QUEERING BLACK POWER: LONGING FOR A HERO

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ABSTRACT

Both Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin had links to the Black Liberation Movements of 1960s and 1970s. Both of these men wrote fiction and social essays on the state of race relations in the United States. Amiri Baraka wrote short stories disavowing homosexuals in his writings. James Baldwin explored queer themes and queer characters in many of his works of fiction during this period. What simultaneously connected and disconnected these two men were their beliefs on human sexuality. While Baraka disavowed his sexuality, James Baldwin openly critiqued the treatment of homosexuals.

My thesis explores how Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin discussed black masculinity, Black Liberation, queerness, freedom, and democracy. The "brands" of masculinity these two men presented in their writings queered them as well as Black Liberation. This created a connection to Gay Liberation. My aim with this project was to provide a lens into understanding Black liberation, Gay liberation, Women's liberation, Third World liberation, and ultimately every movement of liberation against western hegemony as queer movements. I argue that the search for freedom and the disavowal of inauthentic identities coupled with a quest for inclusion in the "American freedom project" queered Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin. I argue as they wrote to extend freedom to their black bodies, they also queered black liberation. The first chapter opens up with a review of the literature and research on relevant topics relating to Black Liberation, queerness, and black masculinity. Chapter two analyzes the literature and social essays of Amiri Baraka and establishes what I define as "queer longing." Chapters three and four examine the literature and social essays of James Baldwin and explain how Baldwin's brand of masculinity queered Black Liberation.

“Queering Black Power: Longing for a Hero”

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Introduction

"Attending to the artists and their work helps us to remember that people are always bigger than the theories, narratives, and histories that seek to explain, define, narrate, and contain them."-Farah Jasmine Griffin *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists & Progressive Politics During World War II* (2013)

"The ideas of freedom, equality, and justice originate from the human body, not with any one geographic or cultural location. Specific historical meanings of freedom take on different imaginings in particular times. The practice of inclusive democracy is not found more readily in the eighteenth century, although particularly individualist formulations are articulated then. Because slavery and patriarchy are embedded in the same historical moment, a 'practice' of democracy is not to be found at this site. **A lived democracy is only to be found by going inside the resistances and expressions of humanity**"-Zillah Eisenstein *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* (2004)

In the summer of 2015, a series of tweets by verified and prominent "Black Lives Matter" activists rallied to defend Deray McKesson from homophobic attacks. McKesson rose to the national spotlight after the 2014 Ferguson protests that occurred after the racially motivated murder of teenager Michael Brown. Those at odds with McKesson felt that he was useless to the current movement for black liberation because he was a queer man. Scrolling through the tweets that day in the summer led me to think about the relevancy of one's sexuality to being an advocate for racial justice. At this moment in time, I heard of the adulterous affairs of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the alleged bisexuality of Malcolm X. For the most part, I remained critically unaware of black queer activists. After doing a bit of research, I discovered the activism of James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin and Audre Lorde. The running historical narrative from the mainstream Civil Rights movement seemed incomplete. In the face of these silences I sought the truth. After a few courses in my Master's program I became interested in the Black Panther Party. To me something was peculiar about this group's somewhat obsession with being the "manliest of men." The more I thought about it, the more fascinated I became with the

overall focus on black masculinity in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

This thesis examines the connection between black masculinity, black liberation, and black sexuality (more specifically in the area of black queer men) and how these factors combined to produce varying notions of freedom and calls for a more inclusive democracy. I trace the contributions of two specific writers and artists from 1952 to 1972: Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin. Although I briefly mention of Eldridge Cleaver, my work focuses exclusively on Baraka and Baldwin and how these two men queered themselves and in turn queered black liberation.

Despite the blossoming of the field of African American History, I found (like a few other scholars) that scholarship usually omitted the contributions of black gay men. One running theory or narrative suggest that this omission was due to the climate of respectability politics and the driving need to redeem the image of the black male. These narratives often confined the artist and intellectuals that lived, wrote, and resisted the racism of the period. The running history of the Civil Rights movement and Black Power Movements placed them in conversation with Women's liberation, the Anti-war movement, the American Indian Movement, the Young Lords, Black Power movements, and the Gay Liberation movement. This conversation represented one of protest, a driving force of the counter culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s. When James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka critiqued the condition of their racial identities they sought to extend the freedoms practiced and performed by white male bodies. I argue as they wrote to extend freedom to their black bodies, they also queered black liberation.

My work relies conceptually on the work of many scholars. The method for my approach to this topic originated from my readings of Farah Griffin's *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists, &*

Progressive Politics During World War II (2013) and Zillah Eisenstein's *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* (2004). Griffin's work explored the political contributions of black women specifically those of dancer Pearl Primus, writer Ann Petry, and musician Mary Lou Williams during World War II. Her insistence on using artists to understand the peculiarities of New York and the World War II period arose from her position that artists can demonstrate that people are bigger than the historical narratives that all too often confine them in theory and explanation. My work seeks to do the same with the writings of fiction and political essays of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka by demonstrating that these men are bigger than the historical narratives that confined them and at times omitted them.[1]

Zillah Eisenstein's work, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* (2004), helped me to understand that some of the most marginalized and oppressed persons can acutely articulate notions of freedom and democracy. When trying to find the origins of freedom in the West, she explained that it was not from those white men from the "chosen history" that omitted the experiences of women, people of color, and queer persons but from those who resisted the white male patriarchy of the time. She explained that a complete definition of freedom and democracy could be found by looking at the resistances and expressions of humanity from those living at the margins of society. Eisenstein began her discussion with the bodies of black slave women. Regarding black liberation, I contend that from the most marginalized and stigmatized expressions of blackness can we understand what true freedom and democracy looks like. It is from black women and black queer persons that we can understand and become a more inclusive democracy.

[1] Farah Jasmine Griffin, Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists & Progressive Politics During World War II (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2013), 1-2.

An evolution of thought is required to transform society that is more inclusive to the diversity of the human experience. In connecting Black Liberation to Gay Liberation, Black Panther Co-Founder Huey Newton helped to forge this connection. In his 1970's manifesto titled, "A Letter from Huey Newton to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," Newton contested that the most revolutionary persons were those of the "homosexual movement." It is as Zillah Eisenstein articulated in *Against Empire,* understandings of freedom and democracy are readily found in the resistances and expressions of the most oppressed people in society.[2]

In order to "queer" Black Power how I use the term queer must be explained and defined, What I term as "queer" is an act or identity that goes against the Western understanding of so-called "natural" sexuality where heterosexuality is defined by interaction with the opposite biological sex.[3] Queer is a representative term for sexual and gender minorities that are not cisgender or not heterosexual. Another term I would like to define for this thesis is "performance" E. Patrick Johnson's articulation of the term. Frequently I discuss masculinity as a performance and I use the idea of "performance" the way E. Patrick Johnson does in his work, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (2003).* In this work Johnson defines performance as interpreting different sites of performed "blackness" where some performances of black people are viewed and understood as genuine and preferred.[4]

In my research of issues pertaining to queerness and performance I build on the work of an influential scholar in Women and Gender studies, Judith Butler. Key to "Queering Black

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[2] Zillah Eisenstein, Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West (New York: Zed Books, 2004) 32-33.

[3] E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson, Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 5-7.

[4] E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 49

Power" and ultimately in a future project, Third World Liberation or Black Liberation scholars must explored those who disavowed homosexuality and queerness unintentionally queered themselves. Analyzing key texts and literature I found evidence of such unintentional "outing" of one's sexuality, this manifested itself in my notion of "queer longing."

My notion of "queer longings" builds on E. Patrick Johnson's explanation of Judith Butler's continuation of Sigmund Freud's theories of mourning and melancholia. Queer longing represents the melancholia manifested by way of the "unconscious as an unacknowledged loss of a love-object and therefore a refusal to grieve this loss."[5] Johnson supports Butler's notion where the ungrieved love of heterosexuality signifies homosexuality, which then becomes a site of simultaneous identification and repudiation of "heterosexual men" like Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver. Indeed, in their rejection of the homosexual these men practiced "queer longing."[6] By examining the works of Amiri Baraka I demonstrate that the black power movement in its need for what I term "black hero masculinities" provides a queer subtext to understand the black power movement due to this "heterosexual melancholy." This heterosexual melancholy results from the historical defining of black masculinity as infantile, cowardly, and counterrevolutionary by European colonizers in the years before Third World liberation. This type of masculinity, which Third World Liberation movements modeled their performances after, represents the ideas of those who colonized them. I see potential for a new understanding of the liberation movements and this thesis is an attempt at the first steps towards a new understanding of liberation, freedom, and democracy outside of these confining notions masculinity.

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[5] E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 49

[6] Johnson, 49.

Recently, during the completion of this thesis I read Eddie S. Glaude's *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul (2017).* Towards the end of his work he presented a quote by American Philosopher John Dewey,

> The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must be continually explored afresh.; it has to be constantly discovered and rediscovered, remade and reorganized; while the political and economic and social institutions in which it is embodied have to be remade and reorganized to meet the changes that are going on in the development of new needs on the part of human beings and resources for satisfying these needs.[7]

Glaude explained how Dewey defined American democracy as an unfinished project and that the purpose and aims of the United States were not fixed in the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution. In order to revise a failing democracy survived by a history of exclusivity there must be what Glaude called challenges and "imaginative leaps on behalf of democracy itself."[8] Writers and artists like James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka showed us the limits and possibilities for black liberation. I contend that we are forever at the mercy of the worlds we create whether they are subsisted by failed notions of freedom or confining constructs of race, gender, and sexuality. These challenges must be studied and learned in order to revive the failed project of the West. In Black Liberation's quest for an "heroic performance of masculinity" we will find that as Ella Baker said, "We are the leaders we've been looking for." Indeed, the inherited models and heroes are flawed and must be challenged and reimagined in order to create an understanding of a notion of what it truly means to live in an inclusive society that facilitates the freedom of all bodies.

[7] Eddie S. Gladue Jr., Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul. (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2017) 190-191.

[8] Ibid., 191

Chapter 1: A "Quare" Historiography

Masculinity requires an adherence to qualities associated with being a "man." Historically, it has been the idea of "whiteness" that has defined and categorized every degree of "blackness" regarding age, gender, and sexual orientation. Beginning with the middle passage, black women have been viewed as exotic and sexualized with the labeling of "jezebels." Black children have experienced short childhoods and were viewed as more menacing because of their skin color. Black men have historically been labeled by white society as pathological, hypersexual, and black rapists. Many of these stereotypes derived from fears of the mixing of the races.

The underlying focus of the black liberation movements of the 1950s-1970s was a simultaneous redemption and search for an authentic and heroic brand of black masculinity. Due to the need for the redemption of the black male image, the focus on masculinity erased the contributions of women and gay men in the historical telling of black liberation. Intersectionality was non-existent and in this movement for equality and civil rights all the blacks were hetero men. Most historians support the notion that many liberation movements such as Women's Liberation, the American Indian Movement, the Young Lords Party, Black Power movements, and Gay Liberation Movement drew inspiration from the gains and advances of the Southern based Civil Rights movement. What is often overlooked by historians and scholars is the connection between Black liberation and Gay liberation. To a certain extent, black liberation can be understood as a queer movement. This reality was in the writings and literature of black artists and intellectuals as they wrote about a desirable performance of black masculinity. A black manhood that could rally the black masses and lead them on to true liberation. Some of the best examples for this analysis draw from the works of men like Amiri Baraka (formally LeRoi

Jones), Eldridge Cleaver, and James Baldwin. To understand black liberation as a queer movement one must first approach the concept with an understanding of the work of Judith Butler and E. Patrick Johnson. In 2003, E. Patrick Johnson furthered much of the groundwork for examining Amiri Baraka's homosexual or queer desires by discussing Ron Simmon's argument from his writing entitled, "Baraka's Dilemma." Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (2003)* presented Ron Simmon's argument regarding the queer sexual identity of Baraka. The source for Simmon's analysis originates from Baraka's pseudo autobiographical novel, *The System of Dante's Hell*.[9] In the work, Simmons and Johnson assert that Baraka's need to repudiate and condemn homosexuals resulted from the repression of his own queerness.

I argue that scholars should take this idea further and expand on the meanings of Baraka's queerness. I suggest that Amiri Baraka's works give us a queer "door" to enter and a "lens" to see and understand the black power movement as one that longed for and avoided certain performances of black masculinity. Black liberation was a queer movement due to what I term as "queer longings" which builds on E. Patrick Johnson's explanation of Judith Butler's continuation of Sigmund Freud theories of mourning and melancholia. Queer longing represents the melancholia manifested by way of the "unconscious as an unacknowledged loss of a love-

[9] Ron Simmons, "Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing Black Gay Intellectuals," in Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men, ed. Essex Hemphill (Boston: Alyson, 1991), 218. Simmons explains that Baraka's adolescent homosexual desires engendered his homophobia. It is not in *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* where Baraka discusses his homosexual desires. Simmons argues that in order to truly understand Baraka's obsession with condemning "faggots," while also repressing his attraction to men, an earlier work such as *The System of Dante's Hell* must be analyzed. Simmons states that *The System of Dante's Hell* is a story many "gay brothers" find relatable. He argues that once gay men read this work they lose their anger towards Baraka and instead feel sympathy because of the pain and fear associated with trying to maintain a hidden desire or "queer longing." Johnson states that Baraka's writings reveal "heterosexual melancholy, the loss of the one for whom he can never have." He goes on to examine the irony that "faggotry" manifests itself through the heterosexual designs of living where one must constantly disavow homosexuality in order to demonstrate heterosexuality.

object and therefore a refusal to grieve this loss."[10] Johnson supports Butler's notion where the ungrieved love of heterosexuality signified homosexuality, which then became a site of simultaneous identification and repudiation of "heterosexual men" like Amiri Baraka. Indeed, in their rejection of the homosexual these men demonstrate "queer longing."[11]

Historians of black liberation and gay liberation view these movements as separate occurrences in communion with the general idea of liberation and countercultural movements of the time. As times changed, the focus shifted and created two "schools of thought" in relation to the telling of a tumultuous time in United States history. These schools of thought are as follows: The first concerned black liberation such as the Black Power Movement where the focus on masculinity remained centered and extremely pronounced. Historians such as Cynthia Young, Peniel Joseph, Joshua Bloom and Walter E. Martin discuss key figures in the black power movements such as Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, and Amiri Baraka and how these men formed the politics and rhetoric of the Black Power movement.

The second school of thought featured historical writing that focused on gay liberation and queer black men. Here, in this school the presentation of black queer men puts them in opposition to stereotypical black masculinity that is hyper masculine and homophobic. Discussions of masculinity, queerness, and blackness were key characteristics but the connection or analysis to discuss black liberation as a queer movement is missed. My work seeks to add to the literature in what will hopefully be a third school of thought: work that conceptualizes Black liberation as part of Gay liberation. The two are linked due to the obsession and "queer longing" for a heroic performance of black masculinity. By examining the historiography, I argue that

[10] E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 49

[11] Johnson, 49.

historians have misunderstood the interworkings and underlying connections between the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These movements all found themselves in opposition to the supremacy and oppression of straight white masculinity and in their resistance and acceptance of certain models queered their movements. Queer liberation provided the common thread to the counterculture movements.

The first school of thought written by historians focused on the machismo of the Black Power movements. In order to accurately "queer black power" one must start with Cynthia Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S Third World Left* (2006) The aim of her work sought to analyze the ideas, art forms, and cultural rituals of a group of African Americans, Latinos/as, Asian Americans, and Anglos who, inspired by events in the decolonizing world, saw their own plight in global terms. Writers, filmmakers, hospital workers, students, and grassroots activists turned to Third World anticolonial struggles for ideas and strategies that might aid their own struggles against the poverty, discrimination, and brutality facing peoples of color.[12]

Young argued that the many protagonist in her book, Amiri Baraka, Harold Cruse, Angela Y. Davis, the filmmakers in Third World Newsreel and at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), unionists in the hospital workers' 1199 union, squatters in Operation move-in, and the students in the Young Lords Party crafted "new diasporic public spheres" insisting on the interconnectedness between U.S minorities and Third World majorities in a movement of global decolonization.[13] Young's work was important because she provided a conceptual framework to see the interconnectedness between various liberation movements as

[12] Cynthia Young, Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S Third World Left. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 12-13.

[13] Ibid., 12-13.

they resisted oppression and protested for inclusion in the West's formulation of freedom and democracy.

On Amiri Baraka, Young used his work "Cuba Libre" to explain how Jones felt that traveling to Cuba created a metaphorical home and that Baraka wanted to become "blacker" more authentic. His search for authenticity served as the foundation for the revolutionary black American state. Young explained, "By demonstrating the integral role culture plays in political change and offering embodiments of the male revolutionary hero, the Cuba trip enabled Jones, the beat writer, to become Jones, the U.S Third World Leftist.[14] I analyze Baraka's "Cuba Libre" and the idea of the male revolutionary hero in order to queer both Baraka and the Black Power movement by connecting Black liberation to Gay liberation.

Young discussed Baraka's admiration of Fidel Castro due to Baraka's need for a revolutionary hyper masculine leader and the tension that it created. This tension was queer because Baraka longed for hyper masculine performance of leadership yet he remained tense about his admiration and longing for Fidel Castro. Young stated, "His objective pose is merely a wily literary ruse, for he was no more neutral than Castro himself. Before Jones ever set foot in Cuba, he had already declared himself in political sympathy with Castro. In 1959, he broke with Yugen's editorial staff over his desire to publish a special issue on the Cuban Revolution. Shortly, thereafter, he independently complied and published a pro-Castro anthology entitled Fidel Castro."[15]

Baraka observed Castro in the same way as the white-hatted heroes of Hollywood fantasy (his fantasy as well). Young mentioned that in Baraka's autobiography that his admiration for mythic characters like Castro and Guevara was planted by popular media images, "This was

[14] Ibid., 31.
[15] Ibid., 33.

1959…and for the last few months I had been fascinated by the headlines from Cuba. I had been raised on Errol Flynn's Robin Hood and the endless hero-actors fighting against injustice and leading the people to victory over the tyrants. The Cuban thing, seemed a case of classic Hollywood proportions."[16] Baraka admired and longed for Castro so much that he wrote a book about him. His connection with Castro allowed him to transform himself into a representative/spokesperson for black American cultural and political revolution. Young wrote about Baraka's transformation, "In Castro's Cuba, Jones would begin to equate the mythic guerilla fighter with the black American artist, equating the black ghetto with the Third World colony. His admiration for guerilla fighters impressed on him the need to utilize his literary skills in the service of revolutionary change." She continued on about Baraka and masculinity, "This profound shift in Jones's worldview facilitated an already nascent identification with bot a real and an imagined Third World characterized by two elements: Jones's reliance on an ultramasculinist ideology and his belief in the central importance of culture in precipitating revolution."[17] This again adds to my analysis that Baraka in his focus on a hyper masculine performance for the leadership of black liberation movements queers him and the Black Power movement. She spent time talking about "Cuba Libre" and the articulate young men that Baraka encountered on his tour of the National Agrarian Reform institute, the Ministry of Education, and la Casa de las Américas. My addition to Young's description is that his admiration of these young men was queer.

In the field of narratives written about Black Power, there exist Peniel E. Joseph's *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2006) adds to the historiography of Black Power. Joseph described the driving force behind the images of

[16] Ibid., 33.
[17] Ibid., 34.

