



James BaldwinReview

To Minimize the Bill That They Must Pay

Introduction to Volume 6, 2020

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Every day of your lives is practice in becoming the person you want to be. No Instantaneous miracle is suddenly going to occur and make you brave and courageous and true. And every day that you sit back silent, refusing to use your power, terrible things are being done in our name.

Audre Lorde, Oberlin College Commencement, 1989¹

...No society can smash the social contract and be exempt from the consequences, and the consequences are chaos for everybody in the society.

James Baldwin, interview with Julius Lester, 1984²

At the time of this writing, the global death toll from COVID-19 has surpassed 200,000. I shudder to think how many have died by the time you read this. In the U.S. alone, the number of confirmed cases has been doubling every three days.³ Current case counts worldwide have surpassed three million. Seven weeks ago, the suburban Detroit elementary school my children attend was closed for two weeks. At that time, school was rumored to be resuming again after a month of “social distancing.” This initial estimate has been revised and extended a few times; we are experiencing week seven now, with the current “stay at home” order expected to extend another two weeks. I’m terrified that won’t be nearly long enough.

At the end of March, Detroit achieved the grisly accolade of being discussed on the 24-hour news cycle as a new epicenter for the spread of COVID-19. In nearly the same breath, with only a slight pivot to Camera Two to signal the change, the well-groomed anchor informed me as well that the United States now leads the world in confirmed cases. A few hours later, Michigan’s Governor revealed that our schools may well remain shuttered for the rest of the school year. The pace at which the situation is changing seems unrelentingly accelerated. During April, the number of cases in Michigan alone surged from 7,615 on March 31st to an astounding 41,379 by May 1st, and this surge has occurred despite the yawning lack of adequate testing equipment.⁴ As tests become available, these numbers will surely spike further. Not weeks, not days, but hours pass and the whole situation has again changed. In the three weeks that passed as I’ve drafted and tinkered with this introduction, Michigan’s governor, Gretchen Whitmer, has, quite wisely, extended the “stay at home” order and canceled the remaining school year.

Homeschooling, then, will continue apace until further notice. Between us, my spouse and I have earned six degrees, four of them in the liberal arts. I’m not worried about whether or not we can finish up third grade here at home. We have a robust library and amiable pupils who are able and earnest readers. Perhaps, like Baldwin who was self-educated through his voracious reading at the New York Public Library, they too will fashion their own unique education from

amongst the shelves. Having worked remotely for most of my professional life, I'm not worried about schedules or "work/life balance." Business on top, pajamas on the bottom, the work from home uniform of the Spring of 2020—we've got that covered too. We've also very reliable WIFI, so I'm sure we will figure out how to Skype or Zoom some virtual participation amongst classmates. The school district and its skeleton staff of underpaid and underappreciated are scrambling to present ever more online learning, though at the elementary level at least all that they are learning appears to be how to be online. How long we will be sequestered in our home, however, is a far more open question.

That we were spectacularly unprepared for this, you already know. As Juliette Kayyem, a former Department of Homeland Security official, put it in *The Atlantic*, that same week schools were initially closed in Michigan, "A crisis finds a nation as it is, not as its citizen wish it to be."⁵ That the United States is currently being misled and mismanaged, this too you already know. That an election is just around the corner, we all know. I'm painfully aware as I write this in May of 2020 that it won't be released as part of the sixth volume of *James Baldwin Review* until October. By the time you read this, our situation is bound to have gotten more dire. I know this as surely as I know that no one amongst us wished for us to be facing such a crisis with our purportedly united states competing amongst each other for desperately needed supplies to make up for a deficient federal response. What I cannot know now is how bad it will be, how many more will perish as the impatient amongst us chafe at "social distancing" and figure that "flattening the curve" is someone else's responsibility. Will market concerns trump concern for our health? Will common sense prevail over market sense? In the eerily Faustian bargain we now face, will we have chosen mass casualties, or mass unemployment? Will tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands of deaths finally be enough to spur my neighbors and fellow citizens to vote on the right side of history?

