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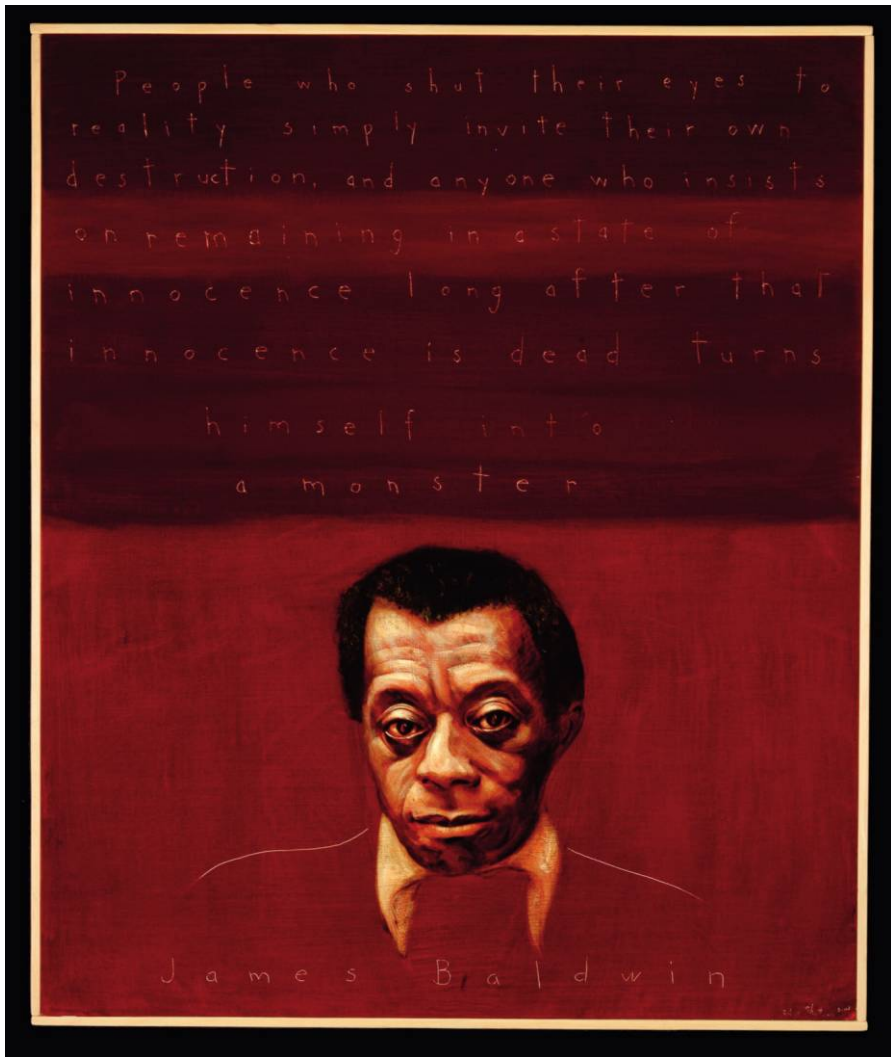
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James Baldwin: "People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster."
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James Baldwin, 1963, and the House that Race Built

Fredrick C. Harris

1963 TURNED OUT to be a cataclysmic moment in the centuries-long struggle of African slaves and their descendants to claim their dignity and human rights in the United States. It was the year of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, and events of that year forced the nation to reckon with its past. A protracted protest campaign that Spring in Birmingham hastened the beginning of the end of racial segregation in public accommodations. On June 11, President John F. Kennedy delivered a civil rights speech to a national televised audience, proclaiming the Negro struggle for rights to be a “moral issue” necessitating a civil rights act. Later that night, civil rights activist Medgar Evers was gunned down by an assassin in his driveway in Jackson, Mississippi. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom drew over 200,000 people, mostly black, to the National Mall on August 28; the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham killed four young girls on September 15; and the assassination of Kennedy, who was still urging congress to pass a civil rights bill, stunned the nation on November 22.