Black Power. In this work, Joseph argued that understanding the history behind the iconic Black Power imagery (clenched fists, black panthers, and afro-wearing militants) required exploring the murky depths of the movement that paralleled and overlapped the heroic civil rights era. Use of the word, "heroic" meant that black power activists were simultaneously inspired and repulsed by the civil rights struggles.[18]

In this work, Joseph traced black radicalism of the Black Power movement back to men like Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes. Peniel Joseph stated that what drove Black Power activists were "the space between new rights and unclaimed freedoms.[19] It was the artist, intellectuals, and writers that drove black radicalism later in the twentieth century. My thesis used prominent subjects involved in the above list to discuss the possibility of a link between black liberation and queer liberation.[20]

Joseph explored how Harold Cruse' manifesto "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual" argued that the key to African American liberation would come from the black community's indigenous, cultural, and artistic institutions. I take this idea and use it as a model to explain that the key to gay liberation and black comes from similar sources.[21]

Peniel Joseph connected James Baldwin to the Black Power movements in the United States. Although in his description of Baldwin, he briefly mentioned Baldwin's homosexuality and only focused on his social and political writings, Joseph did not mention Baldwin's controversial works of fiction. Like Joseph, I see Baldwin connected to the Black Power movement, but for my analysis the connection goes deeper than merely his social and political

[18] Peniel E. Joseph, Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America. (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC: 2006) xvii.
[19] Ibid., 4-5.
[20] Ibid., 6.
[21] Ibid., 6.

essays and includes an in depth look at his works of fiction and what he had to say about queerness, blackness, masculinity, freedom and democracy. On Baldwin's famous social essay, *The Fire Next Time* Joseph stated:

> *The Fire Next Time* found Baldwin at the pinnacle of an American literary establishment that proudly claimed him as its own, although his flirtation with Black Muslims defined him as a political heretic and his acceptance of Muhammad's dinner invitation branded him an intellectual provocateur Even its detractors hailed T*he Fire Next Time* as an important piece of social criticism. More than that, the book established Baldwin as black America's "public witness," the official transcriber of a blue people.[22]

The use of this quote worked to show where historians have focused on James Baldwin. Baldwin's work is used to fit into a historical narrative about race instead of race, gender, and sexuality.

A more recent analysis of Black Power and the Black Panther Party adds to the historiography by focusing on the history and politics of the party by tracing the contributions of key members of the party. Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin's *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party (2013)* offered a serious analysis of how the political practices of the Black Panther Party changed during its history and why people were drawn to participate at each juncture of its evolution. Bloom and Martin understood that without the success of the Civil Rights movement, and without its failings, the Black Power movement from which the Black Panther Party emerged would not have been possible. The authors did not link the Black Power movement with Women's Rights and Gay Liberation but saw the movement in conversation and a part of the anti-war sentiment plaguing the 1960s. They situated their work between 1968 and 1970 focusing on turning points within the Black Panther Party but did not mention how the Black Power movement could have possibly influenced and intersected

[22] Ibid., 72.

with the Gay Liberation movement. Their main argument spoke to the brilliance of the Black Panther Party's political innovation as ideational and also practical. The practice of armed self-defense against the police forces drove the Party's politics. They stated that revolutionary ideas could be easily ignored the far-reaching confrontations between young gun carrying black people and police could not be ignored. The Panther's politics of armed self-defense gave them political leverage, while forcibly contesting the legitimacy of the American political regime.[23]

Bloom and Martin begin their historical narrative by critiquing Michelle Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1978) where she argued that Angela Davis and other revolutionary black women were simple "do-it-for-your-man" in service to misogyny in the name of black liberation. Wallace's work fits in more with a feminist critique of the Black Panther Party. Bloom and Martin admit that her argument was grounded in some truth but state that some Black Panthers asserted an aggressive black masculinity. However, by misrepresenting this black masculinity as the totality of the Party's politics, Wallace and other distorted and defamed the Party. They do not offer this point as a part of the list of characteristics of the Black Power movement.[24]

Like Amiri Baraka and Fidel Castro, Bloom and Martin mentioned the admiration Eldridge Cleaver had towards to Huey Newton. They stated, "Witnessing Newton stand his ground with the police, back them down, and call them cowards, Eldridge Cleaver was filled with jubilation. "Work out soul brother!" his mind screamed, "You're the baddest motherfucker I've ever seen."[25]

[23] Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 13.
[24] Ibid., 8-9.
[25] Ibid., 50.

Bloom and Martin's narrative on Eldridge Cleaver's growth and eventually involvement with the Black Panther Party located him and his work *Soul of Ice* during the mid-1960s United States within a discussion concerning the exploration of questions of race and sexuality. They explained how Cleaver found legitimate love from his lawyer Beverly Axelrod a white woman. They stated, "Cleaver saw a powerful form or redemption: refusing to play Uncle Tom, he was able to be his "terrible" true masculine self." There was no mention of his anti-gay comments or attacks on James Baldwin when they explained how parts of *Soul on Ice* were deeply misogynist and sexist. Exploring homophobic notions within the Black Power Movement was not an important part of their work.[26]

Bloom and Martin understood that the Black Power characteristic of asserting a black revolutionary masculinity proved vital in the Black Panther Party's politics. Black Power Politics challenged the Uncle Tom role of black males subservient to white power as well as the 1960s Civil Rights politics of turning the other cheek in the face of violence. In this same section, Bloom and Martin discussed the party's treatment of women and the women's response to their treatment. The mention of gay liberation comes towards the end of the chapter as they discussed how women led debates on gender and sexuality increased and were shaped by the Women's liberation movement, the sexual revolution, and the Gay and Lesbian liberation movement. Conversations were constructed and led by women influenced by other movements during the time. It is easily understood that may have been all Bloom and Martin needed to say regarding Gay Liberation but there has yet to be an account that argued that the debates and exclusion of queer black men came about as a result of the revolutionary black masculinity obsession, thus queering black liberation[27]

[26] Ibid., 78.
[27] Ibid., 95-98.

Even in the monograph's last chapter titled, "The Limits of Heroism" there is no comment or admission of Black Power masculinism and its effect on queer black women and men. They mention women like Assata Shakur that worked with the Black Liberation Army (BLA) but again they did not spend any time dealing with Eldridge Cleaver's anti-gay remarks.[28]

Bloom and Martin concluded with accolades and admonitions for Peniel Joseph a leading face of the Black Power scholars, and saluted him for challenging the conflation of Black Power and Civil Rights thought and activism. Bloom and Martin understood that they were writing in the same tradition as Peniel Joseph within the First School of thought. They write, "Joseph argues that the Black Power movement, perhaps epitomized by the Black Panther Party, was distinct in crucial ways from, ran parallel to, and at times intersected with the Civil Rights movement throughout the twentieth century." There was an understanding of what came before the Black Power movement but nothing was said on how the movement interacted with the concurrent Gay liberation movement.[29]

The second school of thought focuses on black queer men and began towards the end of the twentieth century. In one pioneering work, E. Patrick Johnson explored performance and black queerness in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (2003). In this monograph, he used the word "performance" to interpret various sites of performed "blackness" with the hope of demonstrating how performance was useful in studying blackness and vice versa. Johnson aimed to examine closely what constituted performance-specifically the performance of "blackness" in black American culture. His main argument

[28] Ibid., 372-389.
[29] Ibid., 395.

(while contending that there exists no fixed or stable meaning of "blackness") was that there is not an authentic blackness and the very questioning of one's blackness is fallible.[30]

The first chapter, "The Pot is Brewing: Marlon Rigg's Black is Black Ain't" Johnson analyzed the film *Black Is…Black Ain't* and discussed how Rigg's cleverly destabilized notions of authentic blackness. His message throughout the chapter surrounding his analysis of Rigg's film shows that when black Americans attempt to define what it means to be black they limit the many possibilities of blackness. I aim to build on this idea specifically with my analysis of black liberation. In the Southern based Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movements an ideal "hero masculinity" became the authentic revolutionary pushing women and queer blacks to the margins.[31]

Within the first chapter there was a section titled, "It's a Dick Thang, You Wouldn't Understand: Blackness and Gender" Johnson revealed how Riggs unhinged the link between hegemonic masculinity and authentic blackness when he filmed himself in his early childhood. Riggs set the stage for, as Johnson explained, "the masculinization of blackness, a black masculinity that disabled communication between him and his father." Johnson discusses how Riggs uncovered a great deal of black male machismo resulting from the Black Power movements of the 1960s. Johnson ended the chapter with an explanation of the brilliance of Rigg's ability to use film to splice competing discourses and images in *Black Is* and how they connected to the logic of black nationalist misogyny he accomplished this in three ways:

> First, the montages denaturalize masculinity from authentic blackness by exposing the amount of discursive labor required to sustain the pursuit of such an unattainable ontological linkage between race and gender. Second, the dialogic and dialectical exchange created by the montage renders blackness as a site of contestation rather than congealment. Third, this technique excavates the black misogynist's "real" agenda: that is, reinscribing black masculinity as the site of authentic blackness in the name of

[30] Johnson, 11.
[31] Ibid., 19-22.

> liberating and protecting the "race"-or, to put more bluntly, making *the black thang a dick thang.*[32]

The most remarkable analysis from Johnson provided the inspiration for my own work. In Chapter Two: "Manifest Faggotry" Johnson unpacked the mask of black masculinity presented as always heterosexual while ignoring the homosexual other. Within this chapter his main argument foregrounds the discussion of melancholia adopted from Sigmund Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia and Judith Butler's explanation of those theories. This chapter was insightful because Johnson applied these models to Eldridge Cleaver's desire for James Baldwin. I will build on this because Johnson showed another way to think and understand the dynamics between these two figures within black liberation. Johnson showed that Cleaver struggled with his own sexuality in his homophobic attacks on Baldwin and his works. In my own work, I explored this further by presenting them both as two queer men. On Cleaver's words on Baldwin Johnson elaborated on Judith Butler's point:

> Cleaver's disavowal of Baldwin's homosexuality in "Notes of a Native Son," then is actually symptomatic of Cleaver's guilt about his ungrieved homosexuality. According to Butler, "in opposition to a conception of sexuality which is said to 'express' a gender, gender itself is here understood to be composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality." She continues: If we gender melancholy in this way, then perhaps we can make sense of the peculiar phenomenon whereby homosexual desire becomes a source of guilt." [33]

The next portion of this analysis allowed me to present an argument that stated that a particular desire for an authentic heroic black masculinity queered black liberation and thus provided a link to gay liberation. Johnson continued:

> Viewed in this light, Cleaver's rhetorical performance in "Notes of a Native Son" actually articulates "what remains inarticulate in [his] sexuality." In other words, rather than suturing his heterosexuality to his masculinity and blackness, he actually unhinges

[32] Ibid., 28-32.
[33] Ibid., 57.

> this ontology in his repudiation of Baldwin, only the repudiation is a decoy for what lies elsewhere-deferred (unconsciously?) until sealed, made manifest with a kiss. Indeed, in *Soul on Ice* Cleaver speaks the love that dare not speak its name in the very act of not speaking. This occurs, however, in the absence of his mourned Other-Baldwin, the homosexual. On the other hand, Baldwin's silence, both about Cleaver's attack and during their encounter, functions differently in that his "nonverbal communication," and mere presence, make manifest Cleaver's faggotry-queering not only the event (the actual one and Newton's recollection of it) but Cleaver's masculinity and blackness as well.[34]

Black Queer Studies (2005) edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson bridged the gap between black studies and queer studies. This volume was created in response to the lack of inclusion of black queer scholarship within the heavily heterosexual male focus within black studies and the white male homosexual focus within queer studies. The majority of the essays in this work were presented at the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference held at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill on April 4-6, 2000. The essays contained a wide range of theoretical and critical arguments and postures. In defending their title "black queer studies" the editors state, "we believe that the term "black queer" captures and, in effect, names the specificity of the historical and cultural differences that shape the experiences and expressions of queerness." [35]

There were a few insightful essays that provided several launching points regarding my work and black liberation and black queerness. The first, Cathy J. Cohen's "Punk, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics" argued that the problem with queer studies was that it operated on a single-oppression framework that does not account for power imbalances. She critiqued Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson on the grounds that they are not true black left intellectuals because they focus on black heterosexual masculinity. Ultimately, Cohen stated that true black intellectuals must embrace a left that designates

[34] Ibid., 57.

[35] E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) X.

sexuality and struggles against sexual normalization as central to the politics of all marginal communities. The most important message from her essay was that movement building and politics where the ground was not built from a shared history or identity but a shared marginal relationship to dominant power that normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges those on the margins. To Cohen the potential of queer politics derives from its ability to link race, class, gender, and sexuality struggles together. I build on this in my chapter on James Baldwin's social and political essays. There I argue that Baldwin's brand of masculinity and philosophy for black liberation was intersectional and interracial. Looking at the most marginalized black intellectuals offers a blueprint for liberation because of their relationship to dominant performances of blackness, masculinity and sexuality.[36]

My idea for what I termed, "heroic masculinity" came from my reading of Dwight A. McBride's essay titled, "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies." McBride begins his essay with the following quote from James Baldwin, "The sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined, you know. If Americans can mature on the level of racism, then they have to mature on the level of sexuality." His purpose with this essay was to provide a working historiography for black queer studies. McBride critiqued the heterosexist strain that plagues so much of African American Studies. Using the work of Essex Hemphill and James Baldwin McBride made an argument for inclusion of black homosexuals in spite of not being a part of the "chosen history" of blackness. McBride argued that most of the academic discourse on African American studies "flattened" black queers or black queer sexuality in conjunction with the "African American community."[37]

[36] Ibid., 42-46.

[37] Ibid., 68-70.

James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* allowed McBride to provide a foundation for black queer studies by using Baldwin as a transition figure from earlier black writers because he was the first "openly gay" black writer. McBride's argument was that Baldwin's relationship to questions of identity (including his own and representations of it) and his choice to remain silent demonstrated the complexities of blackness as well as effectively challenged the dominant constructions of African American studies. McBride stated that Baldwin operated with an "awareness of the hegemony of the category of race in black antiracist discourse still limits the term of his possible identifications with his gay sexuality." He went on and stated that it was due to these identifications that Baldwin made his characters white in *Giovanni's Room*. I build on this idea by connecting other works of fiction by Baldwin like *Go Tell It On the Mountain* and *Another Country* to contest this claim and make the argument that Baldwin is a transitional figure in black writers because he queered his black characters In *Go Tell it On the Mountain* and *Another Country*. Baldwin's works of fiction represented a critique of black liberation and a link to gay liberation, because he saw issues of race and sexuality entwined.[38]

E. Patrick Johnson's essay, "Quare" Studies or (Almost) Everything I know about Queer studies I learned from my Grandmother" strengthened my ability to think theoretically about the black male body- both queer and straight and the limiting of these bodies in the United States notion of freedom and democracy. Johnson defined "quare" as the African American vernacular for queer. He argued for this title to represent queer studies for gays and lesbians of color. Furthermore Johnson stated,

> Theories in the flesh emphasize the diversity within and among gays, bisexuals, lesbians, and transgendered people of color while simultaneously accounting for how racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world. Theories in the flesh also conjoin theory and practice through an embodied politic of resistance. This politics of

[38] Ibid., 72-75.

> resistance manifested in vernacular traditions such as performance, folklore, literature, and art.[39]

In sum, Johnson demonstrated the importance of looking at the human body during performance and how these bodies resist oppressive modes of operation. One way to recognize a true definition of freedom is by looking at queer bodies as they sought inclusion in the United States.

Johnson explained theoretical concepts of blackness, whiteness, Judith Butler's formulation of performativity, and José Muñoz theory of "disidentification."[40] I see the same trend with the writings and literature of black queer intellectuals and writers, but I take this idea to link and forge a connection between black liberation and gay liberation to argue that black liberation and other forms of counterculture protest are also queer movements.

Riché Richardson's *Black Masculinity and the U.S South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (2007) used the media to explore the development of the black male image in the United States. Her monograph added to the historiography within the second school with a discussion on the shaping of black masculinity within the United Sates. Richardson's main argument was that "an engagement of black men in the South is crucially relevant to the more general dialogue about black masculinity in the United States."[41] Her argument went against the trend to associate the city or urban life with the development of black masculinity. Richardson instead used geography and time to discuss selected texts. To set up the historical limitations placed on black masculinity by white supremacy she analyzed Thomas Dixon's *The Klansmen*, the book that inspired the movie *Birth of a Nation* by D.W Griffith. Both of these works facilitated the stereotype of the black male beast. It was the noble white man pitted against the inferior black male.[42]

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[39] Ibid., 134-136.
[40] Ibid., 124-138.
[41] Riché Richardson Black Masculinity And the U.S South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 18.
[42] Ibid., 25.

In conversation with E. Patrick Johnson's articulation of an authentic performance of black masculinity, Richardson analyzed three Spike Lee films: *Malcolm X, School Daze,* and *Crooklyn*. With her discussion of these films she argued that the urban black man became the chosen performance of normative black masculinity in order to disavow the southern black manhood as being inferior. In her discussion of these contrasting notions of black manhood she discussed queerness as well. She stated,

> Malcolm X has served as a prominent symbol of black masculinity since the era of black liberation. However, beyond the sheer power of his heroic masculine iconicity, there has been little interest in looking at how he constituted a discourse on authentic blackness and maleness that was strongly inflected by ideologies of sexuality in his speeches. Some of his speeches construct a hierarchical black masculinity through a north-south binary and also produce tropes of Martin Luther King Jr.-and, by extension, black men in the South more generally-as homosexual, constituting them as alien, inferior, and ineffective within the black liberation movement. [43]

My work differs from Richardson's primarily because I am not invested in the north and south binary as evident in much of her monograph. Instead, I aim to build on Richardson's ideas and discuss "heroic masculinity" and how this quest for the authentic black male hero, queered the black liberation movement.

Kevin J. Mumford's *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (2016) examined the connections between the dominant stigmatized representations of black queer men and "resistance against defamation in order to understand how the pervasive repression of that Baldwin and Rustin confronted-and often lost to-was transformed into a more visible collective voice for the next generation of black gay men." [44] Mumford explored the historical trajectory of the investigation into the meanings of

[43] Ibid., 159.

[44] Kevin J. Mumford, Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 1.

"race for the gay past" he mentioned the following works, Cathy Cohen's *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*, John D'Emilios *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, E. Patrick Johnson's oral history, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, and Joshua Garrison's *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music the Seventies in San Francisco*. Mumford stated that these works within queer studies worked toward the development of a neoliberal goal toward color blindness. He stated that the field of African American Studies overlooked the contributions of black gay men with one exception, a reevaluation of the Harlem Renaissance as a gay or bisexual movement.[45]

The main goal of his work was to explore how and why the politics of respectability within the elite leader's strategy of chaste and asserting the normalcy of the black family and "chasity" resulted in the erasure of the queer black experience. His main argument is that the 1,018,700 black queer Americans have a genealogy of black gayness and a collective past that deserve serious study and full recognition. [46] With his argument he asserted that, "black gay lives matter." His monograph worked within an intersectional framework to further complicate blackness and diversify the lived experiences of blacks in America.

