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The treacherous body: Isolation, confession, and community in James Baldwin

Peter Kerry Powers
Messiah College

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Early in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), young John Grimes sits by a window, ''dusty and weary'' from cleaning his family's living room in preparation for Sunday morning. Watching the boys in the street, he sees their rough, loose play as a kind of freedom denied him in the stringent morality of his Chris-tian home:

> [H]e wanted to be one of them, playing in the streets, unfrightened, moving with such grace and power, but he knew this could not be. Yet, if he could not play their games, he could do something they could not do; he was able, as one of his teachers said, to think. But this brought him little consolation, for today he was terrified of his thoughts. He wanted to be with these boys in the street, heedless and thoughtless, wearing out his treacherous and bewildering body.[1]

As John imagines being worn out in the street instead of his home, ''these boys'' represent an escape from his Christian duties; how-ever, their graceful bodies also bring forth his fearful, only half-acknowledged awakening to homoerotic desire. John's longing sig-nifies his need to escape not only the church but also the isolating implications of an illicit desire he cannot control. This passage crys-tallizes a number of tensions in the novel and throughout Baldwin's work, especially the tension between the social demand that desire be controlled and the individual's need to express desire that comes unbidden, and is uncontrollable.

For John, as for Baldwin, a childhood in the Holiness tradition of the Christian church pits desire against duty. Perhaps more than most Christian movements, Holiness denominations believe that the body is the site within which the spirit is dramatically transformed. They therefore place strictures on dress and adornments and forbid what they consider the sins of the body—especially smoking, drinking, and illicit sex. Rooted in the Wesleyan doctrine that the critical Christian experience is a warming of the heart by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Holiness Christianity was transformed—and divided—through its contact with African traditions of spirit possession in the nine-teenth century. Then, in the decades surrounding the turn of the cen-tury, it was transformed and divided again by the revivalist upheavals that gave birth to Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Holiness Christianity insists not only on the possibility of moral perfection but also on the individual human body as the dwelling space of the Spirit of God, the true Temple of the Holy Spirit.[2]

But treacherous sins of the flesh can prevent this transformation. Paradoxically, despite its attention to matters of the spirit, Holiness Christianity encourages a meticulous attention to and monitoring of the body. At any moment, the body can be invaded by temptation and so must be opened instead to God in order to serve as an instru-ment of the Holy Spirit. Because the body functions as a readable sign of a mysterious spiritual core, congregations use the body not only to display a hidden inner life that otherwise only God can see but

also to reinforce the spiritual and social hierarchies of the community. Thus, we could say that the apparent spontaneity of ecstatic worship in many Holiness churches depends on an unacknowledged liturgy that members enact with varying degrees of intensity and devotion. This liturgy is less programmed than an Episcopal prayer book, but its performance is scripted nonetheless. According to Cheryl Sanders, even unplanned manifestations of the Spirit follow recognizable patterns:

> [The] quintessential ecstatic expression in sanctified worship is the shout, or holy dance, which usually occurs as a spontaneous eruption into coordinated, choreographed movement. There are characteristic steps, motions, rhythms, and syncopations associated with shouting. It is not a wild and random expression of kinetic energy. Rather, a culturally and aesthetically determined staticstructure sustains the expressions of ecstasy in a definite, recogniz- able form.[3]

Sanders further suggests that some churches promote glossolalia (speaking in tongues) at specific points in a service and that intelligible forms of ecstatic speech tend to follow locally acceptable patterns.

These "spontaneous" expressions of the ecstatic body, then, signify more than an individual in communion with God. As a kind of discourse, ecstasy is predicated on the practices of a community and signifies one's membership in that community. Indeed, Sanders points out that Holiness churches that encourage more ecstatic forms of worship will shame members of the congregation into bodily manifestations of the spirit, such as raising one's hands in prayer or shouting, while congregations that prefer more quiet worship will censure members who begin to exhibit those forms of ecstatic behavior.[4] Thus, the body in worship speaks a theological and spiritual language that the community encourages, recognizes, and confirms. Experiences during worship that present themselves as mysterious and unique, even nonrational, are in fact so common that they can be articulated as ritual formulas. And private moments of individual mystical transport are so deeply scripted that individuals who reveal their divine experiences in inappropriate ways may be censured, excommunicated, or simply ignored. Baldwin himself eventually gave up his role as a child preacher because he came to feel that the high drama of the Holiness service was a dramatic trick that he could pull off at will. In the last months of his crisis of faith, Baldwin performed these rituals of the spirit in private for his incredulous and amused high school friends, a performance without power outside the church community.[5]

In this essay, I examine the complicated and often divided text that is the scripted body in Baldwin's work. I'm particularly interested in what it reveals about how Baldwin negotiates conflict between the unarticulated desires of the body and the community's demand for scripted confession, and how that negotiation further frames his re-

sponse to the treacherous bodily intersection of masculinity and race. Rooted in his early experiences of confession, testimony, and conversion in the church, Baldwin regarded the confession of secrets hidden in the body—and the acceptance of our need for others that such confession implies—as the necessary precursor to authentic masculinity and life with others. This essay troubles the question of whether Baldwin's work bears the weight of hope he has for confession, asking what happens if confessing the hidden truth of the inward self is only possible through rituals of the body that a community not only recognizes but also demands.

Shortly after the publication of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin published his first essay devoted to questions of sexuality and gender, ''The Male Prison'' (1954). Here Baldwin explores André Gide's decision, confessed in his memoirs, to live as a domestic, heterosexual male while privately pursuing his homoerotic desire, in shame and secrecy, in the evening streets. Although Baldwin was living in France, his imaginative center rarely strayed far from the American scene; thus, he took Gide's confession as an opportunity to address the icon of the strong, silent man enclosed in personal armor that dominated the post–World War II American imagination. Baldwin reads Gide's silence as typifying not simply the life of a closeted gay man but also the prison of mid-century American masculinity, exemplified, in Baldwin's view, by the ''heroes of Mickey Spillane'' and other pop icons of stage and screen.[6] Gide's confession is testimony of a courageous, if last-minute, effort to break through the isolation that normative heterosexuality had imposed on him and, in different ways, imposes on all men. ''Nothing is more dangerous,'' writes Baldwin,

> than this isolation, for men will commit any crimes whatever rather than endure it. We ought, for our own sakes, to be humbled by Gide's confession as he was humbled by his pain and make the generous effort to understand that his sorrow was not different from the sorrow of all men born. For, if we do not learn this humility, we may very well be strangled by a most petulant and unmasculine pride.[7]

Postwar masculinity in literature and popular culture often included suspicion of women and contempt for those that failed to meet criteria for integrity founded on inviolable isolation. Marlon Brando, in Elia Kazan's film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is barely articulate. His animalistic shriek ''Stella! Stella!'' suggests the inhumanity of male isolation. James Dean parlayed the persona of a sullen, alienated, and potentially violent adolescent into a lucrative Hollywood career. In African American literature, isolated and, to varying degrees, inarticulate protagonists are at the center of the two most notable novels of the period: in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Bigger can barely speak, and Ellison's Invisible Man, while endlessly eloquent within the text, lives underground, incommunicado.

