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Abstract

This essay interprets Baldwin as continuing the Socratic practice of self-examination and social criticism while also shifting his Socratic undertaking by charting the limits of examination created by the harsh effects of race and slavery in the United States. The author argues that Baldwin's Socratic practice inflects not only his essays—the center of previous analyses—but also his fictions. By transposing Socrates to issues of race in twentieth-century America and confronting the incoherent effects of a racialized society, James Baldwin thus carries forward and transforms a pivotal figure in the history of political thought.

Keywords

James Baldwin, Socrates, race and politics, democracy, contemporary United States

In his recent book *Democracy Matters*, Cornel West (2004, 79) names James Baldwin as the “black American Socrates.” “A blues-inflected, jazz-saturated democrat,” Baldwin, in West's words, exercises “a powerful and poignant self-examination—always on the brink of despair, yet holding on to a tragicomic hope,” bespeaking “a rare intellectual integrity and personal anguish.” Like Socrates, Baldwin infects others with perplexity, forcing his readers to grapple with the difficulties of “trying to be a decent human being and thinking person in the face of the pervasive mendacity and hypocrisy of the American empire” (80).

Taking its cue from West, this essay explores how James Baldwin's essays and fiction continue and modify a kind of Socratic examination transposed to the context of racial domination and white supremacy. Recent work in political theory on Baldwin has paid particular attention to the usefulness of his work for democratic theory, emphasizing how Baldwin's essays can inform a “public discourse” about issues such as inequality, citizenship, power, identity, democratic authority, and the uses of history (Balfour 2001, 135).¹ For these scholars, Baldwin's writings lay “a critical groundwork,” in Lawrie Balfour's (2001, 135) words, for engaging these concerns while also, as George Shulman (2008, 27) has put it, urging the cultivation of “practices of citizenship that defeat idealization but not aspiration.” Denying the possibility of realizing American democracy without confronting the history of oppression interwoven in the very fabric of the republic, Baldwin voices the claims of African American

critics stretching from Douglass through Du Bois and West. Baldwin thus builds on the strand of African American political thought that aims to confront the history of race and white supremacy as the indispensable condition of any plausible vision of American democracy by providing theoretical resources for challenging power inequalities related to race, gender, sexuality, and class.² Elaborating Baldwin's work as a practice akin to Socrates's, this essay links these concerns of African American political thought to Socrates's influential model of the questioning philosopher or social critic dedicated to improving his or her fellow citizens through the collective pursuit of knowledge.³ Recently, “Socrates” has come to serve as a trope for self-examination and the kind of “critical” or “philosophic” citizenship propounded by many as needful in twenty-first century liberal democracies;⁴ I argue that Baldwin takes up this Socrates in his original key by articulating and undertaking a practice of *examination*: the interrogation of self and world to recognize the delusions and blindness that contribute to persist structures of oppression. Baldwin thus insists on the destructive reality of the “racial contract,” as Charles Mills (1997, 18, 88) has put it, in its epistemological form, rejecting the ideological coercion propagated by a

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liberal democracy that insists on denying a racialized past. As a “black American Socrates,” Baldwin carries forward the provocative work of the gadfly by confronting the ignorance of those around him, seeking to bring his interlocutors to more truthful and just collective life through examination.⁵

Yet while Baldwin continues these aspects of Socrates’s activity, I also argue that he transforms Socrates’s project, enacting a Socrates “in a different key” by depicting how human beings struggle to practice this examination in their daily lives. In this sense Baldwin’s work provides an opportunity for rethinking Socratic citizenship in ways that anticipate and extend work by contemporary feminists of color, critical race theorists, and theorists of gender and sexuality, highlighting the embodiment of examination and the necessity of social or collective forms of interrogation.⁶ Here I show how Baldwin’s fiction complements the essays by suggesting collective practices of selfcraft that involve a social process of working through the divisions wrought by a history of oppression.⁷ While the essays lay out a strategy of redress in familiar Socratic terms, the insistence on knowledge remains incomplete; one can pursue self-examination and remain defeated. Only when read alongside Baldwin’s fiction can we understand the complications of examination and the necessity of a social practice of examination pursued with others.

Political theorists have largely ignored Baldwin’s fiction, but I argue that his fiction transforms the enterprise of examination presented in the essays by confronting it with what Baldwin calls the “incoherence” of American life: the disparities produced and perpetuated by categorical exclusions. Here I propose seeing Baldwin’s fiction as depicting the heterogeneous humanity beneath the stereotypes of race, gender, sexuality, and class and thus reflecting, albeit in a changed way, the problems Baldwin articulates with his own voice in his essays.⁸ Political theorists may demand more philosophic or critical citizenship, but I read Baldwin’s highly regarded third novel, *Another Country*, as showing how social positions constrained by power articulated along racial, sexual, gender, and class categories can prevent these undertakings from getting off the ground.⁹ The novel focuses readers’ attention on how struggle with others can realize Baldwin’s call to examination and how society so often militates against such realizations. In this way, Baldwin transforms “Socratic citizenship” by showing that any examination of reality depends on communication with differently situated bodies, who each have a distinct vantage point on a shared reality. While Baldwin’s novel gives reasons to resist a simplistic commitment to liberation through examination, it nonetheless sketches the terms under which a complicated examination might take place.

Socrates’s Original Key and Baldwin’s Practices of Examination

While “Socrates” has come to signify many different approaches to politics and philosophy, a recent consensus has emerged about the potential for theorizing democratic citizenship in terms of Socrates’s practice of philosophy.¹⁰ Put in general terms, Socrates has been invoked as the exemplary critic of democracy who, through his criticisms, attempted to bring democratic Athens to a better version of itself. Although with varying (and sometimes conflictual) frames of approach, most recent commentators agree on three important elements of this Socrates: Socrates proceeds by critical examination of his fellow citizens; he subscribes to some kind of intellectualism, by which knowing the truth will lead to better action; and Socrates’s ultimate task lies in bringing citizens to think what they are doing, entailing not political withdrawal but a new kind of informed political engagement. “Socrates” on this reading represents a gadfly dedicated to the productive unsettling of conventional opinions and the concomitant awakening of his fellow citizens to more thoughtful participation in collective life.