And James Baldwin was in the thick of it all. On a late Friday afternoon, May 24, 1963, Baldwin had become rattled and was seeking to calm his nerves with a drink. Baldwin, who was riding in a car with his friend Kenneth Clark, the noted social psychologist, had just left a tumultuous meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The meeting lasted for nearly three hours at Kennedy’s New York apartment on Central Park South, and it turned out to be a disaster. Baldwin and his crew of activists, entertainers, and writers—a dozen or so, among them Harry Belafonte, Lorraine Hansberry, and Lena Horne—were lambasting Kennedy for not having the courage to take a moral stand against racial segregation.

Jerome Smith, a young activist with the Congress of Racial Equality, told Kennedy that he did not think that he should have to beg him for his rights; the fact that he was in Kennedy’s presence, having to

make such a plea, made him nauseous. Baldwin informed Kennedy that—because of the nation’s mistreatment of blacks—he should not expect black men to fight for their country, an unpatriotic revelation that shocked Kennedy to the core. Lorraine Hansberry chimed in that she was less concerned about Negro manhood—a topic of conversation that arose during the meeting—since black men had managed to make strides. Her concern was what kind of civilization produced five policemen in Birmingham, Alabama—“specimens of white manhood,” she called them—who would pin down a Negro woman and jam a knee into her neck.

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remain strangers today.**

Kennedy had had enough. He thought that Baldwin and his entourage were being impatient and unreasonable. The meeting ended with hard feelings and without any resolution. Running more than an hour late for a taped television interview with Clark, Baldwin pleaded, “Kenneth, all I need is a drink. Can we stop at the nearest bar?” Baldwin needed to decompress.

The chaos and victories of 1963 gave birth to some of the most important—and poignant—speeches and writings in American letters, among them Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and “I Have a Dream,” and Malcolm X’s “Message to the Grassroots.” Though there is a tendency to construct King and Malcolm X as a binary of black thought and action during that era, Baldwin—standing in between the titans of non-violent resistance and any-means-necessary self-defense—saw limitations to King’s edict of love for the oppressor and Malcolm X’s condemnation of “white devils.” Baldwin insisted on a different claim. He believed that blacks should not be cast off as strangers in the house that they share with their “countrymen,” a house whose foundation was built with the hands of their ancestors as well as on the mythology of race. Many—if not most—of slavery’s descendants remain strangers today. And this is why Baldwin’s concerns about being looked upon as strangers, in one’s own country, continue to resonate in our times.

We are familiar with the well-worn love/hate binary of King and Malcolm, and perhaps with how Baldwin mediates the binary by raising objections to King’s and Malcolm’s ideological blind spots. But we forget that each had their own unique perspective on the meaning of love and its political purposes, though Baldwin’s love seemed freer. King’s love—what he described as *agape* love—charged black people not to passively set aside their grievances and accept their lot, but rather to rid themselves of any abhorrent feelings toward whites. Doing so, they free themselves, as well as the nation. As authentic, upstanding followers of the Gospel, it was blacks’ obligation, King believed, to redeem the souls