Ironically, the pervasiveness of this masculinity based on isolation

obscures the degree to which men in the postwar period felt themselves increasingly enveloped by economic and cultural networks that compromised their individuality. In his study of homosexuality during the Cold War, Robert Corber demonstrates that the tough-guy icons of film noir and the Western compensated for many men's actual domesticated masculinity, especially visible in public policy and economic life. While fascinated with the hard-nosed or seemingly primitive masculinity of such heroes as John Wayne in *Fort Apache* or Brando in *The Wild One*, most middle-class, white men had entered the era of the gray flannel suit. Government policies encouraged suburbanization and catered to white-collar employment, while dominant business models encouraged standardization in both labor and product. Men "were expected to define themselves through their identities as consumers—an expectation hitherto confined to women—and to take an active role in child rearing Moreover, men were discouraged from competing aggressively with one another and were expected to submit to corporate structures in exchange for obtaining a secure place in the organizational hierarchy."[8]

Corber's analysis suggests a fissure in postwar discourses of masculinity. Official culture encouraged masculine domestication while popular culture reinforced a masculine fantasy of primitive independence. Baldwin's analysis of Gide delves beneath this fissure and demonstrates the common texture of masculine silence and isolation that underlay the divide. Baldwin sees Gide's self-repression and the self-repression of men generally symbolized in the defiantly heterosexist private eyes in film noir, who were designed to compensate for the failings of masculine domestic life. This mode of masculinity relied on a rigorous self-containment that left a man isolated and often enraged. For Baldwin, the "dilemma" of Gide's masculinity was not exceptional but typical:

> Gide's dilemma, his wrestling, his peculiar, notable and extremely valuable failure testify—which should not seem odd—to a powerful masculinity and also to the fact that he found no way to escape the prison of that masculinity. And the fact that he endured this prison with such dignity is precisely what ought to humble us all, living as

> we do in a time and country where communion between the sexes has become so sorely threatened that we depend more and more on the strident exploitation of externals, as for example, the breasts of Hollywood glamour girls and the mindless grunting and swaggering of Hollywood he-men.[9]

Gide's "failure" resulted in a nearly debilitating isolation despite his having bent the knee to a publicly acceptable form of masculinity. While early in his essay Baldwin expresses annoyance at Gide's expression of guilt, by the end, he regards Gide's torment and determined struggle as worthy of respect. In contrast, the inarticulate "he-men" of Hollywood typify American men who display a perverse form of cowardice that masquerades as courage. If in his confessions Gide is incapable of overcoming his guilt, he has at least taken the courageous step of self-exposure. For Baldwin, confession is not everything, but it is a necessary first step to personal and social transformation.

Baldwin's affirmation of Gide's confession is situated at a difficult moment in the history of masculine speech as a private or public phenomenon. On one hand, as the province of glossy confessional magazines and soap operas, confession has often signified a feminine or feminizing force in the American cultural imagination. On the other hand, Baldwin's focus on an individual ethic—Gide's courage or cowardice—partly obscures the critical role confession played in the political and juridical processes of the nation-state in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, in *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Baldwin goes on to portray the ways in which private homoerotic desire is contained not just by its conflict with the dominant cultural imaginary but directly through the legal prohibitions of the French state. This is perhaps especially true of the United States during the Cold War, a period when the mechanisms of confession formed an ideological apparatus constructed on the assumption that there are threatening secrets that must be confessed.

Commenting on the influence of the Rosenberg case during the Cold War, Oliver Harris points out that "the early Cold War years were marked by an unprecedented politicization of culture and by the conscription of private life in the name of national security. The key to political containment abroad was, then, personal self-containment at home, and the Cold War penetration of the private by the public was as much a matter of patriotic self-policing and voluntary self-censorship

as of panoptic state surveillance."[10] Making a similar point, Donald Pease suggests that "[t]he chief political consequence of this confusion of the realms of inner psychology and the national interest was a blurring of the line separating the powers of the state from the civil liberties of private citizens. The search for enemies of the state in the public world was internalized in private citizens' surveillance of their psyches for signs of the enemy within."[11] Both Pease and Harris point toward the Cold War idealization of a self-policing citizenry without secrets, either fully transparent in having made the inner self available to others for examination, or else fully opaque in imagining that there is no inner self, no hidden secret, beyond the surface manifestations of the body at work. The organization man lives for the company; the citizen for the state. The end point of the politics of the Red Scare is that every citizen becomes his or her own McCarthy.

Self-containment or policing, of course, is provoked by a threat the individual must counter or appease. As the McCarthy hearings investigated the private lives of citizens in the nation's battle against Communism, citizens were expected to expose or confess their secret political alliances but also to identify friends and acquaintances known or suspected of being in league with Communism. Citizens affirmed their belonging to the community of the state either through a purified transparency, allowing the gaze of others to confirm that they had no secret life, or through a kind of disavowal and repudiation that took the form of a confession. Langston Hughes, as only one example, downplayed or disavowed his links to radical politics in the 1930s; he reaffirmed this disavowal by suppressing much of his political poetry for his *Selected Poems* (1950), as if to say he was no longer the same person.[12]

In such a structure of surveillance, secrecy, and containment, the desire of the body comes in for particular scrutiny because it entails a potential betrayal of the law upon which the social order depends, *law* here indicating not only stated laws of the polis but also the regulatory norms through which a culture encourages self-policing. Like the spirits of temptation in a Holiness church, desire remains hidden, the surface of the body a sign but not a transparent one. Moreover, to the degree that desire signifies an absence or, rather, the presence of dissatisfaction, it threatens the social order by being both evidence of that order's insufficiency and a rationale for change. Desire is thus always potentially treasonous, and the body treacherous, as both Bald-

win's John Grimes and the House Un-American Activities Committee well understood.

