JAMES BALDWIN'S MESSAGE FOR WHITE AMERICA

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"For everything is changing, from our notion of politics to our notion of ourselves, and we are certain, as we begin history's strangest metamorphosis, to undergo the torment of being forced to surrender far more than we ever realized we had accepted."[1] James Baldwin's statement of a decade ago has proved as prophetic for the writer as it has for the American society about which it was written. In 1961, this nation's racial struggle could be reflected idiomatically by such terms as "Negro civil rights" and "nonviolent resistance"; at the start of the seventies, "black power" and "black revolution" are more appropriate idiom. In 1961, James Baldwin was not only a critically acclaimed and widely read novelist and essayist, he was a black spokesman in increasing demand by both black and white audiences; at the start of the seventies, Baldwin resides in Istanbul and Paris, apparently a frustrated self-exile from the struggle. In one of his infrequent recent public utterances, he notes that "my situation is not the same situation I was in when Martin Luther King was alive and when we were trying, when we hoped to bring about some kind of revolution in the American conscience. . . . Of course, that's gone now."[2]

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1 James Baldwin, "The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King," *Harper's*, 222 (February 1961), 42.

2 James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (New York: Lippincott, 1971), p. 10.

Should the pen and voice of James Baldwin be permanently lost to a struggling and racially torn American society, the loss would be unfortunate indeed; but the rhetoric of Baldwin has already contributed significantly to the understanding, if not solution, of the racial problem in America. In 1965, Albert B. Southwick noted: "It seems fair to say that James Baldwin has had more influence on the thinking of white Americans in regard to black Americans than any other man living."[3] Another critic, Charles Newman, writes that Baldwin "uses" the Black Man "to show the White Man what the White Man is."[4] Both appraisals underline the importance of Baldwin's rhetoric for white America, and this paper proposes to study Baldwin's message to that audience. Analysis will focus primarily on Baldwin's rhetorical themes and his strategies for identifying those themes favorably with his white audience. Restriction of this paper to Baldwin's persuasive impact on white Americans should in no way suggest that he was not writing and speaking to black Americans or that his rhetoric had little impact on the black community. Baldwin's rhetoric, written and spoken, has often addressed itself directly, sometimes exclusively, to the black audience. His appeals to that audience and his impact

3 "James Baldwin's Jeremiad," *Christian Century*, 82 (24 Mar. 1965), 362.

4 "The Lesson of the Master: Henry James and James Baldwin," *Yale Review*, 56 (Autumn 1966), 47.

on them constitute an important study, but one outside the scope of this paper.

The critic seeking to discover and to analyze Baldwin's perceptions of the race problem in the United States finds them in abundance. They are in his collections of essays: *Notes of a Native Son, Nobody Knows My Name,* and *The Fire Next Time;* they are in his plays: *The Amen Corner* and *Blues for Mister Charlie;* less overtly but still clearly, they are in his novels: *Go Tell It on the Mountain, Giovanni's Room, Another Country,* and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone;* they are in his published interviews, dialogues, and speeches; and they are in essays in a wide variety of magazines and journals.

From these extensive and varied reflections of Baldwin, at least four persistent themes of special relevance to white Americans emerge. The first of these themes is that the root of the "Negro Problem" is the refusal of the white to make the psychological adjustments necessary to acknowledge the humanity of the black. This tenet, which serves as a basis for all of Baldwin's rhetoric to the white audience, is recurrent in his speeches and essays, and it is expressed most concisely in an early essay, "Stranger in the Village": "The idea of white supremacy rests simply on the fact that white men are the creators of civilization . . . and are therefore civilization's guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for Americans to accept the black man as one of themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status as white men."[5]