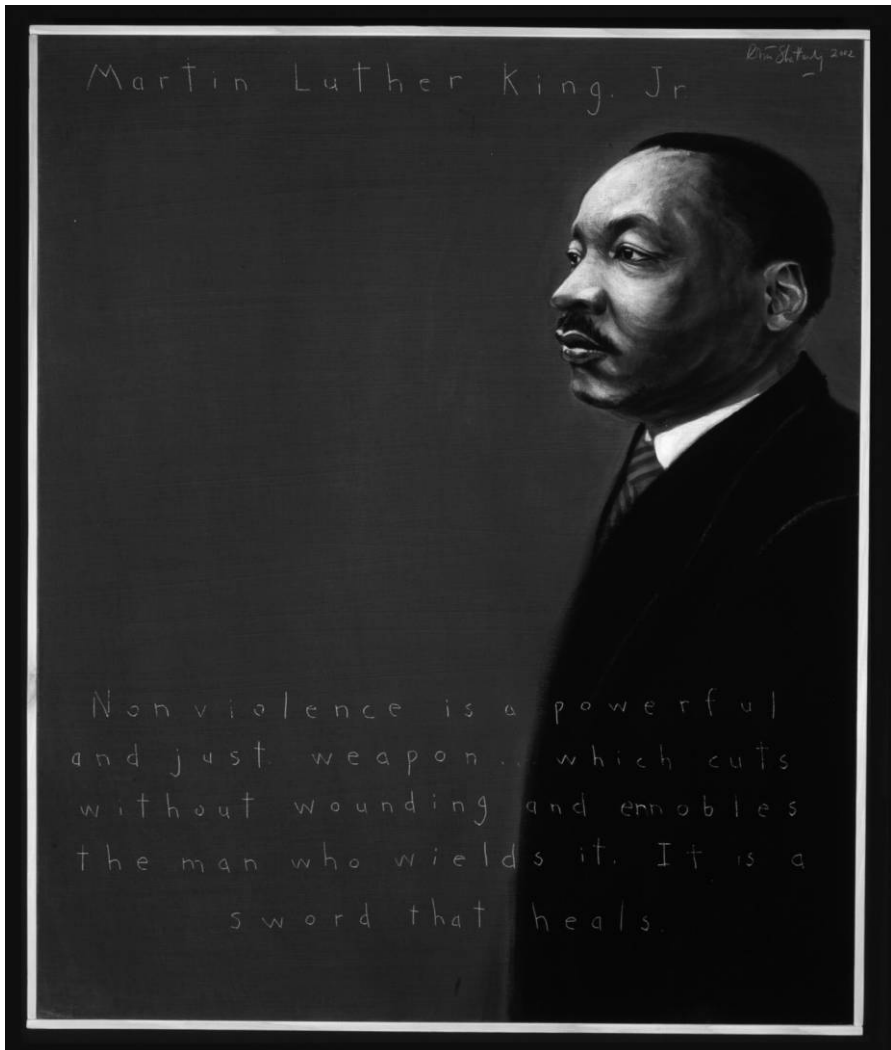
of white racists and to more broadly liberate white Christians, who'd strayed far from the Gospel by making peace with white supremacy. Though perhaps a tactical measure to garner support from sympathetic whites for integration, King's philosophy of love thy enemy did not consider—as many have said then and since—the double burdens a crusade for redemption placed on the oppressed. Blacks had to attend to their own—and their families'—daily indignities, as well as shoulder up the cause of deliverance for a people who meant them harm. But even for the Prince of Brotherly Love, there on occasion lurked, beneath appeals to turn the other cheek, a simmering sullenness camouflaged by gentility. Reading between the lines of "Letter from Birmingham Jail," you get the impression there were times when King struggled with the strength to love.

Malcolm believed in the efficacy of love and thought it was inseparable from the mission of building black solidarity. He asked for a communally directed love, a form of racial uplift that would percolate to the surface years later, after his death, when the cry of pride turned the Negro black, and for a too-brief moment gave priority to the notion that black people needed to rid themselves of self-hatred. Malcolm believed that a deep love for black people was all blacks needed to be taught "in this country because the only ones whom we don't love are our own kind." For Malcolm, the evidence of black lovelessness was the self-directed violence black people rendered unto each other. "If a Negro attacks one of them," Malcolm once said of King and the proselytizers of love-thy-enemy, "they'll fight that Negro all over Harlem." Malcolm's disclosure of black lovelessness in the face of commands to love thy enemy uncovered a deep contradiction in King's philosophy.

Baldwin wrote at length about Malcolm and the Nation of Islam in *The Fire Next Time*, but he mysteriously never mentions King by name in the book. However, like Malcolm, Baldwin found the philosophy of non-violent resistance shortsighted because it required blacks to bear the burdens of a "problem" and a history that they did not create themselves. "There is no reason that black men should be expected to be more patient, more forbearing, more farseeing than whites," Baldwin surmised. Though Baldwin understood the rage of Malcolm and the Nation of Islam, and how that rage nurtured black pride, Baldwin saw limitations in the worldview—which, as Baldwin argued elsewhere, "destroy[s] a truth and invent[s] a history." Baldwin found Malcolm's and the Nation of Islam's invention of history—an invention grounded

"There is no reason that black men should be expected to be more patient, more forbearing, more farseeing than whites," Baldwin surmised.

Martin Luther King, Jr.:
"Non-violence is a powerful and just weapon which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it."
©2012 Robert Shetterly



fundamentally in the hatred of the other—to be effective, though nonetheless sinister.

Baldwin's antidote for transformation was love, but not King's love-thy-oppressor love, but a love that encompasses "a state of being, or a state of grace" across the color line. He insisted that those who were conscious enough—blacks, whites, or whomever—should take the leap, "like lovers," and "end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world."