Judith Butler has suggested that the body represents a threat to the social order because it points to the limits of the law. Although the body assumes its performative role as a "forcible reiteration of [regulatory] norms," the very fact of this reiteration suggests that "bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled."[13] In other words, the very force by which the law says "No" to desire silently implies the possibility of the body's "Yes," an insight delivered to different ends when the apostle Paul recognizes that the law provokes the very desire it is designed to contain.[14] Because the threat that desire poses depends on desire's being hidden away as a secret, confession—one form of what Foucault calls the "incitement to discourse"—can be a coercive means by which the state controls and ultimately displaces desire with behavior that conforms to socially approved constraints.[15] In the Cold War era, this coercion manifested itself forcefully in the link that powerful public figures drew between sexual deviance and Communist sympathy (or, more broadly, inadequate patriotism). Anti-Communists on the left, such as Arthur Schlesinger, and on the right, such as Billy Graham, descried an unholy trinity of pink, lavender, and red subversives, seeing American manliness and self-reliance undermined in a Communism that embraced diseased togetherness with frankly homoerotic possibilities.[16] Moreover, political culture imagined that homosexuals were not only more likely to be manipulated into being subversives out of fear but also that they were simply more likely to be subversive. Senator Kenneth Wherry described the link as follows: "[Y]ou can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives. Mind you, I don't say every homosexual is a subversive, and I don't say every subversive is a homosexual. But a man of low morality is a menace in the government, whatever he is, and they are all tied up together."[17] Characteristically more blunt, Joseph McCarthy suggested to reporters that "[i]f you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker."[18] Of course, the fact that Roy Cohn could long give service to McCarthy and his committee while pursuing his own homoerotic life suggests the nearly impenetrable secrecy of desire, a hiddenness that generated the furious quest for confession in the first place.

The context into which Baldwin inserts the promise of confession

is complicated further by the history of African American men. Like homosexuality, blackness has been construed in popular and political parlance as the embodiment of desire and, therefore, as a threat to the social order.[19] In the early years of the century, films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) justified Jim Crow segregation and Klan violence by representing black male desire as an uncontrollable force that would use the apparatus of the nation to achieve its true end, sex with white women. During the Cold War, African Americans were a particular focus of FBI harassment and were presumed, like homosexuals, to embody the possibility of subversion. This presumption played out quite literally in the case of Paul Robeson, whose artistic career was derailed on the suspicion that his political activism was subversive.[20] Unlike gay men, however, African Americans were visibly marked as subversives through skin color. The split that Gide could maintain between a life of private desire and public approbation could not be so readily enacted by a black man. Nevertheless, African Americans have rarely responded to an invasive public (and white) gaze with the strategy of open and direct confession of desire, more often opting for what could be described as a strategic hiddenness.[21] The Invisible Man lives underground in preparation for an apocalyptic emergence. In Nella Larson's novel *Passing*, blackness is equated with a secret desire that longs to be revealed. Earlier, Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem ''We Wear the Mask'' describes presenting a false face to the master while acknowledging a sequestered self only to God and to others who wear the mask. In a world where the open expression of desire is only a small step from social exclusion, the jail cell, or the lyncher's rope, confession seems an unlikely route toward a transformative politics. It is not immediately clear, then, why Baldwin could see in Gide's confession the potential for heroic struggle against normative masculinity. Why would Gide's confession not simply be a final humiliation, a final yielding to the priorities of the state and the culture? Why not, in fact, refuse this incitement to discourse and retain a sense of one's own integrity over and against the oppressive power that demands speech? Baldwin's hope for the efficacy of confession—and his broad reliance on the confessional mode generally in his work—springs from his understanding of the psychology of shame, the role of silence in domination, and an ambitious, if only partially successful, rereading of the practices of confession in Christianity. First, Baldwin understood that the power through which social norms induce self-containment

depends on the fear of exposure. To confirm the suspicions of the social gaze, then, is to liberate oneself from fear, if from nothing else. One doesn't have to be afraid, that is, of others finding out what they already know. Baldwin asked of Gide, indeed of all sexual beings, the same kind of visibility that was unavoidable for black men. Although there may be other consequences to living with one's desires in the open, fear of being named as a gay or black man can generate self-policing only in those intent on hiding. Baldwin suggests that whatever he could or couldn't do about society, he could at least refuse to collaborate by refusing to interiorize the principles of McCarthyism. Even when viewed as a mode of resistance to the invasive gaze of the state, the armored self-silencing typical of film noir detectives poses as a pugnacious individualism but replicates, in effect if not in full, the state's desire for a transparent citizenry. While appearing to be a renegade who opposes the corruption or fecklessness of the state, the film noir detective always ultimately reinforces the control of law and order. His apparently hard-edged masculine independence is little different from the frightened timidity of the self-policing organization man to the extent that both refuse to admit desire and the need that desire implies.

But merely expressing oneself holds little promise for overcoming the threat of isolation. Baldwin's ''grunting... he-men'' are perversely isolated in their attempts to guarantee their right to belong to a society that insists on extinguishing desire. Baldwin sees in confession the potential of an alternative community, a society without fear. He develops this vision out of his experience of the Holiness church, not so much in its actual practice but in its ideals.[22] In Holiness Christianity, confession is the means by which the body's desire may be expunged in preparation for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The secrets of the body must be repudiated and the inner self transformed by becoming one with Christ. For Baldwin, confession reveals the secrets of the body so that the self can be liberated rather than betrayed. In both instances, until confession, the public flesh hides the true nature of the individual. For the church, the body's sinful desire occupies the space properly occupied by the Holy Spirit, and so it must be displaced. For Baldwin, however, desire points to a hidden self that has been imprisoned by social convention. Rather than a source of evil, desire is a longing for some difference not available in the alienating social world. This hidden self must be revealed through confession, displacing the

false social self imprinted on the body. Such a truth-telling self can then enter into genuine relationships with others in a community of mutual respect.