The first chapter titled, "Losing the March" traced the contributions of Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Bayard Rustin as figures crucial in the 1963 turning point of the Civil Rights movement and each with a unique role in African American gay history. His sections and commentary on James Baldwin and the objectification and appropriation of the black male body were the most enlightening because of the potential questions they posed. Although Baldwin did not publicly confirm his homosexuality in the 1960s he made some sharp critiques when interviewed and pressed about his queerness. Mumford explained that Baldwin

[45] Ibid., 2-3.
[46] Ibid., 3.

had two obsessions: "color and homosexuality." In one 1963 interview with *Mademoiselle*, he dodged questions of his personal sexuality and turned the interview into a discussion of masculinity. On the question, as to whether or not homosexuality was a disease Baldwin answered, "The fact that Americans consider it as disease says more about them than it says about homosexuality." [47]

Another area regarding Baldwin was the analysis of Baldwin's gay novels: *Just Above My Head, Giovanni's Room, Go Tel it on the Mountain, and Another Country.* Labeled a "sex pervert" by the FBI James Baldwin gave gay men in the 1970s portrayals of themselves in the pages of gay fiction as they encountered the imaginary world of James Baldwin. I used this analysis as the launching point to reevaluate Baldwin as the connection between black liberation and queer liberation.[48]

In Chapter Three titled "Payne and Pulp" Mumford explained how psychiatrist Herbert Hendin argued for the importance of James Baldwin's *Another Country*. Hendin encountered several homosexuals as he studied the causes of increased suicide among black Americans. Hendin advocated for Baldwin's novel was great because it explored both "the racial significance of suicide and male homosexuality…and the importance of the white male to the black homosexual." What is significant about Mumford's narrative on Baldwin's work is the way he discussed Baldwin's "brand of masculinity" and ideals against Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* in the Chapter Four titled, "The Limits of Liberation." This chapter explores the black gay male identity and condition because it was often in opposition to the redeeming nature of black masculinity put forth by respectability politics seen in the Southern based Civil Rights movement and the intense focus on manliness and masculinism evidenced in black power groups like the

[47] Ibid., 23.
[48] Ibid., 28

Black Panther Party. It was in the Black Panther Party where Cleaver attacked Baldwin's writings and sexual orientation. Mumford stated, "Yet like Rustin, Baldwin was marginalized by a politics of masculinity that circumscribed his engagement with black power, particularly the conception of black masculinity advanced by Eldridge Cleaver." He explained that Cleaver saw the black homosexual as a victim of psychological castration by the white man especially when a black gay man took a white man as his lover. In my own work, this critique by Cleaver queered him as well as the Black Power movement, a significant moment in Black Liberation. [49]

What was fascinating about Baldwin and Cleaver and the faces of the black liberation struggle advanced differing ideals regarding the black male body. Mumford stated, Baldwin responded to Cleaver with, "My real difficulty with Cleaver, sadly, was visited on me by the kids who were following him, while he was calling me a faggot and the rest of it, I had to try to undo the damaged I considered he was doing." Indeed, the black power rhetoric and the reality deemed "respectability" and sexual restraint as the purview of the integrationist or the racial sellout. In addition, and that this redefinition of black masculinity in the 1960s and 1970s reconstructed the meaning of being a black gay man in negative ways. This reconstructing of toxic masculinity was part of the many reasons why black liberation during the 1960s and 1970s faced limitations. It was not inclusive to the multiple ways in which blackness can be identified. Regarding both the civil rights movement and Second Wave feminist movement the statement, "All the blacks are men, and the women are white" speaks to the reality of the marginalization of queer black men and black women in both of these movements. Mumford ended his narrative surrounding Eldridge Cleaver and James Baldwin by arguing, "In the end, Cleaver's words had divided America in new ways around race and sexuality, gradually reversing the popular

[49] Ibid., 84-87.

embrace of James Baldwin's *Another Country*, with its seemingly naïve utopian dreams of infinite mutations of social difference leading to recognition of black and white interdependence. The extraordinary controversy sparked by *Soul on Ice*, perhaps most especially the conservative backlash, had transformed a deeply homophobic text into the *Catcher in the Rye* of the sixties generation." [50]

The two waves of historiography dealt with the topics of Black Power, Black Liberation, masculinity, and Gay Liberation with different theories and ideologies. Earlier works in the first wave dealt with key figures in the formation of the rhetoric, history, and politics of the Black Power movement. The second wave added to the historiography by presenting the history of the formation of black male identity and inserting the contributions of queer black men and women into the field of Black history and African American Studies. My work will build on both of these waves in the forging of a new wave that features a discussion of liberation movements and how these various movements can be queered.

[50] Ibid., 85-86.

Chapter 2: Amiri Baraka's Queered Brand of Masculinity

Roywilkins is an eternal faggot
His spirit is a faggot
His projection
And image, this is
To say, that If I ever see roywilkins
On the sidewalks
Imonna
Stick half my sandal
Up his ass[51]-Imamu Amiri Baraka

In the summer of 1966, the Black Power movement emerged in part to demonstrate discontent within the Civil Rights movement. Stokely Carmichael, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's new chairman, represented the heroic symbol that inspired this period of liberation. "Black Power" became the ultimate call for black freedom during a decade of worldwide challenges to colonization in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Due to the need to rescue and redeem a form of black masculinity that had been shaped by white supremacy, many black men "performed" a savior and messiah role within black liberation. Indeed, they became heroic figures as they practiced what I deem "black hero masculinities."

This chapter argues for a "queered" Black Power movement connecting Black Liberation and Gay Liberation. My work will examine performances of black masculinity within literature of the Black Arts Movement. I assess whether the Black Power movement's emphasis on machismo and hyper masculine performances of manhood represented a queer longing for a heroic male figure. What I term as "queer" is an act or identity that goes against the western understanding of so-called "natural" sexuality where heterosexuality is defined by interaction with the opposite biological sex.[52] I focus on Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, and Eldridge

[51] Imamu Amiri Baraka, Selected Poetry of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 115.

[52] E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson, Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 5-7.

Cleaver as their raced and gendered bodies, their time in history, and their location intertwined. I argue that all three men critiqued the condition of their racial identities as they all sought to extend the freedoms practiced and performed by white male bodies. As they wrote to extend freedom to their black bodies, they queered black liberation.

Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones) connection to the black power movement began in 1966 with the Black Arts Convention in Detroit and the National Black Power Conference planning summit in Washington D.C. Under his leadership, black power better integrated elements of the black arts movement.[53] In 2003, E. Patrick Johnson furthered much of the groundwork for examining Amiri Baraka's homosexual or queer desires by discussing Ron Simmon's argument from his writing entitled, "Baraka's Dilemma." Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* presents Ron Simmon's argument regarding the queer sexual identity of Baraka. The source for Simmon's analysis originates from Baraka's pseudo autobiographical novel, *The System of Dante's Hell*.[54] In the work, Simmons and Johnson assert that Baraka's need to repudiate and condemn homosexuals resulted from his repression of his own queerness.

I argue that scholars should take this idea further and expand on the meanings of Baraka's queerness. I suggest that Amiri Baraka's works give us a queer "door" to enter and a

[53] Komozi Woodard, A Nation within a nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1-3.

[54] Ron Simmons, "Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing Black Gay Intellectuals," in Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men, ed. Essex Hemphill (Boston: Alyson, 1991), 218. Simmons explains that Baraka's adolescent homosexual desires engendered his homophobia. It is not in *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* where Baraka discusses his homosexual desires. Simmons argues that in order to truly understand Baraka's obsession with condemning "faggots," while also repressing his attraction to men, an earlier work such as *The System of Dante's Hell* must be analyzed. Simmons states that *The System of Dante's Hell* is a story many "gay brothers" find relatable. He argues that once gay men read this work they lose their anger towards Baraka and instead feel sympathy because of the pain and fear associated with trying to maintain a hidden desire or "queer longing." Johnson states that Baraka's writings reveal "heterosexual melancholy, the loss of the one for whom he can never have." He goes on to examine the irony that "faggotry" manifests itself through the heterosexual designs of living where one must constantly disavow homosexuality in order to demonstrate heterosexuality.

"lens" to see and understand the black power movement as one that longed for and avoided certain performances of black masculinity.

While Johnson used performance to study blackness I will use the idea of performance to study the literature and essays of Amiri Baraka. I examine Baraka's "performances" and longing for black masculinity.[55] Historically, the black power movement has been portrayed as a movement that focused on redeeming black masculinity. Within this example of black liberation, black men represented protectors and leaders of the black race. The Black Panther Party embodied the focus on the masculine: applauding machismo, the taking up of the gun, sexism, and the rhetoric of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver helped to "perform" the Black Power movement's authentic brand of black masculinity.

My notion of "queer longings" builds on E. Patrick Johnson's explanation of Judith Butler's continuation of Sigmund Freud theories of mourning and melancholia. Queer longing represents the melancholia manifested by way of the "unconscious as an unacknowledged loss of a love-object and therefore a refusal to grieve this loss."[56] Johnson supports Butler's notion where the ungrieved love of heterosexuality signifies homosexuality, which then becomes a site of simultaneous identification and repudiation of "heterosexual men" like Amiri Baraka. Indeed, in their rejection of the homosexual these men demonstrate "queer longing."[57] By examining the works of Amiri Baraka I demonstrate that the black power movement in its need for what I term "black hero masculinities" provides a queer subtext to understand the black power movement due to this "heterosexual melancholy." This heterosexual melancholy results from the historical

[55] I use the idea of "performance" the way E. Patrick Johnson does in his work, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity.* In this work Johnson defines performance as interpreting different sites of performed "blackness" where some performances of black people are viewed and understood as genuine and preferred.

[56] E. Patrick Johnson, 49

[57] E. Patrick Johnson, 49.

defining of black masculinity as infantile, cowardly, and counterrevolutionary by European colonizers in the years before Third World liberation. The masculinity, which Third World Liberation movements modeled their performances after, represents the ideas of those who colonized them.

Amiri Baraka's queer longings for a "black hero masculinity" included black men and those from other colonized regions around the globe such as men within Third World Liberation movements. The breaking of colonial chains across Latin America, Africa, and Asia connected these notions of manhood to Baraka. In Baraka's book, *Home: Social Essays* evidence for his desire for a heroic male figure is seen in his historic visit to Cuba with Robert Williams, Harold Cruse, John Henrick Clarke, Sarah Wright, Ed Clark, Julian Mayfield, and Dr. Ana Codero. Fidel Castro and Robert Williams represent the heroic figures in this essay.

Baraka's queer longings for the "heroic" Williams and Castro appear in his essay, "Cuba Libre*"* (1960). Robert Williams stood up to the Ku Klux Klan in Monroe, North Carolina, where he also became the head of the state's NAACP branch. Baraka made note of his refusal to adopt "passive resistance." This form of resistance, was a key component of Reverend Martin Luther King, a tactic that placed King on the side of the white middle-class society. Williams potentially set the cast or model that other men later filled in regards to heroic black performances of masculinity. He described his encounter with Williams, "I was most interested in the tall man. His name, Robert Williams, was vaguely familiar." [58] This essay took place years before the Black Power movement but it is important to see the habits, trends, and queer longings within Baraka's writing in the early part of the decade. Other instances of Baraka's queer longings exist in the same essay. While in Cuba, Baraka encountered another heroic performance of

[58] LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc 1966), 30.

masculinity when laughing and talking with a female model. While they conversed, a male soldier walked up and engaged the group:

> The Captain did his best to answer all of them. While he was doing this the model leaned over to me and whispered, "God, he's beautiful! Why're all these guys so good-looking?" And she was right, he was beautiful. A tall, scholarly looking man with black hair and full black beard, he talked deliberately but brightly about everything, now and then emphasizing a point by bringing his hand together and wringing them in slow motion, something like college professors. He wore the uniform of the rebel army with the black and red shoulder insignia of a captain. A black beret was tucked neatly in one of his epaulets. He also carried a big square-handled .45.[59]

Baraka offered a very detailed description of the soldier that he also deemed attractive. He paid careful attention to the soldier's body, his clothing and his movements. Baraka did the same when he finally encountered Fidel Castro, which he described as the highlight of his visit to Cuba:

> He is an amazing speaker, knowing probably instinctively all the laws of dynamics and elocution. The speech began slowly and haltingly, each syllable being pronounced with equal stress as if he were reading a poem. He was standing with the campesino hat pushed back slightly off his forehead, both hands on the lectern. As he made his points, one of the hands would slide off the lectern and drop to his side, his voice becoming tighter and less warm. When the speech was really on its way, he dropped both hands from the lectern, putting one behind his back like a church usher, gesturing with the other. By now he would be rocking from side to side, point his finger at the crowd, at the sky, as his own chest.[60]

The evidence of queer longings within Baraka's "Cuba Libre" essay should not be ignored as mere admiration or a crush as some might label these interactions. They must be taken further and read as desires and longings for an ideal and heroic masculine figure. This figure also emerged within the painful reality and historical context of colonialism. Baraka identified a type of man that was desirable to him as a perfect leader. This man represented one that followed in the same heroic rebellious nature of Nat Turner, leader of a US slave rebellion in the 1830s.

[59] Ibid., 46-47.
[60] Ibid., 70.

These men were handsome, tall, bearded, and eloquent speakers that charmed crowds. Baraka's writings in the early part of the 1960s show the queer longings arose from the "melancholia." He demonstrated a desire for the "ideal," the need for what he understood as an authentic performance of heroic masculinity. Baraka's writings showed that the rhetoric and performances of the black power movement have the potential for being deemed queer. Indeed, there exists no explicitly stated queer identity in the rhetoric of the Black Power Movement. However, I argue that the homophobic statements by men within the Black Power Movement inadvertently queer the black liberation movement.

In a 1963 essay titled, "Brief Reflections on Two Hot Shots," Baraka mentioned James Baldwin and comments on his prestige and his reflections on the black experience in the United States. He discusses James Baldwin's usage of the word "individual" and how Baldwin and South African writer Peter Abraham's use of the word annoyed him. Baraka described undesirable performances of black masculinity by comparing them to white homosexual liberals:

> Earlier Mr. Abrahams spoke of the horror in South Africa as "the ugly war of color," and the idea of "the racial struggle" as "that horrible animal" curdles the blood when you realize it is coming from a black man, and not the innocent white liberal made fierce by homosexuality. Again the cry, the spavined whine and please of these Baldwins and Abrahams, is sickening past belief. Why should anyone think of these men as individuals? Merely because they are able to shriek the shriek of a fashionable international body of white-middle class society? Joan of Arc of the cocktail party is what is being presented through the writings and postures of men like these.[61]

This essay is important because here, Baraka connects himself in opposition to other black writers and as well as their brands of masculinity. The "heroic masculinity" performance of manhood illustrates the ideal because it did not align itself with the power structures of the West. To Baraka, Baldwin and Abraham represented undesirable men because their message echoes the rhetoric of white liberal "homosexuals." Baraka identified and linked homosexuality to white

[61] Ibid.,138.

liberals and compared the voices of Baldwin and Abrahams as effeminate "shrieks" for the white-middle class group. In his essay on Cuba, the heroic masculinities represented performances of manhood that challenged the white-middle class group. In revealing his "deal breakers" or undesirable traits in men he confirmed, supported, and sustained what he desired: masculinity that performed like Robert Williams. This form of masculinity had the power to save and redeem the black masses. Baraka admired Williams' condemnation of the United States:

> In most interviews Williams put down the present administration of the US very violently for its aberrant foreign policy and its hypocritical attitude on what is called "The Negro Question." He impressed almost all of Cuba with the force of his own personality and the patent hopelessness of official Uncle Sham.[62]

Baraka's description of Fidel Castro mirrors his one of Robert Williams' performance of heroic masculinity:

> At first softly, with the syllables drawn out and precisely enunciated, then tightening his voice and going into an almost musical rearrangement of his speech. He condemned Eisenhower, Nixon, the South, the Monroe Doctrine, the Platt Amendment, and Fulgencio Batista in one long, unbelievable sentence. The crowd interrupted again, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel, Fidel." He leaned away from the lectern grinning at the chief army.[63]

With this passage, Baraka showed that his brand of masculinity is one that is heroic and rebellious to dominant western power structure. Baraka's writings revealed heterosexual melancholy, as Johnson described as the "loss of the one whom he can never have." Thus, Baraka's hero masculinities existed through continued disavowal of what he identified as homosexual liberal white masculinities. Baraka continued to mold his brand of black hero masculinities by detailing what men should not do. He described James Baldwin and Peter

[62] Ibid.,31.
[63] Ibid., 71.

Abraham as men who are "well-dressed, educated, and have their feelings easily hurt." He continued on to relegate their black male performances as white homosexual performances:

> Deadly simple. If Abraham and Baldwin were white, for example, there would be no more noise from them. Not because they consciously desire that, but because they could be sensitive in peace. Their color, is the only obstruction I can see to this state they seek, and I see no reason they should be denied it for so paltry a thing as heavy pigmentation. Somebody turn them! And then perhaps the rest of us can get down to the work at hand. Cutting throats![64]

Baraka described both the limits and freedoms of white and black men with his critiques of Baldwin and Abraham. Within America, white men are afforded a wide range of performances of their masculinity. Baraka understands that black men were not allowed to be sensitive or emotional. Colonization afforded black masculinity one performance: being strong and hardworking. In his essay titled, "a dark bag" he mentioned James Baldwin again, "For instance, part of every English sentence James Baldwin writes must be given over to telling a willing audience how sensitive and intelligent he is, in the face of terrible odds." [65]

Baraka talked about freedom and possibilities for black men in America being obtained (to his frustration) only by what the liberal white man gave him. Any black man who accepted this was undesirable:

What the liberal white man does is to open a door into the glittering mainstream of white American life as a possibility for the middle-class black man. All the Negro need do is renounce his history as pure social error and strive with the rest of the strivers, so that he too can help in erecting a monolithic syndrome of predictable social values, based on the economic power and hegemony of the American (Western) white man.[66]Baraka identified once again what he opposed, and also hoped to define and build power not under the influence of the western white

[64] Ibid., 141.
[65] Ibid.,144.
[66] Ibid., 157.

man. According to Baraka, white men were not true allies of black men. He explained that this war was fought between two classes of white men and negroes represented the pawns in the struggle:

> The battles are being waged now, between those white men who think the Negro is good for one thing and those who think he is good for another. This same fight went on during the early days of slavery between missionaries, those who would give the slave Christianity, thereby excusing the instance of slavery as a moral crusade (with concomitant economic advantages) and those who felt that as animals the black men had no need for God, since as animals they had no souls. This fight continues today, with the same emphasis. Except earlier times the liberal forces, the God-carriers, had only the house slave, or occasional freedman, to show off as end products of a benevolent Christian ethic, but now the Kennedys and the Rockefellers have a full-fledged black bourgeoisie to gesture toward as an indication of what the social utopic of the west should look like.[67]

Baraka's social and political essays in the 1960s demonstrated his queer longings. It is important to note that he, like other leaders of the period, understood and revealed that black men lived in a world where they were not free to perform the brand of masculinity similar to white men in the United States. One essay defended his claim that "black is a country" where he detailed again the only performances afforded to black men required one of cowardice and of service to whiteness, thus living without his manhood. The need to perform this heroic brand of masculinity only intensified because it was understood as a route to freedom and liberation. Baraka argued that in order for black men to obtain freedom they must "build their own paths." However, this queer longing simultaneously liberated as it confined. Baraka wanted freedom for heterosexual black men to perform and cash in on the same privileges that white heterosexual men enjoyed due to white supremacy and patriarchy. He recognized that some black men obtained their manhood but only by becoming the servant within the system of white supremacy. He queered and thus devalued the other performance of black masculinity that worked within the

[67] Ibid.,158.

white liberal system. Baraka stated that it would take all black men, willing to perform the same heroic brand of masculinity in order for them to obtain independence and freedom.[68] His poem about the death of Malcolm X connected his social and political essay to his black power literature. Here his queer longing supported a "shining prince" for black power revolutionaries to follow. Black Power activists continue to reference Malcolm X as the heroic revolutionary masculine figure needed to guide the black masses to liberation. In his poem, "A Poem for Black Hearts" Baraka uplifted Malcolm X as a "black god." Baraka even asserted that black men are faggots if they do not avenge his death**.**[69]

During the Black Power movement Baraka wrote play scripts and manuscripts that continued to represent his beliefs and longings on black masculinity. The black power movement influenced activists on the left, urban counterculture, and a long list of gay radicals. Amiri Baraka is not the only figure to idolize Malcolm X for his heroic revolutionary charisma. Manning Marable queered Malcolm X in his work, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* by providing evidence that Malcolm X engaged in homosexual acts during his rebellious youthful days. The black power movement required level of conformity to the ideals and rhetoric of the movement that included performances of black heterosexuality. The Black Power movement's disavowal of homosexuality only further supported their need to perform heroic black heterosexual masculinity. This repudiation of the homosexual excluded men like Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin, the latter coming into contact with Amiri Baraka at an event to celebrate the first anniversary of the Black Panther Party's takeover of the California State legislature with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Eldridge Cleaver endorsed the heroic performance of black

[68] Ibid., 105.