In politics, love as well as hate can be dangerous, and, as Hannah Arendt told Baldwin in a letter she wrote after reading Baldwin's essay in *The New Yorker*—an essay republished months later as one of two essays in *The Fire Next Time*—she objected to his application of love

to politics. “What frightened me in your essay,” Arendt told Baldwin, “was the gospel of love which you began to preach in the end.” Arendt, whose insights as a refugee fleeing European fascism informed her skepticism, explained:

In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy. All the characteristics you stress in the Negro people: their beauty, their capacity of joy, their warmth, and their humanity, are well known characteristics of all oppressed people. They grow out of suffering and they are the proudest possession of all pariahs. Unfortunately, they never survived the hour of liberation by even five minutes. Hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free.

King, Baldwin, and Malcolm, who in various degrees spoke of the political purposes of love, were not bothered by love’s potential hypocrisy. But what does love mean—in all its possibilities and limitations—in a society, in a house built on an ideology rooted in demonizing the other? The capacity to love runs up against a social structure built on deception, strife, and the privilege of the powerful over the other. It’s this tension—love in the face of deception, strife, and privilege—that leads Baldwin to ask in *The Fire Next Time*, “Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?” In 1963, King’s command to love thy enemy cannot foresee the burning house, but Malcolm does, although not for the same reason as Baldwin. Even when Malcolm declared that blacks should love themselves, he clings to an ideology of hatred for the other, whereas Baldwin’s love requires “the transcendence of the realities of color, of nation, and of altars”—an edict with which neither King nor Malcolm X were willing to comply, at least not at that moment. For Baldwin, this transcendence would make black people less like strangers in their own house, but it is a transcendence, I would argue, that would have to be accompanied by the radical restructuring of—or perhaps the destruction of—the rudiments that have kept the house fortified for centuries.

It was the nation’s architects who laid a foundation rooted in slavery, capitalism, and an ideology that for generations has stigmatized slaves and their descendants as inferiors. The foundation has lasted far longer than the tools that were used to dismantle the most egregious practices of racial subordination. Though a new façade and extensive

renovations may conceal the details of the original structure, the foundation remains solidly intact. It still, in this century, remains true that the master's tools, as the very familiar words of Audre Lorde remind us, cannot undo the master's house, no matter the hue of the man sitting in the White House or the number of black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. The foundation is far too solid—far too immovable—for cosmetics to alter the most deep-seated barriers that continue to unsettle the fates of ordinary black folk in twenty-first century America.

In a debate with William F. Buckley, Jr. at Cambridge Union in 1965, Baldwin was on fire. Baldwin stood as truth-teller, forewarning what he was about to say by proclaiming with an impatient glare, "I find myself, not for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah." Baldwin articulated the origins of why black America was locked—and, indeed, continues to be locked—in a perpetual state of inequality. In answering the question at hand—is the American Dream at the expense of the American Negro?—Baldwin, who spoke at times as if he were delivering a Shakespearean soliloquy and a Baptist sermon all at once, spoke on the material and political manifestations of the nation's racist legacy:

From a very literal point of view, the harbors and the ports and the railroads of the country—the economy, especially in the South—could not conceivably be what they are if it had not been (and this is still so) for cheap labor. I am speaking very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: I picked cotton, I carried it to the market, I built the railroads under someone else's whip for nothing. For nothing. The Southern oligarchy which has still today so very much power in Washington, and therefore some power in the world, was created by my labor and my sweat and the violation of my women and the murder of my children. This in the land of the free, the home of the brave.

Though Baldwin elaborated then on how the house was built, we—the nation, the historically injured—are still trying to come to grips with what it means to be a stranger in one's own house. One hundred fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation and fifty years since the height of the black freedom movement, cracks in the foundation still persist, and are expanding. America's public schools remain as racially segregated as they were a generation ago—indeed, they have resegregated in less than fifty years—and are failing to educate a generation of black and brown youth. Despite the rise of the largest black middle class

in American history, the black-white wealth gap has widened considerably in the past decade, accelerated by the Great Recession, in which black homeowners saw their wealth go underwater and lost their homes at a far greater rate than did whites. Black youth unemployment hovers around fifty percent in major cities across the country, and the mass incarceration of nearly a million black people—a figure that includes the hyperincarceration of black men, who make up nine percent of the world’s imprisoned—is nothing less than a national scandal.