Both the popular Christian formulation and Baldwin's revision of it involve a kind of betrayal. As I have suggested, Butler argues that the regulation of the body suggests the possibility of its treachery. For the church, the body is treacherous because it is the prime instrument of the sinful self; it always raises the possibility that the law is insufficient. The Spirit of the Father, therefore, must possess the sinful body so that it is better able to fulfill the demands of the law. For Baldwin, however, the physical body and its desires are less threatening than the public gaze that induces self-policing and the possibility of self-betrayal. It is this self-betrayal and the denial of desire it entails that are the ultimate sins against the body. Ultimately, Baldwin is more concerned with this violence against the self than even the regulation of the body by the church or the state.

Baldwin feels called to come out because the refusal to acknowledge desire brings betrayal of the self and others. In Baldwin's terms, this opening of the self to others not only redeems the individual from an act of bad faith, it also delivers a more authentic social existence, because a society based on deception can exist only in an oppressive relationship to its members. Given the culture of isolation that normative masculinity encourages, Baldwin's analysis leads inevitably to the conclusion that a healthy and authentic masculinity can only be achieved by refusing to "be . . . a man."

Baldwin's confessional dynamic calls for a bold openness by which a kind of nonreligious salvation can be effected. But loosed from the traditional communities that might have received and reaffirmed that confession, it runs the risk of expression in a vacuum, or worse, of censure and exclusion by communities unable or unwilling to bear the burden of another's desire. Like the performances of religious ecstasy that Baldwin pulled off for his friends, confession may have no power in the absence of a community that can hear and validate it. While traditional confessions open pathways for belonging, Baldwin's confessions seek to create a community without shame that can only be imagined in a realm that borders on the apocalyptic; thus, confession bears a weight of responsibility it cannot always deliver. As a black man who faced censure both inside and outside his racial community because of his sexual desires, and as a gay man whose racial identity

made no alliance with whites straightforward, Baldwin saw the problem of community as more than a theoretical problem of reception. Communities are social structures that threaten him with isolation or even destruction, regardless of the courage of his confession and the freedom from guilt the confession can afford.

''The Male Prison'' and the difficult nexus it examines between desire, confession, and containment can be read as a discursive summation of the issues with which Baldwin had struggled in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. In some ways a novel of the Great Migration, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is predominantly a psychological history of secret desire. In his role as a preacher, first in the rural South, then later in Harlem, Gabriel Grimes represents a particular mode of black masculine responsibility and race leadership. Despite his aura of authority and self-possession, Gabriel is a man driven by terror, a terror provoked by his own desire and that of others. In different ways, the psychic and spiritual crises facing Gabriel and his stepson, John, announce a thematic of race, sexuality, and gender that occupied Baldwin throughout his career.

After a youthful period of debauchery and years of pleading from his dying mother, Gabriel gives his life over to God and the church. As if to purify his past, he moves to the opposite extreme in his adulthood, denying and even condemning the body's desires. Indeed, he pursues a stringent sexual purity, marrying Deborah, a woman whom he does not find desirable, in order to father a holy racial lineage that he fantasizes will be analogous to the line of David in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, Gabriel's strenuous pursuit of sexual purity fails to extinguish desire, as his adulterous affair with Esther demonstrates. His first sexual encounter with Esther suggests the degree to which his religious language silences the body, even while that same language gradually begins to express the body, becoming a way to confess desire he cannot countenance:

> He held onto her hands as though he were in the middle of the sea and her hands were the lifeline that would drag him in to shore. ''Jesus Jesus Jesus,'' he prayed, ''oh, Jesus Jesus. Help me to stand.'' He thought that he was pulling back against her hands—but he was pulling her to him. And he saw in her eyes now a look that he had

not seen for many a long day and night, a look that was never in Deborah's eyes.

"*Yes*, you know," he said, "why I'm all the time worrying aboutyou—why I'm all the time miserable when I look at you."

"But you ain't never told me none of this," she said. (126)

In this passage, Gabriel speaks as clearly to sexual desire as to spiritual desire for Jesus. Following the outline Baldwin suggests in "The Male Prison" for a more vital masculinity, we can see in Gabriel a man who needs to confess that he is not a savior upon whom others should depend but simply a man with desires that do not readily conform to public expectations. He chooses, however, the role of savior. And upon discovering that Esther is pregnant, he begins immediately to isolate himself:

"You want me," he asked at last, "to leave my wife—and come with you?"

"*I* thought," she answered, "that you had done thought of that yourself, already, many and many a time."

"You know," he said, with a halting anger, "I ain't never said nothing like that. I ain't never told you I wanted to leave my wife."

"I ain't talking," she shouted, at the end of patience, "about nothing you done *said*!" . . .

"Girl," he said, "does you reckon I'm going to run off and lead a life of sin with you somewhere, just because you tell me you got my baby kicking in your belly? How many kinds of fool you thinkI am?I got God's work to do—my life don't belong to you. Nor to that baby, neither—if it *is* my baby." (131)

Like the "grunting . . . he-men" of "The Male Prison," Gabriel fails to wrestle manfully with his desire or its consequences. Exercising a single-minded will to independence, he refuses to acknowledge his love and need for Esther and hers for him. His dishonesty, predicated on his belief that his moral and religious purity will redeem the world, contributes more clearly to the violence of the world than to its redemption, because his unwillingness to declare the child his own eventually leads to the death of both mother and son.

Gabriel's fear of exposure is rooted in multiple aspects of his life, including his negotiation of the American racial divide. As I suggested earlier, racial politics and sexual politics were deeply entwined during

the Cold War. Whether envisioning black men as ''priapic black studs'' or sexual criminals, or even desexualized Uncle Toms, the white social gaze, driven by its own sexual fears, has been an emphatic and often literal prison for black men.[23] Indeed, Baldwin's career is best described as an effort to parse the complicated intersections of race, racism, and sexuality and to describe the various strategies, failed and successful, that African American men have employed to survive that crossroads.

