty by the white race can only be idealized for him as natural and superior. The “Black” race of peoples, with their oily skins, thick noses, fatty lips, dawdling nature, and indolent dispositions, inclines Kant toward aesthetic disgust and abhorrence of blackness as antithetical to white standards of beauty.

For Kant, the fact that black people are the sight and site of disgust is evident in their skin, and their locales both inside and beyond Africa. Blackness is repulsive and disdainful; especially black skin, which emits foul odors and is grossly unpleasant. The sight of black flesh caused white slave holders to have such an emotional reaction that they subjected their slaves to beatings, often snatching and grabbing their black skins in the attempt to remove it from the body, or eradicate it from their presence.²⁰⁶

Black gay men and their sexuality trigger similar emotions of repulsion, dislike, displeasure, and disdain in the heterosexist imagination, and these emotions translate into judgments: *ugly, nasty, filthy, displeasing, and abomination*. These value terms become fixtures attached to black gay men’s identities, thus demarcating their lives, their identities, and their

²⁰⁵ Immanuel Kant, “*Of The Different Human Races*,” in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, (New York: NY, Hackett Publishing, 2000), Pg. 17.

²⁰⁶ See, Hortense Spillers, *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe*, in *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). Spillers’ concept of “pornotrope” and the flesh.

aesthetics. All of these aspects of the black gay man's profile stand under the suspicion of the heterosexist gaze, for they fall outside acceptable heterosexual and heteronormative sexual norms. According to Miller, these norms are authorized by vaginal sex between women and men, since the vagina is considered the normative and material gateway for heteronormative sex. Of the anus, Miller says: "Yet more than any other orifice it is the gate that protects the inviolability, the autonomy, of males and indirectly of females too."²⁰⁷ Thus, the anus is a violation, something that is off limits for intrusion or penetration, even among heterosexual persons. Men who engage in anal sex with other men are thus believed to be violating a space, a sacredness that protects the autonomy of human dignity. Miller's discussion is worth quoting at length:

If one of the key notions underpinning the feminine is accessibility via penetrability, and the corresponding notion for the masculine is inviolability via impenetrability, then the female anus may not bear the surcharge of significance the male one does. Women expect a certain amount of penetration as coming with the territory of femaleness. It is a necessary condition of the most definitive female action: parturition. Because women's bodies are penetrable by design, the issue about where the penetration is to take place is one about the propriety of location rather than about the issue of penetrability per se. The female anus can never be her vagina; it is at best a backup, a second stringer, but a male's anus is his only vagina; penetrable and capable in a sense made thinkable by Freud, of giving birth, with feces as the baby.²⁰⁸

Miller notes that the anus for females serves as a secondary inlet of penetration for sexual purposes, but it is not a second vagina, and, as such, may be regarded as taboo, but only with respect to its use as a "a second stringer." However, penetration of the anuses of males violates the inviolability of the anus as "the gate that protects the inviolability, the autonomy, of males and indirectly of females too," as Miller argues above. The problematics of Miller's argument are heterosexist in nature; first, in prescribing the female body as penetrable by design for male

²⁰⁷ Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Pg. 100.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 101.

desire and purpose. This raises a serious question of the agency and viability of women to have ownership of their own bodies, and the ways in which they may choose to engage or forego sex with men. Second, the female vagina does not hold the *propriety of location* simply because, as he argues, it serves the purpose for male penetration, but can be of use for varied purposes that are not exclusively sexual, or for men. Using terms such as “propriety” delineates the woman’s body to a heteronormative ideal, and moral obligation for heteronormative hegemonic patriarchal norms of reproduction. Miller falls victim to his own privileging of sexual norms, and unfortunately, it relegates sex and sexual practices—mainly anal sex—to the very argument he seeks to unhinge: the *House of Disgust*. In Miller’s argument, Black gay men have no autonomy in their sexual desires or pleasures, and, unfortunately, neither do women. This also says a great deal about his ideologies of heterosexual male sex acts and anal penetration.

As Miller states, most heterosexual men see anal penetration as a violation of not only their manhood, but of their bodily integrity, the anus not being designed for penetration. Miller presupposes that penetration with females comes with the territory of their femaleness, thus playing into binaries of male and female. Vaginal sex is a highly policed territory, a socially scripted performance that leaves gay men on the periphery of sex acts, if not negating them all together. According to Miller, their sex acts are associated with excrement, in reference to Freud’s judgment. Miller essentially leaves homosexual sex in the lowness of the bowels. If homosexuals are on the bottom of the spectrum when it comes to sex acts and sexual identity, then black gay men are bottomed *out* at the intersection of race and sexuality, and locked into the *House of Disgust*.

Conclusion

The racial and sexual identities of black gay men are often synonymous with their sexual acts. These acts mark them as deviants who have no respect for the moral integrity of their bodies, a dogma affirmed in the sexual gender teachings of the Black Church. We have seen this happen with preachers and pastors like Jamal Bryant, James Manning, and Martin Ssempha. These black preachers hold up black gay men as anathema to black heterosexual values and morals. This tension hinges on the need to create black gay men as the “Other,” pushed out of the heteronormative discourse of societal mores regarding male-female relationships. Black gay men are targets for religious hate speech. Their identities and sexual behaviors are situated in immorality and sexual contamination. When faced with ideologies that speak against their identities and their humanity, black gay men are at the bottom of the hierarchal order of heteronormativity, and the gender sexual politics of male and female norms. They become the stink of the bowels of society. They are consigned to the *House of Disgust*.

Disgust is part of the culture of heteronormative ideologies of male and female, moral and immoral, good and evil, pure and impure, and natural and unnatural, as heteronormative persons develop into various societies, groups, and communities. Disgust is inherently passed on from one generation to the next, making it part of our tastes and standards. Ultimately, it forms part of one’s cognitive and affective personality. Anthropologist Mary Douglas’ discussion on dirt and purity is informative for the ways that dirt adds to the furnishings that fill the *House of Disgust* to which black gay men have been consigned. Dirt, she has argued, is free associated with pollution, contamination, and disgust because “our idea of dirt is dominated by the knowledge of pathogenic organisms.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (New York: NY, Routledge Classics, 2002), Pg. 35.

These pathogenic organisms are viruses, diseases, and parasites that no one wishes to pass from one to another. As a result, dirt is something people wish not to play with or work in, much less put into their mouths, have on their bodies and clothing, or eat in their foods. Dirt is synonymous with the unclean and the impure. It soils and defiles whatever comes in contact with it. As Douglas argues, “If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place.”²¹⁰ When dirt is not outside, on the ground where it belongs, it must be cleansed, washed, or eradicated. The cleansing removes the dirt, returning the soiled object to its original pristine state of whiteness.

Analogously, black gay men are in need cleansing, which is the message resounding from Black Church leaders such as Manning, Bryant, and Ssempe. In religious atonement, cleansing is done either by baptism or prayers of forgiveness: “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool’”²¹¹ In order to be restored to whiteness—i.e., sexual purity—black homosexual males are urged to repent, deny themselves, and ask God for forgiveness. This was the painful testimony of many of the men participating in the Brothers United support group. This is the cost they are to pay in order to be restored to the Christian family; namely, to deny themselves and their sexuality, and to repent of their sinful sexual practices—otherwise, the consequence for persisting in sin is eternal torment. There is no salvation without repentance, and no deliverance without the confession of sins. Turning over their “lifestyle” to the boundary of the Black Church’s sexual politics of respectability is a

²¹⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Pg. 35.

²¹¹ Isaiah 1:18 (New Revised King James Version).

decision to choose Christ, and this decision requires “the mortification” of the flesh, according to the Black Church. Without repentance, the men remain consigned to the *House of Disgust*.

Over the past few years, many black gay men have expressed the importance of reclaiming their lives, identities, and, more importantly, their sexuality. They have turned to one of the most prolific writers of our time to help them re-envision themselves in the black community, the Black Church, and in society. This figure is James Baldwin. The discovery of Baldwin’s writings, messages, and speeches have given black gay men a new voice in articulating the conflict many have experienced in their personal lives concerning their racial and sexual identities. As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the resurgence of Baldwin has created a renewal of *being* and *presencing* for black people; but, more importantly for black gay men. The next chapter will explore Baldwin, his prophetic immanence, and what this means for black gay men as they stake their claims in the world. What does Baldwin mean for black gay men in relation to the Black Church, the black community? In my attempt to answer this question, exploring Baldwin’s gender sexual politics is important, as there are many complexities to his life, especially in terms of his racial and sexual identities. Like many black gay men today, Baldwin faced much criticism for his gender sexual politics; yet, he would challenge many of these with a veracity of power, truth, and love—not only for himself, but for others. The following chapter takes up what happens when black religious rhetoric filters into the public arena, and impacts Baldwin’s role within the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, it discusses how Baldwin engages the discourse of masculinity on the world stage in his essay, “Here Be Dragons.” He looks critically at America and its ideal of manhood, only to turn it on its head, debating whether the nation’s ideology of masculinity is really what we believe it is, or merely an illusion of what we wish it to be.

CHAPTER V

ONE BEING SANCTIFIED “OUT”: PROPHETIC IMMANENCE

IN THE HOUSE OF JAMES BALDWIN

Introduction

On the popular Fox Network television show, *Empire*, which drew millions of viewers because of its hip-hop themed storyline, the Lyon family is a black family who runs a record label and business. The family has many unique dynamics, including drama, drug addictions, sex, violence, and music. However, many viewers tune in because it features an openly gay actor, Jussie Smollett, playing an openly gay recording artist, Jamal Lyon, the son of Lucious and Cookie Lyon. Lucious is a ruthless former drug dealer who used his profits to found the record label. He and Cookie have three sons, and Jamal, the middle child, aspires to leave his mark on the world as a vocalist. In the process, he struggles to find a place, not only in his family, but in the world as an openly gay R&B singer. The dynamics between Jamal and Lucious are tense because his father refuses to accept his son’s homosexuality.

In one episode, Jamal has a flashback from his childhood. His father, outraged by his coming down the stairs dressed in his mother’s clothing, snatches him up and tosses him into the garbage.²¹² As a gay man watching, I cringed during this scene, because of the many stories black gay men have shared with me about how their fathers, mothers, and other family members disowned them for being gay, or for the suspicion that they were gay. The scene from *Empire* is a reality known all too well by black gay men. The relationship between Lucious and Jamal

²¹² *Empire*, Season 1 Episode 1, “Pilot,” Fox Network, January 2015.

oscillates between love and hate, but more often on the side of hate, with Lucious despising Jamal's sexuality.

In another episode, Jamal is in the recording studio with a closeted gay producer, D-Major, and they are getting close. Lucious walks in, causing D-Major to pretend that it was Jamal who was making a pass at him. The situation throws Lucious into a homophobic rage. Frustrated, Jamal screams to his father that all he ever wanted was for Lucious to accept and love him for who he is. In response, Lucious says, "I've listened to you and I've tried to be tolerable to something that is intolerable to my nature.... You just keep throwing this unnatural way of life in my face. I try to talk to you as a man, but all you do is turn into some little girl." Jamal responds, "Well, you're always telling me, Jamal, don't be a sissy bitch. And, for me to put it in my music." Lucious glares at Jamal and violently spews, "You ain't nothing to me but a disappointment. And the day you die from AIDS, I'm going to celebrate."²¹³

For many black gay men, such an experience is also a reality. James Baldwin shared some of these realities in his seminal essay, "Here Be Dragons," from the collected nonfiction work *The Price of the Ticket*. With this in mind, this chapter explores the essay in depth, where Baldwin addresses themes of masculinity, sexuality, and sex through the lens of the American ideal of manhood. Baldwin makes use of the gender-bending image of "androgyny," the freak, and how androgyny permeates every man and woman. In this essay, Baldwin is callously forthcoming. He opens the proverbial closet and *drags out* the American ideal of manhood with severe implications for what defines manhood, all while centering himself—someone who has been categorized as a freak and an "Other"—within the discourse of manhood and sexuality.

²¹³ *Empire*, Season 2 Episode 17, "Rise by Sin," Fox Network, May 2016.

This chapter examines the reasons for Baldwin's emerging prophetic immanence for black gay men, which is based largely on how he transformed understandings of race, sexuality, and gender. This dissertation does not seek to position, underwrite, or overwrite Baldwin as iconographic or god-like. This work does not intend to make Baldwin a god, or a Jesus character who transcends humanity. Rather, it examines Baldwin on his terms, along with the prophetic immanence of his work for racial and social justice. This work is also not an idolization of Baldwin, for he was and remains a complex figure. This dissertation, however, asserts a certain prophetic immanence that has become his legacy: an immanence that includes, yet exists as a surplus of meaning beyond the complexities of his gender and sexual politics. This dissertation also works to recognize Baldwin's presence and immanence for black gay men who seek spiritual and soul nourishment, and to better understand the ways Baldwin so widely influences black intellectual and cultural discourse.

Although he knew he was a black gay man, Baldwin worked to redefine the terms "gay" and "homosexual," requiring that we delve deeper into the implications of these markers, since these terms and their symbols can create prisons very much like the prison of racism. In order to better understand Baldwin's ideas, I will examine the complexities of masculinity within the Reagan Era, which was shrouded in hypermasculine white male patriarchy. I explore the ways in which Baldwin wrote about the ideals of masculinity while juxtaposing his own gender sexual politics in relation to race, sexuality, and gender. I critically investigate Baldwin's stance on the symbol and marker of the word "gay." This term creates in Baldwin a deep exploration in which he would rather do away with the word, but even more so, wishes to implore the varied ways in which men can be fully self-expressed in their sexuality. It is here that Baldwin wishes the reader to consider the idea of androgyny, and what androgyny means in a world of hypermasculinity,

machismo, and the binary relationships of men and women. I will also illustrate in this chapter how Baldwin works through this concept of prison, and how his racial identity had already experienced one type of prison. Baldwin argues that the prison of race confined black people to white hegemonic patriarchy, and, like wardens, white people worked to manage and confine black people to lives of oppression and marginalization. Baldwin did not want to be imprisoned to a life sentence because of his gender sexual politics.

James Cone on James Baldwin's Prophetic Immanence

In his essay, "Here Be Dragons," Baldwin occupied multiple matrices. His physical presence has made a significant impact on this present age through his writings composed during the Civil Rights era. He was a voice and a champion for black people. His presence, though he was small, frail, and effeminate, had fervor. He had an expansive vocabulary and a sharp wit, able to stand on his own in debates against towering intellectual giants. He persisted in the fight for humanity, dignity, and freedom of all peoples. Although deceased, his life and work have a distinct and immanent presencing for black gay men; it speaks to, of, and for their lives. If "prophecy" is both an inspired and morally elucidating interpretation of one's life and one's context, then Baldwin was a social prophet, and what he prophesied continues to resonate with black people who continue the fight for equality and liberation. This is especially true for black gay men, who continue to struggle and find their place as brothers, uncles, fathers, grandfathers, and advocates for justice within the black community today.

Similar to many biblical prophets, Baldwin experienced a marginalized life among his own people. He preached salvation and hope, seeking to deliver black folks into the power of blackness. James Cone, the undisputed founder of Black Theology of Liberation, has argued in

God of the Oppressed that “Christian theology is language about the liberating character of God’s presence in Jesus Christ as he calls his people into being for freedom in the World. The task of the theologian, as a member of the people of God, is to clarify what the church believes and does in relation to its participation in God’s liberating work in the world. In doing this work, the theologian acts in the roles of exegete, prophet, teacher, preacher, and philosopher.”²¹⁴

Baldwin was all of these. When Baldwin wrote, he wrote using God language, the Bible, and the Black Church as sources, and it takes careful listening to hear him espousing truth, justice, and liberation through scripture, biblical characters, and texts in his eloquent prose. As he states in

The Fire Next Time:

There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord. There is still, for me, moreover; there is no pathos quite like the pathos of those multicolored, worn, somehow triumphant and transfigured faces, speaking from the depths of a visible, tangible, continuing despair of the goodness of the Lord.²¹⁵

These descriptors were part and parcel of Baldwin’s experience in the Black Church. The raging tambourines, sinners bellowing and moaning for the Lord, saints dancing and shouting, and the pathos of God’s Word and promise were hopeful blessings awaiting to befall those who called on the Lord. This experience shaped Baldwin, and it was his encounters as preacher and witness that he infused in his works. Describing Black Theology, Cone calls it “a theology of and for black people, an examination of their stories, tales, and sayings.”²¹⁶ Baldwin was doing some aspects of black theology before Cone even defined the field of Black Theology Liberation.

What distinguished Baldwin, and what has contributed to the immanent ‘presencing’ of Baldwin

²¹⁴ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), Pgs. 7-8.

²¹⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, First International Edition, 1993), Pg. 49.

²¹⁶ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Pg. 16.

today, is the fact that Baldwin relied upon his own narrative, including the black lived experience of his day, and infused it with the stories, scriptures and biblical texts to tell the story of black life throughout the world. He was especially concerned with what it meant to be black, beautiful, proud, intelligent, and an agitator. His writing was also inspired, beautiful, and motivating. Cone states, “When I want to know what it means to write with power, I turn to James Baldwin. His language reads as though a transcendent spirit inspired his words. God must write like that. I read his words like scripture.”²¹⁷ As Cone formulated his views on the power of words and “the Word” as a Black Liberation theologian, it is clear that Cone was influenced by Baldwin. And Cone understood what the Word of God and the ideology of Black Power meant to black folks during the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement. Cone stated: “The word is more than words about God. God’s word is a poetic happening, an evocation of an indescribable reality in the lives of the people.”²¹⁸

Cone introduced the concept of black theology and black power, noting that the two are not mutually exclusive, but intertwined in the plight, position, and interests of black people in America. Black power underscores the language and attitude of black theology. It helps the Black Church to develop and extend the stories, narratives, and scriptures relative to black lived experience. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s engaged a critical discourse for black people to reimagine themselves in self-love and self-worth. It reinforced the mantra of black love and black resilience in the face of white oppression. “Black Power, in short,” writes Cone, “is an attitude, an inward affirmation of the essential worth of blackness. It means that the black man

²¹⁷ James Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), Pg. 160.