[69] LeRoi Jones, A Poem for Black Hearts, (1965) Box 1 Broadside Press Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries.

masculinity.[70] Baraka wrote dozens of plays during the Black Power movement at the end of the 1960s and well into the 1970s.

Baraka's continued references to homosexuality and demonstrated queer longing throughout his plays. In "Experimental Death Unit 1" he used the term "homosexual" as an insult to a character's manhood. In this play, two characters, Loco and Duff, engaged in conversation about the world. Duff stated, "The world is to the man who will take it." Loco explained how he despised beauty talks and how he hated those who called themselves artists. Duff retorted and told him that he does not respect the world and does not value it. According to Loco, the freaks were the artists. While they talked, a black woman appeared and joined the two men in conversation. She told them that she was "fresh outta idea alley" and, in that scene, Baraka had Duff insult the masculinity of Loco by calling him a homosexual in order to apprise the woman that she wasted her time propositioning him. Loco insisted that he was just eager and that he was not a homosexual. Duff, wondering if she was a real woman, asked, "are you what you look like?" wondering if she is a real woman. Loco wanted to have sex with the black woman and she called them queer because they debated whether to have sex with her or not. The black woman was very sexual and allowed them to have sex with her in the hallway. Duff called the woman a whore, and she continued to tease both of the men. Loco told Duff that he should have sex with the woman, and Duff told him that his manhood or "dick" was his worth. Duff understood that as a black man his sexuality gave him value.[71]

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[70] Kevin J. Mumford, Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press: 2016) 79-82.

[71] LeRoi Jones, Experimental Death Unit 1, (1967) Box 2 of 4 Amiri Baraka Collection of play scripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Baraka revealed in *Experimental Death Unit 1* that a black man's worth was tied to his sexuality. To be a homosexual was to be weak and worthless. This trend where the word homosexual or faggot represents an insult continued to be a major characteristic throughout his plays. Baraka limited the potential freedom of black masculinity when he wrote about men in this way. He constantly disavowed homosexuality to support heterosexuality as the natural norm for black men, thus queering them.

In his 1967 play, *Madheart,* Baraka told the story of a Black Man as he interacted with a Devil Lady- a white woman and three black women named Sister, Mother, and Woman. In the early lines of the script Baraka used the word "fag" while narrating the voices that talked while music is playing. "Music again, over all, the high beautiful falsetto of a fag. The traditional love song completely taking over."[72] Baraka used the stereotypical queer mannerisms as a point of reference and described how queer men's voices sound. Baraka revealed that he was aware of the vocal performances of queer men. The Black Man and the Devil Lady continued to engage in dialogue and the black women entered, and he revealed that the black sister wanted to be like a white woman. In this play, Baraka revealed a performance of black masculinity in line with his other descriptions throughout his writings. Here, this particular Black Man's character took ownership in the respectability and authenticity of the women of the black race. His understanding of his manhood required that he police the bodies of black women. The Black Man said:

> I used to see her in white discotheque boots and sailor pants. (Pointing to the crawling women) This is the nightmare in all of our hearts. Our mothers and sisters groveling to white women, wanting to be white women, dead and hardly breathing on the floor. Look at our women dirtying themselves. (Runs and grabs wig off of Sisters's head) Take off filth. (He throws it onto the dead Woman's body) Take your animal fur, heathen.

[72] LeRoi Jones, Madheart, (1967) Box 1 of 4 Amiri Baraka Collection of play scripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

> (Laughs) Heathen. Heathen. I've made a new meaning. Let the audience think about themselves, and about their lives when they leave this happening. This black world of purest possibility.[73]

Baraka allowed the black man to rebuke and save the black woman in this scene. This performance of masculinity represented the brand of masculinity that he longed for. One that can be a savior and rebel all at once: a true "black Jesus." Baraka also revealed that the black world could be one of possibilities. When he talked of possibilities he talked about freedom. Freedom to be one's self in the purest form. Although he continually disavowed homosexuality in his writings, the heterosexual melancholia was evident in his repudiation of homosexuality. For Baraka to constantly reference homosexuality via slurs like "fag" suggested that he was aware that black masculinity does indeed have many possibilities. In his quest to limit it to one heroic performance he in turn recognized the many variances of black masculinity. The rest of the play continues with the themes of heroic black masculinity where the black man's character continued to speak of black women belonging to him while he saved and protected these women from themselves by way of the language of authenticity and respectability. Baraka inscribed the performance of limited masculinity onto the black male body which in turn limited others.

The 1968 play, *Police* by Amiri Baraka, continued with a similar theme of black masculinity. In this play a Black Police officer talked about why he does not understand why he hurts people. When the officer spoke he took out a "paper penis pistol" and a white cop came and told him he was a savage. The black people in this play remained at odds with the black police officer. They called him a murderer of sanity and insisted on reporting him. The black woman and the young black girl talked about the black cop being a murder of them for the "White folks." The young girl even told the black woman to use her "whip" on the black cop.

[73] LeRoi Jones, Madheart (1967) Box 1 of 4 Amiri Baraka Collection of play scripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

While the black police officer seduced the black woman, the white cops in the background were "sucking breath like fags contemplating joint" and jumping up in down in apparent pleasure from the scene unfolding around them. The play's final scene showed that the black cop committed suicide from the suggestion and seduction of the black woman. The young black girl told the cops to keep the body, and the black woman declared that she was off to find a good black man. The play ended with the white cops consuming the flesh of the black police officer.[74]

Baraka's play shows the undesirable performance of black masculinity. This performance proved similar to the "Baldwins and Abrahams" in line with the white liberals, emotional, and sensitive. Any black man that allied himself with any aspect of whiteness represented both a traitor to himself and his people. According to Baraka, this degradation of black masculinity impressed the white power structure so much that they got pleasure from the chasm this performance created between the black man and his people. The cops moaned in pleasure as the black woman took control and instructed the black man to kill himself. He was no longer genuine or authentic because the black woman who soon discarded him in search of a "real black man: emasculated him. The undesirable performance of black masculinity devoured and consumed this black.

In sum, *Amiri Baraka's Queered Brand of Masculinity* manifested in his longing for a "heroic masculine" figure that challenged the white power structure embodied by western democracy. Men such as Fidel Castro and Robert Williams were the best of his brand. This longing resulted from the historic reality of colonization that shaped and defined black masculinity as cowardly, infantile, and counterrevolutionary. His longing was queer due to his repudiation of masculine performances he "othered" as undesirable because these performances

[74] Amiri Baraka, *Police March 7, 1967* Box 2 of 4 Amiri Baraka Collection of play scripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

supplanted the structure of white masculinity. Baraka's works supplied us the platform or a method to see his queer desire that came from his grief from his inability to love the "queer other." Homosexuality that became a site of simultaneous identification and repudiation of "heterosexual men" like Amiri Baraka. Indeed, in his rejection of the homosexual Baraka demonstrated "queer longing" while he built up his brand of black masculinity. Baraka's "eternal faggots" like Roy Wilkins signaled the worst of the different brands of black masculinity writers within the black power movement. Baraka revealed the "failings" of black masculinity.[75]

In his simultaneous denial of his queerness, the repudiation of it, and his branding of what he longed for Baraka like Eldridge Cleaver demonstrated that part of the black power movement was organized a rhetoric that stated that, "Hey this is the man for me. This man is my man, the one to liberate us." The queered black power movement found life in the writers, to fully understand this movement we must move beyond the histories that have confined these men for so long. The movement was more than just masculinism, it featured a queer branding of masculinity that was longed by the movement in whole.

[75] Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. (New York: Oxford, 1996), 49.

Chapter 3: James Baldwin's Queered Brand of Masculinity

"A nigger, said his father, lives his whole life, lives and dies according to a beat. Shit, he humps to that beat and the baby he throws up in there, well, he jumps to it and comes out nine months later like a goddamn tambourine." -James Baldwin, Another Country

"The fact that Americans consider it a disease says more about them than it says about homosexuality." -*James Baldwin*

"White man's masculinity depends on a denial of the masculinity of the blacks." -James Baldwin "Letter from a Region in My Mind"

A few years before the birth of the Black Power movement some historians located the genesis of black gay activism in a 1963 meeting between Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Bayard Rustin with Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The three queer radicals entered a meeting full of emotion and resolve. Historian Kevin J. Mumford, stated in *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (2016) the shock felt from Robert Kennedy by "the vehemence of the young members of the contingent, and in turn the press portrayed the scene as a crisis that raised questions about his capacity to deal with race issues" It was James Baldwin who became a "formidable combatant of the government" and Hansberry charged the government with "worrying about specimens of white manhood."[76] James Baldwin similar to Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver represented the "queered" embodiment of black liberation with a "queered" brand of masculinity that would see itself in a performance, a cadence, and a conversation with the disavowed and secreted queer performances of black masculinity within the eventual Black Power movement.

This chapter argues for a variant of the queered performance of masculinity that connects Black Liberation and Gay Liberation. My work will examine performances of black masculinity within the literature and works of fiction of James Baldwin. I asses the conversations between

[76] Mumford, 11-13.

Baldwin's brand of masculinity to those within the Black Power movement. James Baldwin desired a freer space to find himself and pursue his longings. The space he found was in Paris, France. There, in exile Baldwin defined his gay black identity. He found his literary voice and enjoyed relationships with other men. Per an interview with *Mademoiselle,* in the early 1960s, his interview questions revealed James Baldwin revealed he had a two-fold obsession: "color and homosexuality." While dodging further questions into his own sexual identity, Baldwin turned the conversation towards masculinity. Kevin J. Mumford explained that through his writing he cast heterosexuality and homosexuality as symbolic problems of love rather than sources of personal identification. To place James Baldwin as a poster child for gay liberation would be a mischaracterization. During the Black Power movement, and a year after the Stonewall Riots Baldwin remained skeptical of Gay liberation. In an interview, he said, "I'm very glad that it seems to be easier for a boy to admit that he's in love with a boy…instead of what happened in my generation, [where] you had kids going on to the needle because they were afraid that they might want to go to bed with someone of the same sex."[77] James Baldwin must be understood as an anomaly to both movements. Primarily because he worked, wrote, and maintained a precarious existence in the gray area between both movements. This resulted from the reality of the lack of his integration into the civil rights movement (and the historiography) due to his queerness and because he never placed himself within the Gay Liberation movement.

James Baldwin performed straightness and kept his queerness in the background during the unfolding of the Southern based civil rights movement instead of confronting the homophobes he worked with to fight against racism. Therefore, I suggest we analyze the literature and writings of James Baldwin as a lens to understand and bridge gay liberation and

[77] Ibid., 22-23.

black liberation. We can do this by exploring the simultaneous conversations he creates about blackness and queerness to forge a new understanding of the Black Power movement. A queered movement.

The source material for this analysis comes from Baldwin's novels *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), and *Another Country* (1962) and several of his social essays. In the first work of fiction, Baldwin himself claimed that it was filled with homosexual themes that were missed by the reviewers of his book. There within *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, the reader experiences queerness and blackness together along with and Baldwin's unique brand of heroic black masculinity. In *Giovanni's Room* Baldwin took on what some labeled "whiteface" to explore a toxic homosexual relationship between a white American man and an Italian man and the problems of gay love. What Baldwin provided in *Another Country* was a jarring work of fiction filled with tragedy and interracial love. This work explored performances of black masculinity, queer longing, and conversations about race and human sexuality. This work forced a conversation and a connection of sorts between the Black Power writers Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver. I argue that, James Baldwin's queered brand of masculinity was heroic in nature because of the freedom he took with his characters. Baldwin never outwardly disavowed homosexuality or his own queerness. This was the same freedom, that Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver long for in their own writings and activism but due to their disavowal and repudiation of their own queerness, they limited themselves and the subjects of blackness in their works. The queerness is the longing for a heroic brand of masculinity that could act with the same freedoms as white masculinity within the democracy of the United States.

Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is not only a work of fiction but a pseudo-autobiography almost in the same way that *The System of Dante's Hell* was for Amiri

Baraka. While Baraka remained occupied with disavowing his own queerness and unintentionally queering himself while condemning homosexuals, James Baldwin focused on freeing his imagination through his novels and construction of masculinity enough to liberate certain characters in his work. Baldwin used fiction to create his brand of black masculinity, both as a space socially and historically constructed by forces outside of its control as a mechanism to explore themes of race, class, and sexuality. In *Go Tell it on The Mountain*, which many reviewers praised him by stating he was the "heir apparent of Richard Wright" Baldwin examined queer longing, race, and black masculinity through several of the characters in this story. In Part One, fourteen-year old John was a young black boy coming to terms with his sexual identity while experiencing his boyhood as the stepson of a Pentecostal minister at a storefront church in Harlem.

Baldwin, allowed John to consider and wonder about his attraction to Elisha, an older boy at the church he attends. John admired Elisha's masculine performance:

> John stared at Elisha all during the lesson, admiring the leanness, and grace, and strength, and darkness of Elisha in his Sunday suit, wondering if he would ever be holy as Elisha was holy. But he did not follow the lesson, and when, sometimes, Elisha paused to ask John a question, John was ashamed and confused, feeling the palms of his hands become wet and his heart pound like a hammer. Elisha would smile and reprimand him gently, and the lesson would go on.[78]

In just the first part of his book, Baldwin explored a two-fold theme of freedom and queerness. Through John we see the first stirrings of same-sex desire in an adolescent boy as he processed these new emotions. John watched those in attendance at the church and thought, "On Sunday mornings the women all seemed patient, all the men seemed mighty" there was more queer desire from John as he focused on the "mightiness" of Elisha:

> The tambourines raced to fill the vacuum left by his silent piano, and his cry drew answering cries. Then he was on his feet, turning, blind, his face congested, contorted

[78] James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), 6.

> with this rage, and the muscles leaping and swelling in his long, dark neck. It seemed that he could not breathe, that his body could not contain this passion, that he would be, before their eyes, dispersed into the waiting air. His hands, rigid to the very fingertips, moved outward and back against his hips, his sightless eyes looked upward and he began to dance. Then his hands closed into fists, and his head snapped downward, his sweat loosening the grease that slicked down his hair; and the rhythm of all the others quickened to match Elisha's rhythm; his thighs moved terribly against the cloth of his suit, his heels beat on the floor, and his fists moved beside his body as they were beating his own drum.[79]

As John watched another black body, Baldwin granted this young black boy with the freedom to long in the same sense that Black Power writers like Amiri Baraka admired in men like Fidel Castro. Through his fiction, Baldwin allowed us to see a vivid description of Elisha just as Amiri Baraka did for Castro in one of his social essays about his visit to Cuba. What Baraka did in real life is what Baldwin freed himself to do in his own fiction: queer longing with John's character. Reading through his novel, John reflected about an incident in his youth that displayed a queer act and further supplanted his queer longings throughout the story:

> He had sinned. In spite of the saints, his mother and his father, the warnings he had heard from his earliest beginnings, he had sinned with his hands a sin that was hard to forgive. In the school lavatory, alone, thinking of the boys, older, bigger, braver, who made bets with each other as to whose urine could arch higher, he had watched in himself a transformation of which he could never dare to speak.[80]

John pondered from the arousal he received from observing the genitals of older boys at school. He got much satisfaction from what he witnessed that he masturbated. In some way, to the reader, he "consummated" his queerness or becomes queer. Baldwin, used the mind of John to map queerness onto blackness which allowed him to further consider his longings for Elisha. Both bodies meet, the "mighty masculinity" of Elisha wrestles and tussles with the curious John after some playful banter over where to store the cleaning utensils the boys used to clean the

[79] Ibid., 8.
[80] Ibid., 11.

church. Here, the church in Harlem is a location that two performances of masculinity collide in a free moment of exploration:

> Elisha let fall the stiff gray mop and rushed at John, catching him off balance and lifting him from the floor. With both arms tightening around John's waist he tried to cut John's breath, watching him meanwhile with a smile that, as John struggled and squirmed, became a set, ferocious grimace. With both hands John pushed and pounded against the shoulders and biceps of Elisha, and tried to thrust with his knees against Elisha's belly. Usually such a battle was soon over, since Elisha was so much bigger and stronger and as a wrestler so much more skilled; but tonight John was filled with a determination not to be conquered, or at least to make the conquest dear. With all the strength that was in him he fought against Elisha and was filled with a strength that was almost hatred. He kicked, pounded, twisted, pushed, using his lack of size to confound and exasperate Elisha, whose damp fists, joined at the small of John's back, soon slipped. It was a deadlock; he could not tighten his hold, John could not break it. And so they turned, battling in the narrow room, and the odor of Elisha's sweat was heavy in John's nostrils. He saw the veins rise on Elisha's forehead and in his neck.; his breath became jagged and harsh, and the grimace on his face became more cruel; and John, watching these manifestations of power, was filled with a wild delight. They stumbled against the folding-chairs, and Elisha's foot slipped and his hold broke. They stared at each other, half-grinning. John slumped to the floor, holding his head between his hands.[81]

In the above scene, we see what will eventually become a similar formula for the sex scenes Baldwin wrote in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*. I posit that this scene must be read as a pseudo-sex scene between two free black boys. This scene unfolded with symbols and the use of all five senses. It followed the four stages of intercourse: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. Excitement between John and Elisha, symbolized by the "stiff gray mop" which ca*n* be seen as an eroticized and erect phallus. Next the plateau, the coupling between the two boys with the placement of Elisha's arms around John's waist. The two, struggle together in a similar fashion to the Greco-Roman wrestlers with the smaller John determined not to be conquered or take on the role of passivity. In this passage, John thought of Elisha's strong shoulders and biceps, and Baldwin eroticized the manly and athletic prowess of the Elisha. Through John's sense of smell, he took in the pheromones of sex during the plateau stage of sexual intercourse

[81] Ibid., 48

with the odor of Elisha's sweat in his nostrils. Orgasm occurred as Baldwin described the "wild delight" John felt watching Elisha's face change. Finally, resolution occurs, after the climax and left both boys "half-grinning" at each other in apparent bliss.