I wish I knew. Not just the macabre stats I allude to above, but also—and more crucially—I wish I knew how to convince my fellow Americans of a relatively simple fact: Installing a liar to head your government is a bad idea. It is bad for business; bad for diplomacy; it is bad, in the most elemental way, for your health.

How many more will die before those who fashion themselves Republicans, conservatives, or "Red State" loyalists are forced to recognize as does Frida Ghitis, writing for *The Atlantic*, that "the timeline of the pandemic is a story of Trumpian misinformation. Trump's

alternative reality has grown familiar, but this time the consequences are deadly.”⁶

Unfortunately, the echo chamber that comprises our current media landscape leaves little room for hope in this arena. I’ll not belabor here a Luddite’s cry to abandon social media, but will remind readers instead that in the original Greek myth, when her voice was restricted by the vengeful Juno to only being able to parrot back what others spoke, the nymph Echo literally wasted away. Speaking nothing other than someone else’s parting thoughts, not unlike the trolling anonymity of Facebook or the in-your-face, all caps screaming of a twisted Trump Tweet, Echo hid in a cave, her body evaporating until only her voice remained.

Before we go any further, I want you to know that I’ve been putting this off for months now. Since at least August 2019, I’ve been collecting bits of news, pulling quotes, and generally stewing about how I am to frame the 2020 volume of *James Baldwin Review*. It is my honor and privilege to pen the editorial introduction to our journal, but the yoke has weighed heavier this time than most. Mostly because I’ve been unable to find an anchor. The news, as it is, spins so fast it’s been hard to stop the rotation long enough to see the picture clearly. To see, that is, in the arc of history longer than the next hour, which moment is going to hold, to last. Which political misstep, which gaffe on the campaign trail, which vote would truly begin to make something like Brexit not simply a thorny theoretical, but instead a real logistical nightmare in the lives and economies of our interconnected worlds; which miscarriage of the American system of checks and balances, to not put too fine a point on it, would still matter when this issue is released in the fall of 2020? These were the issues I started thinking about when I began planning this introduction. As 2019 came to a close and the hard winter of 2020 began, I became resigned to the mundanity of Trump’s mendacity. His appalling lack of veracity no longer surprised me. What surprised me, instead, was the lack of an outcry.

The things not seen as evidence in the impeachment of the 45th President of the United States are enormously revealing: From the flagrant defiance of the Emoluments Clause from the very first day of his ascendancy to the Presidency to explicit collusion with foreign powers in the disruption of the American electoral system; from repeated attacks on the very notion of a free press, not to mention the blatant, egregious disregard for truth; from seemingly obtuse notions about “alternative facts” to an elected official whose lies are so numerous as to keep a press core busy attempting to “fact check” a dizzying maze of conspiracies and fabrications. What these stunning omissions in the record of high crimes and misdemeanors systematically perpetrated

against the American people and our system of government reveal, most of all, is precisely the terror that ensues when sycophants and yes men and yes women hold fast to craven convictions. Convinced that their jobs as elected representative mattered more than the day to day welfare of their electors; convinced that their perverse religious notions about controlling others' bodies and proscribing reproductive choice mattered enough to allow a known philanderer to claim the mantle of the religious right; convinced that packing courts with conservative justices—no matter their qualifications, or, as the case might have it, their numerous disqualifications—mattered more than the system of checks and balances they quite literally swore an oath to uphold; convinced, perhaps most of all, that fattening their wallets and padding the balance sheets of the corporations that lobbied on their behalf trumped any other consideration, with a steadfastness that might be admired as courageous were it not so basely motivated, a parade of elected officials marched us all steadily towards this moment.

What these lacunae in the impeachment record reveal most of all is that none of this was an accident. The outbreak of a novel coronavirus may well have been an act of God or mother nature, but the spectacular failures of this nation's federal government to address in any substantive way other than distrust and misdirection the very existential threat facing us was the direct result of the actions, plans, and investments made over the last several decades, exponentially accelerated over the last three years of this so wildly inept presidency. That a people would let their elected representatives vote in such a sycophantic kangaroo court as was convened by the United States Senate in February wasn't just appalling; it was downright alarming. I therefore resigned myself to raising the hue and cry.