²¹⁸ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Pg. 17.

will not be poisoned by the stereotypes that others have of him, but will affirm from the depth of his soul.”²¹⁹ Cone emphasized the importance of this affirmation in black people’s resistance to white oppression and the marginalization of the black masses. Baldwin’s writing was shaped with intonations of black power, and gave voice to a people who were ready to fight and die for their liberation. This language and attitude spilled over into black churches and pulpits. With leading voices rising out of the Civil Rights Movement—Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers—black people were eager to hear the fiery words in their own churches. In response, black preachers took the tones, sentiments, and language of these leaders and infused their sermons with them.

Cone notes Baldwin’s influence on his own writing in his text, *Black Theology and Black Power*. He situates Baldwin’s rhetoric as a black theologian and black power activist within his methodology of black liberation and black theology. In his autobiography, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody—The Making of a Black Theologian*, Cone writes, “Reading Baldwin helped me sing my theological blues in *Black Theology and Black Power* as I struggled to make sense out of the urban disasters of the 1960s.”²²⁰ Cone expresses Baldwin’s rage, like so many who were fighting for freedom and liberation, and writes about the refusal of white people to acknowledge the humanity of black people, despite the marches, protests, voting, and picketing. Cone writes that “attributing black anger to the call for Black Power is ridiculous, if not obscene. ‘To be a Negro in this country,’ says James Baldwin, ‘and to be relatively conscious is to be in rage almost all the time.’”²²¹ Cone picked up the themes permeating Baldwin’s writing, especially in

²¹⁹ James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1969), Pg. 8.

²²⁰ Cone, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody*, Pg. 149.

²²¹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Pg. 13.

The Fire Next Time. These themes included white marginalization of the “Other,” black oppression, white male patriarchy and domination, and white America’s refusal to admit the atrocities they inflicted upon black people throughout slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era.

Cone recognized these elements within Baldwin because these themes were core components within many black sermons during the Civil Rights Movement. As Cone said, “I saw in Baldwin what I liked in Martin and Malcolm—blackness and love defined by justice for all and a vision of hope in the face of the enduring power and absurdity of white supremacy.”²²² However, unlike King, Malcolm X, and Evers, Baldwin preached without a church or a mosque. He was not explicitly affiliated with any national organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League, the Black Panther Party, or the Black Arts Movement. He was an itinerant preacher and a fiery literary wordsmith who relied on his religious training as a teenage preacher in a Pentecostal church to spread the Word. Baldwin became a movement leader in his own right within the Black Civil Rights Movement. He inspired black people and gave them something to which to aspire.

James Baldwin: A Witness to America and His Own Past

Baldwin’s life’s narrative comes through as prophetic immanence in his writings. In particular, in “Here Be Dragons,” two tropes foreground this prophetic element: “seeing” and “witnessing.” These are key concepts that appear throughout the essay as Baldwin refers to “looking back” and remembering what *was* in order to get the reader to what *is*. His prophetic immanence relies on his witness of the past, his scrutiny of the present, and his foresight of

²²² Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, Pg. 149.

future possibilities. When Baldwin addresses the issue of masculinity in America, he says, “Now, I can speak only of the western world and must rely on my own experience.”²²³ He indicates that he could not speak prophetically to the whole world, but that he could speak from his own experience. This placed Baldwin on the chopping block, so to speak, because he chose to foreground his own personal experiences in order to capture what he had *witnessed*.

Baldwin often critiqued ideals of gender and sexuality, but he was particularly critical of American masculinity during the era of President Ronald Reagan. America had an identity complex, during which masculine ideals were in flux for the American male. Was this due to the gay rights movement? Were white men threatened in their sexuality, or in portrayals of manhood in the public? Had America grown soft, and needed the muscle and the machismo to buff up its identity? Literary scholar Joseph Vogel argues in “Freaks in the Reagan Era: James Baldwin, the New Pop Cinema, and the American Ideal of Manhood” that the ideal of manhood was in crisis at the end of the Carter administration. When Ronald Reagan became president, he positioned his campaign to restore the ‘ideal’ of American *white* machismo because the nation felt that men were becoming weaker, more vulnerable, and more uncertain.²²⁴

In “Here Be Dragons,” Baldwin used his own autobiography to position the idea of manhood, gender, and sexuality in an effort to “see” exactly what was happening in the changing notions of masculinity and the American ideal. Perhaps it was time to reconsider manhood in America, or reevaluate the notions of what defined a man. In response, Baldwin attempts to disrupt white hegemonic masculinity through androgyny. As Vogel posits, “Baldwin’s interest in

²²³ James Baldwin, “Here Be Dragons,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), Pg. 678.

²²⁴ Joseph Vogel, “Freaks in the Reagan Era: James Baldwin, the New Pop Cinema, and the American Ideal of Manhood,” in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2015, Pg. 464.

the subversive possibilities of androgyny aligned in many ways with the rising black feminist movement and anticipated subsequent developments in queer theory and cultural studies. In place of America's long-standing myths about what a man should be, he calls for a new vision of identity, not constructed by fear of the "Other" or violent hierarchies, but by reciprocity, complexity, border-crossing, and becoming."²²⁵ Indeed, Baldwin muddled the ordering of manhood by scrambling the hierarchal pecking order of masculinity. He foregrounded deep ambiguities about androgyny, and insisted that, within every person, there are male and female entities. In the process, however, his own sexuality would become public fodder, and his movements of particular interest to the government. He would be surveilled by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and leaders of the Black Power Movement would question his allegiance to black Americans, charging him as a race traitor because of his sexual identity.

The Government Surveillance of Baldwin's Gender Sexual Politics

The original title of the essay "Here Be Dragons" was "Freaks and the Ideal of American Manhood," which was written in 1985 for *Playboy* magazine.²²⁶ In this autobiographical essay, Baldwin writes about what it means to be a man in America, and explains how the androgynous, the "freak," is treated in American society. Using his own personal experiences to illuminate the concept of androgyny, Baldwin manages to demonstrate how "freaks" are rejected, and how they frighten society because they represent the inner fears and personal deviances of everyday people.

²²⁵ Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 466.

²²⁶ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, "Pg. 466.

Vogel writes that Baldwin used the term “freaks” because it offers a penetrating confessional account of Baldwin’s own complicated sexual coming-of-age, framed by a broader social and cultural exploration of what it means to be a man in America.”²²⁷ Public leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement villainized Baldwin’s sexuality. His political and sexual activities were surveilled by the FBI and policed under the directives of J. Edgar Hoover under Hoover’s “Sex Deviants Program,” which sought to investigate and harass homosexual men and women. According to William Maxwell’s explosive text, *James Baldwin—The FBI File*, in May 1963, the FBI-compiled records of Baldwin after a “tense meeting with Bobby Kennedy were explicitly angled to supply information ‘of derogatory nature.’”²²⁸ They attempted to gather intelligence about Baldwin’s homosexuality and any derogatory remarks he may have made about the FBI. “Both closeted homosexuality and open criticism of the FBI were capital offences in Hoover’s extra-legal criminal code, and Baldwin was especially suspect for combining them in one super-articulate package,” says Maxwell.²²⁹ The FBI maintained their files in an effort to bring charges against Baldwin for the sins of immoral and unnatural acts. However, their efforts and extensive files failed to create enough evidence to adequately charge Baldwin of homosexuality. Nevertheless, they continued to compile data.

In another report, the FBI surveilled telephone conversations of Baldwin that included conversations with many Civil Rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King, Jr., with whom Baldwin had a close relationship and with whom he worked to strategize the movement. The report noted that many of King’s allies related “discomfort with Baldwin’s ‘sexual

²²⁷ Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 467.

²²⁸ William J. Maxwell, *James Baldwin – The FBI File*, (Arcade Publishing: New York, 2017), Pg. 58.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 58.

propensities'...this discomfort based in part on a misdirected fear that sexual scandal would damage the movement."²³⁰ Similar to their discomfort over Bayard Rustin's participation in the Civil Rights Movement and his close relationship with King, allies of the movement feared how Baldwin's homosexuality would critically harm and undo their work. Black leaders and white commentators worked to make him believe he was inadequate and less than a man because of his sexuality and his race. They wanted Baldwin removed from the center of the Black Power Movement because he was a critical voice for the people. When Baldwin finally left the U.S. for Europe after coming to understand that he was neither needed nor wanted, he wrestled with the internal struggle of his role, identity, and position as a black American man whose sexuality was in question. This conflict of race and sexual identity deeply impacted his role in the Civil Rights Movement. This is exactly what the FBI, the Black Power Movement, and Baldwin's critics wanted: Baldwin *out of sight*.

As the then-director of the FBI, Hoover worked both angles. He directed the FBI and its consulate in the capital of the U.S. book trade to investigate rumors of a book Baldwin was working on; namely, *The Blood Counters*. Although the book never materialized, it caused enough concern for Hoover to inquire about its impact: "Isn't Baldwin a well-known pervert?," the director asked in the lower right margin of a July 17, 1964 memo.²³¹ The inquiry led to a response from one of Hoover's agents, who stated that, "While it is not possible to state that [Baldwin] is a pervert, he has expressed a sympathetic viewpoint about homosexuality on several occasions, and a very definite hostility toward the revulsion of the American public regarding

²³⁰ Maxwell, *James Baldwin – The FBI Files*, Pg. 108.

²³¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 228.

it.”²³² In this tone of voice, Baldwin’s sexual and racial identities were deemed perverted. He was positioned as a hostile covert against American ideals, and, as a result of the surveillance on his identity, which needed to be policed as an outsider, Baldwin was designated a “freak,” whose masculinity was questioned because of his “supposed’ homosexuality. As discussed in the previous chapter, the masculinity of black men in the 1970s was often framed as deviant, sexually promiscuous, and was, as such, always under the gaze of white moral surveillance.

Baldwin’s experience among artists was similarly complicated. Artists of the Black Arts Movement refused to acknowledge him. Amira Baraka, one of the movement’s founders, demonized homosexual men, and especially Baldwin. According to Baraka, a rising star of the Black Arts Movement, Baldwin was “Joan of Arc.”²³³ His “spavined whine and plea”²³⁴ was “sickening beyond belief.”²³⁵ In this way, Baraka used his own writing to ridicule Baldwin’s appeal to white society, and particularly white men, as Baldwin was known to have dated and slept with them.

One of the founders of the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver, also condemned Baldwin, referring to him as a sell-out who lusted for white male attention.²³⁶ In his 1966 essay, “Notes on a Native Son,” Cleaver wrote of his disdain for Baldwin, attacking his racial allegiance by stating that Baldwin had a self-hatred of himself, as well as of other blacks. According to Cleaver, Baldwin had “the most grueling, agonizing, total hatred of the blacks,

²³² Maxwell, *James Baldwin – The FBI Files*, Pg. 228.

²³³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Welcome Table: James Baldwin in Exile*, Pg. 312.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 312.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 312.

²³⁶ See, Eldridge Cleaver, “Notes On A Native Son,” *Ramparts Magazine*, June 1966, Pg. 52.

particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the whites that one can find in any black American writer of note of our time.”²³⁷ Baldwin was also more than a traitor to the race, Cleaver despised his sexuality because, in Cleaver’s eyes, it represented a treason against blackness. As Cleaver writes: “I, for one, do not think homosexuality is the latest advance over heterosexuality on the scale of human evolution. Homosexuality is a sickness, just as much as baby-rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors. A grave danger faces this nation, of which we are as yet unaware. And it is precisely this danger which Baldwin’s work conceals, indeed, leads us away from.”²³⁸ Cleaver admonished Baldwin’s writings, particularly noting that, although he enjoyed some of what Baldwin had to say about race relations, most of it failed the black race because Cleaver could not reconcile it with Baldwin’s fancy for white male attention and, of course, Baldwin’s sexuality. Cleaver posited: “I am not interested in denying anything to Baldwin. I, like the entire nation, owe a great debt to him, but throughout the range of his work, from *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, through *Notes of A Native Son*, *Nobody Knows My Name*, *Another Country*, to *The Fire Next Time*, all of which I treasure, there is a decisive quirk in Baldwin’s vision which corresponds to his relationship to black people and to masculinity.”²³⁹

Baldwin took up the matter of masculinity in a number of his texts, and this deeply disturbed Cleaver. He did not feel that Baldwin, a homosexual, could speak on the matter. Cleaver writes disparagingly about homosexuals, including Baldwin: “Many negro homosexuals, acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged because in their sickness they are unable to

²³⁷ Cleaver, “*Notes On A Native Son*,” Pg. 52.

²³⁸ Ibid, Pg. 56.

²³⁹ Ibid, Pg. 55.

have a baby by a white man.”²⁴⁰ Cleaver is disgusted by Baldwin because, not only does Baldwin’s homosexuality go against the black race, but even in his own sickness, it fails to produce a child to carry on his name or expand the black race. However, to refer to homosexuality as a sickness means that Cleaver does not see Baldwin as a fully capable, healthy black man who has the wherewithal to carry and move the race forward by himself.

Even more disconcerting was the fact that a new sexualized black nationalism stigmatized homosexuality as a capitulation to white norms. The young militants who were part of the Civil Rights Movement often referred to Baldwin as “Martin Luther Queen.” They saw black sexual identity as a weapon, and used their own male patriarchy to police and adjudicate what people did with their bodies, especially in sex acts. The Black Power and black liberation movements were all about the preservation of black love and the black family, but black gay men and women were not part of this preservation. Like so many black gay men, Baldwin found himself the target of hate. The attacks by Cleaver discouraged him, and being called a traitor to the black race created many professional obstacles, which Baldwin spent a great deal of time in the late sixties trying to overcome.²⁴¹ Baldwin shared: “I had difficulties because of Cleaver, which I didn’t want to talk about then, and don’t wish to discuss now. My real difficulty with Cleaver, sadly was visited upon on me by the kids who were following him, while he was calling me a faggot and the rest of it. I would come to a town to speak, Cleveland, let’s say, and he would’ve been standing on the very same stage a couple of days earlier. I had to try to undo the damage I considered he was doing. I was handicapped with *Soul On Ice*, because what I might

²⁴⁰ Gates, *The Welcome Table*, Pg. 312.

²⁴¹ David Leeming, *James Baldwin – A Biography*, (New York, NY: Arcade Publishing, First Arcade Edition 2015), Pg. 292.

have said in those years about Eldridge would have been taken as an answer to his attack on me. So I never answered it, and I'm not answering it now."²⁴²

Cleaver argued that Baldwin's race pandering for white men constituted his turning his back on the black cause and all black movements. How could a black gay man be intimate with a white man, the epitome of the very establishment many in the Black Power Movement were hoping to dismantle? Regardless of the marginalized position white gay men held, they still had access to white power through white privilege. Thus, for Cleaver, and for others in the movement, Baldwin was sleeping with the "white devil," and, therefore, could not be trusted. Furthermore, there exists little evidence that Baldwin ever dated, loved, or was sexually intimate with black gay men. One can but imagine what torment he must have undergone to be labeled a traitor to the race because of his sexuality, and suffer loneliness even in black gay circles.

Yet, Baldwin persevered, and continued to write, speak, and become one of the most prolific voices of the Civil Rights Movement. The attacks on Baldwin's sexuality and moral standing in regard to race did not allow him to stop speaking out against the oppression of black people. It did not prevent him from engaging in public debates on racism, and calling out white America for the atrocities it had inflicted on black people. Baldwin understood that his racial and sexual identities would always be in contention, and this holds true today for many black gay men. Perhaps this is one of the reasons so many black gay men look toward Baldwin as a hero and leader, and find his prophetic immanence consubstantial with their lives, because he refused to back down, despite the hostility and the damning fingers pointed toward him. Instead, he

²⁴² Jordan Elgrably and George Plimpton, "The Art of Fiction LXXVIII: James Baldwin," in *Conversations with James Baldwin*, eds. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), Pgs. 251-252.

pointed the fingers back at those judging him by holding up the mirror of justice and righteousness.

James Baldwin's Queer Politics: The Positioning of Baldwin's Race
and Sex in the Civil Rights Era

Baldwin never stood in or up for gay rights or the gay movement. He was not part of any other political or racial organization during his time with the Civil Rights Movement. Baldwin confirms: "You see, I am not a member of anything. I joined the Church when I was very, very young, and haven't joined anything since, except for a brief stint in the Socialist Party. I'm a maverick, you know. But that doesn't mean I don't feel very strongly for my brothers and sisters."²⁴³ Literary and African American Studies scholar Dwight McBride claims that Baldwin never solidified himself to any group, especially gay organizations, because of the complexity of his racial and sexual identities. Furthermore, the gay movement was complicated by whiteness, and the Civil Rights Movement by its ties to religious communities.

In the documentary, *The Price of the Ticket*, the interviewer poses a question to Baldwin about why he chose to write *Giovanni's Room*, which is a novel about an interracial gay relationship and the burden of being a black writer. Baldwin responds: "Well, one could say I almost did not have an awful lot of choice. *Giovanni's Room* comes out of something that tormented and frightened me: the question of my own sexuality. It also simplified my life in another way because it meant that I had no secrets; nobody could blackmail me. You know...you didn't tell me, I told you."²⁴⁴ However, as McBride puts it, "This is not the same, of course as

²⁴³ James Baldwin and Quincy Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, (New York, NY: Melville House, 2014), Pg. 60.

²⁴⁴ See, *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

saying that Baldwin embraced gay sexuality as associated with the gay liberation movement, to which he had a rather complicated relationship.”²⁴⁵ Baldwin would not assign to himself the identity of being gay, as he found it complicated and “boxing-in.”