In his essay ''The Fire Next Time'' (1963), Baldwin describes the need of every African American boy to have what Baldwin calls a ''gimmick'' for surviving a racist culture. Baldwin interprets his conversion and his years as a young preacher in the church as his personal gimmick.[24] For Gabriel, the desires of his body threaten to undermine his gimmick. Indeed, race plays a role in nearly every major sexual event of Gabriel's life. Race influences his initial decision to marry Deborah, if only because Deborah's social degradation had accompanied the violation of her body by white men. Gabriel's desire to rescue her and to establish a royal line through her reflects an effort to garner and sustain social power over and against the threats from white society. Gabriel's sense of racial threat exacerbates his frantic need to hold what little social power he has been able to hoard. Later in his marriage, he succumbs to his desire for a liaison with Esther, a woman with whom he works in a white household. As their desire is consummated in the master's kitchen, Gabriel's terror of being discovered is *racial* terror. He remains as aware of his location in the house and the open kitchen door as he is of Esther's body. Later, when Esther confronts him with her pregnancy, Gabriel shushes her and looks frantically around the white folks' yard to make sure they are not overheard.

Gabriel's fearful attention to the master's white space suggests that his holiness is at least as much a negotiation with the white as with the African American community. His tenuous position is reinforced when he walks the streets to get medicine for Deborah during a period of white rioting in the black community, which results in the lynching and ritual emasculation of a black soldier returning from the war:

> Night had not yet fallen and the streets were gray and empty—save that here and there, polished in the light that spilled outward from a poolroom or a tavern, white men stood in groups of half a dozen. As he passed each group, silence fell, and they watched him insolently, itching to kill; but he said nothing, bowing his head, and

> they knew, anyway, that he was a preacher. There were no black men on the street at all, save him. Now, someone spat on the sidewalk at Gabriel's feet, and he walked on, his face not changing, and he heard it reprovingly whispered behind him that he was a good nigger, surely up to no trouble. He hoped that he would not have to smile into any of these so well-known white faces. While he walked, held by his caution more rigid than an arrow, he prayed, as his mother had taught him to pray, for loving kindness; yet he dreamed of the feel of a white man's forehead against his shoe; again and again, until the head wobbled on the broken neck and his foot encountered nothing but the rushing blood. (141–42)

As this passage implies, Gabriel's will to power is driven by a deep-seated fear that he will lose his self. The caution by which he holds himself "more rigid than an arrow" while negotiating the dangerous streets fathers the moral rigidity by which he represses his sexual desire in order to claim a position of power in the black community. The suppressed desire to lash out violently against those who force him to contain even the movements of his own body is directly related to the power he can exercise among the relatively powerless as a minister in the church. Gabriel's lack of power in society at large translates into an obsessive mythology of his control of the present (in the community of the church) and of the future (in his fantasy of a royal line). A confession of his desire for Esther would threaten the source of his power because such a revelation would fracture his reputation as a preacher. But even beyond this, such a confession would threaten the fantasies upon which Gabriel has built his identity. It would reveal the cracks in the mask of his moral purity, and the uncontrollable quality of desire would give the lie to the myth of self-control upon which the fantasy of a royal and blessed line depends.

John appears as a counterpoint to Gabriel. Both contend with the nexus of secret desire and racial oppression that defines their masculinity. John's perception of his hazily defined homoerotic desire as a threat and his body as treacherous replicates his father's terrors.[25] As the child of his mother's love affair prior to meeting Gabriel, John seems to embody a desire that Gabriel cannot control. Thus, John's body is not only the site of his own unexpressed longing but also the screen upon which the fantasies and fears of others are projected, especially those of his father in the face of his wife's unspoken memories of an erotic life.

Unlike Gabriel, John's fear is generated not through a threatened loss of power or control but through the threat of not belonging, of being cast into an abyss of isolation without even the comfort of love and family. Early in the novel, John imagines his sexual awakening as the source of such separation:

> John wondered at his panic, then wondered about the time; and then (while the yellow stain on the ceiling slowly transformed itself into a woman's nakedness) he remembered that it was his fourteenth birthday and that he had sinned. . . .
>
> 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 would never dare to speak. (18–19)

The yellow-stained ceiling beneath which John masturbates resolves itself into the figure of "a woman's nakedness," the only shape he can give to the desire to which the stain speaks and which it displaces. John's inability to visualize his homoerotic desire in terms other than those sanctioned by dominant social norms mirrors Gabriel's inability to speak of his desire for a life with Esther. In both cases, desire is silenced by the fear generated in community.

Indeed, John's religious community takes the repression of desire as the necessary precondition for participation, a requirement that Gabriel recognizes and embraces, with brutal consequence. John experiences this call to repression in many different ways but most vividly in the church's public exposure and rebuke of the young preacher Elisha for his sin with his girlfriend Ella Mae. Father James, the lead minister of John's church, calls Ella Mae and Elisha to the front of the church for public chastisement. Public humiliation transforms their relationship into one that meets the acceptable code of relationships for men and women in the church: "If they came together again it would be in wedlock. They would have children and raise them in church This was what was meant by a holy life, this was what the way of the cross demanded" (17–18).

Commenting on this section of the novel, Trudier Harris notes the panoptic quality of fundamentalist African American churches:

> The idea that such churches regulated private lives led to such practices as young girls who became pregnant out of wedlock having to go before entire congregations, beg pardon for their sin, and ask formally to be reinstated into the church. If the church is viewed as having ever-present eyes on the lives of its members, how much more strongly must the members believe that God, whose "eye is on the sparrow," is watching and judging them.[26]

The community's knowledge of its members may be a means of uniting them, but it can also be a means of controlling them. This knowledge and power enable the community to expel those whose sins of the flesh are seen as contrary to the community's iteration of itself through marriage, childbearing, and church attendance. Elisha, the primary object of John's desire in the novel, erases his desire for Ella Mae in order to follow the way of the cross, the sacrifice of the body that community demands. Similarly, John never tells anyone about his desire for other boys, and for Elisha specifically, because it would consign him to social death. Confession, then, both reveals and erases, both expresses and refuses to speak the self. Confessing the self proceeds only in ways preordained by the community of hearers awaiting such confession.