Baldwin’s essays pick up this original key of Socrates and play it in the context of racialized America. In the first place, Baldwin proceeds in his essays from a commitment to the value and importance of examination. While Baldwin never explicitly names Socrates as influencing his approach, themes of examination and questioning pervade his work, and these themes frame Baldwin’s task of inquiry as similar to Socrates’s. “It is part of the business of the writer,” Baldwin writes in the “Autobiographical Notes” that begin his first essay collection, *Notes of a Native Son*, “to examine attitudes, to go beneath the surface, to tap the source” (Baldwin 1998a, 7). Baldwin seeks to “dig down to where reality is” and tell society the truth about itself: “The things that people really do and really mean and really feel,” Baldwin writes, “are almost impossible for them to describe, but these are the very things which are most important about them. These things control them and that is where reality is.” What Baldwin seeks to do is “show this reality” (Baldwin 1998a, 708) by plumbing “subterranean assumptions” and thereby “face the truth” (Baldwin 1998a, 587).

Second, examination describes a necessary and urgent task for Baldwin. Everyone has the “right and necessity to examine everything,” Baldwin writes in the *Saturday Review* in 1963 (Baldwin 1998a, 686). The right to examine in a democracy is evident enough, but its *necessity* stems from the needfulness of finding better ways to live together. “Examination” for Baldwin does not just name a quest for truth and knowledge as intrinsic goods but offers America the only hope to overcome its delusions

about itself and thereby realize its full promise and potential, or, in Baldwin's words, to "achieve its identity." The first clear allusion to Socrates in Baldwin's work underscores this connection between examination and living together well, in the "Introduction" to Baldwin's second collection of essays, *Nobody Knows My Name*:

Havens are high-priced. The price exacted of the haven-dweller is that he contrive to delude himself into believing that he has found a haven. It would seem, unless one looks more deeply at the phenomenon, that most people are able to delude themselves and get through their lives quite happily. But I still believe that the unexamined life is not worth living: and I know that self-delusion, in the service of no matter what small or lofty cause, is a price no writer can afford. (Baldwin 1998a, 135-36)

Believing they inhabit a haven, Baldwin argues, most Americans live under the delusion of a world untarnished by racial hatred and the effects of white supremacy—they live unexamined lives. Moreover, this delusion pertains to both whites and blacks. In this passage and others, Baldwin emphasizes his *own* need to examine delusions, especially delusions of his own worthlessness perpetuated by a racist society. The examination Baldwin practices applies to every reader, regardless of race (cf. Baldwin 1998a, 835).

The converse of this second feature of Baldwin's Socratic project is that life without examination is not worth living. Left unexamined, those who live under delusions about the reality of racism in America cannot recognize the suffering around them or their own implication in (and experience of) this suffering. "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem," an essay later in *Nobody Knows My Name*, contrasts most Americans' lack of examination and their resulting delusions with Baldwin's project of uncovering and questioning through examination (Baldwin 1998a, 170-79).¹¹ Baldwin describes the "fishhooks, the barbed wire" of "wide, filthy, hostile Fifth Avenue," so unlike the Fifth Avenue of Manhattan, just a few blocks south (170-71). "Immense human gaps" populate this stretch of the avenue, gaps where the shells of human beings, deadened by the false hopes of the "Holy Roller sects" or "the hatred of the white world and all its works" haunt the stunted trees and looming projects (170-71). Those who do avoid these deaths "get up in the morning and go downtown to meet 'the man,'" working in the white man's world all day only to return to "this fetid block," struggling to keep a modicum of human dignity "in spite of the insults, the indifference, and the cruelty" they encounter in their working day (172).

In other words, without examination and recognition of the actual effects of these projects, most Americans ignore

their reality, denying a constitutive part of themselves in the process. Baldwin intensifies the Socratic call for an examined life, showing the urgency of questioning what previously lay unquestioned. Most Americans cannot endure the vertigo that critical examination of this system would induce, but Baldwin insists that only through such examination can we live well together. "The way to begin," Baldwin writes, "is through taking a hard look at oneself" (613). Just as Socrates's questioning elicits the pain and dislocation of perplexity, or *aporia*, in his interlocutors, Baldwin recognizes the difficulty of the task he demands. Most Americans prefer to cling to an illusion of happiness that denies the reality around them, reinforcing their power in the process. "Why don't all the Negroes in the South move North?" someone asks Baldwin. He explains what has unfailingly happened: "They do not escape Jim Crow: they merely encounter another, not-less-deadly variety. They do not move to Chicago, they move to the South Side; they do not move to New York; they move to Harlem" (177). Baldwin seeks to unseat the delusion that all Americans have the freedom to choose where they live, to shop where they wish, to work hard for a better life—one of the great and unexamined myths of the republic. But this myth functions as another delusion, and recognizing this myth as false proves nearly impossible when one's illusions about the safety and security of power depend on it.

Following the third facet of Socrates's project, Baldwin also insists that examination will help lead his readers and fellow citizens to think what they are doing and thus reengage in collective life with others. The stakes of the needful examination for which Baldwin calls go beyond just knowing the facts. Baldwin argues that northerners "indulge in an extremely dangerous luxury" when they believe that having fought on the right side of the Civil War allows them to deplore what occurs in the South without turning a critical glance toward themselves. When human beings deny complexity, Baldwin writes in "Many Thousands Gone," they deny themselves and their common humanity: "Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his."¹² One cannot justify the plight of blacks in the North by the worse situation in the South: "This perpetual justification empties the heart of all human feeling," writes Baldwin (178). "It is a terrible, an inexorable, law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own: in the face of one's victim, one sees oneself. Walk through the streets of Harlem," Baldwin counsels dolefully, "and see what we, this nation, have become" (179). Delusions and the veil of innocence under which these delusions masquerade cost human beings their humanity and human community—these are the high prices of their havens.¹³

Examination, Acceptance, and Struggle: *Another Country*

Following Socrates in his original key, Baldwin's essays voice a powerful call for examination to address the dehumanizing delusions that persist in a society structured by categorical oppression. Yet as in the case of Socrates, this call for examination also assumes that people can change simply through knowing better, that recognition of the reality of racism could lead to ameliorating the destructive delusions under which most Americans live. This is not to say that Baldwin blithely repeats the paradox of Socratic intellectualism; on the contrary, he seems to recognize the dangers of such an assumption in *The Fire Next Time*, writing that "people find it very difficult to act on what they know," and in a speech five years later, Baldwin admits that "people are always in great danger when they know what they should do, and refuse to act on that knowledge" (Baldwin 1998a, 295, 752). But in his essays Baldwin never directly offers a way of dealing with the problem that knowledge may not be enough to overcome an oppressive situation.¹⁴ For this problem, *Another Country* offers an elaboration.

