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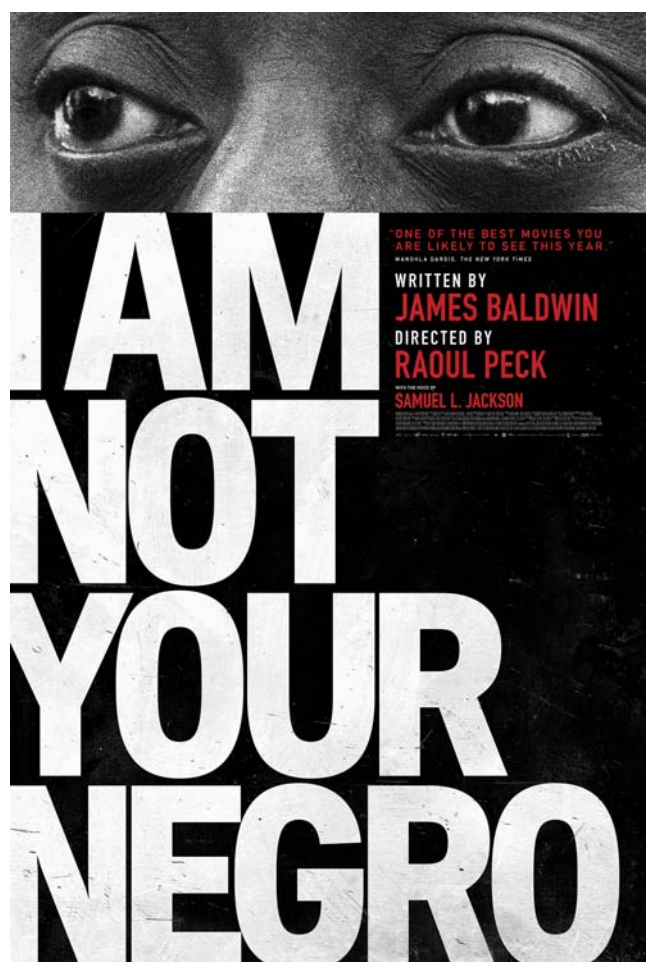
BALDWIN'S RENDEZVOUS WITH THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*

Warren Crichlow

In the early 1980s, an interviewer asked James Arthur Baldwin what remained for him to say after forty years of a remarkably productive writing life. "A great deal," the exuberant optimist Baldwin replied. With a twinkle in his eye and a flash of his characteristic broad smile, he added, "I have an appointment with the twenty-first century . . . when I will still be under eighty."¹

Thirty years after Baldwin's untimely death at the age of 63, Haitian-born Raoul Peck makes good on Baldwin's spirited prophecy through his timely and intrepidly titled *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016). In his rendezvous with Baldwin, Peck carries Baldwin's prescient voice into the twenty-first century where his rhetorical practice of "telling it like it is" resonates anew in this perilous political moment. Drawing on his signature practice of reanimating the archive through bricolage, Peck not only represents but also remobilizes Baldwin's image repertoire, helping to conjugate the very idea of this revered—and often criticized—novelist and essayist to renewed effect. Like audiences of an earlier era, today's viewers become spell-bound by this critical witness's fervent idiomatic eloquence and uncompromising vision.

I Am Not Your Negro is a searing, in-your-face essay film that meticulously approximates through cinematic means what Baldwin *might* have written had he lived to complete the envisioned book "Remember This House."² The extant remnants of Baldwin's materials envisioned a major self-reflexive reexamination of recent American experience through the lives of his three male friends who were all murdered during the incendiary days of the 1960s civil rights movement: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X (later known by his Arabic name, el-Hajj Shabazz Malik el-Shabazz), and Martin Luther King, Jr. Peck's singular achievement resides in his translation of Baldwin's thirty pages of "manuscript," a mere proposal, an incomplete



The theatrical one-sheet for *I Am Not Your Negro*.

Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

idea comprising a bundle of correspondence sent to literary agent Jay Acton, along with some preliminary notes, and marshalling these fragments into his film's imaginative conceit. According to Peck, those preliminary thirty pages offered a portal through which to conceptualize the film. The task, he recalls, became one of finding the "unwritten book" to use as a device for creating a dramatic structure that could help make the film speak with striking, truth-telling relevance.³

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Baldwin's late memoirist experiment combines with pressing themes resolutely addressed during his extensive career to motor Peck's film to resounding effect. By focusing on such preoccupations, particularly the way Baldwin's work strove to foreground the interconnections among constructions of race, moral responsibility, and the American nation, Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro* countenances James Baldwin to speak across generations to today's audiences.

Accolades for *I Am Not Your Negro* are numerous, ranging from the Toronto International Film Festival's Grolsch People's Choice Documentary Award (2016) to the San Francisco Critic's Award for Best Documentary (2016) and culminating in its 2017 Oscar nomination for best documentary feature.⁴ I first saw *I Am Not Your Negro* at a highly anticipated premiere screening at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) last September. Prior to the screening, I tried to imagine what Peck could possibly contribute to the extant repertoire on Baldwin, given the abundant scholarship and audiovisual record already available. To name just one instance, the opening sequence of Pat Hartley and Dick Fontaine's documentary, *James Baldwin: I Heard It through the Grapevine* (1982), conveys not merely the myriad aspects of this lived life, but also how heavily the future weighed on Baldwin in the early 1980s. He was on the move, once again—and perhaps sensing it might be his last “journey,” the film captures Baldwin as he travels and revisits the haunted terrain of his befallen civil rights leader friends and converses with their children, all with the idea of forging an essay on the American South in the post-civil rights era.

In tight focus, a bespectacled Baldwin sits at a typewriter while he ruminates on the task of realizing this painful assignment, one which was perhaps the impetus for the anticipated “Remember This House” that became Peck's generative text for his film. Baldwin's voice-over is familiar: “It was 1957 when I left Paris for Little Rock. 1957. This is 1980 . . . how many years is that? Nearly a quarter of a century. And what happened to all those people, children I knew then, and what happened to this country, and what does this mean for the world? What does this mean for me? Medgar, Malcolm, Martin dead. These men were my friends, all younger than me.”⁵

Of course, James Baldwin was an outspoken critic of white America's irrevocable bad faith toward the civil rights of fellow citizens who happened to be black. Creatively and politically, he was at the center of racial confrontations that exploded in the 1960s, though he broadly understood the corrosive effects of racialism as a deeper manifestation of America's “spiritual disaster.” In his view, the nation historically betrayed its democratic promise with a refusal to acknowledge the gap between its myth of innocent exceptionalism and the



James Baldwin as seen in 1968 by Horace Ové.

actuality of its white supremacist and imperialist aspirations to empire—a legacy of false progress that haunts its ongoing reactionary politics today.