The great tragedy of segregation, to Baldwin, is that "it has allowed white people, with scarcely any pangs of conscience whatever, to *create,* in every generation, only the Negro they wished to see."[6] Restricted almost definitionally to the bottom strata of American society, the black is perceived as an object and functions as a cushion for self-esteem of even the lowest white. When the black rebels against the role he has been assigned by the community, the white is more shocked than angered because the Negro has unaccountably ceased being the "nigger" he had always been. After the Montgomery bus boycott, Baldwin wrote: "The whites, beneath their cold hostility, were mystified and deeply hurt. They had been betrayed by the Negroes, not merely because the Negroes had declined to remain in their 'place,' but because the Negroes had refused to be controlled by the town's image of them. And, without this image, it seemed to me, the whites were abruptly and totally lost. The very foundations of their private and public worlds were being destroyed."[7]

Baldwin's first theme for the white audience is significant because it redefines the "Negro Problem" as a problem of white America; it is also significant because of the attitude in which it is expressed. Rather than hurl every conceivable epithet at white America in the fashion of many contemporary black critics, Baldwin presses this theme relentlessly but with marked compassion. In a round-table discussion with British social critics, Baldwin expressed his affection for his tormentors: "There's something very winning and very moving and very beautiful about those lost people who don't yet know that the world is big and complex and dark and that you have to grow up and become yourself big and complex and dark in order to deal with it."[8] When pointing

[5] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 172.

[6] James Baldwin, "The Hard Kind of Courage," *Harper's,* 217 (October 1958), 65.

[7] Baldwin, "The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King," 35.

[8] James Baldwin, Colin MacInnes, and James

out the folly of a social structure in which the white can always maintain some self-pride in knowing that he is, at least, above the black man, Baldwin shows his concern for the insecure white man: "I suggest that of all the terrible things that could happen to a human being that is one of the worst."[9] Baldwin's first theme to the white audience is not that of an angry young man; rather, it is the attempt of a friend to discuss with America a dark, ugly secret.

A second major theme is related to the first: Present solutions for and attitudes toward the race problem are doomed to failure because they do not address themselves to the deeper issue of identity. Discarding familiar economic and educational indices of Negro emancipation, Baldwin charges that subtle attacks on Negro identity have replaced blatant physical repression. When reminded that the hostility of whites toward Negroes has diminished, Baldwin replies: "I'm delighted to know there've been many fewer lynchings in the year 1963 than there were in the year 1933, but I also have to bear in mind . . . that there are a great many ways to lynch a man."[10] The alternative to physical lynching, as seen by Baldwin, is an attempt by the white world to force the Negro to forego his identity: "Our good will, from which we yet expect such power to transform us, is thin, passionless, strident: its roots, examined, lead us back to our forebears, whose assumption it was that the black man, to become truly human and acceptable, must first become like us. This assumption once accepted, the Negro in America can only acquiesce in the obliteration of his own personality, the distortion and debasement of his own experience."[11] In assessing the impact of "on-the-job-training" and other programs aimed at integration, Baldwin remains highly skeptical of the white's motives. "On-the-job training," argues Baldwin, is designed to "fit" the Negro into a white mold because whites cannot face the reality that "no Negro in this country really lives by the American middle-class standards."[12] Integration, as presently pursued, is "another word, you know, the latest kind of euphemism for white supremacy."[13] In short, Baldwin denies emphatically the prerogative of the white to integrate the Negro into a white society.

The third major theme of Baldwin's message is perhaps the most widely quoted theme: America will be called to account for her sins. This theme of apocalypse pervades Baldwin's rhetoric. In "Stranger in the Village" he warns, "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."[14] Destruction, when it comes, will be not simply a black rebellion in the United States, but rather will be a vengeance more divine than human. In "Letter from a Region of My Mind" Baldwin writes: "I could also see that the intransigence and ignorance of the white world might make that vengeance inevitable—a vengeance that does not really depend on, and cannot really be executed by, any person or organization, and that cannot be prevented by any police force or army: historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance. . . . *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water,*

Mossman, "Race, Hate, Sex, and Colour," *Encounter*, 25 (July 1965), 60.