Baldwin not only explored queer themes within *Go Tell it On the Mountain* but he spoke of a specific type of black masculinity through the actions and inner dialogue of all of his characters. The platform for this definition of black masculinity located itself in the context of the black church. In his imagining of his brand of masculinity he cited the location of the church like a jail, a place that denied freedom. Early in the novel, John's half-brother Roy was in a heated conversation with their mother over how his father (John's stepfather) treated him. Their mother discussed how their father was trying to keep them safe and out of trouble. Roy interpreted this as confinement and responds with, "I ain't looking to go to no jail. You think that's all that's in the world is jails and churches? You ought to know better than that." [82] Both John and Roy wanted nothing of the masculine inheritance of his father. Both black boys, wanted freedom to perform their own masculinity. John longed to be a free individual. He did not want to be like his father, he wanted another life. Just as Baldwin exiled himself to France to find a gay identity, the same held true for John. During all the queer longing for Elisha he wanted a free queer existence and dreamt of it:

> John, who was, his father said, ugly, who was always the smallest boy in his class, and who had no friends, became immediately beautiful, tall, and popular. People fell all over themselves to meet John Grimes. He was a poet, or a college president, or a movie star; he drank expensive whisky, and he smoked Lucky Strike cigarettes in the green package.[83]

John longed for a chance to be free to explore his own brand masculinity. Baldwin used the word, "individual" as a stand in for queer. There was something different about John, something

[82] Ibid., 18.
[83] Ibid., 12.

unique. John recalled a time when he was five and the school principal came into his classroom. The principal told John that he was a very bright boy:

> That moment gave him, from that time on, if not a weapon at least a shield; he apprehended totally, without belief or understanding, that he had in himself a power that other people lacked; that he could use this to save himself, to raise himself; and that, perhaps, with this power he might one day win that love which he so longed for. This was not, in John, a faith subject to death or alteration, nor yet a hope subject to destruction; it was his identity, and part, therefore, of that wickedness for which his father beat him and to which he clung in order to withstand his father. His father's arm, rising and falling, might make him cry, and that voice might cause him to tremble; yet his father could never be entirely the victor, for John cherished something that his father could not reach. It was his hatred and his intelligence that he cherished, the one feeding the other.[84]

John used his desire to be an individual, his longing to be free to defend himself against the oppressive performance of his father's masculinity. John and his half-brother Roy, in their longings for freedom clash with their father. Roy's clash becomes near violent after he witnesses him strike their mother after a heated exchange over their inability to control the movement and behavior of Roy. Their father, Gabriel with all his "masculine might" slapped their mother across the face. Roy responds, "Don't you slap my mother. That's my mother. You slap her again, you black bastard, and I swear to God I'll kill you." [85] After the explosive scene where, Gabriel the father figure moved away from his wife to Roy and beat him. John left to go to the church which became a place for his queer longings. There he encounters Elisha and the two clean the church, and Elisha's presence has a calming effect on John and the two wrestle.

After the first part of this novel, Baldwin articulated more of his complex brand of masculinity throughout the second part of the book. *The Prayers of the Saints* the book is divided into three prayers: Florence's Prayer, Gabriel's Prayer, and Elizabeth's Prayer. Each section followed the inner dialogue and point of view of these characters. Florence was the sister of

[84] Ibid., 12-13.
[85] Ibid., 42-43.

Gabriel. Gabriel was the father and step father to Elizabeth's children, and Elizabeth was the wife of Gabriel and friend of Florence. Through these characters, Baldwin displayed performances of masculinity different from the performances witnessed through John and Roy.

In *Florence's Prayer* Baldwin relived an incident which demonstrated the vulnerability of black women to the predations and sexual assaults of white men. A major theme in the black power movement is longing for the heroic performance of black masculinity that protected black womanhood. Relieving what happened to Deborah was important in the context of what later happened with Deborah and Gabriel. Florence recalled a troubling event in town that day in the south:

> Their neighbor Deborah, who was sixteen, three years older than Florence, had been taken away into the fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her to make her cry and bleed. Today, Deborah's father had gone to one of the white men's houses, and said that he would kill him and all the other white men he could find. They had beaten him and left him for dead. Now, everyone had shut their doors, praying and waiting, for it was said that the white folks would come tonight and set fire to all the houses, as they had done before.[86]

Through this scene Baldwin let the reader know that he understood the historical reality of black men and women in the south and what happened to their bodies facing white supremacy.

The mother of Florence and Gabriel protected the performance of black masculinity. Baldwin understood that women expect a certain performance based in gender expectations for black men. To Florence, her freedom was consumed by the presence her younger brother. His maleness became the focal point:

> Gabriel was the apple of his mother's eye. If he had never been born, Florence might have looked forward to the day when she might be released from her unrewarding round of labor, when she might think of her own future and go out to make it. With the birth of Gabriel which occurred when she was five, her future was swallowed up. There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's-to which, since Gabriel was a man-child, all else must be sacrificed.[87]

[86] Ibid., 62
[87] Ibid., 67.

Baldwin revealed the envy that Florence felt as her mother placed all her energy into guiding Gabriel to an authentic masculine performance. Using Florence's envy, Baldwin showed that with white supremacy, it was black masculinity that needed guiding and nurturing because of the importance that black men play in the home. Florence saw her freedom to be her own individual person limited because of what her mother felt was more important, her bothers masculinity:

> Her mother did not, indeed, think of it as sacrifice, but as logic: Florence was a girl, and would by and by be married, and have children of her own, and all the duties of a woman; and this being so, her life in the cabin was the best possible preparation for her future life. But Gabriel was a man; he would go out one day into the world to do man's work, and he needed, therefore, meat, when they was any in the house, and clothes, whenever clothes could be bought, and the strong indulgence of womenfolk, so that he would know how to be with women when he had a wife. And he needed the education that Florence desired far more than he, and that she might have got if he had not been born. [88]

Within this brand of masculinity women were placed on the margins. After Deborah's rape, Florence and Deborah become close. With the bodies of women, Baldwin sheds light on the way masculinity valued and devalued the women through sexed notions:

> When men looked at Deborah they saw no further than her unlovely and violated body. In their eyes lived perpetually a lewd, uneasy wonder concerning the night she had been taken in the fields. That night had robbed her of the right to be considered a woman. No man would approach her in honor because she was living a reproach to herself and to all black women and to all black men. If she had been beautiful, and if God had not given her a spirit so demure, she might, with ironic gusto, have acted out that rape in the fields forever. Since she could not be considered a woman, she could only be looked on as a harlot, a source of delight more bestial and mysteries more shaking than any a proper woman could provide.[89]

Baldwin indicated that under this inherited performance of masculinity, black women were only valuable when they can maintain sexual purity. Under this new gaze from men, it was only something bestial or less than human that could want anything from her. He attached this gaze to biblical men and critiqued the characteristic of their performance of masculinity where women

[88] Ibid., 67.
[89] Ibid., 68.

maintain value through sexual purity. Through her bond with Deborah, Baldwin allowed Florence to express disgust with this brand of masculinity:

> And Florence, who was beautiful but did not look with favor on any of the black men who lusted after her, not wishing to exchange her mother's cabin for one of theirs and to raise their children and so go down, toil-blasted, into as it were a common grave, reinforced in Deborah the terrible belief against which no evidence had ever presented itself: that all men were like this, their thoughts rose no higher, and they lived only to gratify on the bodies of women their brutal and humiliating needs.[90]

Through the interactions with Florence and Deborah, Baldwin critiqued a performance of masculinity that was destructive to the bodies of women. Deborah endured the jeers from the black men she served in the church and Florence endured the character flaws of her husband. Florence left the south, and moved to the north and in marriage found herself at odds with men and the performance of their sexuality. Baldwin spoke of the continual process of "being and becoming" for black men. Masculinity was a project that was constantly worked on by men. Frank worked on himself when he could, much to the frustration of his wife. Florence felt that at one point in time that she had some control over him. Their marriage did not last, and her husband Frank died fighting in Europe during World War I. Reflecting on her marriage to Frank and his inability to do better or make himself more than what she felt he could be, Baldwin presented the problems with this brand of masculinity through Florence's perspective:

> There was something in her which loved to see him bow-when he came home, stinking with whisky, and crept with tears into her arms. Then he, so ultimately master, was mastered. And holding him in her arms while, finally, he slept, she thought with the sensations of luxury and power: "But there's lots of good in Frank. I just got to be patient and he'll come along all right." To "come along" meant that he would change his ways and consent to be the husband she had traveled so hard to find. It was he who, unforgivingly, taught her that there are people in the world for whom "coming along" is a perpetual process, people who are destined never to arrive. For ten years he came along, but when he left her the was the same man she had married. He had not changed at all.[91]

[90] Ibid., 68.
[91] Ibid., 78-79.

Baldwin's preferred type masculinity revealed itself in the hope and promises of the younger boys John and Roy. The performances that the older black men emulated represented the performances of western masculinity inherited from their colonial masters. It was this notion of masculinity that Baldwin problematized and showed to cause the of the division and strife in the relationships between black men and black women. Baldwin used the husband of Florence to demonstrate the imperfections in the performance of black masculinity. As Florence became upset with Frank for his lack of ambition they have a conversation centered around gender performance and expectation:

> Frank: "And what kind of man you think you married?"
> Florence: "I thought I married a man with some get up and go to him, who didn't just want to stay on the bottom all his life!"
> Frank: "And what you want me to do, Florence? You want me to turn white?"
> Florence: "You ain't got to be white to have some self-respect! You reckon I slave in this house like I do so you them common niggers can sit here every afternoon throwing ashes all over the floor?"

When Florence expressed that she wanted more from Frank, he responded by expressing that ambition and self-respect was something that white men had. Baldwin ended the section about Florence's part taking us back to the present where she was bowed in prayer at the church where her brother served in Harlem. Baldwin allowed more discussion of masculinity through the eyes of Gabriel in the next section. Going back in time, Gabriel is a twenty-one-year-old man married to Deborah, the friend of his older sister Florence. What was understood from this portion of the novel, was that Gabriel never intended to marry Deborah. Her life after her rape was one in devotion to God and to Gabriel. Gabriel read her performance of gender as one that is authentic. Baldwin created a critique of the most "God-fearing" black men in writing out a scene where a group of ministers offend Gabriel by mocking Deborah behind her back:

> But near the end of the dinner, when the women brought up the pies, and coffee, and cream, and when the talk around the table had become more jolly and more good-

> naturedly loose than ever, the door had but barely closed behind the women when on of the elders, a heavy, cheery, sandy-haired man, whose face, testifying no doubt to the violence of his beginnings, was splashed with freckles like dried blood, laughed and said, referring to Deborah, that there was a holy woman, all right! She had been choked so early on white men's milk, and it remained so sour in her belly yet, that she would never be able, now, to find a nagger who would let her taste his richer, sweeter substance. Everyone at the table roared, but Gabriel felt his blood turn cold that God's ministers should be guilty of such abominable levity, and that woman sent by God to comfort him, and without whose support he might readily have fallen by the wayside, should be held by such dishonor. They felt, he knew, that among themselves a little rude laugher could do no harm; they were too deeply rooted In the faith to be made to fall by such an insignificant tap from Satan's hammer. But he stared at their boisterous laughing faces, and felt they would have much to answer for on the day of judgment, for they were stumbling-stones in the path of the true believer.[92]

The religious black men in Baldwin's novel were flawed. They collectively devalue Deborah in front of Gabriel. Deborah was a woman lacking fulfillment because she could not get pregnant and bring forth black children. Continuing with the theme of flawed holy men, Baldwin used Gabriel to demonstrate issues with the inherited performance of the older men in his novel. An affair developed between Gabriel and Esther eventually leading to the creation of a child. Speaking through Esther, he branded a version of masculinity that was authentic when embracing carnal desires. In spite of the sin he felt he committed he gave in thanks to the critique of his manhood from Esther, "You ain't in the pulpit now. You's here with me. Even a reverend's got the right to take off his clothes sometime and act like a natural man." When Esther spoke of rights, she articulated the freedoms denied to black men that perform a religious brand of masculinity. As the affair continues, Esther becomes pregnant and Gabriel explains to her that he allowed himself to be tempted by a wicked woman. Again, through Esther Baldwin offered a critique of the masculinity of holy men, "You be careful," said Esther, "how you talk to me. I ain't the first girl's been ruined by a holy man, neither." Esther requested money from Gabriel so that she may leave town, get her mind right, and have her child. To Gabriel she says,

[92] Ibid., 104.

"I guess it takes a holy man to make a girl a real whore." Esther left town, gave birth to Gabriel's son and named him Royal. She returned to town only after death so she could be buried. Gabriel watched his son Royal grow up without ever letting the child know that he was his father.[93]

Within his first literary work, James Baldwin showcased performances of masculinity through men and boys coming of age. Through John, we saw queerness. Through Roy, we experienced a longing for freedom. Through the older men like Gabriel and Frank, we felt chained and problematic performances of masculinity that resulted from inheriting a performance of masculinity from western white men. Performances of masculinity and the discussions of queerness continue into Baldwin's next novel, *Giovanni's Room*. Unlike Go Tell it On the Mountain, the main characters are white, so although Baldwin abandons discussions of race he explores themes of masculinity and queerness.

In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin mapped queerness and freedom onto white characters and moves them across the ocean to Europe. Where a white American male, created a freer space to explore his sexuality in the room of Giovanni. As Baldwin took on "Whiteface" to openly explore themes of queerness he demonstrated an understanding on the limitations forced upon black masculinity. Back during the book's initial release in 1956, the reviews from the United States were negative and attacked the book for being "deviant." Presently, *Giovanni's Room* is considered a modern gay classic.[94]

In this work, Baldwin presented his brand of masculinity through several characters. His main character, David understood that he must complete certain checkpoints to ensure the authenticity of his manhood. He expressed that he asked his girlfriend, Hella to marry him so that

[93] Ibid., 121-130.
[94] Kevin Mumford, 27.

he may have someone "to be moored to" or in other words, Hella secured the heteronormative performance of masculinity that David reluctantly embraced. In the very beginning of the novel, it is easy to understand why David was looking to secure his masculinity-he was a "closeted" queer man. In his youth, David participated in what he called, "boyish, zestful affairs-which are really, when one thinks of it, a kind of higher, or anyway, more pretentious masturbation."[95] Baldwin presented David as a man that was at ease with his queerness. In his performance of his masculinity David appeared simultaneously bound and liberated. He seemed free in the sense that he identified within himself a fondness for one of the first boys he was intimate with, this boy's name was Joey:

> I started to move and to make some kind of joke but Joey mumbled something and I put my head down to hear. Joey raised his head as I lowered mine and we kissed, as it were, by accident. Then, for the first time in my life, I was really aware of another person's body, of another person's smell. We had our arms around each other. It was like holding in my hand some rare, exhausted, nearly doomed bird which I had miraculously happened to find. I was very frightened, I am sure he was frightened too, and we shut our eyes. To remember it so clearly, so painfully tonight tell me that I have never for an instant truly forgotten it. I feel in myself now a faint, dreadful stirring of what so overwhelmingly stirred in me then. Great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst. But out of this astounding intolerable pain came joy, we gave each other joy that night. It seemed, then, that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love.[96]

Like the pseudo-gay sex scene between John and Elisha in *Go Tell it On the Mountain* Baldwin involved all of the senses when his characters experienced intimacy. Without the disavowal of his queerness, Baldwin mapped freedom onto the bodies of David and Joey. Both boys were free to give each other joy. They were free enough in this brand of masculinity to give each other love. What was different between the literature of Baldwin, Baraka, and Cleaver was that queerness was not used a pejorative or slur. Queerness was presented as real human experience,

[95] James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Penguin Group, 1956), 4.
[96] Ibid., 6-7.

not used to slander men that do not fit into authentic performances of masculinity. With Baldwin, queerness was used as an identifier of free men. Throughout this novel, David existed in the gray area between free masculine performance and one that disavowed and hid as it chained itself to a heteronormative performance. Although, he admitted he enjoyed the "joy" he enjoyed between himself and Joey, that same queer love became a threat to his masculinity:

> But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: But Joey is a boy, I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood.[97]

David lamented over the disavowal of his manhood that followed when school was back in session and the summer break was over. He admitted that he lied to Joey about becoming involved with a girl. Baldwin used David to illustrate how disavowal of queerness manifested itself in the relationships between straight performing men and queer men: "I picked up with a rougher, older crowd and was very nasty to Joey, And the sadder this made him, the nastier I became. He moved away at least, out of the neighborhood, away from out school, and I never saw him again." [98] David became mired in heterosexual melancholy. He secretly longed-for Joey, but was constrained performance of masculinity prevented him from going further in his relationship with Joey.

Baldwin allowed the relationship between father and son to be one of the methods masculine performances are transmitted from generation to generation. Masculinity was not only a performance; it was something passed down and taught. Through the women in his novel, Baldwin created a space to critique the issues he had with the western brand of masculinity. David's father engaged in an affair, and his wife confronted him: "You've been with that girl,

[97] Ibid., 8.
[98] Ibid., 9.

Beatrice," said Ellen. "That's where you always are and that's where all your money goes and all your manhood and self-respect, too." Baldwin's women in *Giovanni's Room* see carnal men, ones that give in to their desires and perform their manhood in ways that they were socialized.[99]

David had freedom to travel, and Baldwin moved him to France due to the confining nature of the United States. David's home in America was a site of confinement and limitations. David, like Baldwin did in moved himself to France to "find himself." Through David, we see read a need to pursue the queer longings that were hidden and closeted in his heteronormative performance of masculinity. David expressed:

> Perhaps, as we say in America, I wanted to find myself. This is an interesting phrase, not current as far as I know in the language of any other people, which certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced. I think now that if I had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home. But again, I think I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France.[100]

What David misplaced was his queerness. In his disavowal of his homosexuality, David lost a part of himself, a key part of his identity. His queerness was what he ran away from for so long in his performance of western heteronormative masculinity. Baldwin used David to show what a constant state of disavowal does to the psyche of queer men. When David arrived in France, he used openly queer characters to critique Americans and masculinity. David, disavowed his queerness and stated that he was only attracted to girls, and refused Jacques request requiring him to ask another man to join them for a drink. David was adamant that he does not "buy drinks for men." Jacques response was a critique of the not only masculinity but the connection between the disavowal of homosexuality and the need to perform a western performance of masculinity:

> I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that'-he paused- "that immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy. I only suggested that you invite him

[99] Ibid., 13.
[100] Ibid., 19.