In an interview from *Go the Way Your Blood Beats*, reporter Richard Goldstein asked Baldwin, “Do you feel like a stranger in gay America?” Baldwin replies:

The word “gay” has always rubbed me the wrong way. I never understood exactly what it meant by it. I don’t want to sound distant and patronizing because I don’t really feel that. I simply feel it’s a world that has very little to do with me, with where I did my growing up. I was never at home in it... I didn’t have a word for it. The only one I had was “homosexual” and that didn’t quite cover whatever it was I was beginning to feel.²⁴⁶

For Baldwin, the word gay was too limiting for him, too binding. It boxed him into a category, similar to the ways he felt race boxed black people into a category and position inferior to whiteness. “Black” had too many negative connotations associated with it, like deviancy, inhumanity, immorality, and unworthiness. In his text, *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin writes to his nephew what the world thought of black people: “You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being.”²⁴⁷ Baldwin did not want his nephew to suffer the same fate that so many black people had experienced since slavery and up until the Civil Rights Movement. They had been made a promise that they would be free, they would have the same inalienable rights as their white

²⁴⁵ Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride, “James Baldwin and Sexuality: *Lieux de Memoire and a Usable Past*,” in *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*, ed. Douglas Field, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), Pg. 122.

²⁴⁶ Baldwin and Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Pg. 59.

²⁴⁷ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963), Pg. 7.

counterparts. Yet, in the letter to his nephew, which was written on the one hundredth anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Baldwin admits that black people were still oppressed, still suffering the ills of white supremacy, still living in poverty, and still being beaten by the hands of white police officers in Harlem and across the country. However, Baldwin encourages his nephew to resist the ideology that whites have of him, and to be proud of who he is, of his people—black people. Baldwin writes, “Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.”²⁴⁸ This message to his nephew both affirms him and unbinds him from the limits of his racial identity. Baldwin is essentially telling his nephew that you can do and be anything in this world, because there is a history of black people who have created a lineage through the arts, letters, and music.

Thus, Baldwin did not see the benefit in identifying with the term “gay,” nor did he see how the identity would help him or the movement he was committed to on behalf of black people. The word was also not a place of home or something he recognized in himself, his community of Harlem, or in his relationship with blackness. The word “gay” was formed and associated with whiteness, and Baldwin neither identified as white nor gay, which seemed to him a marker for white men who slept with or had relationships with other white men.

Baldwin's biographer, David Leeming, makes note of Baldwin's resistance to the word. Leeming states: “He [Baldwin] had generally avoided taking a public stance on issues involving the ‘gay movement.’” Sexuality was a private matter, and he resisted the ideas of being called “gay.” To be “gay” was to be defined—imprisoned—in still another way. Besides, he felt, words

²⁴⁸ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, Pg. 8.

like “gay” and “queer” belittled the reality of love. He was not a “queer” or a “gay” man; he simply loved individuals, many of whom were men.”²⁴⁹

For Baldwin, even the word “homosexual” had its limitations. He saw himself bigger, larger, and more complex. He was not a fixture to be pinpointed and situated in a place. He was more, and he wrote to explicate the complicated identities wherein he lived. McBride writes:

Baldwin was no more content to be simply a black writer, a gay writer, or an activist than he was to write exclusively in the genre of the novel, drama, poetry, or the essay. And the topoi of his work and the landscape of his critical and creative imagination are broad, to say the very least. Scholarship, however, has often tended to relegate Baldwin to one or the other of these identities; it has been slow to move our thinking—not only of Baldwin, but of African American studies generally—in a direction that speaks to the intricate social positions African Americans occupy.²⁵⁰

McBride insists that we have become limited in our approach to the multiplicity and range of sexualities within the African American community. Our attempt to mitigate ‘Others’ and non-conforming sexual identities and genders into categories can be both off-putting and stifling for those who are sexually fluid, like Baldwin. Thus, they resist the terms “gay,” “queer,” and “homosexual,” and they should have the freedom to do so.

Furthermore, I extend McBride’s thoughts on Baldwin, his complicated relationship with the gay rights movement, and his feelings about the word “gay.” As I stated in the previous chapter, homosexuality created a moral panic in the 1950s and 1960s. Essentially, there was a witch hunt to “locate” the homosexual living amongst heteronormative people in order to “out” them, because people feared homosexuals could pass along their deviancy to unsuspecting heteronormative persons. Also, in the 1960s, the Stonewall Riots occurred in Greenwich Village, and sparked the gay rights movement, which was also called the “white gay movement,” of

²⁴⁹ David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, (New York: NY, Arcade Publishing, 1994), Pg. 358.

²⁵⁰ Joyce and McBride, “*James Baldwin and Sexuality*,” Pg. 122.

which very few black gay persons were a part. However, as McBride points out, the “the gay men and lesbians didn’t hesitate to draw on the strategies, symbols, and rhetoric of the Black Civil Rights Movement both for inspiration and for organizing techniques.”²⁵¹ Honestly, the two movements were happening at the same time, and Baldwin had already been actively participating in the Civil Rights Movement, a cause in which issues of race, racism, and racial oppression were at the forefront. Issues of sex, sexuality, and sexual identity were not. Many black leaders, including scholars such as the theologian Clarence James, have argued that: “The homosexual movement has nothing to do with the civil rights. The Civil Rights Movement is not part of the sexual revolution. It is about negative freedom and the freedom from moral constraint.”²⁵² Thus, we see Baldwin constantly having to answer to the media as well as to black leaders about which cause he was fighting for and what was important to him: race or sexuality.

I have written about how black leaders and black preachers have made attempts to *out* black gay men in an effort to ostracize them from the community because their sexual identity was in conflict with their racial identity. Prophet Jones had been called out by Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Bayard Rustin had been asked to step down by black leaders from his participation in the movement and in the March on Washington. There were significant consequences in being outed, one of which was being cast out of the black community. Baldwin knew this, and he chose his words and his fight carefully. This is why I argue that, in the 1960s, when homosexuality was seen as an immoral deviancy of one’s identity, and a person could be *outed* and ostracized from their community, many refused to come *out*. There were huge risks in

²⁵¹ Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), Pg. 19.

²⁵² Phuong Ly and Hamil R. Harris, “*Blacks, Gays in Struggle of Values*,” in *Washington Post*, March 15, 2004.

identifying oneself; and, in Baldwin's case, he was forced to reconcile his sexuality and his racial identity, and forced to admit where his allegiances lay.

Finally, although Baldwin wrote about same sex relationships, particularly between men, he had no qualms about being outed or outing himself in texts like *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*. As I shared from his interview in *The Price of the Ticket*, when asked about his sexuality and *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin answered: "It has also simplified my life in another way, because it meant that I had no secrets. Nobody could blackmail me. You know, you didn't tell me, I told you."²⁵³ Baldwin owned his narrative, and wanted to be responsible for the shaping of his narrative, but he also admitted to his relationships with both men and women. He simply had more intimate relationships with men than with women. Indeed, although he wanted to leave open the possibility of fluid sexuality, the majority of Baldwin's long-term intimate relationships were with men.²⁵⁴

Paradoxically (or perhaps not), Baldwin's queering of the queer politics of his day is a crucial part of the "transcendence" that defines his immanence—or in Deleuze's words, speaks

²⁵³ See, *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

²⁵⁴ See, Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); also, William Jr. Spurlin, "Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity: James Baldwin and the Identity Politics of Race and Sexuality," in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999); and, Justin A. Joyce and Dwight McBride, "James Baldwin and Sexuality: *Lieux de Memoire and a Usable Past*," in *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*, ed. Douglas Field, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). Each of these scholars critically interrogates Baldwin's racial and sexual identities, and the complexities in which Baldwin presented his sexuality over and against his racial identity. Baldwin remained a complex figure when discussing his sexuality, and often refused the terms "gay" and "homosexual," as he argued that these were signifiers for a prison that confines one to a binary of heterosexual-homosexual. Baldwin saw beyond the fixed markers and the symbols they represented, and, in some regard, wanted to do away with these markers. Baldwin continuously wrote and approached sexual identity in many of his writings, including *Giovanni's Room*, *Another Country*, *The Male Prison*, and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Baldwin was not afraid to explore the taboo subject matter, and he wrestled within the identities of gay, homosexual, and bisexual, perhaps in an attempt to free not only himself, but others who struggled to make sense of their sexualities. This is why he takes up the androgynous figure in his essay, *Here Be Dragons*. Baldwin wants to unhinge the ideal of masculinity, particularly in the American imagination, as this ideal of masculinity was tied to ideals of white patriarchy, white masculinity, and white hegemonic power.

to the quality of his life as “pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil...in the midst of things that made it good or bad.”²⁵⁵ As a human subject, Baldwin was involved in all of the complexities of survival, cultural politics, and social restrictions. As the bearer of an emerging prophetic immanence, however, he became the presence of something ineffable, a carrier of ‘pure immanence.’

It was Baldwin’s prophetic immanence on race that dislodged him from the periphery of society and centered him in the discourse of his day. It was his resistance to societal ideologies of sexuality and gender that allowed him to disrupt framed binaries. Baldwin was, in fact, the “freak,” the ugly, big-eyed, scrawny, effeminate man who demanded a call for action. And the world listened; some lovingly, and others with condemnation and judgment.

Positioning *Playboy* and the Civil Rights Movement: How the Adult Magazine
Became an Outlet on Race and Race Relations for James Baldwin

As earlier mentioned, Baldwin’s essay, “Here Be Dragons,” was originally published in *Playboy* magazine in January 1985. It is interesting to analyze why the essay appeared in *Playboy*, considering the fact that this was a magazine founded on the standards of white beauty and sexuality, and which targeted white men, including heterosexual white men. Why would Baldwin choose *Playboy* to publish this essay? Baldwin’s first essay, “The Uses of the Blues,” also appeared in the magazine. And, in 1966, he sat for a *Playboy* interview with Sammy Davis, Jr. and Budd Schulberg. As such, Baldwin was no stranger to *Playboy*. He was familiar with the publication, and he was not alone as an African American writer. In the late 1960s, *Playboy* was

²⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, Pg. 29.

the premier popular magazine in the country for serious established journalism on Civil Rights issues, and featured writing by Alex Haley and James Farmer, in addition to Baldwin, notes Vogel.²⁵⁶ According to Vogel, “*Playboy*’s complicated racial, gender, and sexual politics make it a fascinating platform for Baldwin’s article. *Playboy* originally targeted and appealed to white, straight, middle- and upper-class male consumers, depicting a life of glamor, status, sophistication, and sexual freedom.”²⁵⁷ Black writers writing for *Playboy* and other elite magazines provided a certain cache. It garnered them attention from larger audiences, particularly white middle- and upper-class men, and this helped black writers gain capital within white society—something that black publications could not do. Black writers also earned more money writing for white publications, and, in some regard, white publications gave them legitimacy in the publishing world.

As the historian Elizabeth Fraterrigo notes in *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, “*Playboy* was considered the premier arbiter of American beauty, and thus spoke to the tremendous cultural power of the magazine.”²⁵⁸ American beauty was, in fact, the ideal of white beauty and the promotion of whiteness, and, by promoting it, the magazine amassed a popularity that allowed it to compete with mainstream and holistic magazines of its day. Ironically, this appeal also opened the doors for serious journalism about the issues and topics shaping the country. Fraterrigo states, “As the struggle for racial equality surged forward, *Playboy*’s attention to the Civil Rights Movement provided readers, both black and white, with thoughtful and impassioned commentary.... But if *Playboy* cared more about the status line than

²⁵⁶ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Footnote 4, pg. 482.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, pg. 482.

²⁵⁸ Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), Pg. 138.

the color line, the latter directly impeded African Americans' ability to achieve upward mobility. The stylish way of life [presented in its pages] was compelling, but often frustratingly beyond reach."²⁵⁹ Vogel agrees, saying: "This became particularly true in the Reagan era as the gap widened between the middle and underclasses. In this way, the magazine illustrated the paradoxical possibilities and seductive illusions inherent in American popular culture."²⁶⁰ Baldwin capitalized on this with "Here Be Dragons," and *Playboy* was the premier placement for his discussion on masculinity.

Baldwin was a writer who sold many of his essays to various magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Mademoiselle*. Along with the economic payout they provided, these elite magazines provided him exposure that many other black writers of his time could not garner. Besides, his articles' publications in these magazines meant crossover appeal among white audiences. In November 1962, Baldwin's essay "Letter from a Region in My Mind" was published in *The New Yorker*, and it was unlike anything the magazine had ever printed. The essay caused the magazine's sales to soar, and was hailed a massive success by the media.²⁶¹

However, Leeming states: "There were also detractors—and friends—who resented Baldwin's placing such work in *The New Yorker* among the elite ads for expensive cars and clothes. Many of the same people complained of his selling serious articles to *Playboy* and *Mademoiselle*. Baldwin's not altogether tongue-in-cheek reply was always that his audience were the 'publicans and tax-collectors' as well as the righteous."²⁶² Baldwin saw his writing

²⁵⁹Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, Pg. 140.

²⁶⁰ See Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*.

²⁶¹ See, Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 210.

²⁶² Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 210.

mission as prophetic. His writings were not just for blacks, the poor, and the disadvantaged, but also for the oppressors. His response also makes use of a religious trope, and alludes to his connection to the church by evoking “publicans” and “tax-collectors” along with “the righteous.” When preaching to black congregants, black pastors have often used this trope. Homiletician Cleophus LaRue argues that black preachers make use of connecting biblical and scriptural texts with that of the African American experience. LaRue suggests that the master lens through which African Americans interpret scripture is the theological conception of “a God who acts mightily on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed.”²⁶³ By utilizing his former preaching ilk, Baldwin situated himself in the same discourse of black preachers and biblical prophets such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Hosea. Moreover, this religious trope was a way of describing Jesus’ messianic mission; namely, that he was here for all, and not just for some, or for any specially elected group of people.

“Here Be Dragons” and Masculine Approaches: James Baldwin and the Disruption of
Masculinity, White Hegemony, and Patriarchy

Baldwin’s essay opens with a dictionary definition of “androgynous.” He writes: “To be androgynous, Webster’s informs us, is to have both male and female characteristics. This means that there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man.”²⁶⁴ Baldwin made use of the androgynous figure as an entrée for exploration into his own questioning of his identity, which

²⁶³ Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster Knox, 1999), Pg. 16.

²⁶⁴ James Baldwin, “Here Be Dragons,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), Pg. 677.

he used to juxtapose white male masculinity, machismo, and hypermasculinity, which permeated the history of America and its ideals of manhood. Vogel writes:

Baldwin's interest in the subversive possibilities of androgyny aligned in many ways with the rising black feminist movement and anticipated subsequent developments in queer theory and cultural studies. Surveying the landscape of the Reagan era, he recognizes the tensions between the era's more traditional representations of masculinity (symbolized by President Reagan and many Hollywood blockbuster movies) and its queer alternatives (represented, among other ways in the emerging New Pop Cinema). In place of America's longstanding myths about what a man should be, he calls for a new vision of identity, not constructed by fear of the Other or violent hierarchies, but by reciprocity, complexity, border crossing, and becoming.²⁶⁵

Vogel illustrates a unique perspective in regard to Baldwin's interest in androgyny. Baldwin was very interested in movies, film, and television, and contemporary actors of the '70s and '80s often portrayed masculinity while bending its heteronormative and heterosexual portrayals. Baldwin called for a new vision of masculine identity, including a serious critique of the construct itself. He ventured into the boundaries of gender identities; mainly, the crisscrossing between male and female.

Leeming surmises that Baldwin was fascinated with the idea of being embodied with both male and female identities, which he worked through to live his life as both. Leeming states that, "In the idea of the androgyny...Baldwin found still another metaphor to contain his gospel."²⁶⁶ Baldwin tampered with the idea of how society could work through the binaries of man and woman, venturing the discourses on gender bending and fluid sexualities. Androgyny allowed him to give both of these identities voice and presence in his work and life. According to Leeming:

²⁶⁵ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*.

²⁶⁶ See, Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 210.

Early in March, Baldwin had a dream in which he was joined by a beautiful, very young black woman who, after performing a song and cakewalk with him, seemed to merge with him—“her breasts digging against my shoulder-blades.” The dance became perilous and the dreamer experienced fear. And on March 25 Baldwin wrote a poem in which he refers to painful visions of himself as a child “wrestling in the darkness.” The poem bemoans the loss of an earlier Jimmy, questions the identity of a new Adam and Eve “struggling” to unite, and generally conveys a sense of overwhelming original sin, brokenness, and alienation, ending with the prophet Ezekiel’s cry to God “Can these bones live?”²⁶⁷

Baldwin was fascinated with the Adam and Eve myth, how Eve came from Adam, and, as such, the possibility of reuniting both being male and female entities back into one body. During sexual intercourse, male and female bodies become one; they are united and intertwined.

Baldwin’s dream of the woman merging with him helped him to see in himself the possibility of having both male and female identities, of freeing the woman in him through his works.

Subsequently, he would experience other dreams, where gender and sexual identities struggle to free and express themselves in one body. For instance, at another time, Baldwin dreamed of himself, a male actor, and a young woman engaged in sex. Baldwin escaped the scene and ran down a long dark alley and a “voice within him calls Adam’s nightmare.”²⁶⁸ Leeming writes,

The question of primal relationships, between blacks and whites, homosexuals and heterosexuals, was the basis of *Another Country*, the novel Baldwin was working on at MacDowell. And, of course, it was an essential question in Baldwin’s own life. The struggle between Paul and Ruth, the dancing dreamer and his other—female—self, the Adam and Eve figures “struggling” to come together in the poem, and the complex sexual relationships from which he feels he must escape in order to enter the house where the dance—the creative endeavor—can take place are all related elements of Baldwin’s agony, his own version of “Adam’s nightmare.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 150.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 150.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 150.