[9] James Baldwin, "The American Dream and the American Negro," *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 March 1965, p. 33.

[10] James Baldwin, Nathan Glazer, Sidney Hook, and Gunnar Myrdal, "Liberalism and the Negro," *Commentary*, 37 (March 1964), 31.

[11] *Notes of a Native Son*, p. 45.

[12] "How Can We Get the Black People to Cool It?" *Esquire*, 70 (July 1968), 50.

[13] *Ibid.*, 116.

[14] Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, p. 175.

the fire next time!"[15] A modified form of this theme also appears in Baldwin's rhetoric to the white audience when he discusses black violence in the ghetto. Even while discussing this less cosmic threat of violence, however, Baldwin uses the same symbolic terms of judgment. No individual cause or causes of violence are singled out; vengeance is a blind thing that must naturalistically follow wrong-doing: "People who have been wronged will attempt to right the wrong; they would not be people if they didn't. . . . They will use such means as come to hand. Neither, in the main, will they distinguish one oppressor from another, nor see through to the root principle of their oppression."[16] Justice, reasons Baldwin, must be served, and the black man in the ghetto may well be the instrument of destruction for American society.

A final theme in Baldwin's message to white America is the promise of redemption if Americans will honestly reassess their past and reinterpret their reality and the reality of the black man.[17] This theme is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the essay, "Letter from a Region of My Mind": "If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world."[18] Baldwin's solution to the race problem is primarily an individual redemption rather than a strategy for governmental action. One critic notes: "Baldwin's voice is a prophetic one, however; it is one for describing injustices and arousing consciences, not for planning strategy."[19] This individual redemption, furthermore, never gets far beyond the stage of arousal of conscience. While Baldwin has been severely criticized for his lack of concrete proposals for the problems he makes so vivid,[20] he defends his position by arguing that only a change in individual views of reality will eliminate the source of racial problems, and that if such views are changed, the need for discrimination and hatred will end: "Any honest examination of the national life proves how far we are from the standard of human freedom with which we began. The recovery of this standard demands of everyone who loves this country a hard look at himself, for the greatest achievements must begin somewhere, and they always begin with the person."[21] This change in the individual's view of reality is not seen by Baldwin as merely an isolated act that will end the problem of race; rather it is essential for the liberation of the mind for both black and white in the search for identity.

Although it is helpful for purposes of analysis to categorize and synthesize in dealing with any rhetorical agent, there is a danger of assuming that all themes are static and clearly defined throughout the rhetoric being studied. Such an assumption is especially dangerous with Baldwin, for the dual influences of an artist-Negro ambivalence and increased black militance in the nation have had

[15] Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* pp. 119-120.

[16] James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," *The New York Times Magazine,* 9 April 1967, p. 137.

[17] Although Baldwin stresses the individual nature of redemption more than other spokesmen, the theme itself is recurrent in black rhetoric. For an early treatment, see Frederick Douglass' 1852 4th of July oration.

[18] Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1936), p. 119.

[19] John McCudden, "James Baldwin's Vision," *Commonweal,* 79 (11 Oct. 1963), 76.

[20] See, for example, Dan Jacobson's article, "James Baldwin as Spokesman," *Commentary,* 32 (December 1961), 497-502.

[21] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), p. 116.

definite impressions on Baldwin. The artist-Negro ambivalence is defined by Baldwin as a struggle within himself to maintain the objectivity and sensitivity of an artist in spite of the natural rage he feels as a black man: "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you."[22] This rage, while it never destroys Baldwin, does at times over-ride the magnanimity of his message to white America. In his speeches and interviews, particularly, Baldwin is occasionally carried away by his premonition of doom to the point of edging "perilously close to the hate philosophy of the Black Muslims, whose segregationist doctrines he had unequivocally rejected."[23] The second cross-pressure upon Baldwin's rhetoric has been the increased militancy of the Black Revolution in America in recent years. Baldwin has kept pace with this acceleration. In a recent interview Baldwin supported many of the themes of Black Power advocates, including racial bias as the basis for the Vietnam War and cohesion of the "Third World."[24] The impact of militancy is also felt in Baldwin's most recent novel, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone,* and one critic has written, "Baldwin has almost ceased to be an artist and has indeed become a tortured nerve."[25]