> because he will most certainly refuse if I invite him." David continues to disavow his queerness by expressing one of his fears: "But man," I said, grinning "think of the confusion. He'll think that *I'm* the one who's lusting for his body. How do we get out of that?"[101]

In his first few months, David played what he considered a game of sorts with Jacques where he constantly disavowed his queerness much to the chagrin of Jacques. Finally, he lost the game when he met Giovanni. Immediately, David felt ashamed that his queer identity was out of the closet. Baldwin mapped freedom and possibilities onto the potential relationship between David and Giovanni:

> I wished, nevertheless, standing there at the bar, that I had been able to find in myself the force to turn and walk out-to have gone over to Montparnasse perhaps and picked up a girl. Any girl. I could not do it. I told myself all sorts of lies, standing there at the bar, but I could not move. And this was because I knew it did not really matter any more; it did not even matter if I never spoke to Giovanni again; for they had become visible, as visible as the wafers on the shirt of the flaming princess, they stormed all over me, my awakening, my insistent possibilities.[102]

Baldwin understood so intimately the inner turmoil that plagued men during this time period. He used his character David to simultaneously depict the captivity of sexual identity and the potential for its liberation. He allowed David the freedom to explore his thoughts on his identity and the immediate connection he felt he made at that moment with Giovanni. With the budding romance between David and Giovanni, he allowed his queer characters the freedom to touch each other: "Giovanni carelessly puts an arm around my shoulder." There was nothing holding his characters from innocently touching each other or embracing. This was a free performance of masculinity.[103]

Baldwin permitted the masculinity of David to drift between freedom and captivity throughout his novel. At one moment, he was explored his queerness at other times he

[101] Ibid., 27.
[102] Ibid., 37
[103] Ibid., 46.

disavowed it. This could be what Baldwin did while he lived in France, there he enjoyed encounters and affairs with men. It was in the United States where he focused on race issues with the Civil Rights Movement, yet he still wrote about queer experiences and realities. In one conversation between David and Jacques the two discuss David's relationship with Giovanni. David admitted he was not sure what Giovanni wanted from the friendship, and Jacques pressed him about the type of friendships and love affairs David previously engaged in. Jacques teased David as he powders his questions with, "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" David came to France to find what he admitted he lost-his queerness. His conversation with Jacques continued with advice from an openly queer man (Jacques) to a confined and conflicted queer man (David). Jacques encourages David to pursue queer love, and to allow Giovanni to love and that he should also love Giovanni. Jacques continues:

> Do you think anything else under the heaven really matters? And how long. At the best, can it last, since you are both men and still have everywhere to go? Only five minutes, I assure you, only five minutes, and most that, helas! In the dark. And if you think of them as dirty, then they will be dirty-they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. But you can make your time together anything but dirty, you can give each other something which will make both of you better-forever-if you will not be ashamed, if you will only not play it safe.[104]

In this scene Jacques implored David, that if he continued to think of the relationship and sex between himself and Giovanni as dirty then it will be dirty because he will not free himself enough to give himself over to his queer longings. David wanted to play it safe, to perform his masculinity in limiting ways and Jacques wanted him to do the opposite. Baldwin's band of masculinity took risk and was free to love as one pleases and chooses.

Baldwin used locations to map the themes freedom and confinement. In America, David was confined in his masculinity. In France, he was free to recover the queerness he hid away for

[104] Ibid., 50.

so long. In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin mapped freedom and confinement. The room mirrored the conflict occurring as David tries to free his manhood: "Hela was on her way back from Spain and my father had agreed to send me money, which I was not going to use to help Giovanni, who had done so much to help me. I was going to use it to escape his room."[105]

This room of Giovanni's represented the location of David's freed masculinity but also because of the need to disavow his queerness he feels the need to escape it. Queerness for David, is one of duality where freedom and confinement, constantly at odds with his need to perform masculinity. When David thought or discussed his queerness it was consistently around notions of cleanliness and filth. David worried about his fiancé finding out about the affair between Giovanni and himself. He told Giovanni that in America, there were dirty words for what they have been doing together. Giovanni responds:

> "If dirty words frighten you", said Giovanni, "I really do not know how you have managed to live for so long. People are full of dirty words. The only time they do not use them, most people I mean, is when they are describing something dirty." He paused and we watched each other. In spite of what he was saying he looked rather frightened himself. "If your countrymen think that privacy is a crime, so much the worse for your country." [106]

Baldwin used a foreigner, David to suggest that queerness was a matter that should be acted out in the privacy of one's own room. In short, it was not one's business what goes on in another's bedroom. The bedroom should be a free place for sexuality. Alongside the freedom occurring in the bedroom, Baldwin allowed David freedom to explore his thoughts on his awakened queerness. For David and Giovanni Baldwin allowed both men a chance to interact with each other in public spaces. While the two enjoyed each other's company, David realizes that Giovanni helped him to grow into his queerness. He also helped him to feel free in his queerness:

[105] Ibid., 68.
[106] Ibid., 72.

> Giovanni had awakened an itch, had released a gnaw in me. I realized it one afternoon, when I was taking him to work via the boulevard Montparnasse. We had brought a kilo of cherries and we were eating them as we walked along. We were both insufferably childish, and high-spirited that afternoon and the spectacle we presented, two grown me, jostling each other on the wide sidewalk, and aiming cherry-pips, as though they were spitballs, into each other's faces, must have been outrageous. And I realized that such childishness was fantastic at my age and the happiness out of which it sprang yet more so; for that moment I really loved Giovanni, who had never seemed more beautiful than he was that afternoon.

The above passage represented the fullness of Baldwin's queered brand of masculinity. David no longer held back and allowed himself to enjoy his time with Giovanni. David's queer longing led him across the ocean to a freer space and in that space where he found freedom and joy. With Giovanni, David was not afraid to openly perform this queer brand of masculinity. He achieved freedom with Giovanni:

> I saw that I might be willing to give a great deal not to lose that power. And I felt myself flow toward him, as a river rushes when the ice breaks up. Yet, at that very moment, there passed between us on the pavement another boy, a stranger, and I invested in him at once with Giovanni's beauty and what I felt for Giovanni I also felt for him. Giovanni saw this and saw my face and it made him laugh the more. I blushed and he kept laughing and then the boulevard, the light, the sound of his laughter turned into a scene from a nightmare. [107]

For a brief moment, David was free. Then he wondered, what this freed queerness of his means in the long run. He felt that he has changed into an insatiable beast:

> I kept looking at the trees, the light falling through the leaves. I felt sorrow and shame and panic and great bitterness. At the same time-it was part of my turmoil and also outside it-I felt the muscles in my neck tighten with the effort I was making not to turn my head and watch the boy diminish down the bright avenue. The beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again; but one day I would not be with Giovanni any more. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues, into what dark places? With this fearful intimation there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots. [108]

[107] Ibid., 74.

[108] Ibid., 74-75.

David briefly enjoyed freedom in his queered brand of masculinity, then the disavowal came and he quickly reneged on his queerness. David waned to explore his queerness but he worried that he turned into some kind of monstrous deviant. This time his disavowal made him hate David. As his hatred arose from his disavowal of his queerness continued. David in the space in Giovanni's room confronted his queerness and gender roles. David once felt free in this room where he and Giovanni lived together, now constrained by his queerness he wants out of it. He admitted that in the beginning his motives for moving into the room with Giovanni were mixed. David revealed that one of the main reasons was desperation. Baldwin suggested through David that a relationship between two men, was limited to the same gender performances:

> In the beginning, because the motives which led me to Giovanni's room were so mixed; had so little to do with his hopes and desires and were so deeply a part of my own desperation, I invented in myself a kind of pleasure in playing the housewife after Giovanni had gone to work. I threw out the paper, the bottles, the fantastic accumulation of trash, I examined the contents of the innumerable boxes and suitcases, and disposed them. But I am not a housewife-men can never be housewives.[109]

In the last phrase "men can never be housewives" there was a turn towards disavowal. Baldwin allowed David to confine himself once again into a performance of masculinity that obliterated the freedom and possibilities David toyed with throughout his novel. When a queer man attempted to follow a heteronormative performance of masculinity Baldwin revealed the turmoil that followed. At times David enjoyed Giovanni's touch and other times he vowed that he would never let Giovanni touch him again. When David's fiancé, Hella arrived Baldwin discussed gender roles through her chapter. Baldwin demonstrates through David that masculinity goes unchallenged when one is with a woman.

Ultimately with *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin showed us how masculinity created problems for queer men. We saw a glimpse of free masculinity whenever David allowed himself to explore

[109] Ibid., 78.

and the free space for his queerness. Baldwin used queer characters Jacques and Giovanni to coax David into his own articulation of his queered masculinity. With David, a white American male Baldwin revealed the dual nature of masculinity. The freed and the confined nature of performance. White supremacy afforded white men with diversity, allowing them to flirt with different notions of "being and becoming." A white man could continue to perform his masculinity in tradition of his forefathers or deviate from that by queering himself.

Baldwin took the themes of blackness, queerness, whiteness, and masculinity and placed them in a serious conversation with each other in his third novel, *Another Country*. His first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* had subtle references to queerness, his second *Giovanni's Room* featured openly queer characters, now his third novel takes the conversation further and linked themes and identities.

James Baldwin wrote of interracial love and the tragedy of love while exploring race, desire, and homosexuality in *Another Country*. Kevin J. Mumford stated in *Not Straight, Not White*,

> Set in contemporary New York, the sultry writing and drama of desire challenged readers to question the fixity of polarized dichotomies of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In what turned out to be a winning gamble, the best-selling 1962 novel delivered to is reader a black bisexual entertainer, Rufus, who engages in sexual relations with a young white man and white southern women while he pines for the attention of another white man.[110]

It is this work, that connected Baldwin to the Black power writers Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver. Baraka and Cleaver commented on this work of fiction later in their social essays primarily because they take issue with the presentation of the books black character, Rufus. In branding the masculinity of Rufus, Baldwin presented a queered brand of black masculinity. In his first work, we saw a young black boy John come to terms with his sexual

[110] Kevin Mumford, 25-26.

identity. In *Giovanni's Room*, we see the freedom of white masculinity to openly explore queerness, and in *Another Country*, we get somewhat of a merging between the characters of John from *Go Tell it On The Mountain* and David from *Giovanni's Room*. Rufus, was openly bisexual and operated with agency in *Another Country*:

> In reflecting on the character, Baldwin felt that Rufus was distinguished not by his bisexuality but rather by the agency with which he is endowed. As Baldwin put it, "There are no antecedents for him. Rufus was partly responsible for his own doom, and in presenting him as partly responsible, I was attempting to break out of the whole sentimental image of the afflicted nigger driven that way [to suicide] by white people."[111]

Baldwin understood that in his crafting of Rufus, there were no models of masculinity for him Rufus to emulate. Baldwin did the unheard of when writing about a black bisexual man with the freedom to make his own mistakes, and not succumb to his untimely end by white people. Baldwin gave him freedom in his queered brand of masculinity to take his own life and to end things on his terms. Baldwin used Rufus as an example of the potential hidden within black manhood. He created a conversation surrounding Rufus' blackness, queerness, and manhood with the other characters in the novel.

Baldwin introduced Rufus as a black man moving through white places relatively unseen. The first conversation about masculinity comes from Rufus thoughts about what his father told him about black men:

> A nigger, said his father, lives his whole life, lives and dies according to a beat. Shit, he humps to that beat and the baby he throws up in there, well, he jumps to it and comes out nine months later like a goddamn tambourine. The beat: hands, feet, tambourines, drums, pianos, laughter, curses, razor blades, the man stiffening with a laugh and a growl and a purr and the women moistening and softening with a whisper and a sigh and a cry. The beat- in Harlem in the summer time one could almost see it, shaking above the pavements and the roof.[112]

[111] Kevin Mumford, 28.
[112] James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 6-7.

Movement, according to Rufus' father was what drove black men. This movement gives black men life. Regarding blackness, Rufus understood the historic conditioning of the relationship between black people and the world. He reflected over the grim reality of the profit made over black flesh by the white policemen and the whole world.

In this novel, Baldwin early in this novel presented black masculinity at odds with white masculinity. When Rufus thinks of white men, Baldwin couples a racialized incident with the thought:

> He laughed again. He remembered, suddenly, his days in boot camp in the South and felt once again the shoe of a white officer against his mouth. He was in his white uniform, on the ground, against, the red, dusty clay. Some of his colored buddies were holding him, were shouting in his ear, helping him to rise. The white officer, with a curse, had vanished, had gone forever beyond the reach of vengeance. His face was full of clay and tears and blood; he spat red blood into the red dust.[113]

Rufus remembered this scene while courting a white southern girl named Leona. Baldwin used the negative memories of white men violently performing their masculinity while Rufus engages with Leona about his blackness and sexuality. As the two ride the elevator, Rufus brings Leona closer to his black body and remarks: "Didn't they warn you about the darkies you'd find up North? Leona responds with a colorblind remark: "They didn't never worry me none. People's just people as far as I'm concerned." Baldwin writes onto Rufus, a masculine performance in the same branding as the white officer that stomped his head into the ground: "And pussy's just pussy as far as I'm concerned, he thought-but was grateful, just the same, for her tone. It gave him an instant to locate himself. For he, too, was trembling slightly." With Rufus, Baldwin linked his sexuality and masculinity together. To talk of one, was to talk of the other. Rufus Scott was a proud black man that did not beg women (even white in this case) for any sexual favors:

[113] Ibid., 12-13.

"He wondered if he should proposition her or wait for her to proposition him. He couldn't beg. But perhaps she could. The hairs of his groin began to itch slightly. The terrible muscle at the base of his belly began to grow hard and hard."[114]

Baldwin displayed an intense, open, and free sexuality for Rufus. Rufus was not afraid to pursue taboo interracial relationships and he understood and communicated with an understanding of those sexual taboos. As a black character with agency his performance of masculinity was free in action but not necessarily in thought. Baldwin freed the actions of Rufus but used him as a tool to communicate the mental chains of black sexuality in the context of white supremacy when he has sex with the Leona:

> He tried, with himself, to make amends for what he was doing-for what he was doing to her. Everything seemed to take a very long time. He got hung up on her breasts, standing out like mounds of yellow cream, and the tough, brown, tasty nipples, playing and nuzzling and nibbling while she moaned and whimpered and her knees sagged. He gently lowered them to the floor, pulling her on top of him. He held her tightly as the hip and shoulder. Part of him was worried about the host and hostess and the other people in the room but another part of him could not stop the crazy thing which had begun. Her fingers opened his shirt to the navel, her tongues burned his neck and his chest; and his hands pushed up her skirt and caressed the inside of her thighs. Then, after a long time, high time, while he shook beneath every accelerating tremor of her body, he forced her beneath him and he entered her. For a moment, he thought she was going to scream, she was so tight and caught her breath so sharply, and stiffened so. But then she moaned, she moved beneath him. Then, from the center of his rising storm, very slowly and deliberately, he began the slow ride home.[115]

Although Baldwin tied discussions of Rufus' sexuality to his masculinity he did not write of domination and submission. Rufus thought about the historical rife between whiteness and blackness. His act of interracial sex defied white masculinity:

> Her breath came with moaning and short cries, with words he couldn't understand, and in spite of himself he began moving faster and thrusting deeper. He wanted her to remember him the longest day she lived. And, shortly, nothing could have stopped him, not the white God himself nor a lynch mob arriving on wings. Under his breath he cursed the milk-white bitch and groaned and rode his weapon between her thighs. She began to cry.

[114] Ibid., 13
[115] Ibid., 21.

> I told you, he moaned, I'd give you something to cry about, and, at once, he felt himself strangling, about to explode or die. A moan and a curse tore through him while he beat her with all the strength he had and felt the venom shoot out of him, enough for a hundred black-white babies.[116]

Baldwin located religion and whiteness as limiters of black masculinity. God was white and male, and his angels were white men. The two worked together to contain and bind black masculinity. Rufus simultaneously enjoyed and despised sex with Leona. Duality was a key theme in his main characters John and Gabriel in *Go Tell it On the Mountain* and David in *Giovanni's Room*. Rufus enjoyed the sex because he viewed it as an act of rebellion in the face of white masculinity. When Rufus thought of his ejaculation it is in stark contrast to how the black men in *Go Tell it On the Mountain* view their own. Rufus saw his seed a venom to a white woman's womb, while the black men in his earlier novel saw white seed as a poison to black women and not as desirable as their own. These viewpoints engender questions about the power of the policing of women's bodies, protection of those bodies, and both ultimately linked to notions of authentic performances of masculinity.

When Rufus best friend a white male, Vivaldo entered the next morning, Baldwin used the conversation between the two to discuss the paternalism present in white masculine interactions with black masculinity. Vivaldo remarked that he felt the need to "paternal" towards Rufus and Rufus responds with: "That's the trouble with all you white bastards." Rufus understood that white masculinity saw black men as childlike and felt the need to "parent." Rufus committed his life to challenging that notion.[117]

[116] Ibid., 22
[117] Ibid., 27.

Just like his other novels, Baldwin used women as a lens to present themes surrounding of race and sexuality. Regarding the sister of Rufus, Ida Scott Baldwin presents her critical to the Rufus' performance of masculinity:

> He had not thought at all about his future with Leona, for the reason that he had never considered that they had one. Yet, here she was, clearly intending to stay if he would have her. But the price was high: trouble with the landlord, with the neighbors, with all the adolescents in the Village and all those who descended during the weekends. And his family would have a fit. It didn't matter so very much about his father and mother-their fit, having lasted a lifetime, was not much more than reflex action. But he knew that Ida would instantly hate Leona. She had always expected a great deal from Rufus, and was very race conscious. She would say, You'd never even have looked at the girl, Rufus, if she'd been black. But you'll pick up any white trash just because she's white. What's the matter you ashamed of being black?[118]

Ida expected Rufus to be more but cannot see him amounting to anything if he did not love himself and his blackness. In regard to freedom, Baldwin understood the Village area of New York City as a place of liberation. In his understanding of that historical reality, he wrote onto Rufus the frustrations of the limitations placed on his blackness and sexuality:

> A young couple came toward them, carrying the Sunday papers. Rufus watched the eyes of the man as the man looked at Leona; and then both the man and the woman looked swiftly from Vivaldo to Rufus as though to decide which of the two was her lover. And, since this was the Village-the place of liberation-Rufus guessed, from the swift, nearly sheepish glance the man gave them as they passed, that he decided that Rufus and Leona formed the couple. The face of his wife, however, simply closed tight, like a gate.[119]

Even as Rufus performed his brand of masculinity; he was free to perform but that performance was seldom accepted. He placed white manhood, as the cosigner of black masculinity whenever Rufus thinks about the glances he and Leona get without his white friend, Vivaldo standing with them:

> Without Vivlado, there was a difference in the eyes which watched them. Villagers, both bound and free, looked them over as though where they stood were an auction block or a stud farm. The pale spring sun seemed very hot on the back of his neck and on his forehead. Leona gleamed before him and seemed to be oblivious of everything and

[118] Ibid., 29.
[119] Ibid., 28.