Another Country suggests the tragic possibility that knowing may not be sufficient, and for as much as Baldwin seems to promise in his essays that by interrogating myths and delusions one might illuminate some liberating truth about reality, *Another Country* moves against this by simultaneously insisting on an uncooperative and inert world, one resistant to the change inquiry might urge. The American experience, Baldwin admits, is "an enormous incoherence" (Baldwin 1998a, 228), an incoherence not easily overcome through examination. *Another Country* discloses this incoherence as rooted in the reality of racism in America and intertwined with gender, sexuality, and class in ways that constrain and resist questioning, forcing readers to recognize the harsh consequences of categorical oppression that even intensive examination might not alleviate. Reading Baldwin's novel alongside the essays thus deepens and complicates the question of how examination might lead to social change.

While in his essays Baldwin often develops a "passage from Egypt" narrative that moves from denial to knowledge to redemption (Pinckney 2000), *Another Country*, like much of Baldwin's fiction,¹⁵ circles the inescapability of conflict, of pain, and of suffering in a world marked forever by a history of oppression, eschewing plot for dialogue centering on its characters' struggles to achieve their identities. By discussing Baldwin's fiction as well as his nonfiction, I do not mean to elide the important differences between these genres; rather, I propose seeing Baldwin's fiction as reflecting, albeit in a changed way, the problems Baldwin articulates with his own voice in

his essays. *Another Country* thus acts offers a way to claim the heterogeneous humanity of African Americans, as Roderick Ferguson (2004, 24) has suggested, and to situate examination in the particular lives of its characters. As they wander, intersect, and disperse, the characters of *Another Country* grope toward knowledge of themselves and recognition by those around them. The shapelessness of the novel reflects the characters' own shapeless existences and their limited power to fashion coherent lives despite their strident pursuit of self-knowledge, love, and connection.

Yet while the novel's characters crash again and again on the categorical barriers around them, different responses emerge from this chaos of a world structured by racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.¹⁶ These different responses suggest how Baldwin transposes Socrates in the original key, bringing the project of examination to the embodied situations of particular characters and thus illustrating to his readers the singular ways in which the examined life is pursued. In the figure of Rufus, *Another Country* confronts the enterprise of examination with the conditions of its failure and thus with the chance that no hope of redeeming the horrific American past might persist. Yet the characters of Vivaldo and Ida display different ways of how examination might proceed, even in a society apparently intent on destroying them. Each of these characters complicates the original Socratic key of Baldwin's essays, showing how the problem of examination is less concerned with arriving at knowledge and changing one's life than with struggling through, in the company of others, the self-deluding myths that preclude connection and understanding. Complementing the strenuous labor of examination, acceptance and a commitment to struggle become thematic in *Another Country*; these frame the successes and failures of characters to "achieve their identities," moving Baldwin's "Socrates" into a distinctly different key.

Frustrated Examination: Rufus

If the essays suggest how examination might liberate all Americans from their racialized society, the character of Rufus complicates and ultimately denies such a possibility. *Another Country* begins with Rufus, and his character shadows all of the novel's other characters, containing within himself the most important motifs of the novel.¹⁷ In the first few sentences many of these themes emerge:

He was facing Seventh Avenue, at Times Square. It was past midnight and he had been sitting in the movies, in the top row of the balcony, since two o'clock in the afternoon. Twice he had been awakened by the violent accents of the Italian film, once the usher has awakened him, and twice he had been

awakened by caterpillar fingers between his thighs. He was so tired, he had fallen so low, that he scarcely had the energy to be angry; nothing of his belonged to him anymore. (367)¹⁸

Rufus, like nearly all the novel's characters, faces a bleak and intimidating New York. While Rufus has tried to escape the streets to the movies, he cannot elude the threat of violence—both in the film and in sexual predations. Tired, low, angry, dispossessed: Rufus appears already beaten by the end of the novel's first paragraph.

Rufus's isolation marks one impediment to successful examination. His heterogeneity—his race, his sexuality, and his class—alienates Rufus from a world that pathologizes difference even while it produces it (Ferguson 2004, 26). Rufus exists “entirely alone, and dying of it, . . . part of an unprecedented multitude” (368). As he “peddles his ass”—trying to pick up wealthy, white men who might buy him dinner in exchange for sex—Rufus feels the burden of the past looming like the skyscrapers around him. Still, Rufus examines himself and the world in which he finds himself. He remembers Leona, a white southern woman whom he had loved and yet beat violently until she was taken to Bellevue, the New York mental hospital. As Rufus recollects, we encounter the beginning of their relationship: after meeting at a Harlem club, Rufus takes Leona to a party of Charlie Parker music and marijuana where they have sex on the balcony overlooking Riverside Drive. But in this act Rufus loses his tenderness, overcome with aggression and inexplicable revenge that tear his character apart. Rufus loves Leona and yet he hates her: his love both represents the color-blind and affluent sophistication that the Riverside Drive party seems to symbolize and seems impossible in a society where “miscegenation” remained an indictable crime and Rufus will always be a poor black (and confused) boy. Rufus cannot endure this tension—“The price was too high” (389).¹⁹ Affection gives way to violence, and Rufus acts out the role society expects him to play over and against his knowledge and his desires. Despite recognizing the truth of his oppression and resentment, Rufus cannot escape his self-destructive character. He cannot accept what the world has made him.

As Rufus reflects and examines himself, it becomes clear that without the support of others he cannot face the horrible truths about himself and the world around him. Remembering this doomed affair from his nameless position on the street, Rufus recounts how his life became only worse with Leona. He and Leona begin to compete for the greatest unhappiness. Rufus brawls with Vivaldo in a bar when he thinks Vivaldo has flirted with Leona (394). Leona later tries to reassure Rufus that “there's nothing wrong with being colored,” sparking another round of violence (411). Despite seeing it for what it is,

Rufus cannot persist in a world which denies the possibility of his life with Leona, nor can he escape the terms in which he has been cast: “I'm your boy,” he tells Leona. “You know what that means? . . . It means you've got to be good to me” (401). Rufus hears Bessie Smith's blues wisdom—“There's thousands of people, ain't got no place to go”—and it “speaks to his troubled mind,” but only enough for him to wonder “how others had moved beyond the emptiness and horror which faced him now” (408-9). He cannot seem to find a way.²⁰

The examination promised in the essays runs up against the reality of Rufus's situation; this reality overpowers the hopefulness of facing the truth about himself. Rufus's reflections build his back story—the musical brilliance, the hatred, the wishes for love—and yet Rufus cannot escape a fatalistic awareness “that nothing would stop it, nothing: this was himself”:

Rufus was aware of every inch of Rufus. He was flesh: flesh, bone, muscle, fluid, orifices, hair, and skin. His body was controlled by laws he did not understand. Nor did he understand what force within this body had driven him into such a desolate place. The most impenetrable of mysteries moved in this darkness for less than a second, hinting of reconciliation. And still the music continued, Bessie was saying that she wouldn't mind being in jail but she had to stay there for so long. (413)

Rufus eventually finds an escape from this carceral regime by leaping from the George Washington Bridge to his death. Rufus's self-knowledge, won through the reflection that takes the novel's first seventy pages, cannot save him. Knowing that the pain would never stop, that he could never make it this way, that the rules of the game all but decided the outcome, Rufus sees everybody, white and black, chained together, wishing they could escape from each other. “But we ain't never going to make it,” Rufus thinks. “We been fucked for fair” (442).