In spite of this increased militancy in Baldwin's recent rhetoric, the structure of his message has not been significantly altered. The first theme, that the root problem of racial discrimination is the inability of white Americans to recognize reality, is intact, although Baldwin's sympathy for his white audience is occasionally overshadowed by his outrage at the injustice he sees around him. The second theme, that present efforts are doomed to fail because they do not attack the root problem, also remains intact and has been, in fact, intensified. The third theme of impending doom has likewise been retained without alteration: "If we don't change it, we're going to die."[26] The fourth and final major theme of redemption would seem to be a likely candidate for dismissal, since Baldwin has been making this plea for personal restructure for over fifteen years without notable success. Nevertheless in the same interview in which he expressed militant sentiments more characteristic of a Rap Brown or Eldridge Cleaver, Baldwin still held out hope to his white audience: "I have a great deal of hope. I think the most hopeful thing to do is to look at the situation. People accuse me of being a doom-monger. I'm not a doom-monger. If you don't look at it, you can't change it."[27]

During the past fifteen years, the mood of James Baldwin has varied frequently, but the themes considered here have consistently dominated his message for white Americans.

The persuasive impact of the rhetoric of James Baldwin on white Americans is best understood as identification, for Baldwin eschews traditional logical routes to persuasion in favor of an attempt to establish communion with his audience through a sharing of experience. Because of the difficulty of separating the unconscious persuasion of Baldwin the introspective thinker from the conscious persuasion of Baldwin the writer and propagandist, deliberate and

22 Symposium, "The Negro in American Culture," *Cross Currents,* 24 (1961), 205, quoting Baldwin.

23 Fern Marja Eckman, *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin* (New York: M. Evans, 1966), p. 178.

24 "How Can We Get the Black People to Cool It?' 49-53+.

25 Robert Emmett Long, "From Elegant to Hip," *Nation,* 206 (10 June 1968), 769.

26 "How Can We Get the Black People to Cool It?" 116.

27 *Ibid.*

nondeliberate appeals are more appropriately viewed together.

The ambivalence toward white America displayed in his major themes furnishes Baldwin with two clearly separable roles as a persuader. As an intellectual, a profoundly human writer, Baldwin is strongly influenced by his acceptance of life and love for humanity; as a socially aware black man and transplanted fundamentalist preacher, he becomes a raging prophet of apocalypse. Both roles are persuasive roles, and both roles are capable of producing identification; but the persuasion differs greatly in motivational target, and the identification produced is as different as that which produced the Mayflower Compact and that which produces a U.S.-Soviet arms reduction treaty.[28] The first role, that of intellectual and artist, is one in which Baldwin speaks "with" white America and identifies materially with white America. The second role, that of angry black propagandist and store-front preacher, is one in which Baldwin speaks "to" white America and achieves in his plea for contrition a type of transcendental identification.