A conservative majority on the United States Supreme Court continues to roll back progress. On June 25, 2013, a slim majority dismantled the enforcement powers of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the most successful piece of legislation that evolved out of the civil rights movement. A day before, the court continued its death-by-a-thousand-cuts against affirmative action—a social policy tool that built the black middle class—by calling for stricter rules for considering race in college admissions. The court came back nearly a year later, on April 22, 2014, to let stand—

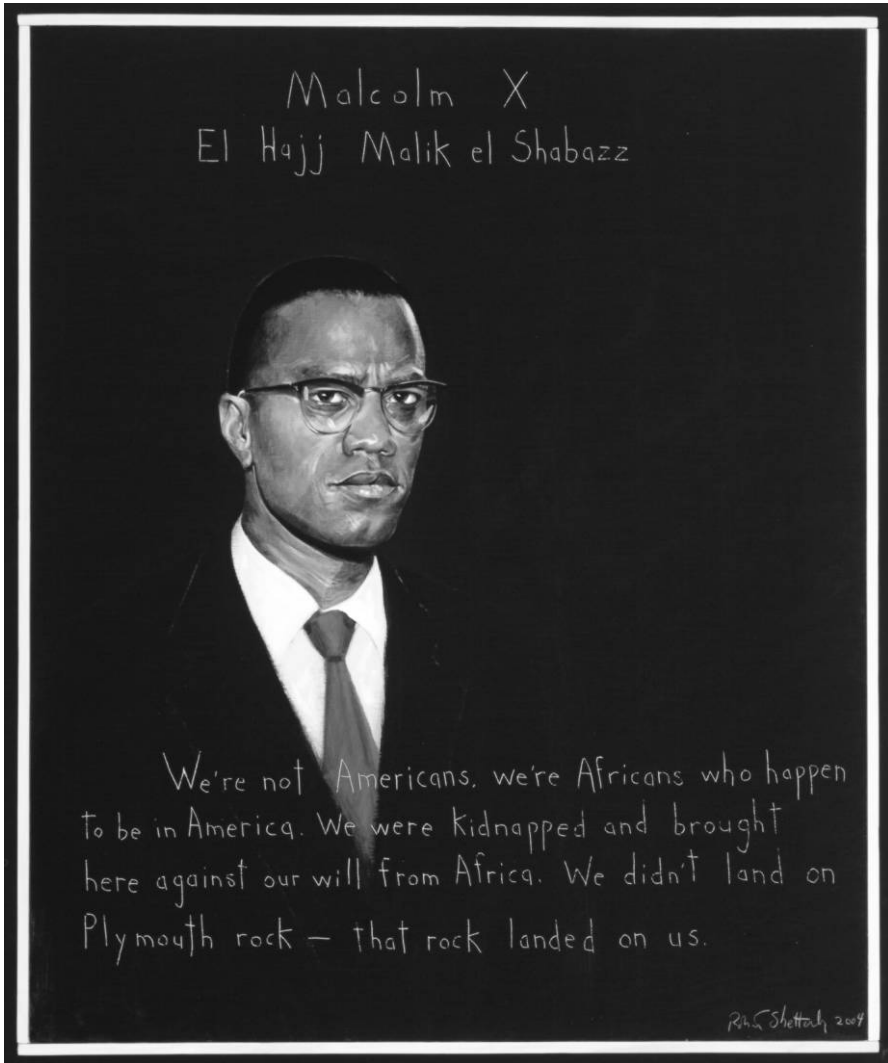
“I find myself, not for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah.”

by an even larger majority—Michigan’s anti-affirmative voter initiative, which constitutionally prohibits the use of affirmative action in that state. A troubled Justice Sonia Sotomayor read her dissent of the Michigan case from the bench, informing her colleagues in the super-majority that “race matters for reasons that really are only skin deep, that cannot be discussed any other way, and that can not be wished away.” She then went on to say, with phrasing that echoed Baldwin, “Race matters because of the slights, the snickers, the silent judgments that reinforce that most crippling of thoughts: ‘I do not belong here.’”