Despite this problem, it would be too easy to reduce confession to a Foucauldian method of social control. The problem of John's sexuality, like his stepfather's, is entangled with the question of race. Unlike Gabriel, John responds to his desire not with rigid self-containment or the will to domination but through a fantasy of flight into whiteness. In the opening sections of the novel, John quite literally runs away from his blackness toward the white part of town. Secreted in a movie theater, he projects his desire for self-expression onto the white heroine who aggressively displays her sexuality and dies a romantically tragic death, scorning those who have spurned her. Faced with the possibility of being rejected for being gay, John imagines himself as the screen's white heroine—remote, distant, heedless of others' opinions. Momentarily a white woman, John imagines an escape from the possibility of rejection by rejecting others. Like the film noir detective who appears to rebel against social convention while ultimately interiorizing its imperatives, John mitigates the possibility of rejection by idealizing a romantic fantasy of social ostracism.

John's conversion at the end of the novel attempts to imagine yet another route toward an authentic masculinity as he opens himself to

others and the possibility of community. Far from the hidden desire for power operating in Gabriel's faith, John's conversion is public and abject:

> And something moved in John's body which was not John. He was invaded, set at naught, possessed. This power had struck John in the head or in the heart; and, in a moment, wholly, filling him with an anguish that he could never in his life have imagined, that he surely could not endure, that even now he could not believe, had opened him up; had cracked him open, as wood beneath the axe cracks down the middle, as rocks break up; had ripped him and felled him in a moment, so that John had not felt the wound, but only the agony, had not felt the fall, but only the fear; and lay here, now, helpless, screaming at the very bottom of darkness. (193)

The emotional violence of this moment marks an absolute negation of the armored self that Baldwin saw at the root of a potentially "petulant and unmasculine pride" in American men. Perhaps equally important in this scene is the public, communal character of John's experience. Authentic community depends on an unguarded self, and the penetration of the guarded self depends upon the presence of a beloved community. Whereas Gabriel's conversion occurs in an isolated field, John's need to rise and join is accomplished through an embrace of the blackness of the church community. But first he must resist the malicious voice of racism that "insisted yet once more that he rise from that filthy floor if he did not want to become like all the other niggers" (194). Unlike Gabriel, John resists the temptation to seek the powers associated with whiteness and instead chooses empathetic identification with his fellow African Americans as he rises up to join the saints:

> "Rise up, rise up, Brother Johnny, and talk about the Lord's deliverance." . . .
>
> "Amen!" cried Sister McCandless, "rise up, and praise the Lord!" . . .
>
> "Rise up, Johnny," said Elisha, again. "Are you saved, boy?"
>
> "Yes," said John, "oh, yes!" and the words came upward, it seemed, of themselves, in the new voice God had given him. Elisha stretched out his hand, and John took the hand, and stood—so suddenly, and so strangely, and with such wonder!—once more on his feet. (205–6)

Standing on his feet suggests the achievement of manhood. But John has become a man by taking the hand of another man, Elisha. And he is immediately embraced by the other men and women of the community—by everyone but his stepfather, Gabriel, who stands apart in bitter self-righteousness, unwilling to rejoice.

This vision of love and community that enfolds John contrasts markedly with Gabriel's isolation. According to Joseph Brown, the conversion places John on an equal social footing with his father while not reducing him to his father's brutality. Fred Standley, however, has suggested that the conclusion of the novel speaks more to John's confusion than to his emergence as a man. Other critics fall at various points along this spectrum.[27] I suggest, however, that the ambiguities at the end of the novel are rooted in Baldwin's understanding of confession as a transforming experience, a conception that only partially overcomes the tension between community and desire.

The end of the novel raises the question of whether confession alone can produce community, or whether every confession of the self requires a hiding of the self. Like the Holiness churches that both encourage and delimit ecstatic experience, John's confession, along with others throughout Baldwin's work, is enabled and restricted by the kinds of community to which it is made. While John's embrace of others marks a significant departure from Gabriel's will to power, solidarity comes at the expense of the explicit manifestation of homoerotic desire that has shadowed the surface of the text, especially in John's relationship to Elisha. Of course, the language of the conversion, focused on images of penetration, opening, and possession, and its culmination in an expression of masculine affection can be read as implicitly homoerotic; nevertheless, desire remains implicit, unspoken. Ironically, communal solidarity in this novel is ultimately achieved at the expense of unorthodox desires of the body whose admission Baldwin cites elsewhere as the source of any courageous confession and true community.

Thus, while Patrick Johnson argues that John's love for Elisha in the novel means that "the Christian body may also be a queer body," Gabriel, Elisha, and even John suppress their sexual desires, suggesting that gayness and holiness, and gayness and blackness, cannot be spoken of together; or, at least, that those simultaneous confessions remain a dream of a world unavailable in 1953 except in Baldwin's imagination and the portions of his manuscript that were not ulti-

mately published.[28] But John's embrace of community is meant to be celebrated, especially in comparison to Gabriel's will to power. Such freedom and such confessions are no doubt a precondition for the kind of human solidarity that Baldwin imagined. They do not, however, create the human community of which he dreamed. Indeed, it remains worth asking what price communities exact for communion. The ending of the novel suggests that John's arrival as a man through confession and conversion depends as much on the self's substantial enclosure as on its disclosure. While John's conversion bridges the gulf of separation between self and others in the formation of community, it does so only by maintaining a gulf inside John himself between public role and private desire. Baldwin's men remain caught poignantly in the excruciating contradictions of confession and isolation. While community is only possible if the self is revealed, communities enable or privilege certain revelations and not others. A person confesses what a community can hear, and what a community can hear is what can count as a genuine confession. John's desire, finally, is still a love that dare not speak its name.

This silence at the end of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resounds more definitively given the novel's publishing history, a history that suggests that Baldwin's problems with confession and solidarity went far beyond the confines of the Holiness church. Baldwin's editors urged him to get rid of most of the religious aspects of the novel—an editorial misprision that provoked in Baldwin a panic-induced nausea—and they may have urged him to rewrite the conclusion to mute its homoerotic theme.[29] In at least one late draft of the novel, Elisha's embrace of John after his conversion is frankly homoerotic—a public confession of faith that is also a confession of same-sex desire—making explicit what remains only implicit in the published version. Emile Capouya, Baldwin's friend since childhood, reported that the ending of the draft was indeed an open revelation of John's homosexuality and that Baldwin had removed it at the insistence of his editors. Whether he did so for this reason or for more obscure personal or aesthetic reasons, Baldwin's decision to alter the ending is significant.[30] The homoeroticism of the unpublished ending suggests a vision of a self and a community whose members are fully transparent to one another: that is, a community that enables but does not constrain. By this time in his life, Baldwin made no secret of his unconventional sexuality. And he had left the church—in body if not in spirit. His

experience with the community of writers and publishers was not substantially different from his experience with his church, at least with regard to self-revelation. The expectations of the publishing community—driven by the logic of the niche market reserved for "The Negro Writer"—were different in detail but not in kind from the constraints John experiences in church. That is, communities listen only with reluctance to confessions they do not want to hear. This is true of all communities—whether of publishers, readers, or saints.