In order to free himself and work through the creative endeavor of relinquishing his agony, Baldwin worked tediously to resolve the concepts of love, intimacy, male and male relationships, and, male and female relationships in his writings. In “Come Out the Wilderness,” Baldwin assumes the female voice of the main character, and this would be repeated in his other works, such as *Another Country* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Leeming writes: “In his female persona Baldwin found a disguise that made it possible for him to confront some difficult questions about himself.”²⁷⁰ He found within himself the woman he desired and longed to be but trapped in the man he also enjoyed being. He accepted both of his identities, but struggled with how to release them without judgment and fear.

Baldwin’s last work prior to his death, *The Welcome Table*, was about a French exiled woman from Algeria who is torn between deep-rooted racism, exile, alienation, and a desire to accept life.²⁷¹ All the main characters of the play are women. Thus, Baldwin assumes the voices of the women, including the woman in him, utilizing the androgyny that propelled him. Yet, it was a certain type of woman with whom Baldwin identified. He saw himself in women he most admired and with whom he most associated. According to Leeming, Baldwin “enjoyed ‘hanging’ out with women who had a certain style, women with whom he could in some sense identify, for the most part black women who could accept him unromantically for what he was without making sexual demands on him.”²⁷² Leeming continues: “And Baldwin not only enjoyed female company, there was a part of him that envied their style, their clothes, their gestures.”²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 150.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, Pgs. 375-377.

²⁷² *Ibid*, Pgs. 376-377.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, Pg. 377.

In his writings, Baldwin was gender bending by writing in women's voices. And this is where Baldwin found joy in writing through female embodiment during what Leeming calls "moments of what might be called wish fulfillment or psychological nostalgia for the lost woman who would convert the Jimmy Baldwin he still sadly thought of as an ugly little man into someone tall, confident, beautiful, and, to use a favorite word of his, 'impeccably' dressed in silks and satins and bold colors."²⁷⁴ Baldwin longed to be transformed into the female identity buried in him, yearning to be released: the sophisticated, alluring, impeccable woman who was his doppelganger.

Baldwin's prophetic immanence exhibited itself as a plenitude of being, and he connected to something both within himself and outside of himself. He accessed his dreams, which gave him insight into other aspects of his sexual/gender identities. He pored over the agony and torment of struggling to make sense of his identities, which were lodged not only within him, but also in every other person. He saw that there was more to the binaries of male and female, which both confined and created turmoil for those who sought relief and salvation. Baldwin used his art and his creativity to work through dichotomies of gender and sexuality.

In "Here Be Dragons," working through the concept of androgyny, Baldwin comes to terms with his own identities and all their messiness. Interestingly, the essay juxtaposes the term "androgynous" with "hermaphrodite." He puts these two terms in conversation in an effort to clarify how they slip in and out of meaning, often becoming synonymous with homosexual. Baldwin begins the essay using Webster's definition of "androgyny" and counter-positioning it with "hermaphrodite." Although Baldwin does not mention homosexuality in the essay, scholars note that underlining the essay is the concept of homosexuality as an emergent oppositional to

²⁷⁴ Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg.377.

the ideal of masculinity in America, and to that ideal's manifestation in white American males.²⁷⁵ However, Baldwin uses the word "gay" and refers to the "gay world" and even his own "gayness" throughout the essay, notwithstanding his reluctance to self-identify as gay or as an affiliate with the gay movement.

In 1982, only a few short years before the essay's appearance in *Playboy*, Baldwin was invited to speak at the Black and White Men Together/New York group on *Race, Racism, and the Gay Community*. Leeming reports that Baldwin announced to his audience: "One has to reject, in toto, the implication that one is abnormal. That is a sociological and societal delusion that has no truth at all. I'm no more abnormal than General Douglas MacArthur. Gays were merely the 'latest example' of America's apparent need to repress difference in the name of morality. Gays, like blacks, American Indians, were just one more group of prisoners of a society not aware that it was itself an emotional and spiritual prison."²⁷⁶ In this regard, Baldwin knew the implications of accepting the labels "gay" and "homosexual," as they deemed one abnormal. He turns the discourse on its head, refuting the words because of the potentially dangerous labels they bear for those thus branded with their particular signifiers. Having one more marker, symbol, and identity could position one as an outsider, on the margins, and *out* of societal and sociological constructs. This complication of identity was a part of Baldwin's dilemma throughout his life.

Although, in the essay, Baldwin mentions his encounter with the gay world, I argue that Baldwin is helping us to understand that there is a world within a world, an underground or intra-world where gay men operate parallel or in tandem with a non-gay world. Gay men operate in

²⁷⁵ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*.

²⁷⁶ Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 359.

the world as active and engaged citizens who vote, socialize, contribute to the economy, and, as Baldwin states, are businessmen, lawyers, doctors, bankers, and athletes. There is no place that gay men have not existed, and yet, they have created their own world within the world. At the time of the essay's publication, it was an underground, unseen, and unknown world to the heteronormative gaze. It was a world within a world, in which gay men socialized and fraternized with like-minded individuals.

Baldwin's prophetic immanence again shines through his speech at the Black and White Men Together group, when he dislodges the terms "gay" and "homosexual." Yet again, he personally refused to be imprisoned by a word or symbol. Instead, he fought against the imprisonment of race. According to Leeming, imprisonment is an important leitmotif in Baldwin's thinking.²⁷⁷ When Baldwin opened his essay by addressing androgyny and the ideal of American masculinity, he notes that homosexuality lingers in the background of American discourse and in society. Baldwin was able to *foresee* how the motif of imprisonment, particularly of being imprisoned by one's race, would bind those to an internal and societal prison that he was all too ready to relinquish. Baldwin wanted black gay men to be freed from yet another marker and symbol. He wanted them to be unbound by the prisons of race and sexuality, which could be an eternal cage of oppression. Baldwin was able to *look back* and through his experiences to help others to freedom by refusing to identify himself with categories and labels that would hinder the struggle toward life.

The Complication of Sexuality: Homosexuality,
Denial, and its Legal Implications

²⁷⁷ Leeming, *James Baldwin*, Pg. 359.

Baldwin had already argued that sociological and societal delusion implied homosexual men were abnormal. Psychiatrists and scientists closely linked the sexual proclivities of gay men with that of the hermaphrodite. In *Women, Science, and Myth: Gender Beliefs from Antiquity to the Present*, social scientist Sue Vilhauer Rosser argued that the German lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrich, who himself was a homosexual, published a pamphlet in 1864 claiming that homosexuals were a third sex. Rosser notes:

Ulrich developed his theory in the wake that the belief at the time that the human embryo possessed both male and female sex organs, losing one as it develops in the uterus. He theorized that male homosexuality came about when the embryo shed the female sex organ, but the same change did not occur in the part of the brain that regulates the sex drive. (Again, the situation was reversed in the case of female homosexuality.) Ulrich assumed that because male homosexuals had a female soul in a male body, they therefore possessed the personality characteristics of women. Likewise, female homosexuals had the personality characteristics of men. According to him, homosexuality was not just an “inversion” in the choice of the sexual object but an inversion of one’s broader gender characteristics as well. This idea did not originate with Ulrich, to be sure. But his theory of the “third sex” gave these gender stereotypes a quasi-scientific basis, confounding sexual orientation with gender and confusing homosexuals with hermaphrodites.²⁷⁸

This ideology of the homosexual and the hermaphrodite confused the terms, and scientists, psychologists, and scholars alike later disproved it in the late nineteenth century. However, the narrative persisted.

According to gender and sexuality scholar David Halperin, “Sexual identity was thus polarized around a central opposition rigidly defined by the binary play of sameness and difference in the sexes of the sexual partners; people belonged henceforward to one or the other of two exclusive categories, and much ingenuity was lavished on the multiplication of techniques

²⁷⁸ Sue Vilhauer Rosser, *Women, Science, and Myth Gender Beliefs from Antiquity to the Present* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2008), Pg. 195.

for deciphering what a person's sexual orientation "really" was—independent, that is, of beguiling appearances."²⁷⁹ People were male or female, man or woman, enacting and participating in sexual norms, which were determined by their sexual organs and sexual pleasures; mainly, sexual interactions occurred between the two sexes. Baldwin worked to disrupt this binary.

Baldwin illustrated that the hermaphrodite, with both male and female sexual genitalia, is not synonymous with androgyny, who do not possess both anatomy. Moreover, the hermaphrodite is labeled as a "freak," but so too are homosexuals. They are on the margins, ostracized and perceived as "unnatural" within societal cultural norms, and both groups are categorized as impure, out of place, and disgusting. Baldwin addresses this issue in his essay, writing:

However, the existence of the hermaphrodite reveals, in intimidating exaggeration, the truth concerning every human being—which is why the hermaphrodite is called a freak. The human being does not, in general, enjoy being intimidated by what he/she finds in the mirror. The hermaphrodite, therefore, may make his/her living in side shows or brothels, whereas the merely androgynous are running banks or filling stations or maternity wards, churches, armies or countries.

Here, Baldwin hoped to relieve the hermaphrodite of the burden of being labeled a freak. He implied that the androgynous person—the businessman, banker, and government official—is the "freak" living in plain sight. There is a man in every woman and a woman in every man that may appear heteronormative to the unsuspecting eye—playing the part, and acting in accordance to societal normalcy—yet, androgynous individuals have the luxury of hiding their sexuality and perversions in plain sight, being unmasked and unnamed due to their powers of "passing" in the world of an idealized American masculinity. Androgyny infiltrates the heteronormative narrative

²⁷⁹ David Halperin, *100 Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*, (Routledge: New York, 1989), Pg. 16.

too, including the economic, political, religious, medical, and militaristic systems, which work to construct a heteronormative and heterosexist ideology.

In an interview with writer Richard Goldstein titled “Go The Way Your Blood Beats,” Baldwin stated that society has unresolved issues underlining masculinity, particularly among men who have not fully developed, matured, or explored their sexuality and maleness. Thus, they remain infantile. They have unexpressed feelings that frighten them. Baldwin states:

I know from my own experience that macho men—truck drivers, cops, football players—these people are far more complex than they want to realize. That’s why I call them infantile. They have needs which, for them, are literally inexpressible. They don’t dare look into the mirror. And that is why they need faggots. They’ve created faggots in order to act out a sexual fantasy on the body of another man and not take any responsibility for it...I think it’s very important for the male homosexual to recognize that he is a sexual target for other men, and that is why he is despised, and why he is called a faggot. He is called a faggot because other males need him.²⁸⁰

The mirror poses complexity, as it requires one to look back, into, and at oneself, and to be authentic. This act of “looking into” poses an identity crisis as it forces one to reckon with the one facing them, and such a confrontation may be difficult to come to terms with while facing the mirror. As a result, “faggots” are the projected figures of the disposal of heteronormative sexual fantasy. They become targets for the unexpressed and infantile heteronormative man.

Baldwin distanced himself from the binaries of man and woman, male and female, and heterosexual and homosexual in order to liberate not only himself but others who are forced into claiming an identity and sexual social construction of race, sexuality, or any other identity that would be confining. In the essay, “Sexual Exiles—James Baldwin and Another Country,” cultural critic James A. Dievler posits: “Writing in distant retrospect, Baldwin claims in this essay, that as a result of having no desire to define himself in terms of socially constructed

²⁸⁰ Baldwin and Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Pg. 65.

identity categories that dominated not only the sexual culture but the culture of New York City as a whole.”²⁸¹ Baldwin recognized that his identity as a black man akin to androgyny, with desires for both sexes, marked him for judgment, policing, and critique. Dievler notes: “Homosexuality was linked to the threat of communism—people were simultaneously accused of both—and the gay subculture was viewed as a threat to traditional morality and the stability of the family.”²⁸² Under these terms, homosexuality served as a political and legal marker for juridical sentencing. One could also be physically detained, which is another type of imprisonment if one were to be found out or discovered to be homosexual. On the other hand, homosexuality was a marker against nation and nationality. One would be deemed treasonous to the American ideal of manhood, nationhood, and family. One could be exiled but also alienated.

Sexuality had come to hold an important symbol in the American state as well as in local identity. Baldwin represented two symbols which were deemed a threat: his sexual identity and his racial identity. These markers made Baldwin a monstrosity: a thing who spoke and was heard. Baldwin was, at least for the purposes of this argument, an ugly queer sissy, insufficiently manly, a thing under social and communal surveillance. Yet, he muddied the terrain of the politics of gender and sexuality, which had been grossly overrepresented by the American binary ideals of man and woman.

²⁸¹ James A. Dievler, “*Sexual Exiles – James Baldwin and Another Country*,” in *James Baldwin Now* ed. Dwight A. McBride, (New York University Press: New York, 1999), Pg. 161.

²⁸² *Ibid*, Pg. 167.

Disrupting Heteronormative Ideals of Manhood
and Masculinity in the Reagan Era

Baldwin made a critical move when he complicated the normative ideal of male and female relationships mediated by love. However, he disrupted its normative orientation, which signifies intimate and personal relationships between men and women. He states: “But love between a man and a woman, or love between any two human beings, would not be possible did we not have available to us the spiritual resources of both sexes.”²⁸³ In other words, in every man is a woman, and in every woman is a man. How we perceive men and women is not specific to their sexual and gendered norms. They are fully capable of expressing both identities, and should not be bogged down by the normative ideals of expression in a singular gendered identity. What is poignant is that Baldwin specifies “or love between any two human beings.” He does not say love between a man and another man or between a woman and another woman. He transcends the boundaries of gender norms of relationships, arguing that love exists between two human beings. This disruption of the pathologies of gender conditions resituates the subjectivity of man and woman. Baldwin makes a pure mess of gender, its norms, and heteronormativity.

Baldwin then moves through the essay, from androgyny to the concept of sexuality and manhood in America. He argues that white American men feel they are losing control of their identity, their maleness, and America. As Baldwin states, “The American *ideal*, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch

²⁸³ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 677.

and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden—as an unpatriotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood.”²⁸⁴

Baldwin uses a trope to illustrate the various binaries of the American ideal, and these binaries are positioned between the *ins* and *outs*, between those representing the American ideal of manhood and others whose race, gender, and sexuality are scorned. McBride states: “Baldwin mines an ideological construct to illuminate its dependence upon an antagonistic dichotomy and to elucidate its strategic deployment in the service of a nationalist mythology. In short, in both epigraphs, Baldwin speaks to the intersectionality of race, sex, class, and gender.”²⁸⁵ The consciousness of manhood in America is the ideology of a hierarchal sexual positioning of white male heteronormativity as the great achievement; namely, an “American ideal of masculinity.”

This positioning of white masculinity over the “Other” earmarks women, black men, and children as property, thus yielding overwhelming power to white men. Vogel writes:

In the 1970s, explained Robert Bly, poet and leader of the mythopoetic men’s movement, we “began to see all over the country a phenomenon that we might call the ‘soft male’...They’re not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There’s a gentle attitude toward life in their whole being and style of living. But many of these men are not happy.” This unhappiness, Bly elaborated, had to do with no longer having role models, in the home or in popular culture, of strong, authentic masculinity. Instead, argued Bly, we saw everywhere domesticated, emasculated men. White men, in particular, felt anxious about their “new roles” in the wake of inroads by minorities, feminists, and gays.²⁸⁶

White men needed to exhume their power. This fear of white male annihilation incited the ushering in of President Ronald Reagan.

As stated in the previous chapter, the 1970s saw the rise of the Black Power Movement, which worked to reimagine the narrative and discourse of black men. The rise of the feminist and

²⁸⁴ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 678.

²⁸⁵ Joyce and McBride, “*James Baldwin and Sexuality*,” Pg. 113.

²⁸⁶ Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 464.

gay movements were taking shape and positioning black people against a hypermasculine white hegemonic discourse that oppressed and marginalized these groups. The introduction of “freaks” and “Others” were positioning these groups in American society in ways that terrified white men, who were afraid of the proverbial mirror reflecting back the real truth of their own hybrid sexualities.

Baldwin’s essay appeared when Ronald Reagan became president. Vogel mentions that former President Reagan’s slogans called for a return to simpler times and ideals: traditional values, unambiguous strength, order, and power.²⁸⁷ It is also worth noting that Reagan was an actor before becoming president. Many of his characters were macho, manly, western—the leading man. Vogel states:

Reagan’s manly, cowboy-like image and aggressive, “no pastels” policies, then, both informed and were informed by a particular Hollywood vision of masculinity. As Jeffords puts it, “Ronald Reagan” and the “Reagan Revolution” became “sites” of a “national fantasy.” They spoke to how America—or at least many Americans—wanted to view themselves. The Reagan revolution was not just about policies; it was about images and narratives of strength, individualism, patriotic militarism, and unambiguous machismo.²⁸⁸

This ideal of white manhood was etched into the memory of white America. Reagan capitalized on these images, and on traditional values and power of American ideals and American manhood. Along with Reagan’s slogans and image, America had lost one of its most formidable symbols of white masculinity when, in 1979, famed western actor John Wayne died. Wayne represented the passing of a more traditional, triumphant vision of white masculinity.²⁸⁹ In the documentary, *Baldwin’s Nigger*, while speaking from London on racism in America, Baldwin

²⁸⁷ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 465.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, Pg. 473.

²⁸⁹ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*.

comments on his development into manhood in light of the image of John Wayne. He remarked that he “was formed in a certain crucible. My school really was the streets of New York City. My frame of reference was George Washington and John Wayne. But, I was a child, and a child in the eyes of the world has to use what he sees. He has nothing else to use. And, you are formed by what you see, the choices you have to make, and the ways you have to discover what it means to be black in New York.”²⁹⁰ Baldwin’s frames of reference, George Washington and John Wayne, framed both manhood and American identity through white hegemonic masculinity.

White masculinity refuses to *see* itself in terms of its need for power in order to stabilize its white hegemonic un-natured and un-nurtured maleness. Any attempts to explore the boundaries of male expression would ultimately push white men to their breaking points, a place where they feel they are losing control. As Baldwin stated, the imagery of the rugged, rough, tough, and macho white man who could save the day had been set in the American psyche. Unfortunately, this kind of white male figure only further reinforced white America’s history of violence, which whites enacted on American soil when they first came into contact with the American Indian. The same violence was also enacted upon blacks in Africa when they forcibly removed black persons from their homeland—stealing them away and savagely beating them into submission. This history of violence would continue with other racially and culturally groups that were non-white.