Many scholars have noted that the 1960s, a decade of unrelenting activism and public intellectual life, were “both halcyon and hell for Baldwin.”⁶ Despite experiencing enormous literary and creative success, Baldwin bore unrelenting hostility, loss, and despair, particularly following the violent assassinations of the leaders he had befriended, including Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., President John F. Kennedy, and, despite their infamous relationship, Robert F. Kennedy.⁷ Balancing art and politics in the midst of social upheaval constituted his everydayness. Some critics argue that his art fell victim to politics, but Baldwin never understood his art in contradistinction to his activism: both were integral to his peripatetic life.

Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz contend that Baldwin spent a lifetime overcoming dichotomous thinking, instead learning how to embody and to speak “the imaginative and social imperatives required to live with contraries, to live with difference . . . [and with] the potential for establishing connections between contrary phenomena—even as contrariness remained in place—rather than forcing disconnections and retreating into encampments.”⁸ Successful or not in negotiating constricted spaces of race, class, and sexuality, Baldwin's rhetorical daring and adroit prophetic vision remain unshakable. *I Am Not Your Negro* considerably broadens Baldwin's continuing significance for ongoing African American claims on human rights and, indeed, his commitment to the universal struggle for emancipation of all human beings.

While the archival footage utilized in *I Am Not Your Negro* might be familiar to any serious student of Baldwin, it is the scrupulous and uncanny way actuality footage is re-assembled that constitutes this film's singular experience. Original Baldwin interviews, debates, and documentaries



Malcolm X with reporters.

© Herman Hiller, courtesy of Magnolia Pictures



James Baldwin with Medgar Evers in Mississippi.

Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

are, thankfully, readily available on YouTube. The many standouts, both audio and visual, range from Baldwin's infamous television debate with William F. Buckley (1965), to Baldwin's renowned admonishment of the racial double standard on *The Dick Cavett Show* (ABC, 1968), to British filmmaker Horace Ové's documentary *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968) in which he "upstages" activist-comedian Dick Gregory, to director Richard O. More's phenomenal documentary *Take This Hammer* (1963). Shot in the Bayview–Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco and produced for local public television station KQED, *Take This Hammer* documents Baldwin's electrifying engagement with the local black community and his role in fostering its coming to voice.⁹ Karen K. Thorsen's recently restored and hauntingly stunning bio-doc *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (1989) certainly should have pride of place.¹⁰

Raoul Peck is meticulously familiar with the Baldwin image archive, having spent ten years—if not his lifetime—considering the film he wanted to make. Unlike in-the-moment documentaries that freeze Baldwin, catching him on-the-fly in public intellectual mode, or works like Thorsen's

loving portrait that ruminates on Baldwin and his legacy following his December 1, 1987 funeral at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Peck's contribution lies temporally elsewhere. *I Am Not Your Negro* looks forward as much as back, projecting not only Baldwin's image, but his words, too, unapologetically and reflexively into the present.¹¹

There is, of course, a plethora of available material to suggest what Baldwin might have said, some thirty years after his death, about Medgar, Malcolm, and Martin—men who were assassinated in quick succession over a five-year period, on June 12, 1963; February 21, 1965; and April 4, 1968, respectively. "Not one of the three," the film reminds its audience, "lived to be forty," but each shared "complex links and similarities" with one another, though the relationships were never fully realized. The James Baldwin Estate granted Peck unprecedented access to Baldwin's archive, both published and unpublished, and its full cooperation with the film was eventually secured. Over an extended period of research, Peck doggedly scoured this archive, finally completing a script selectively culled from Baldwin's texts, foregrounding his impassioned thoughts on these venerated civil rights

leaders and how their violent deaths resolutely shaped his thinking about America at large.

Tellingly, the film also reveals Baldwin's uncertainties about his peripatetic yet inextricable relationship to America and about the complex role he had assumed in the civil rights movement:

There are days—and this is one of them—when you wonder what your role is in this country and what your future is in it.

I was never in town to stay. This was something hard on my morale, but I had to accept, as time wore on, that part of my responsibility—as a witness—was to move as largely and freely as possible, to write the story, and to get it out.

Baldwin's erudition is always front and center within Peck's framing. Addressing 1960's America, he simultaneously issues dispatches to contemporary audiences, parlaying past tragic events and their voiced aftermath into the present, for they so uncannily resemble present-day circumstances, both social and political. This time-space compression effect mesmerizes, as Peck takes Baldwin's lead, inexorably linking epochs and generations of experience.

Temporality is thus necessarily destabilized, heightening the sense that American existence is brutally resistant to self-reflection. To this end, black-and-white archival footage of civil rights-era violence seamlessly echoes recent television news depicting urban rebellions in response to numerous police killings of young African American citizens—from Ferguson's Michael Brown to North Charleston's Walter Scott to Baltimore's Freddie Gray to Chicago's Aiyana Mo'Nay Stanley Jones (seven years of age) to Cleveland's twelve-year-old Tamir Rice to the hundreds of other lives extinguished by law "enforcers" under bewildering circumstances since 1999. Yet, at the film's conclusion, a visceral rapid montage of state violence is dramatically intercut with a series of archival black-and-white photographs of self-respecting black tradesmen, bright-eyed schoolchildren, and dignified society types posed in formal attire. Then archival images quickly give way to an assiduously composed present in the form of a vibrantly colored tableau of well-appointed contemporary black women and men who hold the viewers' gaze in a succession of tightly cropped shots. While their "still moving" defiant and hopeful reenacted stances accentuate their specific middle-class urbanity, the *tableau vivant's* aesthetic charge affords not only an uncanny resonance to stillness and movement in the history of cinema, but also confronts the viewer once again with Baldwin's call for introspection about an uncertain future: "What is your role in this country?"