The working out of who belongs and where is a process that has often turned deadly. The not guilty verdict of George Zimmerman—a neighborhood watch volunteer who racially profiled and then murdered Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen—laid bare the remnants of the house built on race in an age when race is said to matter considerably less. Zimmerman, described in the police report as “white” and in the media as “white Hispanic,” stalked Martin, initiated a confrontation, and then shot him through the heart, ignoring the police dispatcher who advised that he not follow a “suspicious”-looking man “prowling” the neighborhood.

After being photographed for injuries and questioned by police, Zimmerman was allowed to go free after claiming self-defense. The police believed Zimmerman’s story; there was no other story to consider, since the only other witness to the crime was a dead body—a dead black body—presumed guilty. Shot dead only a hundred feet from his intended destination, Martin had in his possession a bag of candy, a bottle of iced tea, and twenty-two dollars, but no ID. The police never

Malcolm X:
"We're not Americans, we're Africans who happen to be in America. We were kidnapped and brought here against our will from Africa. We didn't land on Plymouth Rock—that rock landed on us." ©2012 Robert Shetterly



bothered to canvass the gated community to locate Martin's family or to see if anyone knew him. His body was taken to the city morgue and tagged "John Doe." Even in death, Martin was thought to be someone who did not belong, a stranger.

Public outcry got Zimmerman arrested and charged for murder, forty-five days after the shooting. A six-member jury—five white women and one Hispanic woman—came to the conclusion that Zimmerman should be acquitted. The trial—which both the prosecution and the defense declared, "Had nothing to do with race"—had everything to do with race. The way that Zimmerman was humanized and Martin dehumanized speaks to the trial's racial undercurrents. An anonymous juror interviewed after the verdict expressed far more familiarity with—and

empathy for—Zimmerman than for Martin, affectionately referring to Zimmerman throughout her interview as “George.” She was convinced, for instance, that a recorded scream on a 911 call by a resident in the community just before the shooting was “George’s voice.”

It appears that her sense of empathy for Zimmerman was heightened during the trial when a defense witness told the story of hiding in a bedroom with her infant in one hand and a pair of rusty scissors in the other, ready to fend off “two African-American men” who broke into her home. Martin became linked—unconsciously, if not consciously—to the invaders, not because of any perceived similarity of age or build but because of *the* defining characteristic in nearly all matters of criminality in America, race.

Though some speculated that motherhood would make Martin a more sympathetic figure to the all-women jury, chivalry appears to have won the day for this juror, if not for several others. “I think George Zimmerman is a man whose heart is in the right place but just got displaced by the vandalism, and wanting to catch these people so badly,” the juror believed. She challenged the notion that Zimmerman was an overzealous volunteer. “George,” she continued, as if describing a family member who’d mistakenly erred, was just “overeager to help—like [with] the lady who got broken in and robbed.” The juror recounted in detail how Zimmerman provided the woman with assistance—a new door lock, his phone number and his wife’s, and an open invitation to have dinner at his home when she felt stressed. “I mean, you have to have a heart to do that and care and help people,” she surmised. As if apologizing for Zimmerman, the juror offered that the crime watcher “has learned a good lesson” from Martin’s untimely death.

As if apologizing for Zimmerman, the juror offered that the crime watcher “has learned a good lesson” from Martin’s untimely death.

Yet the juror expressed far less empathy for Martin, or for his family and friends. The few times that the juror spoke to Martin’s character, it was as if she were describing an alien from another planet or an exotic subspecies. When commenting on the prosecution’s star witness—nineteen-year-old Rachel Jantel, who talked to Martin on the phone while Zimmerman stalked him—the juror off-handedly described Martin and Jantel as people whose demeanor and language was a product of “the environment they are living in” and “the type of life they live.”

And the “catalogue of disaster”—to borrow a phrase from Baldwin—keeps mounting. In the outskirts of Charlotte, North Carolina in the early morning of September 14, 2013, a hail of ten bullets from a police officer killed Jonathan Ferrell, a twenty-four-year-old black man, as he stretched forth his hands in a gesture of pleading for help. Ferrell’s

car had run into an embankment and crashed into trees around 2:00 a.m. The car was so mangled that Ferrell had to knock out the back window and crawl out. After walking for a quarter mile, he went to the first house he saw and banged on the door for help. A woman opened the door, thinking that it was her husband, and instead saw a stranger. She quickly shut the door and called 911, reporting it as an attempted break-in, while Ferrell continued to bang on the door and shout for help. Through her panicked voice and sobbing, the dispatcher learned that she was alone with an infant, couldn't locate her husband's guns, and that the alleged assailant was a black man who weighted about 200 pounds. Given the context of a stranger creating a commotion in the wee hours of the morning, the woman's fright is understandable, but the reaction of the police when they located Ferrell is incomprehensible.