²⁹⁰ YouTube, Documentary – “James Baldwin and Dick Gregory – *Baldwin’s Nigger*,” 1969, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zkWshZRm-M>.

Symbolic Imagery of White Power and Representation
in White Masculinity

In his essay, Baldwin comments on slavery as the historic site of white male dominance and violence. Baldwin identifies this site as the leer of “dragons.” The dragon represents a powerful trope of the ancient grimacing mythological creature known for terror, fire, and destruction: “Dragons may not have been here then, but they are certainly here now, breathing fire, belching smoke; or, to be less literary and biblical about it, attempting to intimidate the mores, morals, and morality of this particular and peculiar time and place.”²⁹¹ America is founded on violence and has a glorified history of romancing violence in the making of the “Other.” In this sense, Baldwin regards American masculinity, not as an idea, but as an “ideal.”²⁹² Thus, if America has no problem making slavery a romantic tale, the freak and the “Other” can both be brutally attacked by the same romantic trope.

Whiteness is a constructed identity which positions itself over and against blackness, which is the “Other.” Because white male identity represents an institutional power and hierarchy, black males often aim to absorb whiteness. Literary scholar Nathan Grant posits:

[N]ineteenth-century African American thinkers had constructed a purposive masculinity as a countermeasure—one indeed identical to normative white masculinity—in order to deflect claims of inferiority that would surely materialize in the wake of expressions of black anger: [Douglass and other nineteenth-century African American spokespersons] saw the crucial test of black fitness to be whether or not black men were, in fact, what was conventionally considered ‘manly.’ [The middle-class definitions of manliness they used] contained the following crucial ingredients: nobility, intelligence, strength, articulateness, loyalty, virtue, rationality, courage, self-control, courtliness, honesty, and physical attractiveness as defined in white Western European terms.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 679.

²⁹² *Ibid*, Pg. 678.

²⁹³ Nathan Grant. *Masculinist Impulses: Toomer, Hurston, Black Writing and Modernity*, (St. Louis, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004). Pg. 2.

Whiteness is the hegemonic discourse of masculine patriarchal heteronormative design. Black males' pursuit of white acceptance or white American citizenship emulates this discourse. That is, black males' need for acceptance by white Americans advances their interest in full American citizenship by assimilation to heteronormative Victorian manners. They can work, earn money, participate in a democratic society, and move throughout various spaces without barriers or suspicion.

However, those not mentioned in this discourse are black queer men, whose manners are considered effeminate, soft, weak, and sexually promiscuous. Such traits mark them as the "Other." In Baldwin's terms, they are freaks. Moreover, Baldwin's prophetic immanence bears witness to a child growing into a man, developing and locating his sexuality, mining New York City and the gay world, and overcoming. Referring to the gospel song, "How I Got Over," Baldwin testifies, "My soul looks back and wonders."²⁹⁴ It is through spiritual witnessing that his soul can attest to his survival in unsafe and harsh spaces. Speaking prophetically as a witness of his own salvation, Baldwin invokes a gospel that translates into a spiritual commune both within and outside of himself.

Reflections of Home and Becoming: Baldwin on Being Identified as a Freak and Out of Place in His Home and Community of Harlem

Baldwin's childhood reflections introduce three new tropes: *sexual possibility*, *target*, and *creature*. These tropes push in a different direction from the introductory tropes of the *hermaphrodite*, *androgynous person*, *freak*, and *dragon*. These tropes arise when Baldwin turns

²⁹⁴ See, Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 681.

to his own personal narrative as a young boy growing up in Harlem, experiencing poverty and a tumultuous relationship with his father. One learns that young Baldwin was the victim of multiple forms of abuse. He spoke of extreme poverty and how his family received home relief from the U.S. government. This relief came in the form of prunes and tins of corned beef. Due to the variations by which his mother prepared and cooked the corn beef—from frying, boiling, and baking to adding vegetables and condiments—Baldwin would come to hate the dish as an adult.²⁹⁵

Baldwin then turns to a memory of receiving a beating from his father for losing a dime. The money was the last dime in the house, and his father sent him to the store to purchase kerosene. Baldwin slipped on a piece of ice and lost the dime. “My father,” he wrote, “beat me with an iron cord from the kitchen to the back room and back again, until I lay, half-conscious, on my belly on the floor.”²⁹⁶ This violent scene shows the extreme poverty of Baldwin’s family, the brutality of his father, and representations of manhood. Vogel comments of the episode:

Such experiences were among his [Baldwin] first lessons about what it meant to be a man. Men were violent, and so too was America. “This violence, furthermore,” reflects Baldwin, “is not merely literal and actual, but appears to be admired and lusted after, and the key to the American imagination.” For Baldwin, then, the personal violence he experienced in his home and on the streets was intertwined with the violence that led to state-sanctioned brutality, nuclear standoffs, and imperialist wars.²⁹⁷

The history of America is one of violence. White slave masters beat, killed, and maimed slaves, and this history of violence has continued into America’s future. Baldwin experienced this violence heaped upon him for losing a dime. The beating, however, was not only a representation

²⁹⁵ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 680.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, Pg. 680.

²⁹⁷ Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 468.

of violence, but of manhood. Baldwin lost money, and money was scarce in his family. Moreover, money meant power; namely, a man's power to provide and take care of his family. Baldwin was the eldest child, whom his father sent to the store for kerosene. This was his momentary job, and he neglected his errand. He did not return with the kerosene, which was needed in order to keep the family warm. However, reflecting on the incidence, Baldwin states, "Yet—strange though it is to realize this looking back—I never felt threatened in those years, when I was growing up in Harlem, my home town. I think this may be because it was familiar; the white people who lived there then were as poor as we, and there was no TV setting our teeth on edge with exhortations to buy what we could never hope to afford."²⁹⁸ Furthermore, in *looking back*, Baldwin appears to have found hope and reconciliation with this early lesson on manhood and economics. If all around him was poverty, and everyone was on the same level and equal playing field, including poor blacks and poor whites, then any binaries between blacks and whites or rich and poor were ruptured. They all were *out* of the center and at the bottom of society. In this way, race and class were flattened.

Still, Baldwin adds that he was unbelievably unhappy and pathologically shy.²⁹⁹ Although he shared that it was no one's fault but his own, his father certainly contributed to his feeling ugly. Baldwin states that his father kept him in short pants longer than he should have, and, "I had been told, and I believed, that I was ugly. This meant that the idea of myself as a sexual possibility, or target, as a creature capable of inciting desire or capable of desire, had never entered my mind."³⁰⁰ Only on reflection could Baldwin imagine himself as being

²⁹⁸ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pgs. 680-681.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 681.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 681.

something other than a possible target, or a creature capable of inciting desire. What child would be so astute as to identify himself as being undesirable or unenticing for sexual intimacy?

More interesting in Baldwin's remarks is his reference to himself as a "creature." Here, Baldwin positions himself in the discourse of "freaks." Perhaps it is this slippage between creature and freak in his memory that situates his sense of non-desirability as a child, and links his feelings of ugliness to his identity and self-worth.³⁰¹ Vogel claims that it "finally did enter his mind, he revealed, when he was molested as a young boy by a stranger who 'lured me into a hallway, saying that he wanted to send me to the store.' It was the last time, Baldwin writes, he ever ran an errand for a stranger."³⁰² The *remembering* and *looking back* provides entrée into Baldwin's memory, which serves as a means of positioning his sexuality and gender as undesirable and unenticing. Baldwin is revealing more to us about his own feelings of attractiveness and physical aesthetics. His memory is projecting his own thoughts of feeling ugly and unwanted. However, Baldwin was obviously not undesirable, if indeed, as he recalls, he was the target for someone's menacing desires. This would not be the last time Baldwin's memory triggers estimations of his sexuality and desirability, given his race, gender, and sexuality.

Baldwin introduces readers to another older male character, a Harlem racketeer, for whom he became a young, attractive boyfriend. Baldwin notes how strange it must have appeared to see a "stingy-brimmed, mustachioed, razor-toting Poppa, and skinny, popeyed me together in various shady joints.... I think I was supposed to be his nephew, some nonsense like that, though he was Spanish and Irish, with curly black hair. But I knew that he was showing me off and wanted his friends to be happy for him—which, indeed, if the way they treated me can be

³⁰¹ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 468.

³⁰² *Ibid*, Pg. 468.

taken as a barometer, they were.”³⁰³ Vogel observes that this boyfriend would later show up in Baldwin’s work as a character he would meet and fall in love with: an Italian man in Greenwich Village, who would bring him a certain degree of contentment and security, and the model for Giovanni in Baldwin’s second novel, *Giovanni’s Room*.³⁰⁴

Compellingly, Baldwin ends this narration of his young man/older man relationship concluding, “And though I loved him, too—in my way, a boy’s way—I was mightily tormented, for I was still a child evangelist, which everybody knew, Lord. My soul looks back and wonders.”³⁰⁵ This *reflective* look into the past is the motif through which Baldwin admits readers into a life. He wonders if, had things gone differently, might he have become the preeminent writer, speaker, and activist he became. Did the church and his evangelism save him from a *boyhood love affair* with an older man? Baldwin was able to *reflect*, to conjure a memory within his soul. This was a spiritual revelation, an intimate conversation within himself, with a source with whom he connected. Baldwin remembers that it was salvation that delivered him from what could have been. It provided him with the experience to write about it, and to create characters for *Giovanni’s Room*, one of his most provocative novels on sexuality.

Baldwin’s relationship with his own father was complex, for his father did not understand his son’s effeminacy, softness, or fragility. To escape his father’s abusiveness, Baldwin turned to the streets as refuge, where he tried to dodge his father’s brutality and violence against his sexuality. He understood that his sexual, gender, and racial identities were under the menacing surveillance of society, for his sexuality was filtered through the discourse of displacement.

³⁰³ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 681.

³⁰⁴ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*.

³⁰⁵ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 681.

Baldwin brings up the words “gay” and “queer” in order to unhinge them and illustrate what those terms meant in his then-world. He writes: “The condition that is now called gay was then called queer. The operative word was faggot and, later, pussy, but those epithets really had nothing to do with the question of sexual preference: “You were being told simply that you had no balls.””³⁰⁶

A man without “balls” is a castrated man unable to impregnate and reproduce with a woman and thereby create a family or extend a progeny. However, when gay men are signified as “pussies,” they are identified *with* female genitalia. As Vogel proffers, this emasculation had profound psychological effects on Baldwin. Young Baldwin was chased, bullied, and taunted. He was thrown out of cafeterias and rooming houses. He was told he was bad for the neighborhood.³⁰⁷ “The cops,” Baldwin *recalled*, “watched all this with a smile, never making the faintest motion to protect me or to disperse my attackers; in fact, I was even more afraid of the cops than I was of the populace.”³⁰⁸ Again, Baldwin *remembers* frequently being compared to a woman, usually with more demeaning epithets, and the protection he sought from the police only perpetuated more violence against his manhood and sexual identity. Ultimately, the government, society, and home all failed to provide Baldwin with a safe environment for developing a healthy estimation of his sexual/gender personality.

Baldwin’s prophetic immanence presences the ways in which violence and abuse can bring about *conversion*. When gay selves are imprisoned, trapped, targeted, abused, stripped of power, isolated, and made homeless, they learn that something is wrong in the order of things,

³⁰⁶ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 681.

³⁰⁷ See, Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 468.

³⁰⁸ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, 682.

and they begin to look for new social and religious paradigms entirely. Baldwin makes this clear as he reflects: “For what this really means is that all of the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered, thank heaven, very early in my life. Not without anguish, certainly; but once you have discerned the meaning of a label, it may seem to define you for others, but it does not have the power to define you to yourself.”³⁰⁹ These life experiences in Harlem—being beaten and told he was not a man—were all flattened, in a sense, because, as Baldwin had stated, everyone was poor, black, and “Other.” The categories and binaries only became prevalent once he left home.

When Baldwin moved in spaces outside his community, he suddenly became the realized “Other.” This otherness was situated into American categories of normative notions of man and woman, male and female, black and white, rich and poor. Yet, Baldwin knew these categories and labels were a hindrance to things people needed in order to make sense of themselves, their places in the world, their communities, and society. However, Baldwin noted that the power resided in the individual, the one being labeled, the one who refused the terms and definitions. If one could *reimagine* oneself, in spite of the binaries that were needed to construct and create the “Other,” then the notions of masculinity and femininity, man and woman, and black and white would fall out of place. This is exactly what Baldwin did in his works, writings, and speeches.

Finding A New Community: Baldwin’s Sexual Discovery

Out of the Center of His Black Community

Baldwin would escape the brutal beatings of his stepfather and the harsh streets of Harlem by venturing to the bright lights and illustrious vices of midtown Manhattan. Out from

³⁰⁹ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 681.

the shadows of the torture he endured at home, and away from the harassment of Harlem police officers, Baldwin found another community. Nevertheless, these were years of great terror and confusion for him.³¹⁰

Baldwin found work in the Garment Center of New York City. He was not getting along well at home, so he stayed away most days and nights, venturing into movie houses on Forty-Second Street. “Today that street is exactly what it was when I was an adolescent: it has simply become more blatant,” says Baldwin.³¹¹ During the 1970s and ‘80s, Forty-Second Street, namely Times Square, had become home to sex, drugs, and prostitution. It was filled with places where men and women could find sex anywhere, including bookstores. Baldwin frequented movie theaters, where foreign films were playing, and he would encounter X-rated audiences of men who would go to the dark movie theaters and engage in anonymous sex acts out of public view.³¹² He also ventured into bookstores, where adult magazines such as *Playboy* were sold, and where men “stood, it seemed, for hours, with the magazines in their hands and a kind of miasma in their eyes,” Baldwin wrote. “There were all kinds of men, mostly young and, in those days, almost exclusively white. Also, for what it’s worth, they were heterosexual, since the images they studied, at crotch level, were those of women.”³¹³ Baldwin makes an interesting caveat in stating that the men were heterosexual because of the types of magazines they appeared to be reading. Is it safe to assume these men were heterosexual because they were looking at adult magazines that featured naked women? Or, were they holding the magazines, fixated on the

³¹⁰ See, Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 682.

³¹¹ Ibid, Pg. 682.

³¹² Ibid, Pg. 682.

³¹³ Ibid, Pg. 682.

images because of their curiosity? Perhaps some were homosexual and used the magazines as a ruse to lure other men into thinking they were heterosexual. Most bookstores, which sold adult magazines, were places where men who were homosexual, bisexual, and even curious seekers could cruise and solicit one another for sex under the guise of performing heterosexuality.

Baldwin's assumption complicates his desire to loosen the reigns on masculinity, but, at the same time, illustrates how difficult it was for men to engage in and live their truths without the norms of society dictating their sexual desires. Thus, androgyny signified these men operating in plain sight, in perfect view of the world, while no everyone turned a blind eye.

This insight for Baldwin jarred his *memory*, because he returns the reader back to Forty-Second Street, stating that he “nearly blotted the first time out.”³¹⁴ He *remembers* going to the movies and “that a combination of innocence and terror prevented me from too clearly apprehending the action taking place in the darkness of the Apollo—though I understood it well enough to remain standing a great deal of time.”³¹⁵ Baldwin reflects on a time when a young boy stood behind him and grabbed his cock while another young boy simultaneously came up and put his own cock against Baldwin's hand.³¹⁶ Baldwin states that he fled the movie theater after that incident. But, he would return, possibly out of curiosity or even sexual exploration. However, he felt a sense of great angst when going to the men's room, where most of the action seemed to be taking place, and where men engaged in cruising and sex acts with another. Baldwin stated that: “I didn't want to ‘fool around’ and so risk hurting the feelings of my uptown

³¹⁴ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 682.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 682.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, Pgs. 682-683.

friend.”³¹⁷ The young innocence of his love for his Spanish-Italian lover prevented him from engaging in sex acts with other men; yet, the curiosity of male sex play fascinated Baldwin.

This memory brings Baldwin to yet another moment of paralyzing guilt and terror. He stated earlier in the essay that he had an “innocence and terror,” which prevented him from apprehending what was happening with men in the darkness of the Apollo Theater. Now, according to Baldwin, he has *guilt* and terror. He writes:

I cannot be judged or judge myself too harshly, for I remember the faces of the men. These men, so far from being or resembling faggots, looked and sounded like the vigilantes who banded together on weekends to beat faggots up. (And I was around long enough, suffered enough, and learned enough to be forced to realize that this was very often true.) I might not have learned this if I had been a white boy; but sometimes a white man will tell a black boy anything, everything, weeping briny tears. He knows that the black boy can never betray him, for no one will believe his testimony.³¹⁸

Baldwin’s innocence, terror, and guilt could be, in part, due to his being a child evangelist. Understanding the concept of good and bad—or rather, sin and sinful acts—this terror and guilt could have been an internal conflict of his soul. He was a preacher, and to be in the underbelly of deviance and illicit behavior could have fostered an inability to reconcile himself and his sexuality with his religious faith.