There is something deeply Baldwinesque in this dynamic collage vocabulary of Peck's. It is reminiscent of the characteristic way that Baldwin's own fiction and nonfiction loop backward, then forward, in time, his words utilizing past and present images, always in consideration of a future relation no matter how despairing. The craft here is one of juxtaposing, qualifying, complicating, and recalibrating the archive—both word and image—to draw ever finer connections among histories, experiences, and individuals and their locations.¹²

Peck, like Baldwin, has long been fundamentally concerned with questions of transnational belonging and identity, reflecting on the passage of time, and the nonlinearity of history worked through and against an autobiographical narrative of Harlem or Haiti. Both Baldwin and Peck are concerned with political ramifications of diasporic travel, the ineluctable but often disavowed linkages between colony and the metropole, the transnational experience of dispossession, and the reclamation of a new space and novel claims on citizenship by those still considered "migrant" (the proverbial "stranger in the village") and not yet diasporic. More importantly, Peck, like Baldwin, refuses in *I Am Not Your Negro* to bow down to the master texts of Western history, but rather recalibrates cinema's tools for a renewed ownership—a "birthright," as Baldwin observed, that connects him to "all that lives, and to everyone, forever."¹³ Peck elevates the senses as a primary mechanism for engaging history's capacity to speak to what remains disavowed and unresolved in the present; privileging James Baldwin's biography is but one possible, but eminently illuminating, exemplar.

In one persuasive instance, the "Wisdom" section of *I Am Not Your Negro* recharges lines from Baldwin's essay collection *Nobody Knows My Name*: "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself. On this confrontation depends the measure of our wisdom and compassion. This energy is all that one finds in the rubble of banished civilizations, and the only hope in ours."¹⁴ For Baldwin, the key to relating to others, to imagining alternative futures, inheres in the capacity to face one's self. And Peck's channeling of this recurrent reflective principle is frankly remarkable.

Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Peck experienced exile firsthand at the age of eight when the repressive Duvalier dictatorship precipitated his family's exodus in 1961 to the newly independent Democratic Republic of Congo, where his family continued to reside for decades. Like Baldwin, Peck found his "home" in France, after sojourns in Brooklyn and Haiti, where he served as the minister of culture for a decade, as if anticipating this conversation with Baldwin.



Anti-integration rally in Little Rock, Arkansas in *I Am Not Your Negro*. Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

Indeed, as a lifetime reader, Peck counts James Baldwin as a primary influence for living a transnationally engaged life, and further, credits him for his gravitation toward cinema's political dimensions. Earning an MFA in the late 1980s at the German Film and Television Academy (DFFB) in Berlin, Peck studied with filmmakers Alexander Kluge and Krzysztof Kieslowski, while being exposed to the likes of masters Chris Marker and Alain Resnais. It was there that Peck began his lifelong experimentation with film form and narration.

For the next thirty years Peck continued to foster his signature approach to filmmaking. According to Toni Pressley-Sanon and Sophie Saint-Just, Peck employs the "film medium as a language of protest . . . [using] the medium to decenter hegemonic discourses and to preserve memory through larger historical narratives or personal stories."¹⁵ What remains significant is not only Peck's subtle imbrication of the self- and/or political resolve (and experimentation) laced throughout his work, but also that his prolific output hasn't abated while taking up key positions in the cultural sphere, with his current service as president of La Fémis, France's state film school, a testament to his ongoing commitment.

Peck's oeuvre consistently oscillates between documentary and narrative fiction, a divergent approach most fully realized in a pair of films, *Lumumba, la mort d'un prophète* (*Lumumba: Death of a Prophet*, 1990) and *Lumumba* (2000). Both works take Patrice Lumumba—the first democratically elected president of the Republic of the Congo, who was brutally assassinated in 1961, ending his dream of nationalist independence for the mineral-rich republic—as their subject. *Lumumba*, like Peck's better-known HBO-produced *Sometimes in April* (2005) that depicts the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis, offers an extraordinary fictional revision of historical events, but nevertheless bears the marks of a conventional narrative feature film. Peck's first approximation of Lumumba, *Death of a Prophet*, however, goes in a different direction: that of the essay form, conjoining and conjuring personal archive and historical record to mesmerizing effect.

Eschewing both biopic and reenactment, the representation of the political figure of Lumumba is not the goal of *Death of a Prophet*. Taking his cue from the calculated absence of forensic evidence, Peck structures the work around the fissures that make Lumumba's story impossible to tell or to

resolve via closure. Lumumba's arrest, torture, and subsequent dismemberment (carried out by Belgian and Congolese police, witnessed by government officials including the CIA) remain shrouded in the neocolonial machinations of plausible deniability by Congolese, Belgian, American, and United Nations officials.¹⁶ Indeed, as Christopher Pavsek argues, the entire film "is inspired by an attempt to understand a single photograph [of Lumumba] Peck found among his mother's belongings—while holding at bay the possibility of ever really doing so."¹⁷ Just this sense of incompleteness is imbued in every frame of this disquieting film.

However much the new film may depart from the example of the Lumumba films, several key signature effects have migrated to *I Am Not Your Negro*. For one, words themselves take center stage; the distinct language idioms of Lumumba and Baldwin shape and propel each work. Second, writerly modes—letters, documents, speeches, and texts—serve as structural lynchpins. Third, match cutting from archival black and white to vivid color, coupled with the soundscape, similarly drives the narrative. Finally, the use of voice in *Death of a Prophet*, both Lumumba and Peck's, commenting, complicating questioning, and deferring resolution throughout, anticipates techniques deployed in *I Am Not Your Negro*. Thus, the double-voiced signifying mode's specific deployment across Peck's oeuvre serves to subtly destabilize the very tenor of the images and histories they represent, engendering a reevaluation of current political realities more generally.

Once again, Peck's strategy of double-voicing motif operates in *I Am Not Your Negro*: Baldwin's voice, yes, but also a second analogous vocalization that deliberately resists a simple "voice-over" narrator function. Honoring his commitment to his subject, as well as his own decades-long reflexive documentary aesthetic, Peck eschews meta-commentary, ostensibly circumventing viewer distraction from the desired singular attentiveness to Baldwin's words, persona, and point of view upon which his directorial authority insists.¹⁸ Indeed, this opting for double-voiced reflexivity and temporality extends to Peck's choice of Samuel L. Jackson as narrator, one whose voice insinuates rather than replicates, creating a parallel universe to Baldwin's inimitable lyrical presence. Jackson delivers the emotional resonance of Baldwin's words—the film is all about Baldwin's voice and words—without imposing his inestimable actor's personality and cultural capital. (I, for one, did not recognize Jackson's voice, only learning his role as narrator upon watching the end credits.)

It is remarkable how truly Jackson approximates the emotional and structural cadence of Peck's Baldwin: as the film's "voice," Jackson neither asserts his persona nor allows

outside optics to leak through. Rather, he speaks with or beside Baldwin, never for him.