Examination fails when it proceeds without the company of others and, apparently, when the life needing examination proves too incomprehensible through the lens of categorical difference. Struggling yet ultimately defeated, Rufus “goes under.” Tragically, Rufus tries: he comes to know himself but ultimately cannot use this knowledge to create a better place for himself (or others) in the world. Thus while Rufus does not explicitly become Baldwin's version of Richard Wright's *Bigger Thomas*—that is, as Baldwin describes him, one whose “life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear” (Baldwin 1998a, 18)—Rufus comes horribly close. He recognizes his hatred and fear, but he can never fully accept the fate of his character—his masculinity, his color, his ambivalent sexuality, his being an American. Rufus wants to love

Leona, but he cannot accept and struggle against the social condemnation of a love affair between a black man and a white woman even while he struggles with the heteronormative image of a black man foisted on him. Rufus examines and wonders, but he also resents all of those around him. Soon pain becomes Rufus's whole identity; the bitterness of generations concentrates in him. The truth of his condition, reached through the labor of examination, simply became too much for Rufus to bear.

Examination and Acceptance: Vivaldo

Rufus examines but he cannot accept what he discovers: his isolation and the horrific truth of his situation seem to prevent it.²¹ Yet *Another Country* offers another character to chronicle the struggles of examination, Vivaldo, Rufus's best friend and a poor Italian-Irish would-be novelist. Vivaldo offers an analogue to Rufus with one major exception: he is white. Vivaldo's whiteness, however, fundamentally changes his experience of the world: Vivaldo can express his love for men without being forced to sell it for sex; Vivaldo can frequent Harlem prostitutes without thinking of his sister; Vivaldo can, despite his poverty, pass as respectable, a future version of his former teacher Richard, who lives on Riverside Avenue. In other words, despite their being "up the same streets," Vivaldo and Rufus cannot know each other (409, 411).²² Vivaldo seeks to help Rufus, but he cannot yet understand the source of Rufus's rage and resentment. Hours before Rufus's death, Vivaldo still does not detect his pain.

Differently situated from Rufus, Vivaldo also develops quite differently in the novel, giving an alternative trajectory to examination. The loss of Rufus puts Vivaldo on the path of examination, and Vivaldo's connections with others provide a space for him to come to terms with himself and the world. Following Rufus's funeral, Vivaldo begins to ask questions. Sitting frustrated at his writing desk, Vivaldo feels as if he doesn't know his characters well enough to continue writing. He realizes, at this moment, that "the occurrence of an event is not the same thing as knowing what it is that one has lived through." Vivaldo's reflections continue,

Most people had not lived . . . through any of their terrible events. . . . They passed their lives thereafter in a kind of limbo of denied and unexamined pain. The great question that faced him this morning was whether or not he had ever, really, been present at his life. For if he had ever been present, then he was present still and his world would open up before him. (480)

Without mentioning Rufus's death, Vivaldo seems to confront the crucial question for himself in the novel:

whether or not he can become present to the death of Rufus, whether or not he can face and accept that pain and still struggle onward. As Vivaldo reflects on his incipient love affair with Ida, the younger sister of Rufus, his own insights begin to unfold. Vivaldo recollects his visits to prostitutes in Harlem while he also thinks fondly of first meeting Ida at Rufus's parents' apartment in the same area. The contradiction does yet appear in his mind, that is, that Vivaldo can treat some black Americans as less than human—he would not visit prostitutes in his own neighborhood, after all—while considering others his beloved friends. After his first night with Ida, Vivaldo still carries this tension between innocent delusion and reality: he is crazy about Ida, and he sees her face as a lover would, imbued with mystery as well as the possibility of torment; at the same time, however, making love with Ida, Vivaldo feels as if he is "traveling up a savage, jungle river," engulfed in her strange blackness (523). Vivaldo still sees Ida as a poor black woman, yet he does not yet see his own complicity in these destructive definitions. Even while it seeks to connect despite their differences, his love remains structured by the gap between their positions and the different burdens this creates.

Vivaldo's examination proceeds and blossoms in the company of others as he encounters differences between himself and the world and begins to reflect. While Vivaldo examines, he comes only slowly to accept his responsibility for the world in which he is a white man and Ida a black woman. At first Vivaldo cannot understand why Ida angrily identifies him with "white people" who have made her life miserable (599). Nor can Vivaldo set aside his own jealousy toward the wealthy white producer Ellis to see how Ida has been drawn into a desperate affair in the hopes of making it as a singer. But Vivaldo's own search for reality, anticipated by his insight at the writing desk, eventually brings him to confront and accept his own lack of knowledge. Among old friends in a working man's bar, Vivaldo begins to recognize his own ignorance. "Love was a country," Vivaldo realizes as he reflects on his life with Ida, "he knew nothing about" (631). Not one of us knows this country well—or well enough to avoid the pain and suffering it inevitable incurs: "And now—" thinks Vivaldo, looking around himself, "now it seemed that they were all equal in misery, confusion, and despair" (635).

Something in him was breaking; he was, briefly and horribly, in a region where there were no definitions of any kind, neither of color, nor of male and female. There was only the leap and the rending and the terror and the surrender. (636)

For a moment, Vivaldo looks deeply into the chaotic equality of all human beings, the fact that regardless of

color, gender, class, or sexuality, we all struggle to make our lives despite our limits, indeed to make lives out of such limits. Vivaldo wishes he could give up his differences for Ida so that she might take and love him, so that what held them apart—the immutable fact of each one’s situation—might be overcome. Yet Vivaldo still does not know where this insight leads. As he listens to music with his now drunken friends, Vivaldo recalls the blues that Ida so often sings: “what in the world did these songs mean to her?” he wonders (646). Slowly the recognition awakens: an understanding of Ida’s suffering, about the wound left by the loss of her brother, about the agonies wrought by a hostile world. Reflecting silently among these same, unknowing friends Vivaldo envies their “deadly and unshakable innocence” (647). He cannot forget what his examination has won.