This does not make Baldwin's vision a failure, as if absolute freedom from constraint were the only success that counts. In her reading of the biblical story of Esther as an analogy of coming out, Eve Sedgwick contends that the belief in explicit revelation as a means to systematic cultural change verges on sentimentality:

> First, we have too much cause to know how limited a leverage any individual revelation can exercise over collectively scaled and institutionally embodied oppressions. Acknowledgment of this disproportion does not mean that the consequences of such acts as coming out can be circumscribed within *predetermined* boundaries, as if between "personal" and "political" realms, nor does it require us to deny how disproportionately powerful and disruptive such acts can be. But the brute incommensurability has nonetheless to be acknowledged. In the theatrical display of an *already institutionalized* ignorance no transformative potential is to be looked for.[31]

Sedgwick, drawing on Foucault, emphasizes that there is no easy binary to be drawn between speech and silence, that there are many forms of silence and many modes of deployment.[32] John's silence at the end of the novel can't be equated simply with the silent and disapproving gaze of his stepfather. The implicit homoeroticism of his conversion and the novel's culmination at least point toward and symbolize a mode of masculinity at odds with his father's even while he uses his father's language and lives in his father's house. What seems finally to frustrate Baldwin's design is that confession is a ritual enabled by communities, while communities cannot be created by confessions alone.

These conflicts involving confession, desire, and community—announced first in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and explored explicitly in "The Male Prison"—suggest a thematic that informs most of Bald-

win's work as he returns repeatedly not only to the confessional form but also to the unfulfilled possibilities of community and confession. Baldwin's first explicit fictional investigation of homosexuality, *Giovanni's Room*—a novel that one editor suggested he burn and which much of the African American press excoriated—deals explicitly with the way in which unconfessed homoerotic desire does violence to the self and to others. It also mutes the racial element of Baldwin's desire for solidarity, figuring it only obscurely in the olive-skinned Giovanni. *Another Country* explores similar themes but can only imagine community through a collection of bohemian, would-be artists who, ultimately, are little better at hearing and receiving one another openly than Gabriel's church. Not until well into mid-career did Baldwin begin to bring these elements together in his fiction; it could be argued that he did not integrate them fully with his religious imagination and experience until his final novel, *Just above My Head* (1979). It may be instructive that the politics of confession in *Just above My Head* achieves this integration through the microcosm of family life, whose relationship to broader social or political institutions remains untranslated and perhaps untranslatable.

Very late in his career, in his last published essay, Baldwin again meditated on the debilitating qualities of the isolation that accompanies unspoken and unheard desire, though figured now through the imagery of the seen and unseen:

> I hazard that the physically androgynous state must create an all-but-intolerable loneliness, since we all exist, after all, and crucially, in the eye of the beholder. We all react to and, to whatever extent, become what that eye sees. This judgment begins in the eyes of one's parents (the crucial, the definitive, the all-but-everlasting judgment), and so we move, in the vast and claustrophobic gallery of Others, on up or down the line, to the eye of one's friend or one's lover.
>
> It is virtually impossible to trust one's human value without the collaboration or corroboration of that eye—which is to say that no one can live without it. One can, of course, instruct that eye as to what to see, but this effort, which is nothing less than ruthless intimidation, is wounding and exhausting: While it can keep humiliation at bay, it confirms the fact that humiliation is the central danger of one's life. And since one cannot risk love without risking humiliation, love becomes impossible.[33]

Here again is the theme Baldwin first sounded in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and then made explicit in ''The Male Prison.'' The young Baldwin had judged Gide's confession a ''failure'' because he could not embrace the desire he spoke of in his fiction and revealed finally in his journals and late memoirs. The Baldwin of ''Here Be Dragons'' might have tempered this judgment by noting that the success or failure of any confession depends not only on the will and courage of those who speak but also on the courage and loving regard of those who listen. Baldwin's excision of John's declaration of love for Elisha from *Go Tell It on the Mountain* can be read as an unfortunate repression and, therefore, his judgment on Gide as a judgment on himself. It can also be read more sympathetically as Baldwin's acknowledgment that communities that hear such confessions are as rare as those who are willing to make a confession to be heard. While the community of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* could not be imagined without John's religious conversion, it could perhaps only be imagined without explicit manifestation of Elisha's and John's forbidden desire. The church, and Baldwin's editors—and perhaps even Baldwin, in the end—remained unable to imagine a community in which an embrace like that of John and Elisha could be recognized as a confession not only of faith but also of desire. In this respect, both community and confession remained idealizations throughout Baldwin's career, realized as a sign, imagined as a hope.

Messiah College

Notes

1 James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Dell, 1985), 30; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2 For overviews of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements in the United States, see Melvin Dieters, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1980); and John Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon, 1985); see also Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston* (Berkeley, Calif.: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), 79–107. The best contemporary examination of this tradition can be found in Cheryl Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996). My analysis of Baldwin is inevitably shaped by my having been raised in one

of the Holiness traditions. While my own intellectual journey has taken me nearly as far afield from those beginnings as Baldwin's own, I hope my reflections suggest a respect for Holiness Christianity born of intimacy.

3 Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 61. Judith Butler's analysis of the interplay between bodies and discursive systems, especially her understanding of the body's performance as an iterated style, has been helpful to my thinking. Butler speaks against the notion that the body exists as a fundamental and undiscursive ground: " '[S]ex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (*Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* [New York: Routledge, 1993], 1–2). Building on Butler's insight, I am suggesting that the body as it performs in a particular social space is a system of recognizable signs even when it is apparently spontaneous or uncontrolled.