In America, I was free only while in battle, never free to rest—and he who finds no way to rest cannot long survive the battle . . .¹⁹

Throughout, Jackson is restrained yet effective; avoiding the pitfalls of bombastic voice-over endemic to orthodox narration, he matches his own speaking rhythm with Peck's directional rhythm of sound, image, text, and voice. In the many shifts between Baldwin's voice and that of the "narrator," the audience is never deterred from either the essence of Baldwin's words or their underlying meaning. Although the sound of Jackson's voice hardly resembles Baldwin's in cadence, pitch, or style, Jackson nevertheless channels the radical power of his declamatory speech. It is as if a poet, reciting another's poem, has so mastered the tonal, dynamic, and emotional implications of words as to create a double-sided mirror, inviting spectators to both interrogate Baldwin's perspective and to seek out independent meaning seen in the embattled society: to, in effect, participate in the conversation to imagine a more just future. Jackson transfers this emotional energy without waste or idle flash: he neither under- nor over-reaches, as if realizing what the film needs, and delivering that, and nothing more. Although an utterly unexpected choice as narrator, Jackson is exemplary in this role, proving to be a brilliant casting decision.²⁰

I Am Not Your Negro is also indisputably "about" cinema, a medium to which Baldwin was both attracted and repelled. From his formative extracurricular encounters attending movies with his adored PS 24 teacher Orilla ("Bill") Miller to the failed attempt to adapt his autobiographical essay "Equal in Paris" (1955) with his collaborator Sol Stein for the CBS dramatic series *The United States Steel Hour* (1953–63), Baldwin sustained a vexed relation to the moving image.²¹ It is common knowledge that his scenario for a film on Malcolm X, based on Alex Haley's "autobiography," proved too controversial and aesthetically adventurous for a Hollywood production and was never realized.²² In the early 1980s, as biographer David Lemming recounts, Baldwin completed a screenplay in collaboration with Engin Cezzar and the esteemed political director Constantinos Costa-Gavras. Due to their contradictory visions, the project collapsed, and this thwarted script sadly never made its way into the planned film adaptation, *L'Espadon* (*The Swordfish*).²³

Peck's film doesn't belabor any such path of rejection, focusing instead on the larger issues that animate Baldwin's thoughts on movies themselves as symptomatic of American racial politics and social relations. Most readily expressed in

his extended essay *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), Baldwin's perspectives on movies illuminate how tales of love and hate, bias and cruelty, fear and ignorance, remain so extraordinarily active in twenty-first-century American visual culture. Peck's use of a sequence from director John Stahl's *Imitation of Life* (1934) offers but one cringe-worthy illustration, when the fair-skinned black child Peola (Freda Washington) rejects her much darker mother, Delilah (Louise Beavers) and then flees crying "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!" in front of her aghast white classmates.²⁴ In Peck's film, this sequence is juxtaposed to the infamous photograph of fifteen-year-old Dorothy Counts, who, in 1957, was tasked with integrating Harding High School in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. Baldwin's words recall the image with dismay:

There was unutterable pride, tension, and anguish in that girl's face as she approached the halls of learning, with history, jeering, at her back. It made me furious, it filled me with both hatred and pity. It made me ashamed. Some one of us should have been there with her!²⁵

It would be a mistake to read this coupling and the other relational dyads that Peck constructs—such as his juxtaposition of Doris Day in *Lover Come Back* (Delbert Mann, 1961) with the 1911 lynching photograph of Laura Nelson in Okemah, Oklahoma—as an attempt to shame, on the filmmaker's part.²⁶ Rather, the film insists that Baldwin's concern lies with "the state of the civilization" that can't stop producing and reproducing such images.²⁷ His powerful corrective to these repetitions constitutes the film's narrative thread:

History is not the past.
It is the present.
We carry our history with us.
We are our history.
If we pretend otherwise, we are literally criminals.

In this instance, Baldwin's words resonate with those of Walter Benjamin's celebrated treatise on time: "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."²⁸ The same holds true in this film: the image of American-style violence evinced in the 1963 photograph that Lorraine Hansberry vehemently describes as "the white cop standing on a Negro woman's neck in Birmingham" returns again, beyond the frame of the film itself, in the viral 2015 cellphone video of a fatal chokehold administered by a policeman in Staten Island, despite Eric Garner's desperate plea, "I can't breathe!"²⁹

Peck brings this film to the screen at an inauspicious political crossroad in the United States. Baldwin may

appear as an ephemeral moving image on the big screen, but Peck projects his commanding presence into the fray of today's erratic political maneuvering, where divisive and racially inflected ideologies manipulate the future course of a nation, in dire directions, with global implications. In this vexing crisis of deepening economic inequality, ever-increasing environmental degradation, snowballing xenophobic populist nationalism, expanded police militarization, and the growing prison-industrial complex, *I Am Not Your Negro* conveys Baldwin's forthright belief that Americans, in their peculiar way, remain profoundly unwilling to genuinely confront levels of experience that constitute—however complexly diverse—a shared human world.

In the section "Selling the Negro," Baldwin calls out Hollywood's predilection for ducking conflict with happy endings fulfilled by the "self-perpetuating fantasy" of capitalist consumption, reproduced with *La La Land*-like evasion. Baldwin pointedly characterizes such diversions as "grotesque appeals to innocence" that undermine both critical reflection on oneself and the capacity to invest in ethical compassion for others. In Baldwin's words, "These images are designed not to trouble, but to reassure. They also weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are."

I Am Not Your Negro emphatically endorses the fearless Baldwin: "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced." As he was fond of saying, "safety is illusive," a lesson as testament to his own life of creative volition self-fashioned against mediocrities or the worse assumed intentions upheld for being black in America.³⁰ Peck translates Baldwin's lesson of self-definition, as the film is indelibly marked by his enduring inspiration, clearly rendered.³¹ At the same time, Raoul Peck's own biography functions as urtext: his lived experiences of neocolonialism and racism, from the disappearance of bodies and subversion of knowledge through the carceral violence of power, from Haiti to the Congo and on to New York and the metropolitan centers of Europe, imbue the text. Baldwin's insistent, rhetorical audaciousness validates what it means to cut through "all that jazz" (Baldwin's *bon mot* for mythologizing) generated by systems of power. Inheriting this legacy, Peck adopts a fierce urgency to name and shape the persistent negations that constitute the history of the American present. Synergizing Baldwin's words and image, Peck forces viewers to face—and not ignore—justifications of racialism and "pretended humanism" that continue to imprison Americans in bad faith.³² In this way, *I Am Not Your Negro* extends the prescience of Baldwin's moral passion and expressive gift of language beyond his death in 1987 to connect with today's insurgent call for black life.