While Rufus’s examination led him to the brink of an unacceptable reality, Vivaldo thus finds the strength to accept himself and the world that has made him. The Socratic project shifts to a different key, from the simple task of examination to the painful work of acceptance followed by the suffering of struggle. Accepting this reality, then, Vivaldo struggles against it. While an oppressive society threatens his love for Ida, Vivaldo, unlike Rufus, can persist in part because of his commitment to another. Displayed in public, the love affair between Vivaldo and Ida raises “clouds of hostility” that threaten to swamp them (495); the “entire shapeless, unspeakable city” seems to hover around their squalid apartment, oppressing them with its every noise and glance (650). “Minefields accumulate” around and between Vivaldo and Ida (652). Yet while Vivaldo never claims to know the depths of Ida’s pain, he can commit to struggle alongside her, still haunted by his failure to do so for Rufus. Vivaldo recognizes the need to work for love and that, absent love, one cannot get through it all (670). One must accept the pain, but, Vivaldo tells his friend Eric, “one’s got to *try*” (716). Vivaldo resolves to take up his burden and love Ida despite the unfriendly world that refuses to acknowledge this love as legitimate.

Examination and Struggle: Ida and Vivaldo

Vivaldo shows how examination might proceed toward acceptance and struggle, but Vivaldo’s struggle also requires another: Ida. While Vivaldo’s love appears in stark contrast to Rufus’s isolation, the transposition of the Socratic project of the essays remains incomplete without an account of how the commitment to another human being can provide the space and the strength to pursue examination. Moreover, while Vivaldo provides a counterpoint to Rufus, Ida inhabits the space between them. Vivaldo appears better equipped to accept a reality absent Harlem’s stunted projects and the violent prejudice faced

by black, non-heteronormative Americans; this reality broke Rufus whereas Vivaldo can bear up against it. But Ida lives with an awareness of both worlds; she is the “outsider-insider” of the novel. She has left the Harlem of her childhood behind and now lives in the Village with Vivaldo. The loss of Rufus haunts her, breeding resentment and anger toward a world that could allow such a thing to occur. Ida thus functions as the fulcrum for the argument of this essay: if Ida shows evidence of ameliorating the vicious effects of a racialized society through her own self-examination, the hopefulness of Baldwin’s Socratic project of inquiry in the essays persists; if, however, Ida’s character goes the way of Rufus, the novel at best shows how white people such as Vivaldo have overcome their delusions while bleakly admitting the impossibility of black people to do the same.

Ida’s embattled situation initially appears to doom any project of examination. This bleak horizon emerges in stark contrast to the liberal innocence of Cass, the white and affluent wife of Richard, Vivaldo’s teacher and friend. “There are other countries—have you ever thought of that?” Cass suggests to Ida.

Ida threw back her head and laughed. “Oh yes! And in another five or ten years, when we get the loot together, we can pack up and go to one of those countries.” Then, savagely, “And what do you think will have happened to us in those five years? How much will be left?” . . . “What you people don’t know,” she said, “is that life is a *bitch*, baby. It’s the biggest hype going.” (679)

While Cass has just revealed her affair with Eric as an act of boredom, Ida confronts her with the bleak reality of a black woman striving to make it. For despite loving him, Ida feels unable to marry Vivaldo—love cannot change the reality of their disparate situation. Their differences, artificial as they may be, create an unbridgeable gap. Cass could never know “what it’s like to be a black girl,” just as Vivaldo could never understand what led Ida’s brother, Rufus, to commit suicide. Vivaldo cannot understand the prison of Harlem that produced Ida and Rufus; he can accept his own responsibility, but he can never fully confront Ida’s world, a world very similar to that which sent her brother off the George Washington Bridge.

Ida’s circumstances do not bode well for the prospects of a “passage from Egypt” through examination. Throughout the novel, Ida appears hardened against those around her, impervious to hate as well as love. Ida acts distant and unfriendly: Vivaldo remembers her air of disdain when they met (493); “It doesn’t pay to be too nice,” she tells Eric (596). Ida erupts at Cass for not seeing the pain that led her brother Rufus to his death. Everyone has to suffer, she tells Cass: “You don’t have experience paying your

dues and it's going to be rough on you, baby, when the deal goes down" (679). Ida's inflexibility also seems to shadow any insights Vivaldo wins, suggesting that while he may examine and accept the world, Ida's resistance may prevent any overcoming of the distance between them.

The structure of the novel builds these questions around examination to a culmination at the novel's end. Up until that point, Baldwin never narrates the novel from Ida's point of view, thus refusing readers any knowledge about how Ida's self-examination has proceeded, that is, about how well she has come to terms with the reality of the world she and Vivaldo face. Throughout the novel, readers only see Ida from the outside. While every other major character has a portion of the story told through his or her point of view, Ida's inner world remains unavailable; Ida speaks with other characters whose internal responses Baldwin describes, yet Ida remains closed. One cannot be sure if Ida has asked herself the questions asked by Rufus and Vivaldo, if Ida has undertaken to examine herself and her delusions about the world.²³

The closed, enigmatic Ida dramatically reveals herself in the final scene with Vivaldo, a scene that adds a crucial facet to the development of examination, acceptance, and struggle—and thus to Baldwin's "Socrates in a different key." Vivaldo returns from a night with his friend Eric and Ida confesses her desperate seduction of Ellis. Ida explains to Vivaldo how much difficulty she has had accepting the loss of Rufus and the fundamental unfairness of her beloved brother's ending up as he did. Ida had resolved to succeed in the white man's world and "settle the score" after her brother's death: she would "hit the A train" and make it downtown as her brother hadn't (741). But the "love jive" (733) confuses Ida: Ida's love for her brother Rufus leads her down a path of vengeance, but her love for Vivaldo also seems to draw her toward coherence and some kind of healing. Thus being with Vivaldo makes her wonder about the idea of success behind her plans; her beliefs about "the way of the world" seem less than true when contrasted with the world she and Vivaldo have begun to create together. She recognizes that what she believed about the world had led her against herself: "It wasn't me. It wasn't me," she tells Vivaldo (748).