Baldwin, it appears, had empathy for these white men who lived in the darkness of the theaters, exploring their sexual proclivities. They were sad and tormented white men who could not face the reality of their lives, or their sexuality. They were gripped with fear of anyone discovering their sexual desires, which is why many of them sought sexual relations with black

³¹⁷ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 683.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 683.

men because, as Baldwin points out, a black boy could never betray a white man's secret; no one would believe him.³¹⁹

As I mentioned earlier, the binaries that Baldwin used to illustrate androgyny were, in reality, already manifested in class, race, and sexuality between white and black men. Black boys were easy targets. They were lower class in the hierarchy of manhood and in racial identity, so they became prey for white predators. Baldwin described these men at length:

These men looked like cops, football players, soldiers, sailors, Marines or bank presidents, admen, boxers, construction workers; they had wives, mistresses, and children. I sometimes saw them in other settings—in, as it were, the daytime. Sometimes they spoke to me, sometimes not, for anguish has many days and styles. But I had first seen them in the men's room, sometimes on their knees, peering up into the stalls, or standing at the urinal stroking themselves, staring at another man, stroking, and with this miasma in their eyes. Sometimes, eventually, inevitably, I would find myself in bed with one of these men, a despairing and dreadful conjunction, since their need was as relentless as quicksand and as impersonal, and sexual rumor concerning blacks preceded me. As for sexual roles, these were created by the imagination and limited by one's stamina.³²⁰

Baldwin breaks the proverbial closet doors off the hinges by outing these men. He ruptures the narrative of an ideal American manhood. No man is left out of this new narrative, including married, single, and those cheating on their wives. Baldwin snatches the wool from the eyes of America and its views on masculinity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality. He collapses the categories of traditional manhood, including traditional sex roles. Baldwin let it be known that the categories of masculinity, manhood, and men were both unstable and undefinable. He writes: "At bottom, what I had learned was that the male desire for a male roams everywhere, avid, desperate, unimaginably lonely, culminating often in drugs, piety, madness, or death."³²¹ What

³¹⁹ See, Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 683.

³²⁰ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 683.

³²¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 683.

was killing these men, drowning them in loneliness, and suffocating them in drugs and piety, was their deep desire to maintain and live a lie. Their manhood, sexual desire, and masculinity were wrapped up in a lie, a lie that America fed them.

Baldwin proceeds by shifting the essay's location to Greenwich Village, and weaves a compelling narrative of his life as a young black gay man navigating not only his tumultuous home life, but also the dangerous, sin-filled streets of Harlem, eventually moving downtown to this gay haven. Although he may have initially romanticized Greenwich Village as a safe place for others like himself, he found it quite the opposite. Baldwin writes: "Life for niggers was fairly rough in Greenwich Village. There were only about three of us, if I remember correctly, when I first hit those streets, and I was the youngest, the most visible, and the most vulnerable."³²² Noticeably, he used the word "nigger," and not blacks. He implicates himself in this category, stating there were only three of them, and he seemed quite aware of his place within the hierarchy of race in the Village, as he was most visible.

Baldwin makes yet another juxtaposition of his visibility with his desirability. He states that he was, "decidedly the most improbable."³²³ "Perhaps, as they say in the theater, I was a hard type to cast," he surmises.³²⁴ In a community of gay men, and particularly white gay men, Baldwin expected there to be a camaraderie of like-minded persons in Greenwich Village. However, he knew that his black skin was a feature by which he would be cast as the "Other." And, in his otherness, he was undesirable, "a hard type to cast." Even in the theater, he was not part of the audition, the cast, or the ensemble of whiteness. Equally, the sight of Baldwin in a

³²² Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 684.

³²³ *Ibid*, Pg. 685.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 685.

white gay neighborhood, in which very few blacks ventured, was the sight of someone out of place. He was both spectacle and anonymous in the white gay community. As social justice scholar John O. Calmore argues: “The particular cultural construction of the anonymous black man in public space prompts an ambivalent societal gaze toward him, a gaze that may reflect both reasonable and unreasonable suspicion. As a result, people tend to despise, to fear, and to avoid him.”³²⁵ Looking to escape and find a community where he could be among similar individuals, Baldwin arrived anxiously in Greenwich Village, looking for a warm reception and a loving welcome. Violating the purity and sanctity of white spaces. Baldwin discovered that he was a transgressor.

Despite his entering a community of gay men with whom he felt a shared sexual identity, Baldwin’s reality was that he was still dealing with white people in white spaces. The culture of gayness did not allude to camaraderie across races. Baldwin’s racial and sexual identities were predicated on hierarchy, access, and privilege. Additionally, race, class, and economics were no longer flattened as they were in Harlem. In Greenwich Village, where few blacks ventured, all of these categories came at an expense for black gay men, who did not have the luxury or affordability to linger in the area as patrons. They were considered trespassers in white spaces that were created and shaped by white gay men. Economically, socially, and politically, Baldwin and other black gay men were not considered viable collaborators or contributors to white gay men or their movement. What capital did black gay men bring? What did black gay men have that would situate them into the culture and community of white gay men?

³²⁵ John O. Calmore, *Reasonable and Unreasonable Suspects: The Cultural Construction of the Anonymous Black Man in Public Space (Here Be Dragons)*, in Athena D. Mutua, *Progressive Black Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Pg. 138.

Sexual identity does not make for equality among all, because some have access and privilege that others never will. Baldwin was black and gay. Although being gay in the 1960s and 1970s was considered abhorrent behavior in society, to be black *and* gay crossed another boundary outside the typical spheres of otherness and marginalization. Baldwin and other black gay men like him had to hide their sexuality and desires. They had to remain closeted for fear of being isolated and ostracized from their communities. They were not allowed space or opportunity to be disruptive agitators like their white gay counterparts, and especially not in Greenwich Village. Baldwin quickly recognized that not only was he a disgusting site/sight in Harlem, but also elsewhere.

Locating Baldwin's Gender Sexual Politics in White Spaces: The Negotiation of His Sexual Identity Within Race and Intimate Relationships, and His Return to Home

As was discussed in the previous chapter, “disgust” is part of the cultural formation of people as they develop in various societies, groups, and communities. Disgust is passed from one generation to the next, contributing to a culture's sense of taste and manners. Ultimately, it is contributory to one's cognitive personality, including their emotional and mental identities. Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that the concept of “dirt” signifies pollution, contamination, and disgust because “our idea of dirt is dominated by the knowledge of pathogenic organisms.”³²⁶ In the same vein, dirt often signifies people as being vile, unclean, and impure in acts and behavior; it is, moreover, related to how people maintain and care for their bodies. For black gay men, engaging in oral and anal sex are metaphorically dirty matters and, hence, filthy.

³²⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Pg. 35.

Despite the fact that many heterosexual people engage in anal and oral sex, it is the thought of two men using their bodily functions for pleasure with other men that disgusts heteronormative persons. They imagine the fecal waste and matter that may potentially be exposed during sex acts, and this makes the sex acts between two men sound dirty, unclean, illicit, and impure. As a result, heterosexist people perceive gay men as disgusting. Black gay men are not only out of place, but also displaced out of societies and communities.

Baldwin wrote of how he escaped his own community of Harlem for Greenwich Village, an area which was known (and still is), as a site for homosexual cruising and gathering. In other terms, it is the bowels of the under-life, a seedier part of the city, considering that it is where homosexuals meet for love, sex, and social gathering. Greenwich Village is a community literally situated at the bottom of Manhattan. Here, the homosexual is out of sight; that is, out of the gaze and the policing of livelier areas such as Midtown, Times Square, the Upper West Side, and the Upper East Side, where productive heterosexual citizens and their families occupy space. Although gay men live in these communities, Greenwich Village is where they engage in homosexual activity, frolicking, and gathering. Thus, the homosexual is excreted to the bowels of lower Manhattan, out of view of the heterosexual normative gaze, in the underbelly of Manhattan.

Baldwin escaped to lower Manhattan, in part, due to his sexuality, but also his racial identity. In many ways, he was desired, but in other ways, he was despised. Calmore calls this representation of the unsightly black man, *unwanted traffic*. He says:

The term unwanted traffic suggests, that the negative representation flows with black males through time and across space, from youth to elder years and from predominantly black settings to predominantly white or mixed settings. Because of the high degree of residential segregation, most black men are perceived as unwanted traffic within the very neighborhoods that should represent supportive homeplaces.³²⁷

³²⁷ Calmore, *Reasonable and Unreasonable Suspects*, Pg. 138.

Both at home and in Greenwich Village, Baldwin was unwanted traffic. He found no place or space to live into this sexual identity. This was not Baldwin's fault. Gay men had to create their own spaces in order to find desire, passion, sexual expression, and love with other men.

Greenwich Village provided this space.

This world within a world had been carved out for white gay men. Baldwin discovered white gay men who desired him, but he could not participate in the white gay aesthetic. The gay world had been created in and served white ideology and culture. In some regard, he was an anonymous black man navigating a highway of disenfranchisement. Baldwin attempted to move and interact with the white gay community in the Village. He hoped to be seen and acknowledged by other gay men in order to resolve the racial conflict that had rendered him sexually unwanted and undesirable. But, even in his own community, Baldwin was unwanted traffic. He had to circumnavigate his effeminacy, just as he did when his stepfather found his sexuality on the wrong side of heteronormative fluidity. According to Baldwin,

A black gay person who is a sexual conundrum to society is already, long before the question of sexuality comes into it, menaced and marked because he's black or she's black. The sexual question comes after the question of color; it's simply one more aspect of the danger in which all black people live. I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, into a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly. Their reactions seems to me in direct proportion to the sense of feeling cheated of the advantages which accrue to white people in a white society. There's an element, it has always seemed to me, of bewilderment and complaint. Now that may sound very harsh, but the gay world as such is no more prepared to accept black people than anywhere else in society. It's a very hermetically sealed world with very unattractive features, including racism.³²⁸

³²⁸ Baldwin and Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Pgs. 66-67.

As such, Baldwin was misdirected traffic, opposing the flow of normalcy in his home, his community, and even in Greenwich Village. His race and sexuality disrupted spaces that considered his sexuality a social conundrum. He knew that he was menaced and marked, but he pushed back against those markers to reclaim his own identity. He resisted the prisons of race and sexuality. He knew that, once he accepted these terms, definitions, and boundaries, they would keep him bound. Even in the streets, Baldwin encountered several men who made attempts to take advantage of him. Some tried to use him, and others harassed, threatened, and verbally assaulted him for his sexuality. Baldwin posits,

On every street corner, I was called a faggot. This meant that I was despised, and, however horrible this is, it is clear. What was not clear at that time of my life was what motivated the men and boys who mocked and chased me; for, if they found me when they were alone, they spoke to me very differently—frightening me, I must say, into a stunned and speechless paralysis. For when they were alone, they spoke very gently and wanted me to take them home and make love. (They could not take me home; they lived with their families.) The bafflement and the pain this caused in me remain beyond description. I was far too terrified to be able to accept their propositions, which could only result, it seemed to me, in making myself a candidate for gang rape. At the same time, I was moved by their loneliness, their halting, near speechless need. But I did not understand it.³²⁹

Baldwin claimed that his sexuality and his presence were “despised,” thus, contemptuous and repugnant. On the streets, his black skin and effeminate aesthetics were perfect for surveillance. The heteronormative gaze upon his body rendered him undesirable. He was in pain and conflicted about his own looks and sexuality. He saw himself as disgusting, only because others first saw him so. He was an unwanted black gay man in public view. Yet, he was also wanted for sexual pleasure, although it was out of sight.

Androgyny was more than a metaphor for Baldwin. It was also a fantasy for some and a fetish to others, and Baldwin gave white men and women what they needed, desired, and yearned

³²⁹ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 684.

for. Baldwin explained that the sight and thought of him and his sexuality were emotionally unpleasing. However, what is most telling in the quote above is that, when the men and boys were alone with him, Baldwin and these men and boys were *out* of the public gaze, alone in the bedroom. He states that they spoke “very gently” and “wanted me to take them home and make love.”

This parallel world within a world, the gay world, was a terrain where men were vulnerable. They were free to be themselves and express their desires and love for other men. Baldwin was no longer a marginalized, unwanted, disposed body. He was not caught in a binary, but became the singularity by becoming the sexual release of white male fantasy. This frightened him most because he did not understand how he was both a despised, unsightly, and disgusting creature in plain view but, in the bedroom, beyond the gaze of surveillance, a lover, confidante, and harbinger for companionship, lust, and desire. This baffled him. These were the same men whom Baldwin earlier postulated in his essay, “are running banks or filling stations or maternity wards, churches, armies or countries,” yet would lie naked with him in his bed, making love. They wanted to be free, exploring sex with another man. However, the American ideal of masculinity prevented them from living openly and being their true authentic selves as gay men, or as men who desired sex with other men. White hegemonic masculinity halted this and any other notion of male sexual exploration, desire, and pursuit.

Most telling is the number of lovers Baldwin had, including white and black women. His love and sexual desires were not limited to a single gender. He explored all the aspects of himself, and found love with those who wanted to find love. “The first black girl I met who dug me I fell in love with, lived with and almost married,” Baldwin wrote. “But I met her, though I

was only twenty-two, many years too late.”³³⁰ Sexual exploration with white women also provided Baldwin with the space to engage his freedom of love. But, ironically, Baldwin would fall in love with the first black girl who *dug him*. Baldwin yearned for love, because, at home, he had been told he was ugly. His father withheld love from him, and the streets—whether in Harlem or Greenwich Village—certainly did not call for intimate love relationships. Baldwin, like so many, wanted love, and he was readily available to return it to whoever gave it to him. As a friend once told Baldwin, “go where the blood beats.”³³¹

Baldwin’s sexual explorations with white women went beyond simply love. For the white women, it was a fetish and, in some instances, a rebellion against their parents. As Baldwin recalls: “The white girls I had known or been involved with—different categories—had paralyzed me, because I simply did not know what, apart from my sex, they wanted.”³³² This perplexity seems to be confounded in the same mystery with those of the white men who would degrade Baldwin in public, yet, in the bedroom would *whisper their love, fears, and desires*. This similar paralysis frightened him when the *men spoke gently* to him, and, *wanted him to take them home and make love*. Only in the confines of the bedroom, naked and alone with Baldwin, are these people free and vulnerable. What is telling is that Baldwin knew that the binaries of black and white kept him bound to the reality of being an “Other” to white women, and his displacement as “Other” diminished him to the part of his body they wanted for their disposal—his penis. And yet, as Baldwin states: “More than one white girl had already made me know that her color was more powerful than my dick.”³³³

³³⁰ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 685.

³³¹ See, Baldwin and Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Pg. 74.

³³² Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 685.

³³³ *Ibid*, Pg. 686.

Race trumps gender. That is, race trumps black men regardless of their having a penis. They are still black men in opposition to white men, regardless of their gender alignments. Baldwin continues: “In short, I was black in that world, and I was used that way, and by people who truly meant me no harm. And they could *not* have meant me any harm, because they did not see me.”³³⁴ Being unwanted traffic, mere flesh, and an object of consumption, Baldwin was simply useful genitalia, an instrument of white sexual power between white men and women.

One evening, while in Greenwich Village, Baldwin was at the bottom of the steps of the subway station, saying farewell to friends who had come to visit him, when he noticed a gang of boys at the top of the steps who “cried, in high, feminine voices, ‘Is this where the fags meet?’”³³⁵ Frightened, Baldwin did not feel he could go back upstairs, and he would have to ride the train with his friends to another stop and then walk back down to his home. However, one of the boys noticed Baldwin, called his name and came down the steps and threw one arm around him, asking where he had been. “He had let me know, some time before, that he wanted me to take him home—but I was surprised that he could be so open before his friends, who for their part seemed to find nothing astonishing in this encounter and disappeared, probably in search of other faggots.”³³⁶ These boys were Baldwin’s androgyny, now clustered and searching out “faggots” to take them home so that they too could feel desired and loved while making love. The question remains, however: why feign disgust in public, asking: “Is this where the fags meet?” This was their way of displaying machismo in public, throwing off the scent for those who may be wondering what the young gang of boys were doing in Greenwich Village. While

³³⁴ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 686.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 684.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, Pg. 684.

the group found camaraderie in androgyny, and in their ability to mask who and what they really were in public view, they could not hide their same-sex desires.

Finally, Baldwin reflects on a time in which many of the men he had once encountered in passing had died. This memory is jarring because we are able to bear witness, along with Baldwin, of a tragic ending for himself, had he not escaped the streets. Baldwin laments: “But many of them are dead, and I remember how some of them died—some in the streets, some in the Army, some on the needle, some in jail.”³³⁷ Fortunately, Baldwin made it out, through the mean streets of the gay world of Greenwich Village. He had not succumbed to the snares and traps to which many had fallen prey.

Baldwin once encountered a friend who asked Baldwin why he never stopped to talk to him, and Baldwin replied: “That’s right, baby; I didn’t stop because I didn’t want you to think that I was trying to seduce you.”³³⁸ This queer world Baldwin was navigating was not for him. He saw something more, something under the surface and beneath the veil, where there were scores of lonely, miserable, and sad men. He saw them because he saw the reflection of himself in that world. Baldwin writes of similar feelings: “I moved through that world very quickly; I have described it as ‘my season in hell,’ for I was never able to make my peace with it.”³³⁹ This religious rhetorical move helps us understand that it was Baldwin’s faith that saved him from potential death, drugs, and a life of misery and loneliness—thus saving his soul, not only from a figurative hell, but from the prison that binds androgyny. Many others, however, were locked in, unable to live, move, and be free in their identities because of the American Ideal of masculinity.

³³⁷ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 684.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 685.

³³⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 685.

Conclusion

James Baldwin wrote about the discoveries of life, black and white, in order to free himself from the constraints, binaries, and prisons that Americans were insistent in maintaining. He looked into the past, present, and future, juxtaposing these times and spaces, and critically interrogating race, gender, sex, and sexuality on their individuated terms. He used his own life and experiences, opening the closets of his racial, gender, and sexual identities. It was as if Baldwin was saying: *come, take a look, and see what you find*. In documentary film, *The Price of the Ticket*, Baldwin states:

I think the trick is to say yes to life. I think that the details, it's only, it's we of the 20th century who are so obsessed with the particular details of anybody's sex life. I don't think those details make any difference. I would not be able to deny a certain power that I have had to deal with which is to deal with me, which is called love. And, love comes in very strange packages. I loved a few men. I loved a few women...and a few people loved me, and that's, I suppose, is all that saved my life.³⁴⁰

Baldwin took the reins of his life and lived out loud. "Here Be Dragons" serves as a witness of his coming out, of his androgyny, and Baldwin embodies all the aspects of his gender/sexual being. He pushes beyond the borders of white hegemonic discourse on manhood and the American ideal of masculinity and identity, and by doing so, began navigating immanent spaces beyond the complexities of the racial and gender politics of his generation. In short, as Deleuze puts it, he became "A LIFE, and nothing else."³⁴¹ The pure immanence of Baldwin's LIFE created a complete upheaval and reversal of the religious categories that imprisoned him as a human subject growing up in the world of "good and evil." Ideas about the human condition, sin, salvation, and hope were all radically disrupted, and a space of personal and social conversion

³⁴⁰ See, *The Price of the Ticket*. Documentary, Maysles Films, August 14, 1989.