Crowd gathering at the Lincoln Memorial for the March on Washington in *I Am Not Your Negro*. Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

Peck is neither disingenuous about cinema's role in fomenting social transformation nor unsophisticated about the limits of image-work amid asymmetrical political resources. "The present time of discord, ignorance, and confusion is punishing," Peck writes, alluding to the growing nativism overtaking American and European democracies. "I am not so naïve as to think the road ahead will be without hardship or the challenges to our sanity will not be vicious."³³

Beyond this caution, Peck commits to a visual aesthetic inflected by a social critique that refuses to mask outrage. As in Peck's earlier works, the image archive visually contemporizes ongoing extremes of inhumanity willfully disavowed in everyday life and ensures that *I Am Not Your Negro* foregrounds Baldwin's observations on twentieth-century racial anxieties that remain trenchantly accurate in the twenty-first

century: "To look around the United States today is enough to make prophets and angels weep. This is not the land of the free; it is only very unwillingly and sporadically the home of the brave." The infamous grainy black-and-white video footage of Rodney King's indiscriminate police beating establishes a metonymic relation to Baldwin's pointed remark, exceeding the scope of its familiar recognition. Barely audible thuds of nightsticks repeatedly striking King elicit a visceral affective response in the viewer, just as they simultaneously discount this body's agency. Effectively, the sequence rouses thoughts of responsibility, personal and collective, required to overcome the blindness toward the institutional forms of violence continually witnessed today.

Baldwin's humanistic analysis, his "witnessing," resoundingly attests to and displays an activist imperative to explicitly

name and define systems of oppression that render some lives vulnerable, marginal, contingent—indeed, worthless—due to race, class, gender, or sexuality. In collaboration with Baldwin, its subject, *I Am Not Your Negro* challenges the moral life of contemporary American culture, provoking its audience to examine ongoing patterns of injustice that many pretend do not exist, and further, to “ask questions” (Baldwin’s phrase) about what futures of human solidarity it may still be possible to forge.

While *I Am Not Your Negro* reveals the specificity of America’s black experience, more pervasively, in Baldwin’s words, it “is the story of America,” which “is not a pretty story.” Indeed, Baldwin perceptively chronicles this story, yet the “very vivid question” of futurity he ponders in the film’s opening sequence kick-starts its resounding hermeneutic: “What is going to happen to *this* country?”

Peck’s film opts to defer answers, instead choosing to keep in view, within Baldwin’s characteristic dialectic response of despair and optimism to unheeding social conditions, questions that remain inherently necessary to repeat thirty years later. The double-voiced strategy of Baldwin and Jackson empowers this paradoxical quest for futurity, despite never-ending pathologies of racialized violence and injustice. One immediate instance comes to mind: Bob Adelman’s iconic photograph *Woman Crying at Memorial for Martin Luther King, Jr.* (April 9, 1968) accompanies Baldwin’s recollection of fear and the futility of tears. Responding to the image’s expressed despair, Baldwin’s words simultaneously acknowledge and eschew tragedy: “What can we do? ... I still believe that we can do with this country something that has not been done before. We are misled here because we think of numbers. You don’t need numbers; you need passion.”³⁴

Yet it is the film’s concluding sequence that resolutely privileges the question on which American futurity depends. Caught *in medias res*, characteristically pensive, cigarette-in-hand visage, framed in a stark black and white close-up, Baldwin directly addresses the viewer, telling-it-like-it-is: “I can’t be a pessimist, because I am alive. To be a pessimist means you have agreed that human life is an academic matter, so I am forced to be an optimist . . . to believe that we can survive whatever we must survive.” In this disquieting moment Baldwin’s penetrating gaze fixes the audience (both the earlier televisual context and contemporary viewers), betraying an intuitive sense his brutal truths have hit home: “I’m not a nigger, I’m a man,” he says, “. . . If I’m not the nigger here and you white people invented him, then you’ve got to figure out why. And the future of the country depends on that, whether or not it is able to ask that question.”

Baldwin wrote steadily on these perennial concerns from the 1940s to the 1980s, producing 124 book reviews, six novels, seven works of nonfiction, two plays, several film scripts, a photo-text collaboration with Richard Avedon, a collection of short stories, an illustrated children’s book, two books of poetry, and a series of published dialogues with Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, and Margaret Mead; and untold numbers of speeches and community-support interventions, documented and undocumented.³⁵ Further, his life and work spawned a secondary industry of literary scholarship, and a slew of academic theses and dissertations. James Baldwin miraculously managed to produce a body of work while remaining in the thick of ongoing relentless political struggle and an onslaught of bitter criticism from all sides. And it resolutely endures.³⁶ Over the last twenty years, reappraisal and an animated critical rethinking of Baldwin’s life and work in scholarly circles have reached a pinnacle of activity, culminating perhaps in the year-long interdisciplinary celebration of Baldwin’s ninetieth birthday in 2014.³⁷ In addition, four iterations of the International James Baldwin Conference have convened over the last six years in various cities, including Paris in 2016, and extensive activity around the conference has helped to spawn the open access journal *James Baldwin Review*.³⁸

In the contested space of academic studies, where Baldwin’s outright refusal to be labeled or categorized by any single ideology has led to competing claims by those advancing both literary and identitarian political positions, *I Am Not Your Negro*’s great contribution is to remind academia along with the general public that Baldwin was irrevocably and undeniably a fluid thinker and writer, attuned to the flux of social, historical, and political realities he addressed through relentless writing and public engagement. At the same time, Baldwin was consistent and unrelenting in his resistance to racism, exhibiting an unshakable commitment to the centrality of the individual human being and to the emancipation of all people from the constraints of a society driven by self-serving fears, gross inequalities, and the accumulated collateral damage produced by late capitalism’s effects.

Until the end, Baldwin’s writing was attuned to societal transformation and its declension, a commitment that necessitated his lifelong search for experimental modes of writing and expression that exceeded the reach of his earlier writing, and continuously defied critical expectations. *I Am Not Your Negro* reflects, in its own medium-specific experimental mode, a direction perfectly suited to its subject, one that Baldwin himself just might have adopted had he survived to grace the twenty-first century.³⁹ One hopes, however, that this urgently needed film does not become a substitute for



James Baldwin: *I Heard It through the Grapevine* (1982).

the act of reading the fulsome works of James Baldwin. Indeed, *I Am Not Your Negro* is constrained by its selective use of Baldwin's essays and speeches to speculate on what final message his "Remember This House" might have to offer. Given Peck's rules of engagement with the text's fragments, the extent to which Baldwin's subsequent impassioned fiction might well have shaped this late, unfinished work remains up for grabs.