This revelation leaves Vivaldo reeling, vertiginous; Ida's speech suddenly shifts the reality of his earlier resolution to love Ida despite the struggles it would entail. Vivaldo reaches out to find some grip: the coffee pot, the coffee cups, sugar, milk, cigarettes. Feeling these things, reminding himself of their existence, reconnects Vivaldo to the reality that had seemed to vanish with Ida's words. Ida had withheld the truth to protect Vivaldo, fearing he could not bear it. Vivaldo thinks to himself that he had at last found what he wanted, the "true Ida," but now he has no idea how he could live with it (751). For a moment, it

seems as if everything between them will fall apart, disintegrating beneath the weight of the truth.

Ida's dramatic revelation calls attention to her particularly fraught struggle in the novel. Ida lives with the most intimate knowledge of the murderous effects of an oppressive society; she has the most to confront in her task of examination. As a black woman, moreover, she has found herself forced to use her sexuality for advancement: Vivaldo sees her as a whore even in her moment of confession; when she seeks protection from Ellis, it can come only through her own subordination. As Baldwin later wrote, Ida was "an object of wonder and even some despair—and some distrust—to all the people around her, including people who were very fond of her" (Baldwin 1998a, 709). Fearing further abandonment and disempowerment, Ida is reluctant to speak the truth to Vivaldo, saying that men wouldn't love women if they spoke truly and trying to attribute her lonely sadness to its being that "time of the month" (732, 734). Ida's situation has led her to act against herself, to a self-destructive identity, which she has no choice but to struggle against—or else suffer the same fate as her brother.

Under these conditions, Ida's powerful speech indicates the degree of struggle required by Baldwin's project of examination. Ida must insist on her own self-definition and self-valuation, on a black female-centered understanding denied by Vivaldo and the world around him. Yet rather than define herself exclusively in opposition to Vivaldo, she also must seek connection. Ida must simultaneously reject the internalized psychic oppression of being but a "poor, ignorant, black girl" while articulating to Vivaldo what it means to be Ida, to be a subject worthy of recognition. Ida does this by speaking out, bringing herself to the fore and initiating the work of reconciliation on which both she and Vivaldo depend. She witnesses her oppression, in Kelly Oliver's (2001, 18) term, making Vivaldo witness herself as well, to "enable working-through rather than merely the repetition of trauma and violence."

This working-through happens in the context of a loving connection that Ida and Vivaldo forge during the course of the novel. The end of *Another Country* thus shows the interdependence of Vivaldo and Ida—and thus the importance of the pursuit of connection—as a final element alongside acceptance and struggle that constitute Baldwin's "Socrates in a different key." While each of them feels overwhelmed by the truth, Ida and Vivaldo do not despair. Vivaldo is stunned, but Ida asks not for understanding or kindness—just, it would seem (for Ida doesn't quite say it), that Vivaldo might stay. Ida and Vivaldo touch:

They stared at each other. Suddenly, he reached out and pulled her to him, trembling, with tears starting up behind his eyes, burning and blinding,

and covered her face with kisses, which seemed to freeze as they fell. She clung to him; with a sigh she buried her face in his chest. There was nothing erotic in it; they were like two weary children. (752)

Ida and Vivaldo cleave to one another. Having examined and accepted the truths of their life together, now they must struggle forward in a world that seems intent on breaking them. The final section of *Another Country*, hopefully titled "Toward Bethlehem," seems to promise an alternative to the lonely logic of Rufus's examined, yet destroyed life as well as the incompleteness of examination when undertaken by Vivaldo alone. Needless to say, the life created by Ida and Vivaldo remains fraught and difficult: In their final scene, Ida admits that there may not be any hope for her, as if aware of being doomed to repeat her brother's history; Vivaldo too finds himself both afraid of Ida and overwhelmed by the "wilderness of anger, pity, love, and contempt and lust" that she provokes in him (748, 751). Yet when Ida and Vivaldo embrace like "weary children" in their final scene, Baldwin seems to emphasize their youth and the possibility it holds. Moving "toward Bethlehem," Ida and Vivaldo have begun a journey with their own miraculous actions. While Ida remains silent, the scene closes with Mahalia Jackson's gospel filling the room, holding this same promise that Ida and Vivaldo hold within themselves: the possibility of bringing a changed world into being.²⁴

Socrates in a Different Key: The Journey toward Coherence

"The principal action in the book," Baldwin said of *Another Country* in an interview with the *Paris Review*, "is the journey of Ida and Vivaldo toward some kind of coherence" (Baldwin 1984). Writing elsewhere, Baldwin describes how the shapelessness of *Another Country* also reflects the "incoherence" of life in America. The novel's characters desperately seek the self-knowledge without which real love is impossible, but they find themselves unable to change and incapable of gaining real insight. By depicting this, Baldwin writes that *Another Country* suggests that "love is refused at one's peril."²⁵ While revealing the struggle to examine and change, *Another Country*, according to Baldwin, also demonstrates complicity, especially white innocence and the delusions that structure daily life.

The trajectory of Ida and Vivaldo "toward some kind of coherence" shows what it might mean to struggle against the incoherence of life in America, a struggle pursued through examination and acceptance and yet never finished, just as the final embrace of Vivaldo and Ida at the end of *Another Country* describes only one more step

toward coherence, not its achievement. "The journey toward coherence" represents the path of examination chastened by the pain and suffering to which *Another Country* bears witness. This paradoxical moment of connection and looming disintegration encapsulates the unfolding of examination that has taken place in the novel. Rufus examines himself but cannot accept what he finds. Vivaldo, with his lighter burden, can accept the fruits of his examination, but that acceptance depends on his connection with Ida. Ida's pursuit of examination remains shrouded until the final scene, when she recounts it herself, yet this truth telling threatens to destroy the fragile bond she and Vivaldo had created. Still, Ida's fundamental opaqueness in the novel indicates the opaqueness at the core of every human being and thus the endlessness of all struggles to know and be known by others. Baldwin's "Socrates in a different key" has complicated the simple task of examination by depicting the work of acceptance, struggle, and connection in the characters of *Another Country*; each character's particular embodiment delimits and conditions his or her ability to examine and overcome the oppressive structures of society. Moreover, the characters' connections to each other lend space and strength to the painful undertakings Baldwin acclaims in the essays. The journey is a struggle and, at least in the terms of the novel, an endless one.