The problem with the hue and cry, though, is that it requires, grammatically, a direct object. The voice and the trumpet, that is, are raised in pursuit of some *one*. Early English statutes reveal that the hue and cry was designed as a way of sharing liability. If one came across a crime and didn't raise the hue, one was liable for that crime; similarly, if you refused to enter into pursuit upon hearing the hue and cry, then you were now held liable. The rub here, is twofold: Firstly, as our epigraph from Audre Lorde suggests, when we allow our representatives to be derelict in their duties, we are all liable for the damage they do in our name. Secondly, as any good Foucauldian can tell you, power is not that simple. Even were there *only one* culpable party in this, a resounding *j'accuse!* rolling from sea to shining sea might not be enough.

When the Emperor has no clothes, we expect the court to play along. But the version of the story I heard included a little boy, the child's wisdom that often saves us all, who pointed out the folly of the naked man. Most versions of this fable end here, with a fairly apparent moral: when a ruse as transparent as invisible clothing is so baldly denied, only an innocent child—one not yet corrupted by self-interest—is courageous enough to speak the truth. This, surely, is the moral that is traditionally endorsed by the tale. It has mostly survived as a children's fable, after all. It was always my assumption that at this point the people raised up and deposed that fool. The naked, raving Emperor was removed once the people saw him clearly. Wasn't he?

The version of the story that comes to us from Hans Christian Anderson, however, contains some ominous final lines, lines worth pausing over, for he's woven another lesson into the king's magical robe.⁷ The final paragraph is, in my reading, both the most sinister and most pertinent:

‘But he has nothing on!’ said the whole people at length. That touched the Emperor, for it seemed to him that they were right; but he thought within himself, ‘I must go through with the procession.’ And so he held himself a little higher, and the chamberlains held on tighter than ever, and carried the train which did not exist at all.⁸

Knowing full well the fabric was a sham, the Emperor and his retinue continue the ruse. In this final moment of the fable, the existence of the fabric has ceased to be relevant at all, the procession is all that matters.

When the procession trumps everything else, as Baldwin suggests in our second epigraph, surely our social contract—that implicit agreement wherein the importance of truth and the rule of law are sacred—is smashed and we cannot avoid the consequences. What if it's not just the Emperor and his court that play along, but all the gullible citizenry? And if that's not bad enough, what about those who aren't gullible, but instead are knowingly, cynically enabling his unchecked mendacity for their own gain? The parade of pretense in the tale of the Emperor and his clothes is merely that, a parade. A march down the street, a celebration of sorts to mark the event of his majesty's insecurities and narcissism.

But what if the march, instead, was to a press conference? What if the Emperor, as it were, stood behind the podium preparing his subjects for a great trial? What if, in the final postulation that I dearly wish were only hypothetical, he stood there ranting, lying not just about his clothes, but about everything else? Lying about the availability of tests?⁹ Lying about the

timelines for a vaccination or a cure? Turning daily televised coronavirus “updates” into miniature campaign rallies? Rallies that appear designed specifically to ease economic worries and get the stock market back on track? Suggesting outlandish and dangerously irresponsible things like injecting bleach as a cure?¹⁰ Updates purporting to address a scientific matter and a clinical crisis with an incoherent word salad devoid of scientific grounding of any sort, trading instead on a mixture of xenophobic, racist dog whistles that sow further the seeds of distrust? Addresses that amount to nothing more than another round of gaslighting, producing only more cognitive dissonance? What if the parade and the misinformation at the podium continue even then?

Finding ourselves at this terrifying juncture, I take solace in the fact that one of the cures, as it were, for gaslighting and the cognitive dissonance it provokes is to establish a baseline. It helps pull us away from the clamor of competing narratives when we corroborate some key aspects of a lived reality. To act, in short, as a witness to one’s time and place, to stand bravely before the weight of history and declare, “it happened like this” is to counteract piece by piece, witness by witness, moment by moment, and life by life the torrent of occlusion and misdirection that is currently being sold as a “decentralized” approach to the pandemic by the United States government. By raising, if not the hue and cry then at least your own voice to cry foul—as the child in our fable has—is to insist that the continued pretense of an unclothed emperor is a danger to us all. Such witnessing is surely the only way to prevent the parade from marching us to our doom.