David Leeming points out that, as Baldwin's strength waned with his 1986 cancer diagnosis, he nevertheless continued to labor on numerous projects in his Saint-Paul de Vence home in the south of France—where he had taken up residence for sixteen years.⁴⁰ Baldwin's preoccupation with his third play, "The Welcome Table," offers one instance of his labors in those final days. For Baldwin, the "welcome table" signified a gathering place, both physical and metaphoric, where writing and social communion simultaneously occurred, where past, present, and future could meld in the intimate biracial, bisexual interchange of working on and through the multiple potential realities of the diversity of

guests gathered around the table. Magdalena Zaborowska, for one, describes this work, still unpublished, as an unfinished coda and an "artistic last testament."⁴¹

As Zaborowska and Leeming, among others, point out, "The Welcome Table" was one of several projects reflecting Baldwin's writerly experimentation in how to grapple with "open wounds," giving renewed expression to his abiding need to witness "history happening" even if he could not clearly see a resolution to its horror. "Remember This House," along with a sketch for a Beauford Delaney novel tentatively titled "A Higher Place," as well as other ideas for introspective and prospective inquiry, were part of Baldwin's last "journey." Peck then retrieves this figurative term to initiate the opening sequence of *I Am Not Your Negro*: "I am about to undertake a journey . . . a journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you."⁴²

Baldwin's journey is palpably *not* over—perhaps just beginning. The film makes certain his illuminating prose and penetrating critique continue to assume new meanings in the



Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and James Baldwin in *I Am Not Your Negro*. Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

present, which in turn creates new imaginaries for the future. *I Am Not Your Negro* augers a significant pedagogical intervention, set to revive knowledge of Baldwin through multifarious viewings, but equally to jump-start the art of reading in schools and communities where a new generation may have little access otherwise to Baldwin texts.⁴³ Along with Peck's companion edition, Vintage International-Random House, a major Baldwin publisher, is issuing repackaged paperback editions of Baldwin, with new introductions by prominent contemporary writers and scholars. Baldwin had a prophetic sense of his "appointment with the twenty-first century." In innumerable ways, Raoul Peck's superbly realized *I Am Not Your Negro* has helped him honor that date.⁴⁴

Notes

1. James Baldwin interview on *Faces* (television show), Part 3, uncredited video from 1979 or 1980 (uploaded August 1, 2009), www.youtube.com/watch?v=emiKF7_4esQ
2. Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin* (New York: Vintage International, 2017), xiv. This slim book contains Peck's essay and script, selected texts from James Baldwin, and brief reflections by Baldwin estate executor Gloria Baldwin Karefa-Smart and film editor Alexandra Strauss.
3. Ibid.
4. On February 26, 2017, *I Am Not Your Negro* was overlooked for the best feature documentary Oscar award in favor of the five-part made-for-television documentary, *O. J.: Made in America*, directed by Ezra Edelman. Of note, four of the five nominees in the 2017 documentary category are black directors, including Roger William Ross (*Life Animated*) and Ava DuVernay (*13th*) along with Peck and Edelman.
5. *James Baldwin: I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, produced by Pat Hartley, Dick Fontaine, and James Baldwin (1982), www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlwj36hcrMQ
6. James Baldwin and Randall Kenan, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Vintage, 2011), xvii.
7. The section of the film that Peck has titled "Witness" condenses Baldwin's "sketch" of the acrimonious May 24, 1963 meeting that he organized between then-attorney general of the United States, Robert F. Kennedy, and a discrepant group of black and white civil rights activists, lawyers, and artists. Among the group was the 33-year-old acclaimed playwright, Lorraine Hansberry. In the wake of Medgar Evers's murder, the Birmingham Sunday School bombing in which four little girls perished, and the ongoing violent repression of nonviolent civil rights activities, the group hoped to persuade the Kennedys to provide direct protections to marchers and to black children attempting to integrate "Deep South" schools. Baldwin often recounted Kennedy's infamous response which, "referring to the Irish past, said that a Negro [like Baldwin] could become president in forty years." Baldwin equated Kennedy's incomprehension and lack of moral commitment to the same duplicitous innocence that prevented white Americans from squarely facing the nation's racial crisis. Deftly combining still images and Baldwin's words, Peck powerfully conveys the irreparable breakdowns in relations encapsulated by Hansberry's bitter meeting-ending exit line, recounting: "But I am very worried," she [Hansberry] said, 'about the state of the civilization which produced that photograph of the white cop standing on that Negro woman's neck in Birmingham.' Then she smiled. And I am glad she was not smiling at me. She extended her hand. 'Goodbye, Mr. Attorney General,' she said, and she turned and walked out of the room." Baldwin would not see Lorraine Hansberry again; she died January 12, 1965. See James Baldwin, "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit," in Baldwin and Kenan, *Cross of Redemption*, 109–13; Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 38–45.
8. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz, eds., *James Baldwin: America and Beyond* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 3.
9. *Take This Hammer*, Director's Cut (remastered August 2013 by Movette Film Transfer and Bay Area Television Archive, 59 min, 16 sec). Originally produced by the KQED Film Unit, directed by Richard O. More, San Francisco, Spring 1963.
10. *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (Karen K. Thorsen, Douglas K. Dempsey, 1989), <http://jamesbaldwinproject.org/Synopsis.html>. Notably, the producer was William "Bill" Miles.