The police found Farrell wandering, shoeless and dazed, near a road that leads to a swimming pool. Thinking he had been saved, Ferrell ran towards the three police officers. Instead, they fired a taser at him, then a rapid succession of twelve bullets from the gun of one police officer—first four shots, then six, and then finally two—ending Farrell's life with ten bullets, minus the two that missed.

Kojo Nantambu, president of the Charlotte branch of the NAACP, who in the past year had been critical of a string of police shootings of unarmed men in Charlotte, told the press in the wake of Farrell's death that black men are "never given the benefit of the doubt." "The poor, the African Americans and minorities," Nantambu concluded, "are being looked upon with less humanity and a degree of disdain" by the police.

Ferrell's family tried to humanize him, noting that Ferrell, who had a 3.7 GPA as a chemistry major at Florida A&M University, had moved to Charlotte to be close to his fiancée, and that he was working two jobs to earn money to return to college. Ferrell was deemed a respectable black man. Though if he had not been, the brutality that led to his death would still have been unwarranted. As if it's worth repeating, the virtues of respectability will not protect black people—and black men in particular—from the potential dangers of police abuse. Police bullets do not discriminate against "the worthy or the unworthy," the poor or the middle class when they are speeding toward black people. They do not retreat back into the barrels of guns after discerning—in split seconds—that the "wrong one" has been unfairly targeted for punishment.

And the catalogue of disaster mounts still.

Few cities reveal the remnants of the house that race built more than Detroit, whose hyper-racial segregation, concentrated poverty, fields of abandoned homes, and forced civic bankruptcy have made it a target of contempt. On November 2, 2013, again in the early hours of the

morning, Theodore Wafer, a fifty-four-year-old white man, who lives in the nearly all-white Detroit suburb of Dearborn Heights, gunned down Renisha McBride, an inebriated nineteen-year-old black woman from Detroit. Standing behind the locked screen door of his front door, Wafer removed the gun's safety lock, and with the gun pointed at McBride's head, fired, blasting the woman's face beyond recognition.

When police arrived, McBride was lying dead on Wafer's porch, unarmed. An investigation found no signs of forced entry into the house. McBride's family, initially told by police that someone had dumped the woman's body on a porch in Dearborn Heights, speculated that after Renisha's cell phone went dead, she sought help after leaving the scene of a car accident, which had occurred some hours before. When Wafer was disturbed that morning, he did not look out and see a "damsel in distress" or a wayward teen needing help after having too much to drink. He saw a dark figure that threatened. Though frightened perhaps by the thought of someone breaking into his home, Wafer did not pick up his phone to call 911. He went for his gun. After firing on McBride, Wafer then called 911 to inform a dispatcher that he had "accidentally" shot a stranger.

Those who have been othered into strangers, as well as those who have become vicious perpetrators—most often against those closest in reach—both stand as remnants of the house. People who have little power in their lives will use their bodies—and what they carry on their bodies—as vehicles of empowerment, charging their ligaments to respond with malice to the slightest of slights. When opportunity strikes, their bodies can become retaliatory armaments aimed at settling scores, both old and new. Neither Martin's love thy enemy nor Malcolm's black-on-black love has stemmed that flow. It is the hate that hate produced.

On April 2, 2014, on the far east side of Detroit, in one of the poorest sections of the city, Steven Utash, a white man from suburban Clinton Township, hit a ten-year-old black boy—who darted out into the street—with his pickup truck. Utash stopped the truck and got out to see if the boy was all right. He was immediately set upon by a mob of black men, a dozen or so, who slugged, kicked, and stomped Utash into unconsciousness. Hearing the crash and seeing the chaos from her apartment window, Deborah Hughes, a black woman, hurried from her apartment to the scene, carrying a .38 pistol hidden in her pocket for protection. A retired nurse, Hughes first attended to the boy, who turned out not to be seriously injured, and then headed for Utash, who

The virtues of respectability will not protect black people—and black men in particular—from the potential dangers of police abuse.