James Baldwin Review's sixth volume begins with our “Feature Essay” by Nicholas Buccola, “The Great Debate: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Civil Rights Revolution.” In “The Great Debate,” Buccola introduces readers to the story at the heart of his new book, *The Fire Is upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Debate over Race in America* (Princeton UP, 2019). The Harlem-raised James Baldwin and the privileged William F. Buckley, Jr. could not have been more different, Buccola notes, but they both rose to the height of American intellectual life during the civil rights movement. By the time they met in February 1965 to debate at the Cambridge Union, the stage was set for a clash between what Buccola terms “Baldwin’s call for a moral revolution in race relations against Buckley’s unabashed elitism and implicit commitment to white supremacy.” Buccola’s engagement with the lives of these men on opposite ends of the political spectrum is a compelling lead-in to the

analyses that follow, most of which deal more narrowly with the specifics of Baldwin's life, works, and legacies. That these specificities have a history, a heritage, a lineage that links today's troubles to yesterday's debates is the Baldwinian historical lesson writ large, and Buccola's focus on the two influential figures and their juxtaposition on the debate stage is a ready primer in this curriculum.

Nadia Alahmed's essay, "'The Shape of the Wrath to Come': James Baldwin's Radicalism and the Evolution of his Thought on Israel," begins our formal essay section with another lesson in Baldwin's history, this time of the arc of his thoughts on the Israeli state. Tracing the evolution of Baldwin's discourse on Arab-Israeli conflict as connected to his own evolution as a Black thinker, activist, and author, Alahmed explores Baldwin's relationship with some of the major radical Black movements and organizations of the 20th century to argue that "Baldwin's transformation from a supporter of the Zionist project of nation-building to an advocate Palestinian rights and national aspirations reveals much about the ideological transformations of the larger Black liberation movement." Marquita R. Smith's essay, "'Birthing a New World: Black Women as Surrogates of Liberation in James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*," continues our examination of the contours of political thought and activism that found expression in Baldwin's writing. By exploring representations of Black women as caregivers in *Beale Street*, Smith argues that "Black women's care work in the face of social death [is] an example of how Black women act as surrogates for Black liberation." Monica Pearl's essay, "Chagrin d'amour: Intimacy, Shame, and the Closet in *Giovanni's Room*," brings us from history and politics to literature and sexuality, with an exploration of Baldwin's second novel. For Pearl, as for many other critics before her, *Giovanni's Room* is a text "riven with shame" that navigates the uneven terrain of a non-normative love affair. Pearl's reexamination of the closet, a conceit she sees as both "literal enclosure and metaphorical description" presents a fresh reading of this novel, as Pearl offers up unique insights into the protagonist's oscillating flirtations with desire, disgust, and disclosure.

JBR volume six presents an expanded graduate student essay section from previous volumes, part of a renewed commitment to our editorial mandate to foster diverse conversations around James Baldwin. Volume six's Graduate Student Essay Award winner, Emily Na, starts this section with a fascinating examination of Baldwin's life as a cook and epicure, noting how food and food cultures have impacted his writing with her marvelous essay, "Baldwin's Kitchen:

Food and Identity in His Life and Fiction.” Nicholas Binford’s contribution here, “The Warrior and the Poet: On James Baldwin and the Many Roles in Revolution” prods us to greater care in our word choice, noting the unthinking ease with which many label Baldwin as a revolutionary to argue, “that thoughtlessly calling James Baldwin revolutionary obscures and erases the non-revolutionary strategies and approaches he employed in his contributions to the civil rights movement and to race relations as a whole.” Our expanded graduate student section concludes with Miller Wilbourn’s essay, “Baptism by History: Reading James Baldwin’s Existential Hindsight in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.” Bringing key existentialist thinkers to an examination of the existential strains in Baldwin’s prose, Wilbourn also brings to bear some impressive archival work in his examination of the textual and developmental history of *Go Tell It*.