³⁴¹ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, Pg. 27.

came into view. According to Vogel: “Baldwin attempted to force a confrontation between America’s myths and realities. If the country was to change (a tenuous qualifier for Baldwin), it would not happen merely by moderate concessions in laws and institutions; its language, stories, images, and consciousness needed to change. His variation in ‘protest’ required an insistence that the ‘Other’ be recognized as more than a cause or a problem, a phantom of fear or projection of panic.”³⁴² This is why Baldwin positioned the essay around his personal narrative. He was the most formidable figure to be taken seriously. He was a “freak/*out*-sider/ pussy”—an effeminate queer under surveillance. Yet, it is Baldwin who shifts the singular matrix of the American ideal of manhood and masculinity, both calling and dragging *out* those who worked to render him bare flesh whose sex and sexuality fell to the margins.

Baldwin’s intelligence, articulation, and larger-than-life persona illumined his sexuality. His ‘in your face’ appearance and vocalizations often paired with other black leaders, and, along with his artistic and social activism, earned him an audience that bore witness to his open living, untethered to gender and sexual totalizing ideologies. He was a black man, dancing on the ideals of manhood while flaunting his female subjectivity. Baldwin plays out his sexuality and black identity on his own terms. There is no hiding it, and, there is no denying it: “But we are all androgynous,” says Baldwin, “not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other.”³⁴³

³⁴² Vogel, *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, Pg. 481.

³⁴³ Baldwin, *Here Be Dragons*, Pg. 690.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

When it comes to their racial and sexual identities, black gay men live in a hostile world. This is not to say that other marginalized and oppressed groups do not experience hostility. However, black gay men experience racial and sexual oppression from everywhere, including the Christian church. As I have demonstrated above, the Black Church has exhibited deep hostility toward black gay men. The Black Church has also been unkind and unwavering in its views of homosexuality, and this positions black gay men at the margins of their communities and families. This dissertation has worked through a trajectory of black gay men's voices, hearing them speak of their experiences within both the Black Church and their own families, and discussing how negative discourses on black sexuality—particularly against black gay men and their sexual habits—have become part of the ideology of the church.

These insights have been explored by religious scholars such as Victor Anderson, Michael Eric Dyson, Horace Griffin, Cheryl Clark, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Cornel West. Their works critically interrogate the Black Church and the historical implications of religious rhetoric toward black sexuality and homophobia. This dissertation has utilized these scholars, including other critical black gay male voices, such as Essex Hemphill's and, more important, James Baldwin's, to help underscore the importance of lived narratives that tell the story of what it means to be black and gay in a hostile world. Baldwin has written extensively on the matter of black sexuality, black gay men's experiences in the world, and the Black Church. Using himself and his own life history, Baldwin is presencing; he is a prophetic immanence for black gay men.

He unhinges societal notions of masculinity, black male gender performance, and black gay identity, and repositions black gay men at the center of grace and dignity. He works to help black gay men locate themselves in the world, in their families, and in the Black Church so that they may have their own say about their black bodies, their black sexuality, and their black identity.

Black religious rhetoric in the Black Church has played a key role in the construction of views about black sexuality and black sexual taboos, especially in homophobia against black gay men, and in homophobic ideologies of disgust and immoral behavior. From Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr. to Pastor Jamal Bryant, black preachers vehemently preach from their pulpits to the detriment of black homosexual men, the black community, and the black family. Targeting high profile public figures such as Prophet Jones and James Baldwin illustrate that, no matter who you are or your commitment of work to the black race, black male homosexuality is not welcomed in the Black Church. Thus, black gay men find themselves being preached *out* of the church because of their sexuality. Yet, they remain hopeful that the one black institution, which has been a staple in the black community, serving as an extension to the black family, will open its doors and arms, affirming and welcoming black gay men despite their sexuality. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, unpacking the taboo subject of black sexuality is a deeply rooted problem that has permeated the psyches of black people since they were kidnapped and stolen from their homes in Africa, and brought to the shores of America as slaves by white men.

The black body has been castrated, mutilated, and destroyed through slavery by white slave masters, and the lingering effects have persisted even today. I have teased out a genealogy of how the black body has been viewed and narrated through a history of rape and disease, which has positioned black people in some instances as inhuman and, in others, as second-class citizens

who are impure and immoral beings. After arriving in America and being forced to adapt Christian values and morality, black people inherited the puritanical values concerning sex and sexuality from their white slave masters. Unfortunately, these values further instigated negative perceptions of how black people viewed their own bodies, and shaped their ideologies on sex and sexuality. The sex and sexuality of black people has, in turn, impacted their well-being, including their social and political lives, especially in terms of how they negotiate their self-worth in a world that has consistently reminded them that they are not enough, unworthy, unwanted, and undesirable. This outlook on sex and sexuality within the black community has played a significant role in how black gay men view themselves in the world, and has shaped their lived experience within their communities and families. Black gay men have been ostracized because of who they are. Their racial and sexual identities have marked them as disgusting because of the ways in which they engage in sex with members of the same sex. Marked as disgusting, black gay men remain at the margins of the black community, the Black Church, and society.

The role of black respectability politics maintains a key factor in how black gay men negotiate between their racial identity and sexual identity. They are forced to find ways to navigate those identities within the black community, unlike their white male counterparts, because the prevailing ideology in the black community is that one cannot be both black and gay. Being gay is associated with whiteness.

Baldwin constantly struggled against this ideology when members of the Black Arts and Black Power Movements—namely, Eldridge Cleaver—claimed that Baldwin's allegiance was not for the black race, but for the white man. Thus, as I have discussed in this dissertation, Baldwin fought against the labels that would confine him and his work because he knew that these prisons would only further marginalize him, and his message would be lost.

Both James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin were targeted because of their sexuality, and Rustin was ousted from his role as the organizer of the March on Washington because of his sexual proclivities. In order to remove Rustin from his role in the Black Power Movement, Senator Strom Thurmond and Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. threatened Martin Luther King, Jr. that they would leak to the press the rumor that King and Rustin were involved in a romantic sexual affair, which was false. However, by this example, one can see the extreme measures many black preachers have taken in order to ostracize and demonize black gay men. The difference between Baldwin and Rustin was that Rustin was an openly gay man, whereas Baldwin chose not to publicly affirm his sexuality. Although he wrote extensively about gay sexuality and gay relationships in his fiction, and spoke publicly about these in the media, Baldwin argued that his own sexuality was about love for all, regardless of gender.

This is why Baldwin is relevant to black gay men and lesbians today. His prophetic immanence of living a LIFE on its terms, not confined to a prison of race or sex, made him a target similar to other prophets. And yet, he would not conform. Like the scripture from Romans 12:2—“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”³⁴⁴—Baldwin reminds us all to be not conformed to the prisons, binaries, and categories of this world. This is the message that resonates for black gay men today, because they see in Baldwin the will to be free, untethered by the limits of a faith tradition that refuses to acknowledge their humanity and dignity.

Baldwin understood the Black Church because he did not only come from it, but he epitomized—in some respects—what the Black Church should be about; namely, love for all

³⁴⁴ Romans 12:2 (New Revised King James Version).

regardless of their gender, sex, or sexuality. As a teen preacher, Baldwin stated that he left the church because he loved himself and he loved his congregation, and would do no harm to them for the sake of taking from his own people. That is his prophetic immanence, or what Gilles Deleuze calls “a life.” As Deleuze states: “A life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given lived objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects.”³⁴⁵ Baldwin carried with him the meaning of life, the meaning of love, and the meaning of truth. He actualized in his life a key tenet of Christianity: “love your neighbor as your love yourself.”

Baldwin understood how black religious rhetoric impacts the lives of black people, and black preachers could take a page from his book, understanding that, if black preachers love black people—all black people, regardless of their sex or sexuality—then they understand the ways in which their religious speech significantly impacts black gay men from childhood to adulthood. We are all God’s children, all needing love and compassion.

³⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, Pg. 29.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones. Photo credit: The LIFE picture collection by Joe Scherschel

Prophet Arrested On Morals Charge

DETROIT, Feb. 20 (UP) — Prophet Jones, Negro leader of the Church of the Universal Triumph, Dominion of God, Inc., was arrested today on a morals charge.

The spiritual leader, who moved here from his home in Birmingham, Ala., 21 years ago, smiled nervously for photographers when brought into police headquarters.

He wore earrings, had an expensive looking pearl entwined in his hair, wore a loud sports jacket and sported ornate cuff links in a flashy green shirt.

Senior Inspector Paul Slack said the police department was the complainant in the warrant issued for the prophet's arrest.

"We've been working on the case five to seven months," Slack said. He declined to disclose other details of the case except to say the prophet was specifically charged with "gross indecency."

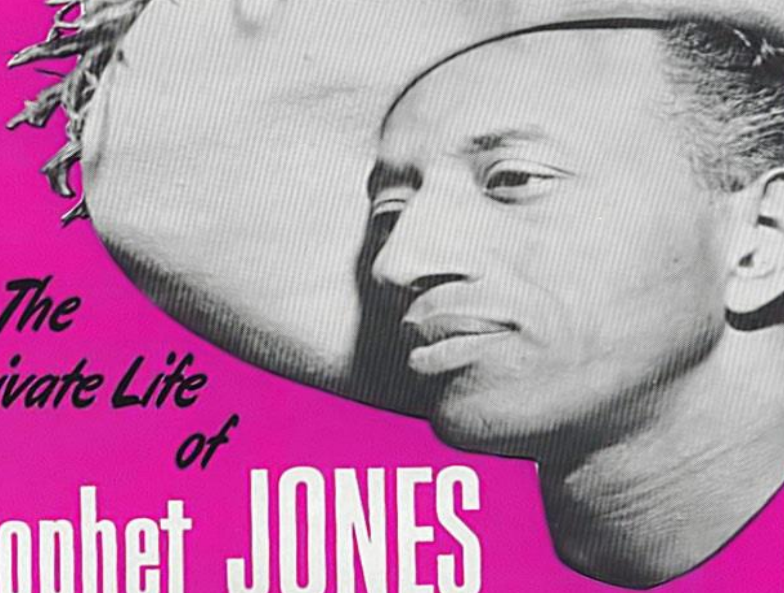
Jones, who made his first public sermon at the age of seven billed as an "evangelical prodigy," has had other troubles in recent weeks.

Figure 2. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones arrested on morals charge. Photo credit: *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune*—February 21, 1956.



Throne For A 'Prophet': Testing the special built throne in his new Detroit church, Rev. Dr. James F. (Prophet) Jones snuggles back into carved, red upholstered dais, which has telephone within reach. Design of lavish throne is said to be like one used by King Solomon. ..

Figure 3. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones. Sitting in a special built throne in his new Detroit Church. The throne is carved, red upholstered dais, with a telephone within reach. Said to be like one used by King Solomon. Photo credit: AP Wirephoto



*The
Private Life
of*
Prophet JONES

People know him only as a dapper, diamond-clad minister who wears a \$13,000 white mink coat but there is a side to Detroit's fabulous Prophet Jones which has never been revealed to the public. For this startling inside story read, "The Private Life Of Prophet Jones" in April HUE.

Also in the big April issue:

- Children Of Celebrities
- Ladies Of Burlesque
- Thirty Years In The Men's Room
- Female Fashions For Men

At your newsstand or send 15¢ to:

HUE 1820 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago




Figure 4. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones on the cover of HUE Magazine/Jet Magazine, March 11, 1954.

ARE



HOMOSEXUALS BECOMING RESPECTABLE?

One of the best kept secrets on the campus of a southern Negro college was that a noted genius was overly fond of young boys and to protect the scientist's reputation he



Charles Brown (c.), an outspoken sex deviate, made no secret of his desire to have a sex-changing operation, marry a GI.



Detroit's Prophet Jones (l.) said charges that his valet, James Parker (r.), tried to solicit a cop was no grounds for his arrest, was never left alone with tender youths. Likewise, a mid-western colored high school football coach is known for his winning teams—and his homosexual tendencies.

Behind the scenes, some of America's most celebrated males have tripped the gay fantastic. This fact, further amplified by the recent discovery of some 1,100 homosexuals in the U. S. State Department, has prompted the public to wonder if—by its own sanction—homosexuals are becoming respectable.

One of the most outspoken sex non-conformists on the American scene is Charles R. Brown, a 27-year-old shake dancer and professional female impersonator. Brown attempted last year to go to Denmark for an operation that would make him "a woman legally" so he could marry an Army sergeant stationed in Germany.

Unlike Brown, noted lecturer Payard Rustin, 41, who was a Committee on Racial Equality leader, denies homosexual tendencies, yet has been arrested several times on morals charges. He was jailed in California a year ago for allegedly committing a sex offense with two men in a car.

Among other prominent Negroes whose strange sex lives are whispered conversation is a celebrated writer, a successful actor, a noted educator, two members of a

Some Say Homosexuals Need Treatment, Not Jails



Globe-girdling lecturer Bayard Rustin (r.) was jailed on sex counts.

nationally-known quartet, a West Coast newspaperman, a classical pianist, a late boxing champion, several male choreographers and a now-deceased composer.

Dr. Alfred Kinsey, author of two extensive studies on American sexual behavior, estimates that homosexuality has touched 37 per cent of U. S. males. The fact that

so many flourish and are accepted by other mates is an indication of their almost casual acceptance in this country.

Much of the problem of sex perversion is being bared on Broadway, where four plays dealing with homosexuality have reached the stage this season. Two of them, *End As A Man* and *Tea And Sympathy*, deal with sex deviation in prep schools. The others, *Ladies Of The Corridor* and *The Immoralist*, explore homosexuality in other phases of society.

Many people are willing to treat members of the "third sex" as victims of an illness that needs treatment rather than criminals who should be punished. Such was the attitude of Detroit minister Prophet Jones when his valet, James Parker, 25, was placed on probation for soliciting a policeman for immoral purposes. Said the dapper Prophet: "Psychiatrists said the boy liked men more than women, but that's no grounds for arrest."



Figure 5. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones valet, James Parker, arrested for attempting to solicit sex from an undercover police officer. There were speculations about Prophet Jones' sexuality and his relationship with Parker. Photo credit: Jet Magazine, "Are Homosexuals Becoming Respectable," April 15, 1954.

Figure 6. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones' valet, James Parker, arrested for attempting to solicit sex from an undercover police officer. There were speculations about Prophet Jones' sexuality and his relationship with Parker. Photo credit: Jet Magazine, "Are Homosexuals Becoming Respectable," April 15, 1954.



J. Edward Bailey

Portable Throne For Prophet Jones: Four royal guards carry Detroit's Prophet Jones, wearing \$12,900 white mink coat and orchid corsage, on red plush portable throne built for him by congregation. Throne is designed after Pope's papal chair. Prophet fell asleep several times during six-hour service in new Detroit church.

Figure 7. Prophet James Francis Marion Jones. Four royal guards carry Detroit's Prophet Jones, wearing \$12,900 white mink coat and orchid corsage, on red plush portable throne built for him by his congregation. Throne is designed after Pope's papal chair. Photo credit: The Coli

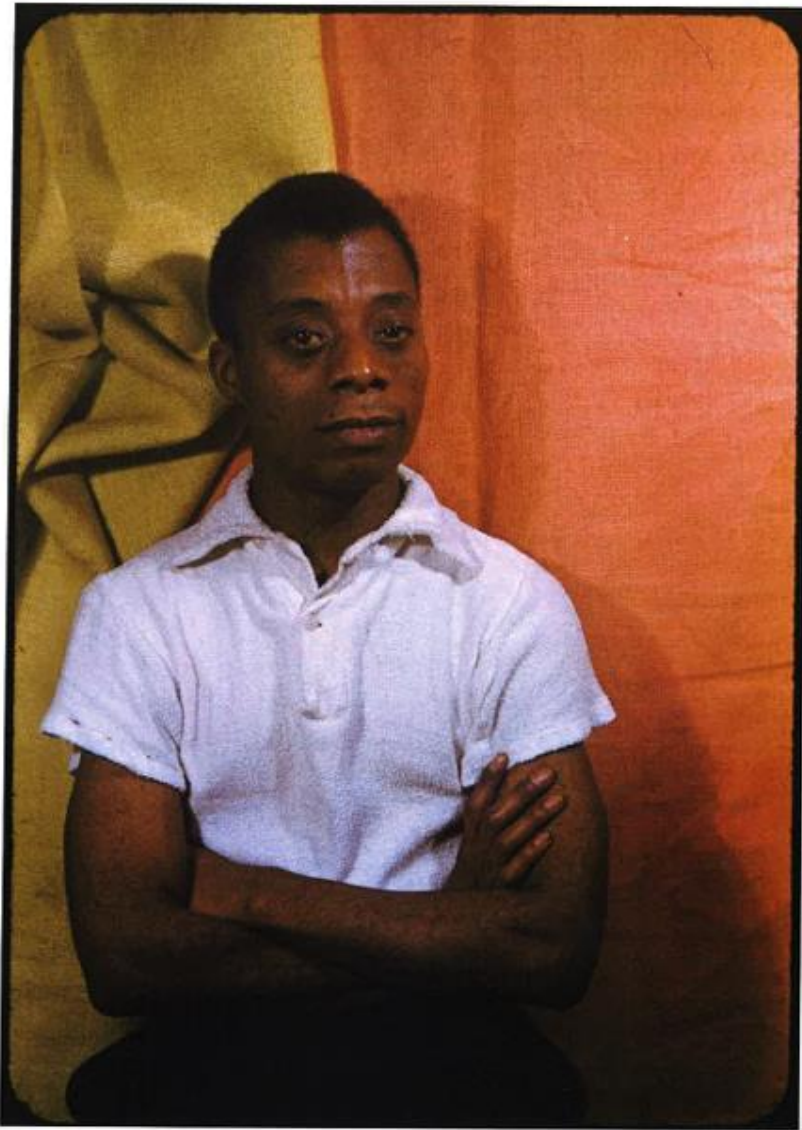


Figure 8. James Baldwin. Photo credit: Kidskunst.