American Hoodie: At Calvary.

Charcoal. 54 × 34 in. Courtesy of the artist and EbonNia Gallery, Dayton, Ohio. ©2013 James Pate.



was still being beaten. Pushing her way through the crowd, Hughes threw herself on top of Utash's body to stem the blows and demanded that the beating stop. The men pulled back.

By then, Utash was battered, bruised, and unresponsive. Hughes massaged Utash's chest and head and, for a moment, he came to. After all he had sustained, Utash asked the stranger attending to him one question: "Is the boy dead?" Hughes assured him that the boy was alive and would be fine; Utash then drifted back into an unresponsive state. He was taken by ambulance to a hospital, where he remained in a medically-induced coma for nine days. Though approximately 150 people gathered to witness the free-for-all, no one else intervened to help Utash, or help Hughes help Utash. Asked why she came to the aid of a white man when so many in her community stood by, Hughes responded in words that transcended—as Baldwin commanded—"the realities of color, of nation, and of altars" by answering plaintively, gracefully, without irony and in words Baldwin might have whispered into her ear, "He was a man, he wasn't white."

Looking from the perch of 1963, Baldwin speaks more to America's current state of racial quagmire than the insights of either King or Malcolm X. Trying to persuade and shame white America, as King did in 1963, will not work in today's toxic political environment that wills a post-racial society. Likewise, the crypto-nationalism that characterized Malcolm's thinking prior to his break with the Nation of Islam in 1964 will get little reception from an increasingly cosmopolitan and

"I am terrified at the moral apathy, the death of the heart, which is happening in my country."

economically diverse black population. In this age of falsity and insane cruelty, now more than ever do we need Baldwin's rawness, his steadfastness, his not forgetting to see the world through the eyes of the other. Baldwin's insistence on bearing witness to the conditions of the forgotten and wretched is paramount in the face of the super-privileged of all hues and altars, in the face of those who quietly insist that peace must be made with the world as is, as well as those who claim to speak in our stead but boast of selling out as if it's their birthright. We are littered with untruth-truth tellers and profiteers of accommodation, who've comfortably settled for the false prophets they once condemned and vowed never to become. This is why Baldwin—his voice, his soul—is needed in these fallow times.

In May and June of 1963, Kenneth Clark interviewed King, Malcolm, and Baldwin for television, individually and on separate days. Both King and Malcolm, as spokesmen for diametrically opposed movements and philosophies, gave Clark scripted responses to the merits of violence and non-violence, love and hate. But Baldwin, as was his custom, spoke

freely, deeply, and honestly. With cigarette smoke swirling about—he did not get the requested drink after the meeting with Kennedy but a smoke instead—Baldwin told Clark, “I am terrified at the moral apathy, the death of the heart, which is happening in my country.”

Wrapping up his interview with Baldwin, Clark asked the writer for his thoughts on the “future of our nation.” Baldwin sighed. He looked as if he wished that Clark had not asked that question, but felt cautiously optimistic about the future nonetheless. Baldwin acknowledged the inseparability of the Negro and the nation in terms that King—who wrote in “Letter from Birmingham Jail” that Americans are “tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality”—would have endorsed. Then Baldwin waxed philosophically: “I’m alive—to be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter, so I’m forced to be an optimist.” But Baldwin also believed that white America needed to confront its past sins, its present injuries, and its continued denials if there were to be a future. White America needed to work out its neurosis regarding the Negro. In essence, Baldwin was asking white Americans to lie back on the couch and ponder why they had not “embraced the stranger whom they maligned for so long.”

As if serving as psychotherapist at large for the white part of the nation, Baldwin insisted that his “countrymen” needed to “find out in their own hearts why it was necessary to have a nigger in the first place.” “I’m not a nigger, I’m a man,” Baldwin declared to Clark. “If I’m not a nigger here and if you invented him—you, the white people, invented him—then you’ve got to find out why.” This is a question that still haunts. Baldwin—whom I suspect is looking down on us from above, flicking a cigarette with one hand and sipping a cocktail with the other—is still asking when, if ever, the stranger will be fully embraced in the house that was built on race. 🌐