The first persuasive role assumed by Baldwin is that of artist rather than revolutionary. This role was originally the exclusive role of Baldwin, and in an early essay he argued its necessity: "Leaving aside the considerable question of what relationship precisely the artist bears to the revolutionary, the reality of man as a social being is not his only reality and that artist is strangled who is forced to deal with human beings solely in social terms; and who has, moreover, as Wright had, the necessity thrust on him of being the representative of thirteen million people. It is a false responsibility (since writers are not congressmen) and impossible, by its nature, of fulfillment."[29] Rejecting the protest literature of Richard Wright, Baldwin in his role as artist addresses his audience as fellow Americans and fellow humans in an attempt to establish material identification, the type of communion that occurs when a "speaker operates within a given frame of reference, among men affiliated with relatively harmonious groups."[30] Baldwin attempts to bridge the gap to his audience first by identifying with it as an American: "In my necessity to find the terms on which my experience could be related to that of others, Negroes and whites, writers and non-writers, I proved, to my astonishment, to be as American as any Texas G.I."[31] Furthermore, the problem of race is depicted as a problem faced by all Americans and for which all Americans, regardless of color, must bear guilt: "Appearances to the contrary, no one in America escapes its effects [the Negro problem] and everyone in America bears some responsibility for it."[32] Second, Baldwin seeks commonality with his audience by using the search for identity as a mutual goal of black and white Americans. In an early essay, "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American," he writes about his contacts with other American artists in Europe: "The fact that I was the son of a slave and they were the sons of free men meant less, by the time we confronted each other on European soil, than the fact that we were both searching for our separate identities."[33]

[28] The separability of Baldwin's two persuasive roles does not indicate that both roles may not be found in any single theme. Baldwin's first theme, for example, contains both impassioned appeals to white guilt and expressions of warm understanding and sympathy.

[29] Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, pp. 32-33.

[30] L. H. Mouat, "An Approach to Rhetorical Criticism," in *The Rhetorical Idiom*, ed. Donald C. Bryant (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958), p. 172.

[31] Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, p. 4.

[32] Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, p. 8.

[33] Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, p. 4.

Even though Baldwin in his role as artist attempts to complete his material identification with white America by arguing that he does not make any alignments on the basis of color,[34] it is obvious that Baldwin must recognize some gap between white and Negro—otherwise there would be no racial problem to solve. Baldwin does recognize this racial gap, and he demonstrates its consequences quite graphically.

Baldwin also enhances his role as compassionate artist when he exhibits a strong sympathy for the white who must redefine his concept of reality. In a letter to his nephew published in *The Fire Next Time* (and read by enough white Americans to keep it on the best-seller list for forty-one months), Baldwin advises young James to love the whites, "your lost, younger brothers."[35] One entire essay, "Faulkner and Desegregation," is devoted to Baldwin's "understanding" of "what is happening in the minds and hearts of white Southerners today."[36] This conciliatory attitude on Baldwin's part is similar to that of the late Martin Luther King, Jr., and one critic notes: " 'My Dungeon Shook' could well have been written by Martin Luther King."[37] And like the message of Martin Luther King, the message of Baldwin the artist gains a great deal of its persuasive impact from his manifest good will toward the white audience.

The second role filled by Baldwin in persuasion of the white audience is that of outraged black and preacher offering redemption from the terrible guilt white America bears. This side of Baldwin has been termed by Robert Penn Warren "the Boy Preacher": "James Baldwin has, long since, left the church. But when he left, he smuggled out the Gift of Tongues. The magic, however, does not work at his every whim. . . . But it does work when, among all the persons who make up 'Jimmy Baldwin,' that person whom we shall call the Boy Preacher takes over for his moment."[38] The Boy Preacher plays upon white guilt feelings, and the segment of the white audience reached by this message of guilt has been identified by Whitney Young as "[t]he intellectual kind of white person who is moved by this because he has a great deal of guilt feeling, people who, as Baldwin well knows, are in a masochistic mood, where they don't do anything but at least will permit themselves to be ridiculed and punished."[39]

The first strategy of Baldwin the preacher is, understandably, an appeal to guilt feelings of the auditor or reader. This appeal is made on two levels: the level of race and the level of personal fulfillment. On the first level of guilt in racism, Baldwin demonstrates a crystal clear understanding of the hidden self-accusations of white America. In an essay totally devoted to the nature of white guilt, "Unnameable Objects, Unspeakable Crimes," Baldwin writes:

> The guilt remains, more deeply rooted, more securely lodged, than the oldest of old trees; and it can be unutterably exhausting to deal with people who, with a really dazzling ingenuity, a tireless agility, are perpetually defending themselves against charges which one has not made. . . . They are dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, but they do not know how to release themselves from it, and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence. This incoherence is heard nowhere more plainly than in those stammering, terrified dialogues white Americans sometimes entertain with that black conscience, the black man in America.[40]

34 Eckman, p. 179.
35 Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, p. 23.
36 Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, p. 117.
37 Addison Gayle, Jr., "The Dialect of 'The Fire Next Time,'" *The Negro History Bulletin*, 30 (April 1967), 15.
38 *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York, 1965), p. 280.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 297.
40 James Baldwin, "Unnameable Objects, Unspeakable Crimes," *The White Problem in*

This guilt, reasons Baldwin, is generated by the inability of whites to acknowledge the terrible crimes they have perpetrated upon black people. Guilt, furthermore, is augmented by a deep fear, a fear that "black people long to do to others what has been done to them."[41] This fear both accentuates the guilt and keeps it hidden, resulting in a condition in which whites have "begun to lose touch with reality—to lose touch, that is, with themselves."[42]

Baldwin understands the nature of white guilt, and he uses it relentlessly in tormenting his white audience. In an early essay, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," he blames the white for the nightmare of the ghetto: "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 and see what we, this nation, have become."[43] Further, he deposits the sins of the South upon the conscience of all white Americans: "I know another Negro, a man very dear to me, who says, with conviction and with truth, 'The spirit of the South is the spirit of America.' . . . The South is not merely an embarrassingly backward region, but a part of this country, and what happens there concerns every one of us. . . . They are two sides of the same coin and the South will not change—*cannot* change—until the North changes."[44] The guilt strategy applies particularly well to insecure whites, but its intended scope is universal. Warren notes:

> So any white man is caught in a cleft stick—damned if he does, damned if he doesn't.
>
> Now, it is perfectly true that the white man is due to be called up short, made to look in the horrifying mirror: you must see yourself as a worm before redemption is possible. This is always the technique of the preacher—and of the Boy Preacher. But whatever the theological and spiritual overtones may be, the intensity of the relish with which the indictment of sin is made is sometimes uncomfortably reminiscent of the old accent of Malcolm X.[45]

A second motivational touchstone of Baldwin the preacher is one of the most basic of all appeals, that of fear; and it is an appeal which has been much stronger in Baldwin's recent rhetoric than in his early rhetoric. This fear appeal is found in Baldwin's last book of essays, *The Fire Next Time,* where he warns: "A bill is coming in that I fear America is not prepared to pay."[46] In his most recent interviews this appeal is much more obvious. In the July, 1968, *Esquire* interview, the fear appeal is nearly as blunt as any appeal of an Eldridge Cleaver or H. Rap Brown: "There's nothing more that you can do to me, nothing more at all. When you, in the person of your President, assure me that you will not tolerate any more violence, you may *think* that frightens me. People don't get frightened when they hear that, they get *mad.* And whereas you're afraid to die, I'm not."[47] In general, however, Baldwin's use of fear appeals is subordinated to his guilt appeals. Even in his third major theme of the Day of Judgment the strategy of appeal seems to emphasize the justification for revenge over the physical danger of the revenge itself.

The final strategy of Baldwin in his role of propagandist and preacher is that of absolution from sin and guilt. This strategy, which appears to resemble closely Baldwin's appeal to "achieve our country" in his role as intellectual and

America, ed. by *Ebony* editors (Chicago: Johnson, 1966), pp. 174-175.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 176.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name,* p. 71.

[44] *Ibid.,* pp. 69-71.

[45] Warren, p. 291.

[46] Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* p. 117.