11. An estimated four thousand people attended the service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. An obituary had reported on his death in France: Lee A. Daniels, "James Baldwin, Eloquent Writer in Behalf of Civil Rights, Is Dead," *New York Times*, December 2, 1987. A later unsigned article reported on the memorial at the cathedral: "James Baldwin: His Voice Remembered," *New York Times*, December 20, 1987; it introduced a section of eulogies delivered at the service, including Toni Morrison, "James Baldwin: His Voice Remembered: Life in His Language," *New York Times*, December 20, 1987, 27, at www.nytimes.com/1987/12/20/books/james-baldwin-his-voice-remembered.html. It is notable that while Toni Morrison's eulogy is not included in the Thorsen documentary, Isaac Julien opens his 1989 film, *Looking for Langston*, with Morrison's words delivered at the funeral.
12. On these points, Cheryl A. Wall offers an insightful and persuasive anticipation of Peck's film. See her "Stranger at Home: James Baldwin on What It Means to Be an American," in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 35–52.
13. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Beacon Press, 2012), xii.
14. Toni Morrison, ed., *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 136.
15. Toni Pressley-Sanon and Sophie Saint-Just, eds., *Raoul Peck: Power, Politics, and the Cinematic Imagination* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 3. This edited compendium provides critical essays on Peck's evolving vision across his extensive filmography of twenty films since 1982 (though not *Le jeune Karl Marx* (*The Young Karl Marx*) and *I Am Not Your Negro*, both in production at the time of the book's publication). In addition, the book offers a selection of writing by and interviews with Peck, providing insights into his cinematic specificity and range, as well as the insistently international trajectory of his career.
16. Despite the Belgium government's 2002 "apology" for "indirect" complicity in the assassination, many of the details of Lumumba's murder remain secreted. Tensions between what is known about the Lumumba affair and simultaneously disavowed is explored in Sven Augustijnen's enthrallingly reflexive "documentary," *Spectres* (Auguste Orts, co-produced by Projections, Cobra Films, and Jan Mot, 2011). See also the illuminating exhibition catalogue on Sven Augustijnen, entitled *Spectres* (Brussels: Asa, 2011).
17. Christopher Pavsek, "The Black Holes of History: Raoul Peck's Two Lumumbas," *Framework: Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, nos. 1–2 (Spring and Fall 2009): 86.
18. See Pressley-Sanon and Saint-Just, *Raoul Peck*.
19. Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin*, 41.
20. I make this assessment notwithstanding the outspoken Jackson's unfortunate March 8, 2017, comments regarding Daniel Kaluuya (*Get Out*, Jordan Peele, 2017) and other black British actors cast in roles that he believes African American actors might better understand, having grown up in the American racial situation. Jackson's subsequent clarification of his comment did not seem to help matters, as he contended that African American actors do not have equal opportunities to work in the UK and adapt the British accent. Jackson later called out—this time, rightly so—Ben Carson's (Donald Trump's Housing and Urban Development "Secretary") bizarre equation of African slaves as "involuntary" immigrants coming to America. See Hillary Busis, "Get Out Finds Unlikely Critic in Samuel Jackson," *Vanity Fair*, March 8, 2017, www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/03/get-out-samuel-l-jackson-black-british-actors-jordan-peele-daniel-kaluuya; Paul Chi, "Samuel L. Jackson Clarifies *Get Out* Comments: It Was 'Not Meant to be a Mean Slam,'" *Vanity Fair*, March 9, 2017, www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/03/samuel-l-jackson-get-out-black-british-actors-not-meant-negative; Ben Kentish, "Samuel L. Jackson Slams Ben Carson for Comparing Slaves to 'Immigrants,'" *Independent*, March 7, 2017, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/samuel-l-jackson-ben-carson-us-slaves-immigrants-housing-secretary-donald-trump-a7615681.html
21. Adam Kaiserman, "James Baldwin and the Great Divide: Adapting 'Equal in Paris' for Golden Age Television," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 39, no. 3 (2014): 112–34. See also James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (New York: Dell, 1976). For an extraordinary reading of this text, see Jane M. Gaines, "Green Like Me" in her *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 24–51. Baldwin's memoirist approach to race and film criticism significantly informs *I Am Not Your Negro*.
22. James Baldwin, *One Day When I Was Lost* (New York: Vintage, 2013).
23. Baldwin's screenplay was based on Osman Necmi Gürmen Turkish novel, published in French by Gallimard in 1979 under the title *L'espadon*. See David Lemming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 358. See also Magdalena Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 256–58.
24. Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin*, 50–51. John M. Stahl's *Imitation of Life* (1934) is adapted from the 1932 Fannie Hurst novel of the same title. The plot concerns Bea Pullman, a young white widow with a daughter, Jessie, who hires Delilah as a live-in maid and cook. Delilah and Peola share the Pullman household, and eventually the successful pancake business Bea builds with Delilah, where Delilah serves as both muse and chief laborer. Most commentators agree that while the film touches on the racism that Peola and Delilah face in their relationship and in the larger society, such conflicts are rendered secondary to the conflicted family melodrama of Bea, her love interest Steve, and her daughter Jessie, as set in evolving attitudes toward white American masculinity and femininity. Issues of race were further muted in the 1959 Douglas Sirk remake, with Peola replaced with the more neutral name Sarah Jane,