Our “Dispatch” for volume six is a personal account about film, film making, and friendship in a career of working with and on Baldwin from none other than acclaimed filmmaker Karen Thorsen, whose magisterial documentary, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (1989) continues to inspire with the moving recollections and remembrances Thorsen collected. Her contribution to the study and appreciation of Baldwin cannot be overstated; *James Baldwin Review* is therefore honored to share with our readers the beginning of her own remembrance of how that film came into being. Her essay, “The Disorder of Life: James Baldwin on My Shoulder” represents but the first part of her remembrance; Part Two will follow in our next volume, due out in the fall of 2021.

Volume six’s bibliographic essay comes to us from Joseph Vogel, whose review article charts the general direction of scholarship in James Baldwin Studies between the years 2016 and 2017. His judicious and nuanced survey of the field identifies notable features including: the “political turn” connecting Baldwin’s social insights from the past to the present; renewed interest in the Baldwin archive; and continued interest in situating Baldwin in national, regional, and geographical contexts as well as issues of gender and sexuality. Vogel’s bibliographic entry is followed by a review from D. Quentin Miller of a remarkable, interdisciplinary symposium that brought scholars together to consider anew the works and relationships between Baldwin and his “spiritual father,” the painter Beauford Delaney, over three days at the University of Tennessee on February 19-21, 2020 in an event entitled, “In a Speculative Light: The Arts of James Baldwin and Beauford Delaney.”

Our 2020 volume finishes with two submissions, “From the Field”: two collected conference panels, one from 2018 and one from 2019. Stemming from a roundtable that followed a screening of Raoul Peck’s *I Am Not Your Negro* (2017) in Zurich in February 2018, co-authors Jovita dos Santos Pinto, Noémi Michel, Patricia Purtschert, Paola Bacchetta, and Vanessa Näf present here a collective essay wandering between the audio-visual and textual matter of the film and Baldwin’s essay “Stranger in the Village”, which was also adapted into a film-essay directed by Pierre Koralnik, staging Baldwin in the Swiss village of Leukerbad. “Rebranding James Baldwin and His Queer Others” was a session held at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in November 2019 in Honolulu, Hawaii. The conference papers gathered here—by Magdalena J. Zaborowska, Nicholas F. Radel, Nigel Hatton, and Ernest L. Gibson III—show how Baldwin’s writings and life story participate in dialogues with other authors and artists who probe the issues of identity and identification, as well as with other types of texts and non-American stories, boldly addressing theoretical and political perspectives different from his own.

Theoretical and political perspectives different than Baldwin’s own is a tempting way to refer to the seeming distance between the concerns of the 1960s, or even the mid 1980s, and our worries today amidst a global pandemic. As we look to the life, works, and legacies of James Baldwin for solace, inspiration, and compassionate humanity as our aid in these crises, we come to see him, not unlike this volume’s cover, primarily as a kind of Ur-witness.

The cover for volume six comes to us from pioneering Atlanta-based artist Dr. Fahamu Pecou, whose portrait of Baldwin, *Eleri (Witness)* evokes Baldwin’s own understanding of himself as primarily an observer, a commentator. The diffused light and the angelic glow rendered masterfully by Pecou’s brushstrokes, juxtaposed with the clerical garb, suggest as well Baldwin’s somewhat recent reception as a prophet, a seer of sorts upon whom we can depend for comfort, for guidance, and for instruction in a perilous time.

In a 1984 interview with Julius Lester, Baldwin was asked about his self-designation of this role as “witness,” and his response is instructive: “I am a witness. In the church in which I was raised you were supposed to bear witness to the truth. Now, later on, you wonder what in the world the truth is, but you do know what a lie is.”¹¹ This remark has, understandably, been quoted numerous times as a testament to Baldwin’s own sense of artistic imperative, his understanding of his duty and role as a literary artist. What’s often left out, however, is that the

comment comes amidst Baldwin's repudiation of being overly ideological, notwithstanding his own political activism. In other words, Baldwin claims the role of witness directly after he refuses the moniker of "spokesman." Picking up on this, Lester prods Baldwin further about the difference between a spokesman and a witness. Baldwin's answer has something to do with the difference between speaking for others—spokesman—and trying to make clear the state of things as they are. As he puts it, his aim is to, "to interpret and make clear."¹² And still Lester presses him, wondering about the confidence Baldwin seems to have about his role as witness, wondering, "if it's possible for writers now, black or white, to have that confidence."¹³ As the whole of this interview has been framed by the difference between Lester and Baldwin, writers whose careers began roughly 15 years apart, Lester poses his next question as one of generational difference: "I wonder if the world hasn't changed between the time you started and the time we started?"¹⁴ Again, Baldwin's response is instructive, and worth quoting at length:

Well, it may have. In one way or another, one is very much a prisoner of his time. But I know what I've seen and what I've seen makes me know I have to say, *I know*. I won't say I believe, because I know that we can be better than we are. That's the sum total of my wisdom in all these years. We can also be infinitely worse, but I know that the world we live in now is not necessarily the best world we can make. I can't be entirely wrong. There's two things we have to do—love each other and raise our children.¹⁵

As in so many other instances in his interviews and writings, when pushed to the wall, rhetorically, Baldwin claims the children. He claims our collective responsibility to them in his searing jeremiad concerning mid twentieth century race relations, *The Fire Next Time*: "For the sake of one's children, in order to minimize the bill that *they* must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion..."¹⁶ Nearer the end of his life, intense eyes ablaze with sorrowful worry over the state of the country in the aftermath of the civil rights era, he refuses the notion of despair in Thorsen's *The Price of the Ticket*, "I'm not in despair, I'm enraged," and pivots again to our responsibilities: "You can't tell the children that there's no hope."¹⁷ The children Baldwin evokes as a last rhetorical resort aren't simply metaphorical. They are, instead, children whose lives he knew and cherished. Nieces and nephews like those just born to his sisters when he embarked on the collaborative venture with the Turkish painter Yoran Cazac that would result in *Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood* (1976).

Billed as a “children’s book for adults” on the original dustjacket, *Little Man, Little Man* has received scant attention. Panned or ignored upon release, the book quickly went out of print. It is not a standard children’s book, that’s for certain, for *Little Man* is devoid of the clear moral or aphoristic fable that motivates so much of the genre. It’s rerelease in 2018 allows us a new opportunity to explore and experience it, to wrestle with the very adult themes within as presented through Cazac’s impressionistic watercolors and the narrative perspective of a young Black child in Harlem, TJ.

As he bounces his red ball and encounters the characters in his life and on his street—for a young black boy from Harlem, they are nearly synonymous—we glean a number of things about TJ and his companions in this limited world. We learn that there is power in music and dance to enliven and unite, even amidst poverty, addiction, and dereliction. We learn that something is off with Ms. Lee. She gets sad sometimes, TJ notes, and “she walk like she don’t know where she going.”¹⁸ TJ and the slightly older WT are enraptured by her beauty, but the evasive yet insightful Blinky is more guarded in her assessment. We suspect Ms. Lee’s walk, where “her eyes is red sometime and she smell strong, like smoke, and sweet, like she been eating peppermint candy, and sometime she smell like licorice” can be attributed to her addictions, her actions on the roof that her husband, Mr. Man, warns against.¹⁹

As TJ’s ball comes crashing down on him near the close of the book, accompanied by a glass bottle from the same roof that shatters and leaves WT cut and bleeding, we learn most of all that we cannot abdicate our responsibility to our children. In as much as anything is clear in this impressionistic book, it is clear to this reader that Ms. Lee is responsible for the bottle falling, responsible, then, albeit obliquely for the cut on WT’s foot. As she bandages his foot in the basement apartment, it’s equally clear that what TJ, WT, and Blinky need most from the adults in the room, more than medical care perhaps, is assurance. Assurance that some adult amongst them is responsible, not just for them, but responsible to them. As Ms. Lee takes WT’s tear-stained head in her hands and plaintively reassures him, all she can muster is “Little Man, Little Man,” emblazoned across the page in brilliant rainbow letters.²⁰ But it is enough, for in these words she provides WT and his friends assurance that no matter the mess, no matter the proximate or immediate cause of the conundrum or crisis, more mature heads will prevail to ensure that tomorrow will arrive with an able hand on the tiller.

“Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise.”²¹ Baldwin, of course, was right about this when he penned it in 1963. It is no less true today. It is entirely in our hands to educate the children, to better equip them for their futures than we have for their present. It is in our hands to hold accountable our representatives for their crimes, be they of commission, omission, or accessory. It is in our hands to bear witness to their failures. It is in our hands to demand change, for it will be our hands that cast the votes. It is, finally, in our hands to minimize the bill our children will pay for the delusions we have thus far allowed to parade in our name.

What has changed between Baldwin’s 1963 and the time of this writing, perhaps, is our recognition of how interconnected we have become. Our globalized flows of supply and demand, our just-in-time logistics chains, have proven this most spectacularly when they have faltered. When the myriad of shopping and delivery services with which many of us supply and structure our lives are overcome by unprecedented and unanticipated demand, like a run on a bank, panicked without dependable leaders or even reliable facts, we assuage our fears with shopping, with provisioning for the apocalypse, and suddenly all the toilet paper is gone. So too are the bottles of hand sanitizer and the soap gone. Empty are the spaces on the shelves that used to hold a dizzying array of cleaning products. Fresh meat and produce are scarce, and with the restaurants closed by state order to all but take-away, a nation of plenty worries about how long the virus can live on cardboard and Styrofoam containers. Because it is all in our hands, please remember to wash them.

Grosse Pointe Park, MI, May 1, 2020

Justin A. Joyce is one of the founding editors of *James Baldwin Review*, the journal’s current Managing Editor, and Research Director at The New School. His work on James Baldwin has appeared in *James Baldwin Review*, *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin* (2009) and *James Baldwin in Context* (2019).

Notes

- 1 Audre Lorde, Commencement address, Oberlin College, May 29, 1989. *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*. Eds. Rudolph Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), p. 216.
- 2 James Baldwin, Interview with Julius Lester, “James Baldwin: Reflections of a Maverick” (1984), reprinted in *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn, New York: Melville House, 2014), pp. 35-53, p. 44.
- 3 Derek Thompson, “All the Coronavirus Statistics are Flawed” *The Atlantic* March 26, 2020, < <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/fog-pandemic/608764/> >.
- 4 Daily counts and statistics are available via <https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus>.
- 5 Juliette Kayyem, “The U.S. Isn’t Ready For What’s About to Happen,” *The Atlantic*, March 8, 2020, < <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/us-isnt-ready-whats-about-happen/607636/> >.
- 6 Frida Ghitis, “The Political Genius of Donald Trump,” *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2020, < <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/trump-genius/609142/> >.
- 7 I am indebted to Dwight A. McBride, whose commencement address to The Graduate School at Northwestern University in 2017 brought this ominous ending of the tale to my attention. I’ve adapted his remarks from that occasion in this essay.
- 8 Hans Christian Anderson, “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” Collected in *The Harvard Classics: Folk-Lore and Fable*. Ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York, NY: P. F. Collier & Son Corp., 1937), p. 238
- 9 Seven weeks after President Trump erroneously announced that, “anyone who wants a test gets a test,” *The New York Times* reported on April 28th that less than 2 percent of the U.S. has been tested. See reporting by Jack Healey, Manny Fernandez, and Peter Baker, “Reopening Plans Across U.S. Are Creating Confusing Patchwork,” *The New York Times*, 27 April, 2020, < <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/us/coronavirus-governors-states-reopening.html> >.
- 10 On April 23rd, 2020 President Trump suggested that injecting or drinking bleach and other disinfectants might be a cure. See Jane C. Timm, “It’s irresponsible and it’s dangerous’: Experts rip Trump’s idea of injecting disinfectant to treat COVID-19,” *NBC News*, 23 April, 2020, <

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/it-s-irresponsible-it-s-dangerous-experts-rip-trump-s-nl191246> >.

11 James Baldwin, Interview with Julius Lester, “James Baldwin: Reflections of a Maverick” (1984), p. 44.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, p. 45

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (New York, Dell, 1963) p. 139.

17 James Baldwin, Qtd, in *The Price of The Ticket*, Dir. Karen Thorsen

18 *Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood*. P. 34

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

21 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, p. 141.

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