> everyone but him. And if there had been any doubt concerning their relationship, her eyes were enough to dispel it. Then he thought, If she could take it so calmly, if she noticed nothing, what was the matter with him? Maybe he was making it all up, maybe nobody gave a damn. Then he raised his eyes and met the eyes of an Italian adolescent. The boy was splashed by the sun falling through the trees. The boy looked at him with hatred; his glance flicked over Leona as though she wore a whore; he dropped his eyes slowly and swaggered on-having registered his protest, his backside seemed to snarl, having made his point.[120]

Again, Baldwin revealed a duality in black masculinity. Black men performed their masculinity but struggled to become free in thought as well. It was a constant process. Within this duality of black masculinity, black masculinity found itself at odds with the performance of white masculinity that policed the bodies of black men and white women like Leona. Baldwin gave us more on the internal struggle Rufus deals with. Baldwin shows the differences in two performances of masculinity. With the character Vivaldo he demonstrated the privilege attached to white men that makes Rufus resentful of the white people around him:

> Then Rufus resented all of them. He wondered if he and Leona would dare to make such a scene in public. If such a day could ever come for them. No one dared to look at Vivaldo, out with any girl whatever, the way they looked at Rufus now; nor would they ever look at the girl the way they looked at Leona. The lowest whore in Manhattan would be protected as long as she had Vivaldo on her arm. This was because Vivaldo was white.[121]

Rufus in his simultaneous resentment and disavowal of whiteness longed for the freedom attached to white masculinity. This was a similar if not identical longing seen in the writings and literature of Amiri Baraka. In this heroic branding of masculinity Baldwin forges a link between his own work and the writings and literature of Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver. In *Another Country*, Rufus desired freedom to determine his own destiny, and he struggled with the agency Baldwin attached to his performance of masculinity. It was in a constant struggle between his desires and his reality.

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[120] Ibid., 30.

[121] Ibid., 31.

Baldwin wrote an open performance of queerness onto his character Rufus. The queered brand of masculinity performed by Rufus puts Baldwin at odds with Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver because Rufus takes two white men as lovers. To Baraka and Cleaver this was the ultimate transgression for black men. In one scene, Rufus contemplated prostitution in exchange for a bite to eat:

> They watched while the meat was hacked off, slammed on bread, and placed on the counter. The man paid and Rufus took his sandwich over to the bar. The felt that everyone in that place knew what was going on, knew that Rufus was peddling his ass. But nobody seemed to care. Nobody looked at them. The noise at the bar continued, the radio continued to blare. The bartender served up a beer for Rufus and a whiskey for the man and rang up the money on the cash register. Rufus tried to turn his mind away from what was happening to him. He wolfed down his sandwich. But the heavy bread, the tepid meat, made him begin to feel nauseous; everything wavered before his eyes for a moment; he sipped his beer, trying to hold the sandwich down.[122]

The early moments of the exchange foreshadow the potential symbolic castration of Rufus for three reasons. The first reason reveals itself in the act of the meat being hacked off, slammed on the bread, and placed on the counter. Rufus becomes another piece of meat to the man buying him food. Rufus feels disgusted with himself when he has sex with another man. The second instance of symbolic castration reveals itself in the terms of money and power. It was the man that paid for the food, he is providing for Rufus. This act of sexualized paternalism was similar to the paternalism Rufus despised in his friend Vivaldo earlier in the novel. Thirdly, in this scene of exchange Rufus felt without the agency he previously operated with when dealing with his sexuality. Baldwin wrote that what was happening at the moment, was "happening to him." Rufus felt without power and without his manhood. Although, he did not go home with the man, Baldwin revealed duality in the queerness of Rufus. He resented the feeling of emasculation but this moment triggered a memory of a past lover:

[122] Ibid., 42.

> He thought of Eric for the first time in year, and wondered if he were prowling streets tonight. He glimpsed for the first time, the extent, the nature, of Eric's loneliness, and the danger in which this placed him; and wished that he had been nicer to him. Eric had always been very nice to Rufus. He had had a pair of cufflinks made for Rufus, for Rufus' birthday, with the money which was to have brought his wedding rings: and this gift, this confession, delivered him into Rufus' hands. Rufus had despised him because he came from Alabama; perhaps he allowed Eric to make love to him in order to despise him more completely. Eric had finally understood this, and had fled from Rufus, all the way to Paris. But his stormy blue eyes, his bright red hair, his halting drawl, all returned very painfully to Rufus now.[123]

Baldwin revealed the struggling queerness plaguing Rufus. This was the heterosexual melancholy that afflicted so many black men. Baldwin understood this and articulates it through the queer encounters throughout his novel. Rufus recalled his treatment of Eric and the lie he told him when asked about his queerness. Rufus told Eric, "I'm not the boy for you. I don't go that way." Eric moves closer to Rufus and responds: "But I can't help wishing you did. I wish you'd try." Baldwin writes of the satisfaction Rufus felt because white man asked him to be his lover. However, he also puts the struggling Rufus out in a way that suggest he is indeed queer. When Eric stated: "I'd do anything. I'd try anything. To please you." Rufus considers and laments: Then with a smile, "I'm almost as young as you are. I don't know-much about it." Rufus makes an excuse to explain why he cannot engage in his queerness with Eric. From that moment he gets satisfaction from Eric's longing for him:

> Rufus had watched him, smiling. He felt a flood of affection for Eric. And he felt his own power. He walked over to Eric and put his hands on Eric's shoulders. He did not know what he was going to say or do. But with his hands on Eric's shoulders, affection, power, and curiosity all knotted together in him-with a hidden, unforeseen violence which frightened him a little; the hands that were meant to hold Eric at arm's length seemed to draw Eric to him; the current that had begun flowing he did not know how to stop.[124]

Rufus was fascinated and terrified that he was attracted to another male and also he feels satisfaction from the power he exerts over a white man. Baldwin queers and liberates Rufus'

[123] Ibid., 45.
[124] Ibid., 46.

performance of masculinity but keeps him chained to his feelings surrounding blackness and whiteness. The final confirmation of Rufus' queerness comes when he utters to Eric with a smile: "I'll try anything once, old buddy."[125]

Baldwin explained that Rufus eventually gave in to Eric and took him as his lover but their relationship had its faults. Those faults manifested in the back and forth game Rufus played concerning his queerness and masculinity:

> And when Eric was gone, Rufus forgot their battles and the unspeakable physical awkwardness, and the ways in which he made Eric pa for such pleasure as Eric gave or got. He remembered only that Eric had loved him; as he now remembered that Leona had loved him. He had despised Eric's manhood by treating him as a woman, by treating him as nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity. But Leona had not been a deformity. And he had used against her the very epithets he had used against Eric, and in the very same way, with the same roaring in his head and the same intolerable pressure in his chest.[126]

Within this revelation about Rufus' behavior in his interracial relationships with a white man, Eric and a white woman, Leona he effectively problematizes this brand of black masculinity. Rufus thought and performed his masculinity in the same imaginings and models of the white men he despised he thought and acted in terms of power and domination. This spoke to the reality of toxic masculinity and what it does to the black men longing for the manhood that oppressed them and how it affected those in their lives. It created a disastrous environment for Leona:

> They fought all the time. They fought each other with their hands and their voices and then with their bodies: and the one storm was like the other. Many times-and now Rufus sat very still, pressing darkness against his eyes, listening to the music-he had, suddenly, without knowing what he was going to, thrown the whimpering, terrified Leona onto the bed, the floor, pinned her against a table or a wall; she beat at him, weakly, moaning, unutterably abject: he twisted his fingers in her long pale hair and used her in whatever way he felt would humiliate her most. It was not love he felt during these acts of love: drained and shaking, utterly unsatisfied, he fled from the raped white woman into the bars. In these bars no one applauded his triumph or condemned his guilt. He began to

[125] Ibid., 46
[126] Ibid., 46.

> pick fights with white men. He was thrown out of bars. The eyes of his friends told him that he was falling. His own hear told him so. But the air through which he rushed was his prison and he could not even summon the breath to call for help.[127]

Rufus continued into a downward spiral isolating himself from his friends and Leona. He continued to get into arguments with Vivaldo and Leona. He despised them and their whiteness. Baldwin articulated a longing within an expressed frustration from Rufus when he states that whiteness is killing him: "How I hate them-all those white sons of bitches out there. They're trying to kill me, you think I don't know? They got the world on a string man, man, the miserable white cock suckers, and they tying that string around my neck, they killing me." Baldwin granted Rufus with agency and with that agency he takes his own life at the end of the first third of the novel. Regarding the often tragic end that comes to queer characters in books, film, and television it is worth unpacking the implications and meanings of Rufus' suicide. In *Not Straight, Not White* Kevin Mumford discussed Baldwin's reflection on his character Rufus: "There are no antecedents for him. Rufus was partly responsible for his own doom, and in presenting him as partly responsible, I was attempting to break out of the whole sentimental image of the afflicted nigger driven that way [to suicide] by white people." [128] This statement presented in Mumford's work should be read as reflective statement on queer being and queer love.

In a 1970s interview, Baldwin stated that, "I'm very glad that it seems to be easier for a boy to admit that he's in love with a boy…instead of what happened in my generation, [where] you had kids going on to the needle because they were afraid that they might want to go to bed with someone of the same sex."[129] Baldwin's words on his character, Rufus' suicide articulated a

[127] Ibid., 53.
[128] Mumford., 28.
[129] Mumford, 23.

reality for a black character where his end could result from another issue besides his race. Rufus turned to suicide because of issues related to his sexuality. Baldwin understand the complicated ways that oppressive constructs operated and denied men like Rufus their freedom to live.

So much of the Black experience in the United States was tied to a narrative of abuse, exploitation, and oppression from white Americans. Baldwin's character, Rufus offered a new perspective on this narrative. Rufus acted with agency and told the world that in the words of Tyler Perry's character, "Madea" that "I can do bad all by myself." This ability to "do bad" was not just a reality and freedom that white Americans had the privilege to act on but was also shared by blacks in America. Rufus performed a problematic queered brand of masculinity in conflict with white America and led a tragic life.

With his works of fiction Baldwin presented his own particular brand of masculinity that could be black as well as queer as it contested and articulated freedom and democracy while seeking inclusion in the United States. In the next chapter, James Baldwin discussed his own experiences at the intersections of queerness and blackness. There was no disavowal between his manhood or his queerness.

Chapter 4: James Baldwin's Own Queer Masculinity

"I think that I know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been. It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing"-James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*

"These men, so far from being or resembling faggots, looked and sounded like the vigilantes who banded together on weekend to beat faggots up. (And I was around long enough, suffered enough, and learned though enough to be forced to realize that this was very often true. I might have learned this If I had been a white boy; but sometimes a white man will tell a black boy, anything, everything , weeping briny tears. He Knows that the black boy can never betray him, for no one will believe his testimony.)" James Baldwin, *Freaks and American Ideal of Manhood*

James Baldwin's works of fiction between the years of 1953-1962 created conversations around blackness and queerness with the Southern based Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movements. In the previous chapter, I argued that Baldwin's brand of masculinity was heroic in nature because of the freedom he exemplified with both himself and his characters in his fiction. While Baraka discussed and longed for a heroic masculinity in his social essays and writings Baldwin uncovered America's fixation with masculinity by connecting blackness and maleness. In his social essays, James Baldwin saw the performances of black masculinity and white masculinity linked and in a continual conversation. This dialogue between the two performances discussed insecurities, history, myths, blackness, and queer longings. In this chapter I argue that, James Baldwin's queered brand of masculinity could be considered heroic in nature because of his own queerness and his willingness to challenge American masculinity through the lens of black liberation.

In his social essays, Baldwin discussed his own experiences at the intersections of queerness and blackness. There is no disavowal between his manhood or his queerness. Although In his earlier essays he did not blatantly discuss queerness and masculinity, he wrote of

black masculinity in the similar way Amiri Baraka and other writers within the Civil Rights and eventually the Black Power Movements. The method used, connects him to writers like Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver because in his articulation of the black experience he wrote of black manhood and the need for liberation from the oppressor embodied in the performance of white masculinity. *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) was the first step towards Baldwin's establishment as an intellectual voice of his time.

In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin used the literature of his mentor, Richard Wright to explain the importance of literature to the work of liberation. "American protest novels" work when they articulated and engendered freedom for those that were oppressed. He moved on to discuss how the oppressor and the oppressed were bound in the same society and through that binding they share beliefs and depended on the same truth. Baldwin wrote, "It must be remembered that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society, they accept the same criteria, they share the shame beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality." With this quote, Baldwin aptly explained that blacks and whites in America have accepted the same exact models of race and sexuality. [130] He further explained that in order to achieve a "new society" was only possible when the oppressed disavow the models and performances of the oppressor,

> Within this cage it is romantic, more, meaningless, to speak of a "new" society as the desire of the oppressed, for that shivering dependence on the props of reality which he shares with the *Herrenvolk* makes a truly "new" society impossible to conceive. What is meant by a new society is one in which inequalities will disappear, in which vengeance is exacted; either there will be no oppressed at all, or the oppressed and the oppressor will change places. But finally, as it seems to me, what the rejected desire is, is an elevation of status, acceptance within the present community.[131]

[130] James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (16,17)
[131] Ibid., 17.

In Baldwin's "new society" freedom is understood and best expressed through the removal of inequalities, justice for all, and the removal of the oppressive relationship between whiteness and blackness. In *Notes of a Native Son,* Baldwin situated himself in opposition to the Southern based Civil Rights movement and the Black Power Movement to follow. Baldwin's connection to these movements in one in oppositional conversation. Baldwin, a queer man understood that the goals of the current black liberation movements was simply an exchange of power between white men and black men. It is the "acceptance within the present society" that confined the potential of black liberation. It was this acceptance within the inherited failed projects of race and sexuality that Baldwin problematized. Baldwin continued to discuss black people's fascination and willingness to follow whiteness,

> Thus, the African, exile, pagan, hurried off the auction block and into the fields, fell on his knees before that God in Whom he must now believe; who had made him, but not in His image. This tableau, this impossibility, is the heritage of the Negro in America: Wash me, cried the slave to his Maker, and I shall be whiter, whiter than snow! For black is the color of evil, implacable on the air and in the skull, the he must live with. Beneath the widely published catalogue of brutality-bringing to mind, somehow, and image, a memory of church-bells burdening the air-is this reality which, in the same nightmare notion, he both flees and rushes to embrace. In America now, this country devoted to the death of the paradox-which may, therefore, be put to death by one-his lot is ambiguous as a tableau by Kafka. To flee or not, to move or not, it is all the same; his doom is written on his forehead and carried in his heart.[132]

Baldwin connected both the past and present of the American negro and also explained the historic and religious legacy of raced and gendered bodies. Baldwin presented American Christianity as a force that is exclusive to blackness, threatening to blackness, and yet in the end embraced by blackness. Although he does not explicitly state anything about sexuality in this piece he follows the above passage with an analysis of Bigger Thomas, the protagonist in

[132] Ibid., 17.

Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Bigger Thomas was caught in a queer longing for the freedom within the performance of white masculinity,

> In Native Son, Bigger Thomas stands on a Chicago street corner watching airplanes flown by white men racing against the sun and "Goddamn" he says, the bitterness, bubbling up like blood, remembering a million indignities, the terrible, rat-infested house, the humiliation of home relief, the intense, aimless, ugly bickering, hating it; hatred smolders though these pages like sulphur fire. All of Bigger's life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear. And later, his fear drives him to murder and his hated to rape; he dies having come, through violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood.[133]

Baldwin stressed that the American protest novel should articulate notions of freedom to oppressed persons. He explained further regarding Bigger Thomas, how his tragedy resulted from his acceptance of a theology that denied him life and his humanity. This humanity Baldwin described was for all races, genders, and sexual orientations,

> But our humanity is out burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only do what is infinitely more difficult-that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that It is his categorization alone which cannot be transcended.[134]

Baldwin described a pathway for freedom as he wrote for the oppressed. The oppressed must not only have agency, but possess the capability to move beyond the social constructs that often limit those in relation to the privileges and freedoms enjoyed by the preferred "other." From *Notes of Native Son* Baldwin explored these truths-literature focused on liberation must articulate freedom for those who need it and the oppressed must have methods to transcend the limitations on their freedom within. Baldwin did this in his own works of fiction reviewed in the previous chapter. Within his first literary work, *Go Tell It on The Mountain (1953)* James Baldwin showcased performances of masculinity through men and boys coming of age. Through John, we saw queerness. Through Roy, we experienced a longing for freedom. Through the older men like

[133] Ibid., 18.
[134] Ibid., 18.

Gabriel and Frank, we felt the chained and problematic performances of masculinity that resulted from inheriting a performance of masculinity from western white men. He transcribed onto the young black boys in this work a potential for a liberated freedom by queering their performances of black boyhood. In the older men, we see what he described was the tragedy of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, an inability to move beyond an inherited performance of masculinity.

In "Many Thousands Gone" another section of *Notes of a Native Son* James Baldwin, entered a deep discussion about black masculinity. He first explained that black men are only admired in the musical performances. Entertainment afforded black men a platform to tell their stories. Baldwin wrote the effect of the black man had on the American psyche and demonstrated the peculiarity of the historical narrative of black masculinity:

> The Story of the Negro in America is the story of America-or, more precisely, it is the story of Americans. It is not a very pretty story: the story of a people is never very pretty. The Negro in America, gloomily referred to as that shadow which lies athwart our national life, is far more than that. He is a series of shadows, self-centered, intertwining, which now we helplessly battle. One may say that Negro in American does not really exist except in the darkness of our minds. [135]

Baldwin described how the performance of black masculinity exist only in mind in constant battle with the American project. The story of Black masculinity moved and existed in the dark recesses of the mind of America, as if a monstrous being of the night. When one American thought of black men it was in through the process of othering:

> This is why his history and his progress, his relationship to all other Americans, has been kept in the social arena. He is a social and not a personal or human problem; to think of him is to think of statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence; it is to be confronted with an endless cataloguing of losses, gains, skirmishes; it is to feel virtuous, outraged, helpless, as though continuing status among us were somehow analogous to disease-cancer, perhaps or tuberculosis-which must be checked, even though it cannot be cured. [136]

[135] Ibid., 19.
[136] Ibid., 19.

Baldwin compared the problem of the black man in America as othered, pervasive, and in constant need of policing because it cannot be remedied. Baldwin cleverly described the oppressive existence that was black masculinity. He went on to write that if a black man broke free and existed beyond the "sociological and sentimental" image held by America he is in danger of retaliation from those whose gaze he is under. In this retaliation, the American Negro was dehumanized and along with the loss of humanity for the Negro, those in participation also lost their humanity. What was interesting is that he did not explicitly mention whiteness nor white Americans, "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. Baldwin cites all Americans in the continuation of this oppressive reality. He indicts the oppressor and the oppressed that bought into the lie. Beyond that, by positioning Baldwin in conversation with Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver we see in Baldwin's indictment of America and its victimization of African American that he omitted the labels and othering prevalent in American society. It is America vs. the Negro-this Negro could be a black woman or a queer black person. Negros, to a certain extent participated in this othering process when they stripped the humanity of those marginalized within the black community: black women and queer black people. Baldwin described intersectionality in this work. The problem of the oppressed Negro is one shared by America's white population and the heterosexual male performance of black masculinity.

Although he omitted any mention of whiteness, Baldwin painted with a broad brush the multifaceted ways in which the Negro lived and existed in an oppressed condition.