The language of "incoherence" thus performs two important functions for Baldwin. First, in the essays, the confrontation with incoherence encompasses the task of examination as Baldwin describes it. Here is Baldwin's black American Socrates in Socrates's original key: just as Socrates confronts the incoherent beliefs and actions of his fellow Athenians to bring them to more truthful lives, Baldwin notes how the incoherence of the world in the face of questioning prods further examination. In an essay from 1961, "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," Baldwin describes how "disparities" often produced by "the fact of color" lead to "incoherence."²⁶ This incoherence—what Baldwin calls the incoherence of the American experience—presents the largest obstacle to the writer in America: "to try and find out what Americans mean is almost impossible because there are so many things they do not want to face" (228). Incoherence, then, describes the product of delusions pervasive in American life, the resulting incongruity between mythic innocence and reality, between the illusions (and delusions) by which most people live and the actual conditions of collective life. Such incoherence is also born from inarticulacy about one's past and how it has formed the present; this is the inarticulacy Baldwin confronts with his essays (cf. Baldwin 1998a, 723). As Baldwin writes in his review of Alex Haley's *Roots*, being deluded about one's origins creates incoherence: "They become incoherent because they can never stammer from whence they came"

(Baldwin 1998a, 763). To examine both ourselves and the world, we must confront the present state of incoherence as the first step.

The “journey towards some kind of coherence” depicted in *Another Country* adds a second layer to “coherence.” Here Baldwin transposes Socrates to a different key, one of acceptance, struggle, and the pursuit of connection. As the final scene between Vivaldo and Ida powerfully demonstrates, coherence possesses a more basic meaning than logical compatibility. The coherence toward which Vivaldo and Ida journey describes, at the most basic level, the pursuit of mutuality, of sticking together, and thus the basis of their commitment to connection even as they struggle. They journey *toward* coherence. Just as Baldwin titles the final section of *Another Country* “Toward Bethlehem,” this coherence describes something on an ever-receding horizon, an object of pursuit never quite attained. Rufus fails to approach anything like this coherence: we encounter him alone on the streets from the beginning of the novel, and he seems incapable of sharing his burdens with others, as Vivaldo and Ida learn to do. Similarly, Vivaldo’s love for Ida moves him from recognition to acceptance and struggle, but until he faces Ida and she witnesses his commitment, his inner reflection remains mere words. So too the powerful speech of Ida at the end of the novel underscores the obstacles to examination and the painfulness of the struggle that examination requires of her. While Ida and Vivaldo come together at the novel’s end, this promises only “a kind of coherence,” in Baldwin’s words, one that remains unachieved.

The movement toward coherence suggests how Baldwin’s work brings together examination and the confrontation of an oppressive society into practices of embodied, collective examination. Baldwin’s work suggests that examination alone is not enough to overcome incoherence. Recent accounts of Baldwin’s politics have introduced the “problem of acknowledgement” to describe how knowledge alone is insufficient for addressing systems of oppression,²⁷ but adding a reading of *Another Country* shows how one must commit to examine, accept, and struggle *with others*. Acknowledgment becomes a collective task. Substituting coherence as an unreachable yet nonetheless imaginable object of human striving thus shifts discussions of democratic citizenship from simply a matter of diagnosis and prescription by Socratic social critics or philosophic citizens to a *process of engagement* with oneself and others, seeking not knowledge or enlightenment but self-understanding and self-possession through examination, acceptance, and struggle. The essays, as Balfour (2001) has suggested, provide a language for this process; *Another Country* shows the struggle of articulating this language, the messiness of its embodiment, and the costs exacted by the pursuit of understanding.

Another Country furthers this shift from solitary to social examination by situating these practices in the particular lives of its characters. The struggle forward does not come to pass by individual decisions so much as by joint movements toward coherence, such as when Ida and Vivaldo fall into one another’s arms, pledging with words and action their commitment to persevere. Selfcraft, in Edwina Barvosa’s (2008) term, proves inadequate as a solitary practice because of the obstacles posed by existing identity schemes and social constructions; only an “intrapersonal politics” that engages both self and others can promise some kind of reconciliation.²⁸ The struggle of Ida and Vivaldo, moreover, dramatizes the pain and difficulty of moving toward coherence that Kelly Oliver (2001, 10) calls “working through,” showing how, as Oliver puts it, “in order to imagine peaceful and compassionate relations, we must be able to imagine working-through whatever we might find threatening in relations to otherness and difference.” Ida and Vivaldo discover how they can act on what they know (and do not know) about each other; *Another Country* shows how each of their struggles to examine and understand the world around them requires the involvement of the other. The struggle becomes a messy, human wrestling within and among selves and world in Baldwin’s novel, showing the range of shapes examination can take within the lives of those affected by (as well as perpetuating) categorical domination.

The necessity of this examination’s being *social* stems not only from the need to include the perspectives of others to achieve some knowledge of one’s situation but also by virtue of the deeper motivation for examination, acceptance, and struggle according to Baldwin: love. Here Baldwin’s work usefully spans two strands of discourse emerging from feminists of color and others that have emphasized love and connection as a response to oppression. On one hand, Baldwin’s work anticipates arguments by Maria Lugones (1987) and Merle Woo (1981), among others, that have stressed love’s function as a survival tool (cf. Sandoval 2000, 139-84). Here love inspires a new kind of “playful perception,” in Lugones’s words, that can identify with the other and motivate traveling to the other’s perspective. Love enables mutuality by motivating commitment to the other. Love in this sense serves at least two functions in *Another Country*: it leads Ida to “hit the A train” and avenge the death of her brother; yet it also draws Vivaldo and Ida together and instigates their recognition of how mutual love can sustain the agony of struggling to understand themselves and one another. Shadowed by a hate that also drives Ida to use Ellis for her advancement, Ida’s love also motivates her connection with Vivaldo and thus animates the hopeful spirit of reconciliation at the end of the novel.

On the other hand, Baldwin’s work also anticipates love as a political practice of resistance.²⁹ In this form, love

becomes the basis for resisting categorical oppression at large, articulating what Cynthia Willet (2001) has called the “erotic” power for social change. From the basis of their love, Vivaldo and Ida have a position from which they can work through the oppressive structures of the world as they move toward coherence; love thus sustains examination, acceptance, and struggle and carries the potential to emancipate lovers from structures of oppression. Love becomes, in bell hooks’s (1994) words, “a practice of freedom,” the motive force that moves estranged and isolated individuals toward some kind of reconciliation. Whereas writings by Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Patricia Hill Collins, and others have called for a focus on the erotic and its value for resisting oppression (Willet 2001, 177-80), Baldwin’s work links this political practice with the ethical disposition named by Lugones and others, illuminating how love can motivate political projects while being rooted in particular human beings.