4 Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 61–62. Sanders notes that some churches will enforce quiet in worship not only by controlling the order of worship but also by allowing public rebuke by church leaders. More ecstatic churches are known for "exhorting persons to speak aloud, stand, raise their hands, or shout and subjecting them to verbal ridicule if they refuse, as in 'You think you're too cute and too sophisticated to shout'" (62).

5 See W. J. Weatherby, *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 27.

6 James Baldwin, "The Male Prison," in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 105.

7 Ibid.

8 Robert Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 6; see also 1–9.

9 Baldwin, "Male Prison," 105.

10 Oliver Harris, "Cold War Correspondents: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Cassady, and the Political Economy of Beat Letters," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 46 (summer 2000): 172.

11 Donald Pease, "Leslie Fiedler, the Rosenberg Trial, and the Formulation of an American Canon," *boundary 2* 17 (summer 1990): 162.

12 For a full description of Hughes's response to the McCarthy hearings and his revision of his association with Communism, see Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II, 1941–1967: I Dream a World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 208–22.

13 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2.

14 Paul is at some pains in Romans to declare that the law is good, whatever the complications; nevertheless, he clearly recognizes the peculiar double role that prohibition plays, giving birth to desire even while it imposes restraints: "Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have

known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me'' (Romans 7:7–10, New Revised Standard Version).

15 Michel Foucault, ''Introduction,'' *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House: Vintage, 1990), 17.

16 See K. A. Courdileone, '''Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960,'' *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 515–45.

17 Senator Kenneth Wherry, quoted in Max Lerner, *The Unfinished Country: A Book of American Symbols* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 313; see also Courdileone, '''Politics in an Age of Anxiety,''' 532.

18 Joseph McCarthy, quoted in David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard, 1993), 54; see also Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 73; and Courdileone, '''Politics in an Age of Anxiety,''' 521.

19 This attitude toward black male sexuality is perhaps epitomized by Malcolm Cowley's remark in the 1920s: ''One heard it said that the Negroes had retained a direct virility that the whites had lost through being overeducated'' (quoted in David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* [New York: Penguin, 1997], 91). Perhaps the most important general theoretical argument concerning this attitude comes from Frantz Fanon: ''The civilized white man retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license, or orgiastic scenes, or unpunished rapes, or unrepressed instinct Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves 'as if' the Negro really had them'' (*Black Skin, White Masks* [New York: Grove, 1952], 165). See also Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, eds., *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), especially the essay by Robyn Wiegman, ''Fiedler and Sons,'' 45–70. On the stereotyping of African Americans generally, including the stereotyping of sexuality, see Marlon Riggs's documentary film *Ethnic Notions: Black People in White Minds* (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1986).

20 See John Vernon, ''Paul Robeson, the Cold War, and the Question of African-American Loyalties,'' *Black History Bulletin* 62 (April–September 1999): 47–51. For more general work on the relationship between racial politics and the Cold War, see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001); and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

21 See Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s discussion of signifying as a rhetorical strategy of indirection (*The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988], 53–54).

22 While Marlon Ross is not concerned with the dynamics of confession and community or its relationship to Baldwin's religious background, his essay ''White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality'' clarifies the degree to which Baldwin understood that the exposure of secret desires to the light was a necessary process for personal and political healing: ''The uncloseting of desire—sexual desire—would be a necessary step if Americans hoped to unwarp their imaginations from the destructive bent of racism'' (in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight A. McBride [New York: New York Univ. Press, 1999], 34). To date, Michael F. Lynch has written the most extensively on the question of Baldwin's experience of Christianity and its consequences for his fiction; see, for example, ''The Everlasting Father: Mythic Quest and Rebellion in Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,'' *College Language Association Journal* 37 (December 1993): 156–75. Lynch sees Baldwin's work as embodying a form of dialectical embrace and rejection of the church and its doctrine because the practice of the church is contrary to its highest ideals. I think there is more at stake, however, which the conflict between desire and Christian duty in Baldwin's work makes clear. If I am correct that despite his theory of community and confession, Baldwin's fiction suggests that the price of belonging is the deferral of desire, then the problem for Baldwin is the *ideals* of the church, not simply its practice. See also Michael F. Lynch, ''A Glimpse of the Hidden God: Dialectical Vision in Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,'' in *New Essays on ''Go Tell It on the Mountain*,'' ed. Trudier Harris (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 29–57; ''Just above My Head: James Baldwin's Quest for Belief,'' *Literature and Theology: An International Journal of Theory, Criticism, and Culture* 11 (September 1997): 284–98; and ''Staying Out of the Temple: Baldwin, the African American Church, and *The Amen Corner*,'' in *Reviewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen*, ed. D. Quentin Miller (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2000), 33–71.

23 The reference to ''priapic black studs'' is from ''The Fire Next Time,'' in *The Price of the Ticket*, 350. Baldwin's well-known critique of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom is contained within his critique of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, whom he describes as another white fantasy of black masculinity (''Everybody's Protest Novel,'' in *The Price of the Ticket*, 27–33).

24 Baldwin, ''The Fire Next Time,'' *The Price of the Ticket*, 341.

25 Houston A. Baker Jr. sees all the features of the bildungsroman in John's anxiety about his awakening sexuality and his efforts to escape the claustrophobic religion of his family (*Black Literature in America* [New York: McGraw, 1971], 16).

26 Trudier Harris, ''Introduction,'' *New Essays on "Go Tell It on the Mountain*,'' ed. Harris, 20–21.

27 See Joseph A. Brown, ''I, John, Saw the Holy Number: Apocalyptic Visions in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Native Son*,'' *Religion and Literature* 27 (spring 1995): 53–70; and Fred Standley, ''Go Tell It on the Mountain: Religion as the Indirect Method of Indictment,'' in *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*, ed. Fred Standley (Boston: Prentice Hall, 1988), 188–94. For an overview of criticism on *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, see Trudier Harris's introduction to *New Essays*, 1–28.

28 E. Patrick Johnson, ''Feeling the Spirit in the Dark: Expanding Notions of the Sacred in the African-American Gay Community,'' *Callaloo* 21 (spring 1998): 404.

29 See James Baldwin, introduction to *The Amen Corner* (New York: Dell, 1968), xiv.

30 See Weatherby, *James Baldwin*, 96.

31 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 78.

32 Ibid., 3.

33 James Baldwin, ''Here Be Dragons,'' in *The Price of the Ticket*, 679–80.