Baldwin then employed his ongoing critique of the Bigger Thomas Character in *Native Son*. Here what he was a part of his brand of black masculinity came with the urging for black

men: "The American image of the Negro also lives in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no other possible reality." Therefore, according to Baldwin, black men lost all agency when they followed the performance of masculinity that their white counterparts forced upon them. On Bigger's murder in the story he continued:

> Then he, like the white enemy with who he will be locked one day in mortal struggle, has no means saves this of asserting his identity. This is why Bigger's murder of Mary can be referred to as an "act of creation" and why, once this murder has been committed, he can feel for the first time that he living fully and deeply as a man was meant to live. And there is, I should think, no Negro living in America who has not felt, briefly or for long periods, with anguish sharp or dull, in varying degrees and to varying effect, simple, naked and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day to violate, out of motives of the cruelest vengeance, their women to break the bodies of all white people and bring them low, as low as that dust into which he himself has been and is being trampled; no Negro, finally who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment to the "nigger" who surrounds him and to the "nigger" in himself.[137]

Through Bigger's murder Baldwin explained that in this "act of creation," Bigger found his freedom and his masculinity. In Baldwin's work of fiction, *Another Country* (1962) a similar "act of creation" granted Rufus Scott with his freedom and masculinity when he took his own life. Baldwin granted Rufus with agency and with that agency he took his life at the end of the first third of the novel. His character Rufus, allowed Baldwin to separate Rufus from the common trope in black literature where a black character's demise was complicated by outside forces. Baldwin understood this in the protest novel he read and in his own works of fiction.

Within James Baldwin's brand of masculinity, he discussed in *Notes of a Native Son* how white Americans saw the performance of black masculinity. To white America, their African American brethren were always in need and deserving of special recognition. This viewpoint is an inherited performance of whiteness, going back to the early origins of America. Baldwin argued, "The White American regards his darker brother though the distorting screen created by

[137] Ibid., 29.

a lifetime of conditioning. He is accustomed to regard him either as a needy and deserving martyr or as the soul of rhythm, but he is more than a little intimidated to find this stranger so many miles from home." [138]

Towards the end of *Notes of a Native Son*, James Baldwin connected blackness and manhood in America to blackness and manhood in Africa. He explained the difficulty American blacks have in explaining their desires to those living in Africa. This need arose from American black's desire to validate their manhood and blackness in America:

> The American Negro cannot explain to the African what surely seems in himself to be a want of manliness, or racial pride, a maudlin ability to forgive. It is difficult to make clear that he is not seeking to forfeit his birthright as a black man, but that, on the contrary, it is precisely this birthright which he is struggling to recognize and articulate. Perhaps it now occurs to him that in this need to establish himself in relation to his past he is most American, that this depthless alienation from oneself and one's people is, in sum, the American experience. [139]

Baldwin understood that a vital part of the Negro experience in America was a desire for a validated lived experience. Part of the condition of the black man rests in a longing for acceptance in their performance of masculinity. This can be queered in the sense that it arose from a desire for an ideal performance of masculinity that liberated and was embraced by America. Black men wanted to live their lives free, similar to white men. This longing of black masculinity and the desire for it to be fully realized and accepted by America is in a continued conversation with white masculinity:

> There are, no doubt, as many ways of coping with the resulting complex of tensions as there are black man in the world, but no black man can hope to ever to be entirely liberated from this internal warfare-rage, dissembling, and contempt having inevitably accompanied his first realization of the power of white men. What is crucial here is that, since white men represent in the black man's world so heavy a weight, white men have for black men a reality which is far from being reciprocal; and hence all black men have

[138] Ibid., 86.
[139] Ibid., 89.

> toward all white men an attitude which is designed, really, either to rob white men of the jewel of his naïveté, or else to make it cost him dear.[140]

Baldwin explained that black men may never be fully liberated from their white counterparts, and what resulted was an attitude that will either snatch ignorance on race issues from the white man or make it cost him dearly. Baldwin went on to state that black men simply want their humanity recognized by whiteness. Baldwin wrote, "The black man insists, by whatever means he finds at his disposal, that the white man cease to regard him as an exotic rarity and recognize him as a human being." To Baldwin, the recognition of the humanity of blacks was something that was nearly impossible because of the way power and ignorance work to prevent such a realization on the part of whites. Towards the end of *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin explained that American democracy was not a radical break from the past of Europe because it was exclusionary from its founding. Omitting blacks from the promises of democracy. The major idea for *Notes of a Native Son* can be understood that black men and white men are forever linked, and this drama between the white man and the black man created a new black man and a new white man:

> The time has come to realize that the interracial drama acted out on the American continent has not only created a new black man, it has created a new white man, too. No road whatever will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village where white men still have the luxury of looking on me as a stranger. I am not, really, a stranger any longer for any American alive. One of the things that distinguishes Americans from other people is that no other people have ever been so deeply involved in the lives of black men, and vice versa. The fact faced, with all its implications, it can be seen that the history of the American Negro problem is not merely shameful, it is also something of an achievement. For even when the worst has been said, it must also be added that the perpetual challenge posed by this problem was always, perpetually met. It is precisely this black-white experience which may prove of indispensable value to us in the world we face today. This world is white no longer and it will never be white again. [141]

[140] Ibid., 122.
[141] Ibid., 129.

In the end, the world has changed and black men will no longer be silent. The calls for the recognition of both their masculinity and the humanity of the black race forced the white world to understand that it is no longer able to continue exclusionary notions of freedom and democracy.

In a similar fashion to Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver, James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name (1959)* explained what black men held in common which was their relationship to the dominance of white masculinity:

> What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful relation to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world and of themselves, held by other people. What, in sum, black men held in common was their ache to come into the world as men. And this ache, united people who might otherwise have been divided as to what a man should be.[142]

Baldwin accurately foretold the shortcomings of black liberation from the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s to the Black Power movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. Baldwin centered masculinity as the uniting force among blacks across the world and the longing, the desire to be free from the defining of black masculinity by white supremacy. The last sentence in the above passage appeared to explain the unity in the pursuit of a true and free definition of black manhood. However, it also sheds light on the exclusion of women and queer blacks from the liberating forces from white supremacy. The obsession or fascination with black masculinity not only queered these liberation movements but it prevented them from embracing intersectionality. With the need to redeem black masculinity and confront the denial of the humanity of black men an authentic performance of black manhood became the "defaulted" black person excluding black women and black queer men and women.

[142] Ibid., 152-153.

Baldwin continued this essay with a discussion regarding his thoughts on black intellectuals and writers like Richard Wright, Aimé Cesaire, Dr. Marcus James, and George Lamming. Baldwin does not shy away from his admiration of these revolutionary black men just like Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver embraced them in admiration. On Aimé Cesaire he wrote:

> Cesaire is a caramel-colored man from Martinique probably around forty, with a great tendency to roundness and smoothness, physically speaking, and with the rather benign air of a schoolteacher. All this changes the moment he begins to speak. It becomes at once apparent that his curious, slow-moving blandness is related to the grace and patience of a jungle cat and the intelligence behind those spectacles is of a very penetrating and demagogic order.[143]

Baldwin, Cleaver, and Baraka queered themselves in their admiration of the men that represented a heroic branding of black masculinity. Baldwin entered into a discussion about *The Male Prison* in the same essay, *Nobody Knows My Name*. Here he discussed a homosexual protestant named, André Gide. Baldwin explained that he felt that Gide should have keep his queerness hidden from the public view. Baldwin also stated that he felt that the discussion about whether homosexuality was normal or not was not important because the answer never made a difference. He explained on the matter:

> But there are many ways of outwitting oblivion, and to ask whether or not homosexuality is natural is really like asking whether or not it was natural for Socrates to swallow hemlock, whether or not it was natural for St. Paul to suffer for the gospel, whether or not it was natural for the Germans to send upwards of six million people to an extremely twentieth-century death. It does not seem to me that nature helps us very much when we need illumination in human affairs. I am certainly convinced that it is one of the greatest impulses of mankind to arrive at something higher than a natural state. How to be natural does not seem to me to be a problem- quite the contrary. The great problem is how to be- in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word-a man.[144]

[143] Ibid., 155.
[144] Ibid., 232.

Baldwin connected the discussion of homosexuality to masculinity and without stating his own queerness defended homosexuality he said the greatest problem is not for humanity to do what it is natural but rather what they do with manhood and how to engage performances of masculinity. The preoccupation with doing what was "natural" was a misdirection from the Western World's (for example, the United States) obsession with preserving a desirable performance of masculinity. The West has no interest in doing what was "natural" because of the constructs created to privilege straight white men.

In this essay, Baldwin used his discussion of André Gide to explain the imprisoning nature of masculinity. Ultimately, he stated that the relationship between men and women became threatened whenever there was a dependence on the exploitation of external factors such as he cited, "glamour girls and the mindless grunting and swaggering of Hollywood he-men." [145] Towards the end of this portion about the male prison, Baldwin described what was known today as "toxic masculinity" and how it created conflicts on matters of love and respect between men and women. In Baldwin's writings, what is known as "toxic masculinity" was labeled as the imprisoning "unmasculine pride:"

> It is worth observing, too, that when men can no longer love women they also cease to love or respect or trust each other which makes their isolation complete. Nothing is more dangerous than this isolation, for men will commit any crimes whatever rather than endure it.[146]

In another section of *Nobody Knowns My Name* titled, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" *James* Baldwin problematizes the brand of American masculinity and described it as a menacing force. In this explanation, Baldwin may have written about his own victimization by masculinity since he was a queer black man he wrote:

[145] Ibid., 235.
[146] Ibid., 235.

> I think that I know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been. It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship, therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing.[147]

Baldwin quickly moved on to place himself in the wide stroke of the generalized and representative American Negro male without stating that he was separated or othered within this group due to his queerness. He stated that black men suffer due to the sexualizing of their bodies because of white supremacy's obsession with black male sexuality. From there, Baldwin stated that the world traps people in the socially constructed roles they play. Baldwin understood the oppressive power of stereotypes and how they prevented one from being as they truly were. It prevented queer possibilities for queer masculinities.[148]

Baldwin continued his discussion of masculinity in one of his more famous works, *The Fire Next Time.* In this work, Baldwin admonished blackness in a letter dedicated to his nephew James that black people must accept white people. He explained this by first stating that black people should not strive to emulate whiteness, but instead the work of liberation comes in accepting white people. He explained:

> There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. The really terrible thig, old buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but as you will discover people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity.[149]

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[147] Ibid., 269-270.
[148] Ibid., 271.
[149] Ibid., 293-294.

Baldwin stated that the white identity was maintained by the marginalization, oppression, and othering of blacks. Even when white people "knew better" it was difficult for them to commit to true alliances with blacks because when blacks gained equality and civil rights the world whites and white privilege was shattered. He continued in his explanation and stated that in the white world the black man (blackness in general) functions as a fixed star or an immovable pillar, and if this fixed star gains equal humanity with the white race then "heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations." He ended his letter to James and stated that black liberation was impossible until white liberation and black liberation were achieved together. Baldwin advocated for an interracial liberation.[150]

Baldwin discussed the peculiarities of the black man In America. For black masculinity to survive the struggle is a daily occurrence:

> The man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth-and indeed, no church-can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable. This is because, in order to save his life, he is forced to look beneath appearances, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words.[151]

James Baldwin explained that the very survival of black masculinity and black identity created a black condition or experience that cannot be moved by the worst of white supremacy. The very survival of black identity facing the worst of white supremacy invalidates all narrative of black inferiority. To Baldwin, to survive negated the historical "white lies" about black manhood and black identity.

[150] Ibid., 294-295.
[151] Ibid., 343.

Queering Black Power: Longing for a Hero
Conclusion

"The myth of European superiority is naturalized right along with a Western-defined masculinity."-Zillah Eisenstein, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West*

"Borrowing a phrase from writer James Baldwin, Rorty used the term, "achieving our country," to explain the work of the Reformist left. This group of progressive intellectuals, artists, and activists sought to make the nation live up to its founding principles of liberty and equality for all. While they did not forget the brutality of our nation's past, they maintained that it was a continuous work in progress, one that had demonstrated and would continue to demonstrate its ability to become a better place."-Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists & Progressive Politics During World War II*

In understanding the exclusivity of American notions of freedom and democracy we should understand that exclusion is in the Western formulation of freedom and democracy. In her work, Zillah Eisenstein stated, "A racialized discriminatory practice is internalized in the Western canon along with the erasure of its sexed/gendered history while a western masculinist whiteness becomes the standard of reason."[152] Both Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin protested this canon in their works of fiction and in their political and social essays. Both men understood the exclusion from American definitions of freedom and democracy was supported through the othered raced and gendered bodies that came under the hammer of Western imperialism. For them, the exclusion of black liberation dealt with different brands of masculinity. James Baldwin understood this pressing problem when he stated, "*White man's masculinity depends on a denial of the masculinity of the black."* Amiri Baraka articulated a similar understanding when he stated,

> Deadly simple. If Abraham and Baldwin were white, for example, there would be no more noise from them. Not because they consciously desire that, but because they could be sensitive in peace. Their color, is the only obstruction I can see to this state they seek, and I see no reason they should be denied it for so paltry a thing as heavy pigmentation.

[152] Zillah Eisenstein Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West. (New York, New York: Zed Books, 2004). 75.

> Somebody turn them! And then perhaps the rest of us can get down to the work at hand. Cutting throats!

What bound these two men together was their choice to use literature to articulate an inclusive and at times contradictory notion of manhood in order to protest the many exclusivities that derived from the so called "American freedom project." This was a failed project that excluded people of color, women, and queer persons. What separated Baldwin and Baraka from each other was their discussions and conversations on the queer experiences and imagined realities of men, and how these discussions of queerness shaped the formulations of their brand of "heroic masculinity."

In Chapter Two, Amiri Baraka's Queered Brand of Masculinity manifested in his longing for a "heroic masculine" figure that challenged the white power structure embodied by western democracy. Men such as Fidel Castro and Robert Williams were the best of his brand. This longing resulted from the historic reality of colonization that shaped and defined black masculinity as cowardly, infantile, and counterrevolutionary. His longing was queer due to his repudiation of masculine performances he "othered" as undesirable because these performances supplanted the structure of white masculinity. Baraka's works supplied us the platform or a method to see his queer desire that came from his grief from his inability to love the "queer other." Homosexuality then became a site of simultaneous identification and repudiation of "heterosexual men" like Amiri Baraka. Indeed, in his rejection of the homosexual Baraka demonstrated "queer longing" while he bolstered his brand of black masculinity. Baraka's "eternal faggots" like Roy Wilkins signaled the worst of the different brands of black masculinity

writers within the Black Power movement. These men revealed the failings of black masculinity.[153]

In his simultaneous denial of his queerness, the repudiation of it, and his branding of what he longed for Baraka demonstrated that part of the black power movement was organized a rhetoric that stated that, "Hey this is the man for me. This man is my man, the one to liberate us." The queered black power movement found life in the writers, to fully understand this movement we must move beyond the histories that have confined these men for so long. The movement was more than just masculinism, it featured a queer branding of masculinity that was longed by the movement in whole.

In Chapter Three, James Baldwin's Queered Brand of Masculinity manifested in his longing for a "heroic masculine" figure that challenged the myth of white superiority while also opening black masculinity to infinite possibilities of being and becoming. Farah Griffin's explanation of Richard Rorty's borrowed term "achieving our country," to explain the role of not only the intellectual left but what I would state as the role of African American writers. I would suggest that in his writing part of Baldwin's brand entailed a sort of "achieving our manhood." For him, his role like many African American writers over the past couple hundred years should be viewed as a valuable contribution to social change. Part of that change involved opening the possibilities of black masculinity.[154]

Staring with Chapter Three, Baldwin's first literary work, *Go Tell It on The Mountain (1953)* James Baldwin showcased performances of masculinity through men and boys coming of age. Through John, we saw queerness. Through Roy, we experienced a longing for freedom.

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[153] Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. (New York: Oxford, 1996), 49.

[154] Gene Andrew Jarrett, Representing Race: A New Political History of African American Literature. (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 11.

Through the older men like Gabriel and Frank, we felt the chained and problematic performances of masculinity that resulted from inheriting a performance of masculinity from western white men. He transcribed onto the young black boys in this work a potential for a liberated freedom by queering their performances of black boyhood.

In understanding, the freedom often given to white men, Baldwin openly and freely explored queer themes in *Giovanni's Room* (1956). The main character, David sense of masculinity drifted between "freedom and captivity" throughout the work. The captive parts of David's masculinity required him to disavow homosexuality, to meet certain checkpoints like marriage to be considered a man, the refusal to buy a drink for another man, and the abrupt ending to his homosexual romances with Joey and Giovanni both in his teen years and as an adult. The free possibilities of David's masculinity allowed him to pursue romances with other males, Joey and Giovanni and to move in with Giovanni. Ultimately with *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin showed us how masculinity created problems for queer men. We saw a glimpse of free masculinity whenever David allowed himself to explore and the free space for his queerness. Baldwin used queer characters Jacques and Giovanni to coax David into his own articulation of his queered masculinity. With David's character, Baldwin revealed the dual nature of masculinity and both freeing and the confining nature of this performance.

Finally, in the third reviewed work of fiction in Chapter Three, Baldwin took the themes of blackness, queerness, whiteness, and masculinity and placed them in a serious conversation with each other in his third novel, *Another Country (1962).* Baldwin understood that in his crafting of Rufus, there were no models of masculinity for him Rufus to emulate. Baldwin did the unheard of when writing about a black bisexual man with the freedom to make his own mistakes, and not succumb to his untimely end by white people. Baldwin gave him freedom in

his queered brand of masculinity to take his own life. To end things on his terms. Baldwin used Rufus as an example of the potential hidden within black manhood. He created a conversation surrounding Rufus' blackness, queerness, and manhood with the other characters in the novel. It is worth noting, that in spite of Baldwin's articulation of free black queer characters in *Go Tell It On The Mountain* and *Another Country* possibilities for this sort of freedom became increasingly limited during the 1960s and 1970s due to the culture of respectability politics, the influence of Christianity, and the need to redeem the image of the black male. These freedoms could not be articulated until soon after the emergence of the Gay Liberation movement. The need to redeem and find this "heroic performance" of black masculinity is how the Southern based Civil Rights movement queered itself. This included its disavowal of queer black men like James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin. James Baldwin enabled a political genealogy of black queer literature where the social impact took years and decades to be understood. Baldwin's social essays also critiqued the western superiority of white masculinity and racism and offered a new hope for the possibilities of free black men.

This thesis is not a total representation of every African American writer. My aim with this project was to provide a lens into understanding black liberation, gay liberation, women's liberation, Third World liberation, and ultimately every movement of liberation against western hegemony as queer movements. I argue that the search for freedom and the disavowal of inauthentic identities coupled with a quest for inclusion of an identity in the "American freedom project" queered all of these movements and should be explored further.

Finally, a quote from Richard Rorty connects Baldwin's and Baraka's role in "achieving our country,"

> Nations rely on artists and intellectuals to create images of, and to tell stories about, the national past, Competition for political leadership is in part a competition between

differing stories about a nation's self-identity, and between differing symbols of greatness.

For much of the United States' history the chosen defaulted embodiment and inheritor of freedom and democracy was symbolized as a straight cis-gendered white male. When in actuality we can better understand freedom and democracy by looking at the sites of resistances and other expressions of humanity and identity. Writers such as James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka took up the challenge to compete with these false symbols- a "false god" of sorts in order to achieve a greater ideal of freedom and democracy within America. These differing stories about America's self-identity are vital in the continual working and defining of American democracy which should always be in a constant state of "being and becoming." Humanity and identity is not static and can never stay silent in the chains of oppression and captivity.

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