[47] "How Can We Get the Black People to Cool It?" 116.

artist, is actually quite different. The motivation in the first case is positive, an appeal to good will and altruism on the part of the white audience. The second appeal is more an offer of relief from distress. The emphasis here is not on constructive action in the future, but rather on a purgation of all past sins and guilt. This appeal of forgiveness is attractive both because it is a simple solution to a most complex problem and because it can solve individual problems of identity. Nowhere in any of his essays (and in very few speeches and interviews) does Baldwin make any concrete political proposals. His position seems to be: The problems of race cannot be solved without a drastic alteration of white America's self-perception; conversely, once such an alteration is made, solution of racial problems will follow automatically. To the white American immobilized by guilt, this solution is most seductive:

> As for the public drama, precipitated, as it were, by the catalytic introduction of James Baldwin, it must be of apocalyptic intensity. We are not to think of a Civil Rights Bill, of FEPC, of housing, of social adaptations, of economic adjustments, of legal process, of education, of the slow growth, painful and wavering, of understanding and a sense of justice. We are to think of the blaze of light that rends the roof and knocks us all—all America and all American institutions—flat on the floor while the "vertical saints" sing and rejoice and the whole continent rocks like Pentecost. . . .
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> The drama is powerfully appealing. . . . It promises to carry us beyond the daily nags and nocturnal dubieties, beyond the dusty burden of self and self-accusation, beyond niggling responsibilities.[48]

While the strategies and motive appeals of Baldwin vary according to persuasive role, they are generally intermingled in his rhetoric. A paragraph that begins with a thoughtful examination of the forces operating on the mind of a white Southerner will often end with a sweeping indictment like: "The emptier our hearts become, the greater will be our crimes."[49] Baldwin's ambivalence toward white America is omnipresent; it seems at times to touch almost every sentence with both warning of the Old Testament and the gospel of the New.

Baldwin's persuasion for many white Americans is bolstered by high source credibility. His message may often be accepted over competing messages because he speaks as an individual artist and not as a spokesman for a particular political philosophy or organization. He criticizes both liberal and conservative whites; he criticizes black militants as well as the black middle class. Consequently, his message appeals as an honest message, a message created by deep introspection. When responding to a statement that Baldwin does not speak for all Negroes, Warren notes that this perhaps is his greatest strength: "That Baldwin speaks for himself is . . . the source of Baldwin's power. Whatever is vague, blurred, or self-contradictory in his utterances somehow testifies to the magisterial authenticity of the utterance —it is the dramatic image of a man struggling to make sense of the relation of personal tensions to the tensions of the race issue."[50]

In summary, Baldwin's message to the white audience has been a remarkably consistent message. The racial problem in the United States is a problem of white denial of Negro identity; this problem is not being solved by present attitudes and approaches to the issue of race; white America will be called to judgment for its wrong-doings; and redemption is possible through acknowledgment of guilt. While the general themes of the message have been con-

[48] Warren, pp. 281-282.

[49] Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, p. 70.

[50] Warren, p. 296.

stant, the appeals used in presentation vary dramatically. Throughout Baldwin's themes, the white man is alternately embraced and denounced, reasoned with and threatened. This variability of appeal appears to be more a strength than a weakness in Baldwin's persuasive effect. The guilt appeal is a powerful one for affluent white America, but it is limited by human defense mechanisms that can dissipate intolerable guilt outside of constructive channels. The accompanying stress on love, commonality, and brotherhood has the capability of both reducing the tension created by the guilt appeal and channeling the tremendous guilt energy into more socially useful endeavors.

James Baldwin's message for white Americans has been communicated through many rhetorical forms and throughout most of two decades. His has been a thoughtful and powerful message, and its themes have been persuasively developed for those willing to attend them. Despite Baldwin's present despair, critic Robert F. Sayre's evaluation of the artist-preacher's impact appears justified: "Whatever deeper comprehension of the race issue Americans now possess has been in some way shaped by him. And this is to have shaped their comprehension of themselves as well."[51]

[51] "James Baldwin's Other Country," in *Contemporary American Novelists,* ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964), p. 158.