While political theory has largely been reluctant to treat race and racial injustice as fundamental to the study of modern democratic life, James Baldwin’s work joins a chorus of African American writers before him by powerfully articulating the necessity of not simply understanding but acting to overcome America’s history of categorical oppression. Writing as a “Socrates in a different key,” Baldwin’s distinctive transposition of critical citizenship into the register of embodied collective inquiry illuminates a mode by which we all might fight systems of oppression and the delusions such systems foster through collective examination, acceptance, and struggle. As Baldwin (1998a, 230) once put it, “I don’t believe any longer that we can afford to say that it is entirely out of our hands. We made the world we’re living in and we have to make it over.”

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Notes

1. In addition to Balfour, see Shulman (2000, 2008), Glaude (2007), and Marshall (2011). For an early and still very worthwhile assessment of Baldwin in the context of American political thought, see McWilliams (1973).
2. For another example of this approach to Baldwin, see the recent discussion by Frank (2010).
3. Some of this language comes from the description in Blondell (2002) of the minimal reading of Socrates. On Socrates as a social critic, see Walzer (2002).
4. See the description of “Socratic citizenship” in Villa (2001). Cf. Wallach (1988) and Kateb (2006).
5. By discussing “race in America” I do not mean to deny that, as Baldwin once told an interviewer, “the racial question and the sexual question have always been entwined.” Baldwin shows that there is no extricating questions of race from those of gender, sexuality, and class.
6. See, e.g., Collins (2005), Sandoval (2000), and the general discussion by Willet (2001).
7. For “selfcraft,” I draw on the work of Barvosa (2008), and for “working through,” I am indebted to Oliver (2001).
8. On “heterogeneous humanity” in African American literature, see Ferguson (2004).
9. I use the term *categories* to refer to race, sexuality, class, and gender and *categorical oppression* to refer to oppression that occurs along any one or all of these categories. This follows Lombardo (2009, 44): “It is not just our category mistakes but indeed the mistake of relying too heavily upon categories that prevent us from understanding ourselves. The means by which we may free ourselves from this mistake is not to dismiss but, rather, to critically interrogate the assumptions concerning who and what we are that we receive in and as ‘common sense.’”
10. See, e.g., Nussbaum (2010), Walzer (2002, 13), and Villa (2001, 3, 15, 58). For a reading of Socrates along similar lines to Villa, also see Kateb (2006). Herbert Marcuse (1964) invokes Socrates in terms similar to Walzer’s as a critic connected to Athenian democracy.
11. Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in the rest of this section refer to Baldwin (1998a).
12. “Many Thousands Gone” (20). Note here that Baldwin’s “we” applies to everyone, as Balfour (2001, 43-49) has argued.
13. “Innocence” describes an important concept for Baldwin: a denial of the reality of the world and of others as well as of responsibility to others and the world. See Balfour (2001, 43-9) and Shulman (2008, 134-35).
14. This describes a problem different from the classic problem of “akrasia.” Baldwin’s concern is not with lack of will

- but rather with basic inability caused by structural constraints. His characters have the “taste for conflicts” that the akratic agent lacks. See Rorty (1986).
15. For the purposes of this essay, I focus on *Another Country*, but I refer to points of intersection with other fictional works as they appear. Treatments of *Go Tell It On the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* appear in McWilliams (2005) and Campbell (2002, 103-4), respectively. By finding tension between Baldwin's essays and novels, my reading differs from Zaborowska (2009), who identifies similar themes in the novel but does not touch on the earlier essays under analysis here. Also, Baldwin's last three novels—*Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and *Just Above My Head*—turn away (at least in part) from confronting the senselessness of American life as illuminated by conflicts along lines of race, gender, and sexuality, and instead appear to seek some respite in the black family. For more on these three novels, see Scott (2002) and Harris (1985).
 16. Here I show the interrelation of these four categorical inequalities (race, gender, sexuality, and class), following the suggestion of Dwight McBride (2005, 87) that “whenver we are speaking of race, we are always already speaking about gender, sexuality, and class.” However, other scholars have focused almost exclusively on race and sexuality in studies of *Another Country*. See Zaborowska (2009, 91-140), Dievler (1999), Feldman (2000), and Toombs (2000).
 17. Baldwin (1998a, 709) discloses Rufus's important role for the entire novel in “Words of a Native Son,” published in *Playboy* in 1984: “Rufus was the only way that I could make the reader see what had happened to Ida and what was controlling her in all her relationships, why she was so different, why she was so uncertain, why she suffered so.”
 18. Unless otherwise indicated, all page numbers cited in this section of the text refer to *Another Country* in the Library of America edition (Baldwin 1998b).
 19. See the powerful end of Baldwin's short story “Going to Meet the Man” (Baldwin 1998b, 933-50), where the poisonous combination of racial hatred and sexual aggression creates Baldwin's fictional Bull Connor.
 20. In the same way, the protagonist of Baldwin's (1998b, 831) story “Sonny's Blues” finds himself at a dead end for his life despite his talents and possibilities. As his brother says of Sonny, “I didn't want to believe that I'd ever see my brother going down, coming to nothing, all that light in his face gone out, in the condition I'd already seen so many others.”
 21. Perhaps Rufus could accept his situation, but it would amount to a death sentence. I would read his suicide, however, as a rejection rather than an acceptance.
 22. Du Bois's “veil of race” renders each opaque to the other and structures their lives in radically different ways.
 23. In an essay published in 1984, Baldwin describes this strategy of making the reader wonder about Ida by not having her describe her situation in her own words: “I had to put great lights around Ida and keep the reader at a certain distance from her. . . . What Ida thought had to remain for all of them [the other characters of *Another Country*] the mystery which it is in life, and had to be, therefore, a kind of mystery for the reader, too, who had to be fascinated by her and wonder about her and care about her and try to figure out what was driving her to where she was so clearly going” (see “Words of a Native Son,” Baldwin 1998a, 709).
 24. Still, this promise is ambivalent: Vivaldo and Ida are young, but they are also, to some extent, innocent. For the purposes of length, I have omitted the other relationships—primarily those between Richard and Cass and between Eric and Yves—that continue variations on this theme.
 25. Leeming (1994, 200). The quotes from this paragraph—and my account of the letter, which is not publicly available—come from 200-201.
 26. “Notes for a Hypothetical Novel” (Baldwin 1998a, 227). Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in this paragraph refer to this edition. Baldwin worked on these essays while also writing *Another Country*.
 27. See Shulman (2008, 2011); cf. Markell (2003) and Turner (2012).
 28. Barvosa (2008, 207-29) focuses more on the integration of singular selves, but her conclusion points toward how these practices must be collective, especially in situations marked by categorical differences.
 29. Here Stephen Marshall (2011, 24) comments more generally that Baldwin offers “a political practice of love as provocation to be undertaken by lovers struggling with and on behalf of a beloved society.”

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