- played by white actress Susan Kohner. For a compelling analysis of the film, see Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Lucy Fisher's classic edited anthology on the film, *Imitation of Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).
25. Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin*, 12.
 26. Laura Nelson was lynched with her teenage son Lawrence Nelson on May 25, 1911. Both were hung from a steel bridge crossing the Canada River in Okemah, Oklahoma. The photograph copywriter is G. H. Farnum, Okemah. The photograph was published in *The Okemah Ledger*, and was reproduced as a 3½ x 5½ postcard. For details, see James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000), 178–79.
 27. Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin*, 43–44; James Baldwin, “Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit,” in Baldwin and Kenan, *Cross of Redemption*, 113.
 28. See Walter Benjamin, “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253–64. Patrice Lumumba’s last letter to his wife, Pauline, resonates here, too: “History will have its say but it will not be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or at the United Nations, but the history which will be taught in the countries freed from imperialism and its puppets.” Patrice Lumumba, *Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958–1961*, ed. Jean Van Lierde (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 422–23.
 29. Al Baker, “Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner’s Death,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html
 30. I thank Peter M. Taubman for this insight into Baldwin’s phrase. “There is no safety” is the leitmotif of Taubman’s unpublished essay, “Note on James Baldwin, a Native Son,” delivered as the Miles M. Kastendieck Chair of English Address, April 9, 1987, Brooklyn College, New York.
 31. Toni Morrison, for example, eulogized Baldwin’s courage as exemplary: “Yours was the courage to live life in and from its belly as well as beyond its edges, to see and say what it was, to recognize and identify evil but never fear or stand in awe of it. It is a courage that came from a ruthless intelligence married to a pity so profound it could convince anyone who cared to know that those who despised us need the moral authority of their former slaves, who are the only people in the world who know anything about them and who may be, indeed, the only people in the world who really care anything about them.” See note 11.
 32. In his 1963 “A Talk to Teachers,” for example, Baldwin urged: “Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point pretending that this won’t happen.” In Morrison, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 678.
 33. Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck from Texts by James Baldwin*, xii.
 34. Baldwin’s paradoxical optimism is echoed in the fiery conclusion of his most well-known essay, “Down at the Cross: Letter from the Reflection of My Mind” (originally published 1962): “And here we are, at the center of the arc, trapped in the gaudiest, most valuable, and most improbable water-wheel the world has ever seen. Everything now . . . is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others—do not falter in our duty, we may be able. . . to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. . . *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!*” In Morrison, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 347.
 35. See Richard Avedon and James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1964/Penguin, 1965); James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, “Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde,” *Essence Magazine*, 1984; James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, *A Dialogue* (New York: Lippincott, 1973); James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (New York: Dell, 1972); James Baldwin, *Littleman, Littleman: A Story of Childhood*, illustrated by Yoran Cazac (New York: Dial Press, 1976).
 36. See for example Dwight A. McBride, ed., *James Baldwin Now* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) and Douglas Field, ed., *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
 37. The 2014 “Year of James Baldwin” was perhaps most visible in its New York City edition. New York Live Arts organized events in collaboration with a variety of arts organizations and several universities, including Columbia University, presenting premieres of several new theatre works based on Baldwin’s writing, such as “Nothing Personal,” directed by Patricia McGregor; “Stranger on Earth,” conceived and directed by Carl Hancock Rux; “Notes of a Native Son,” by the composer STEW; several dance premieres by choreographers Charles O. Anderson and Dianne McIntyre; art installations, public programs, and talks and discussions addressing the theme “James Baldwin, This Time,” featuring such notables as Jamaican novelist Jamaica Kincaid, biographer David Leeming, and Studio Museum of Harlem Director Thelma Golden. See <http://arts.columbia.edu/coe/new/2014/year-of-james-baldwin>. In September 2015, the Film Society of Lincoln Center, again in collaboration with Columbia University, presented a thirteen-film program, “The Devil Finds Work: James Baldwin on Film,” curated by Rich Blint and Jake Perlin: www.filmlinc.org/series/the-devil-finds-work-james-baldwin-on-film/#films
 38. *James Baldwin Review*, edited by Douglas Field, Justin A. Joyce, and Dwight A. McBride, www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/journals/jbr/

39. Among recent critical scholarship invigorating Baldwin studies, to name a few: Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "Alas Poor Jimmy," in *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 96–118; Consuela Francis, *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963–2010* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014); Matt Brim, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Michele Elam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (New York: Cambridge University Press); Ed Pavlic, *Who Can Afford to Improvise: James Baldwin and Black Music, the Lyric and the Listeners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
40. Baldwin's former Saint-Paul de Vence home presently sits in dilapidated condition. The James Baldwin Estate lost ownership of the house after the author's death in 1987. The house is currently owned by a French real estate company with plans to raze the property for a luxury condo development. Several writers and Baldwin scholars still hope to save the property or some part of it as a site of memory to Baldwin, but also as a potential residence for writers and artists. Several writers have documented their sojourns to the hilltop house, including Thomas Chatterton's essay on his "pilgrimage" there in "Breaking into James Baldwin's House" for the *New Yorker*, October 25, 2015, www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/breaking-into-james-baldwins-house. Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah offers a memoirist's take on her visit to the Baldwin house with "The Weight," in *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race*, ed. Jesmyn Ward (New York: Scribner, 2016), 19–32; and Shannon Cain describes her experience in "I Squatted James Baldwin's House in Order to Save It," in *Literary Hub*, July 14, 2016, <http://lithub.com/i-squatted-james-baldwins-house-in-order-to-save-it/>. In addition, "His Place in Provence" is an independent collective organized to negotiate a French/U.S. public-private acquisition of Baldwin's house as a residence for artists and writers. It calls for members, donations, and participation at its website: <http://hisplaceinprovence.org/>. For more details see Rachel Donaldio, "Battling to Save James Baldwin's Home in the South of France," *New York Times*, April 4, 2017: www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/arts/battling-to-save-james-baldwins-home-in-the-south-of-france
41. Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade*, 249–64. Zaborowska indicates that a 1987 manuscript of the play and related materials remain part of the James Baldwin Estate and are not available for citation. However, an early version of "The Welcome Table," directed by Baldwin collaborator Walter Dallas, was performed in 1983 at the Academy of Arts in Philadelphia. Also see David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 372–78, and H. L. Gates, "An Interview with Josephine Baker and James Baldwin," with an introduction by Anthony Barthelemy, in *Southern Review* 21, no. 3 (1985): 594.
42. Leeming describes "Remember This House" as having origins in a 1979 article Baldwin was to write on revisiting the American South planned for the *New Yorker*. Research Baldwin conducted toward the piece expanded the initial assignment into an idea for a book project that would unpack his retrospective considerations of the civil rights movement for McGraw-Hill. Neither project, however, could be completed before Baldwin's death. See Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 352–71.
43. In a report that appeared in the year of the Baldwin ninetieth-birthday-anniversary commemorations, some educators cited poor reading habits and censorship for inhibiting the study of Baldwin's works in schools, particularly where there is fear that his writing may be difficult, sexually explicit, or read as "inflammatory" in a presumed "postracial" environment. Felicia R. Lee, "Trying to Bring Baldwin's Complex Voice Back to the Classroom," *New York Times*, April 24, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/04/25/books/james-baldwin-born-90-years-ago-is-fading-in-classrooms.html. More recently, a campaign has been launched by Janelle Monae and other celebrities to encourage reading of James Baldwin's novels and essays: <https://mic.com/articles/170874/samuel-l-jackson-janelle-mon-e-chris-rock-and-more-celebs-want-you-to-know-your-baldwin#.3cTDN6zY>
44. On April 12, 2017, the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture, a division of the New York Public Library located in Harlem, announced the major acquisition of James Baldwin's papers long held by the Baldwin Estate. Complicated restrictions mandated by the Baldwin family will remain in effect on some archival materials, particularly Baldwin's personal letters and correspondences. Nevertheless, researchers will for the first time have on-site access to a wealth of manuscripts, drafts, notes, and other ephemera that are likely to broaden the study of Baldwin's life and work. See: Jennifer Schuessler, "James Baldwin's Archive, Long Hidden, Comes (Mostly) Into View," *New York Times*, April 12, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/arts/james-baldwins-archive-long-hidden-comes-mostly-into-view.html