Figure 9. James Baldwin. Homo-Harlem: Learning How to be Gay from Movies. Photo credit: Huffington Post 2010.



Figure 10. James Baldwin. Photo credit: Kidskunst.

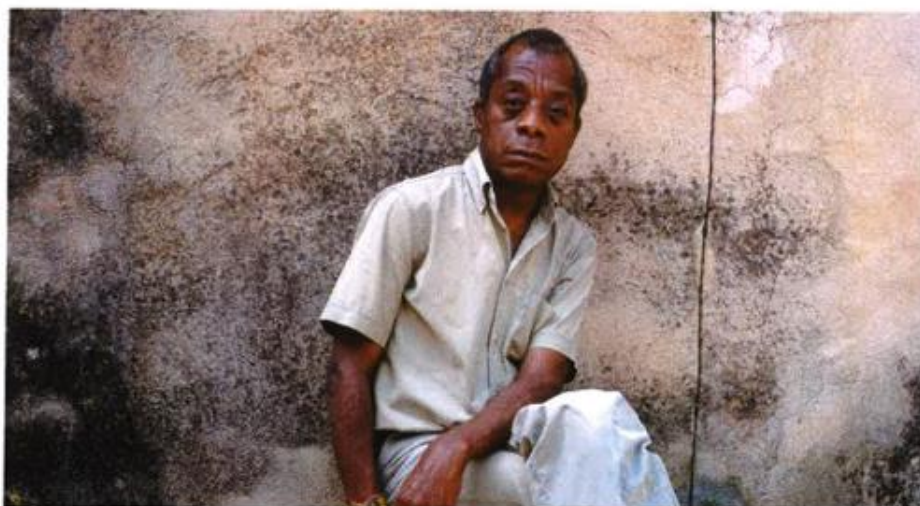


Figure 11. Jame Baldwin. Photo credit: Dmitri Kasterine, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France, 1976.

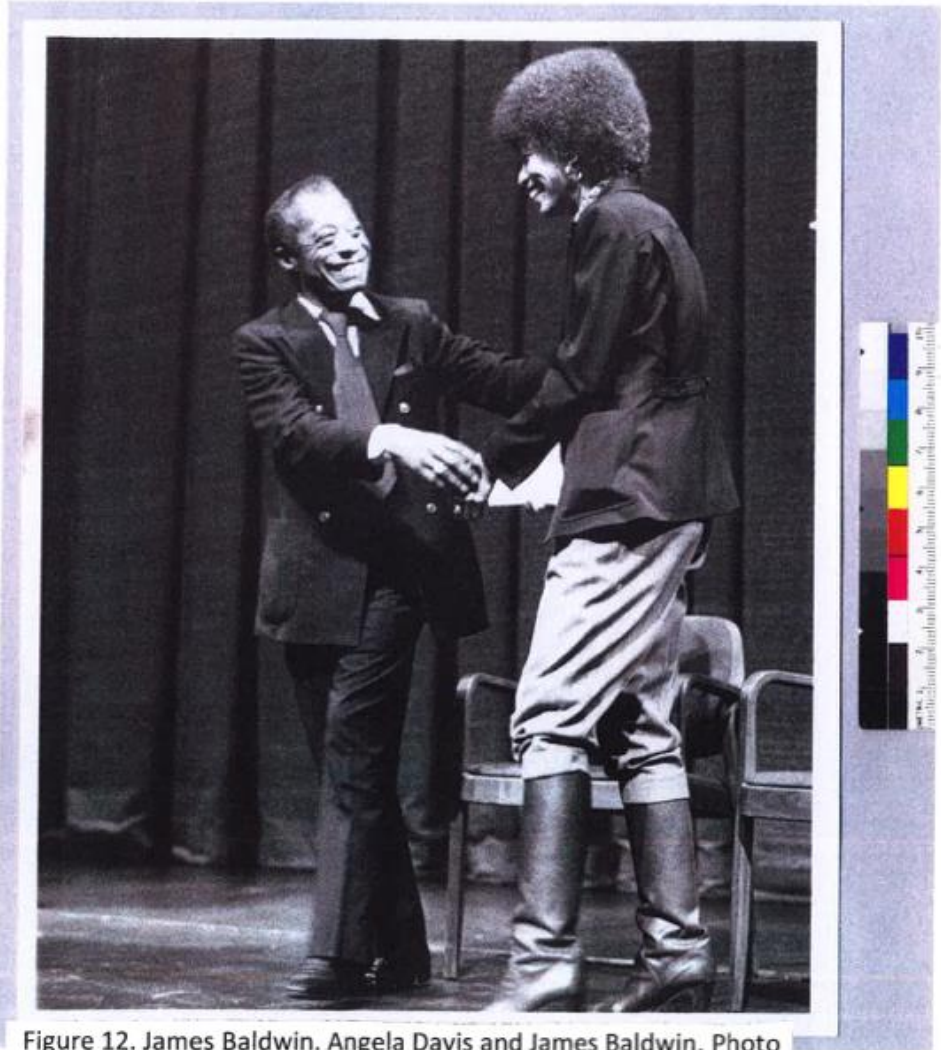


Figure 12. James Baldwin. Angela Davis and James Baldwin. Photo credit: Jason Schultz, Vanderbilt University Library

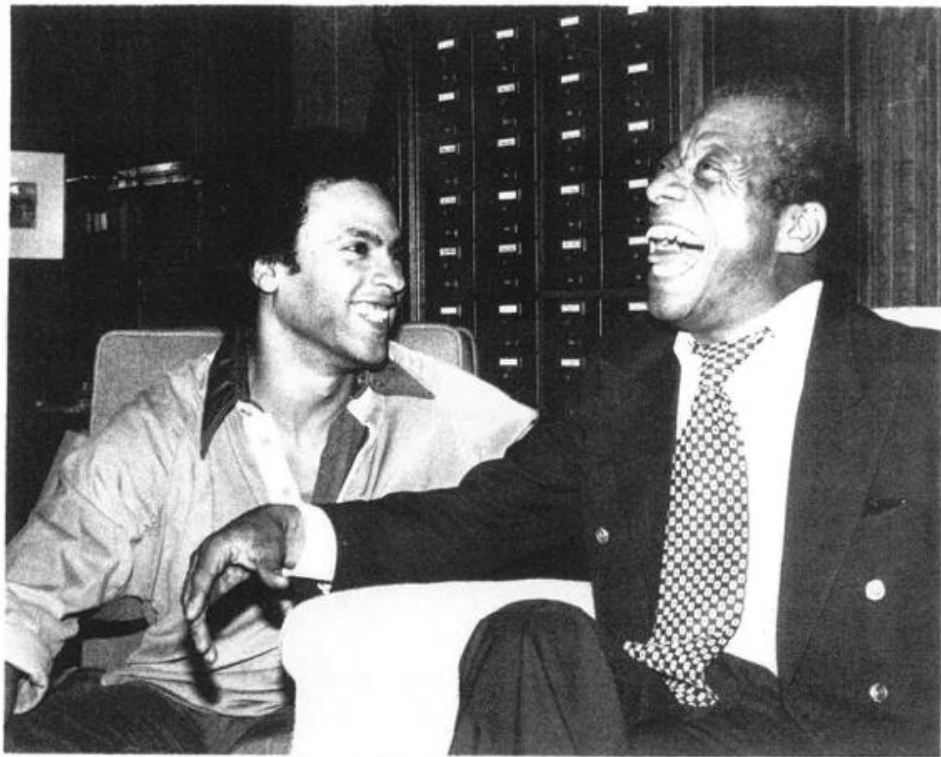


Figure 13. James Baldwin. Huey P. Newton and James Baldwin. Photo credit: Jason Schultz, Vanderbilt University Library

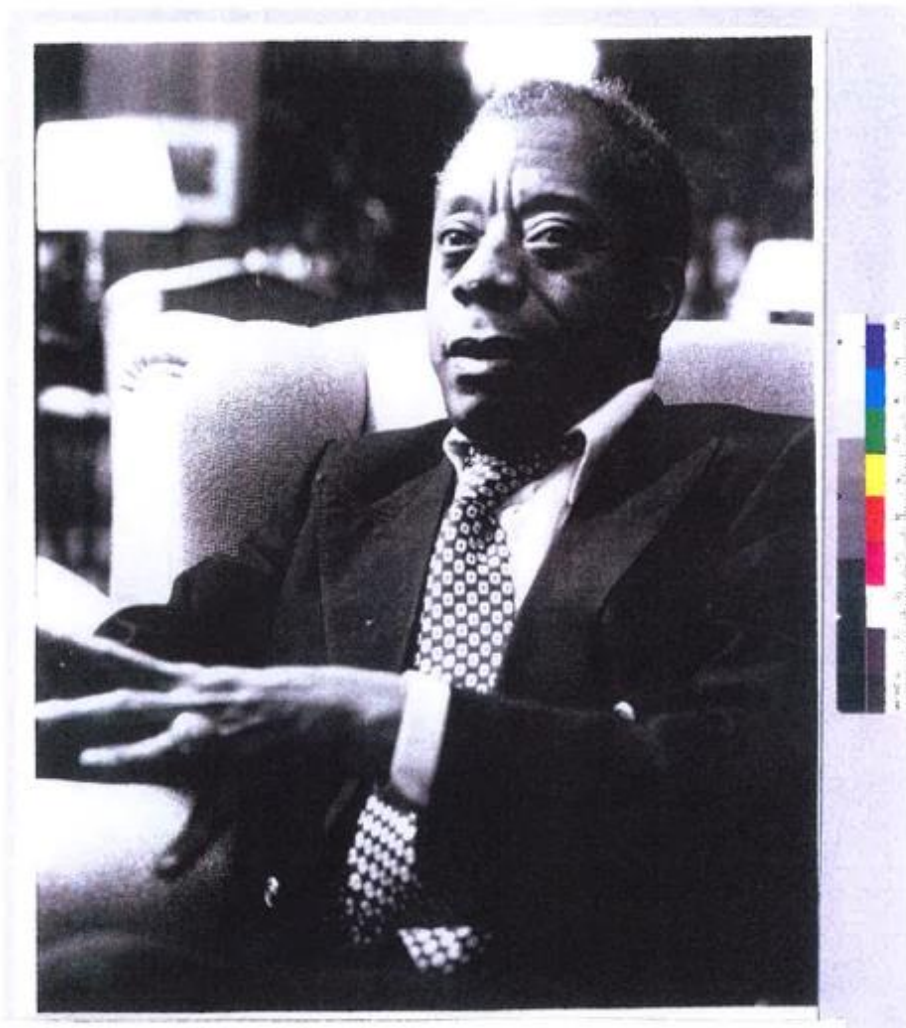


Figure 14. James Baldwin. Photo credit: Jason Schultz, Vanderbilt University Library

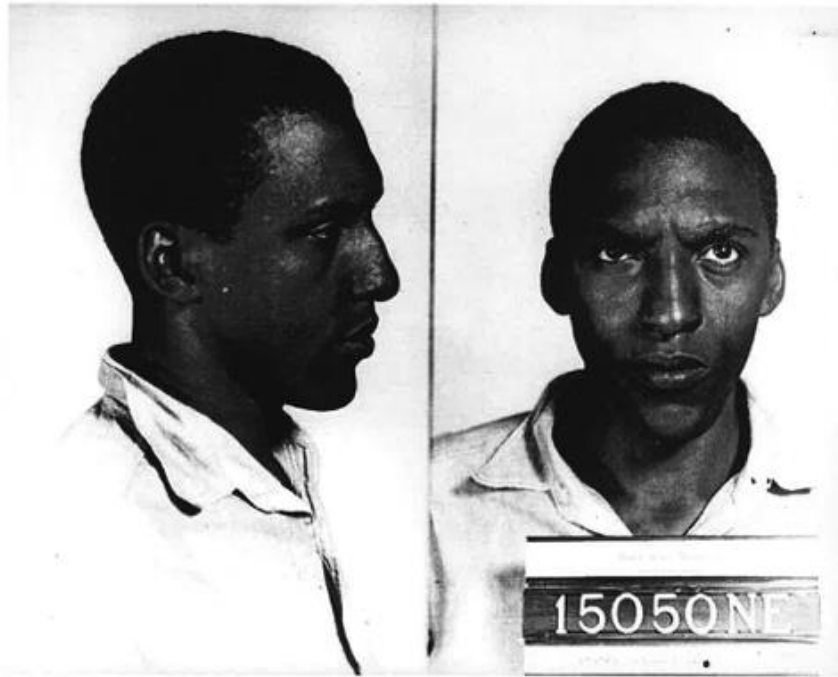


Figure 15. Bayard Rustin. Arrested on Moral charges for having sex with another man in a car in Pasadena, CA in 1953. Photo credit: AfroPunk



Figure 16. Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin, September 1963. Photo credit: The Washington Post



Figure 17. Bayard Rustin. Photo credit: Brother outsider



Figure 18. Bayard Rustin. March on Washington. Photo credit: Brother Outsider



Figure 19. Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, Jr.
Photo credit: Monroe Frederick/Courtesy of the Estate of Bayard Rustin



Figure 20. Reverend James Manning, All The Land Anointed Holy (ATLAH) World Missionary Church in Harlem. Sign outside of ATLAH's church in March 2014. Photo credit: *Pink News*



Figure 21. Reverend James Manning, All The Land Anointed Holy (ATLAH) World Missionary Church in Harlem. Sign outside of ATLAH's church in February 2014. Photo credit: *New York Post*



Figure 22. Reverend James Manning, All The Land Anointed Holy (ATLAH) World Missionary Church in Harlem. Sign outside of ATLAH's church in February 2014. Photo credit: *Yelp*



Figure 23. Reverend James Manning, All The Land Anointed Holy (ATLAH) World Missionary Church in Harlem. Sign outside of ATLAH's church in February 2014. Photo credit: Towleroad



Figure 24. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.
Photo credit: Find Me A Grave



Figure 25. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., Seated with Reverends Bolen, Brown, and Cullen. Photo credit: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

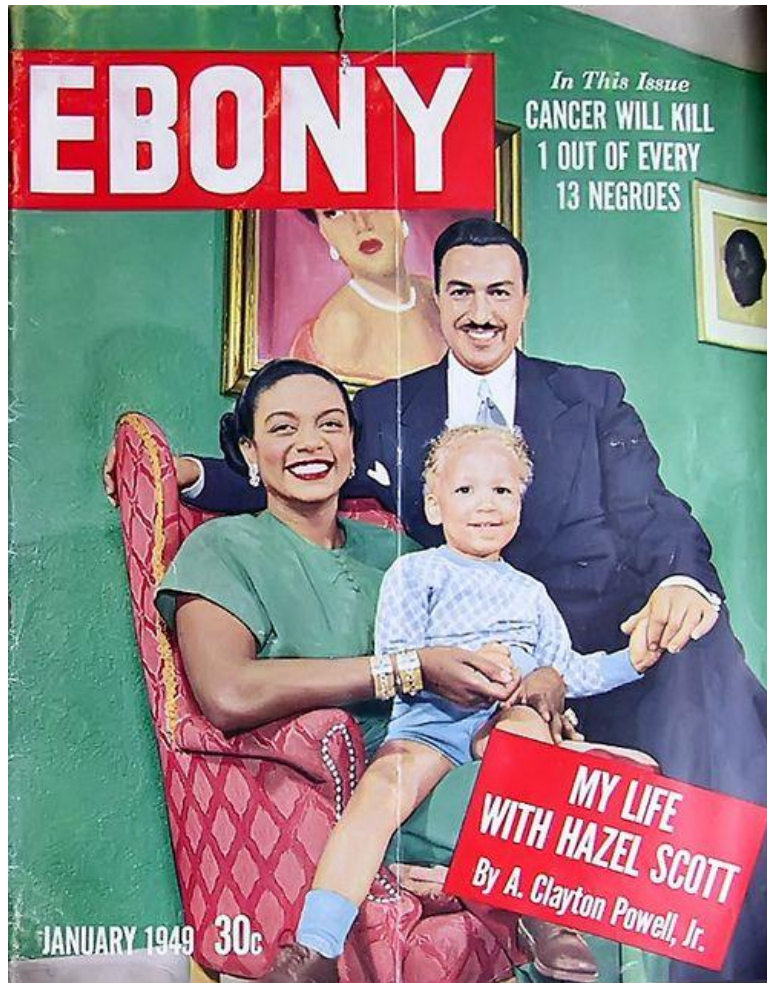


Figure 26. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.; his wife, Hazel Scott, and Their son, Adam Clayton Powell, III, on the cover of *Ebony Magazine*, 1949. Photo credit: *Ebony Magazine*



Figure 27. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Photo credit: Great Black Heroes



Figure 28. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Malcolm X.
Photo credit: Great Black Heroes



Figure 29. Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Church of Reverends Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Photo credit: Abyssinian Baptist Church



Figure 30. Inside Abyssinian Baptist Church. Photo credit: Abyssinian Baptist Church

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