James Baldwin and the Moral Crisis of American Democracy
A public lecture by Prof. Eddie Glaude Jr., Princeton University
Introduction by Prof. Marie Griffith, Washington University in St. Louis
Graham Chapel at Washington University in St. Louis
October 24, 2019
7:00 p.m.– 8:30 p.m.

Griffith:
Good evening, everyone! Welcome to tonight's event, sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. I am Marie Griffith, the Center Director, and it's really great to see all of you here. I just want to remind you, if you would please, to silence your phones and buzzing devices. Also, I want to welcome those of you live-streaming us from home; I know we always get a robust group there, which is wonderful. We have a couple more events this semester, to which I'd like to call your attention. This coming Monday evening, October 28th, we are welcoming Asma Uddin on the topic, *When Islam is Not a Religion*: *Inside America's Fight for Religious Freedom*. And this will be followed by a panel discussion with Danforth Center professors Tazeen Ali, John Inazu, and Laurie Maffly-Kipp. That's Monday at 7 o'clock in Emerson Auditorium in Knight Hall. And then on November 4th, the Danforth Center is co-sponsoring with the Carver Project a public dialogue between author Jemar Tisby and our own John Inazu on Tisby's acclaimed book *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about American Church's Complicity in Racism*. That's November 4th at 7:30 PM in Wrighton Hall room 300. That's the lab sciences building that just got renamed Wrighton Hall. And further information is available out there on the welcome table outside this room and of course we hope some of you will join us for these events.

Tonight, we are honored and greatly delighted to welcome distinguished scholar, author, and prominent public intellectual Dr. Eddie S. Glaude. He is the chair of African American Studies at Princeton University, formerly professor of Religion at Princeton. And, he has an interesting and important connection to St. Louis and to Washington University, as he is also the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor there. Mr. McDonnell attended Princeton and, as all of you know, or most of you know, he founded St. Louis based McDonnell Aircraft Corporation in 1939, which a few decades later became McDonnel Douglas, and eventually merged with Boeing. Mr. McDonnell was a trustee of Washington University, and was also the board chair of trustees in the 1960s, as well as a trusted advisor to WashU's leaders until his death in 1980. As most of you know, he was remarkable in his philanthropic endeavors, which has been a tradition carried on by his family members to this day. So, in addition to the James S. McDonnell distinguished university professorship held by Professor Glaude, the family has generously made possible James S. McDonnell Hall at Washington University as well as much else in St. Louis, such as the James S. McDonnell Planetarium. And the McDonnell family also has a long history with John Burroughs School here in St. Louis and I'm delighted that Professor Glaude will be speaking to the whole school assembly there tomorrow morning. And I want to publicly thank Lane O'Shea and Daniel Harris for their help in making this possible. And we also welcome some of you from the John Burroughs School community here tonight as well. Professor Glaude is extraordinarily broad in his intellectual influence. He is the former president of the American Academy of Religion, which is the largest professional organization of scholars

of religion in the world. He is the author of many books, essential books, on African American religion and philosophy. His books on religion and philosophy include: *An Uncommon Faith: a Pragmatic Approach to the Study of African American Religion*, *African American Religion: a Very Short Introduction*, and *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early 19th Century Black America*, which was awarded the Modern Language Association's William Sanders Scarborough Book Prize. His best-known books: *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* and *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* take a wide look at black communities and reveal complexities, vulnerabilities, and opportunities for hope. Hope that is, in one of his favorite quotes from W.E.B. DuBois, "not hopeless, but a bit unhopeful." *Democracy in Black* has been described as one of the most imaginative, daring books of the 21st century. And in the words of Bill Moyers, "the book breathes prophetic fire. Inconvenient truths leap from every page." He is currently at work on a book about James Baldwin, which will be released in April, here, titled *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*. Glaude is also a columnist for Time Magazine and a regular contributor on MSNBC, and he has written widely in venues from the New York Times to the Huffington Post. This is, of course, in addition to publishing many influential articles about religion in academic journals. Known to be a convener of conversations and debates, Glaude takes care to engage fellow citizens of all ages and backgrounds from young activists to fellow academics, journalists, commentators, and followers on Twitter, in dialogue about the course of the nation. His scholarship and his sense of himself as a public intellectual is driven by a commitment to think carefully with others in public. And having taught with Eddie for nearly a decade at Princeton, I can also genuinely call him a dear friend. An exquisite teacher and mentor to both students and colleagues and someone that I know to be profoundly committed – genuinely committed – to making our country and all of us better than we are. The subject of Professor Glaude's lecture is James Baldwin and the Moral Crisis of American Democracy. Please join me in welcoming him now.

Glaude:
How are y'all doing? You good? Thank you, Professor Griffith, for that gracious and loving introduction. It is wonderful to be in your presence again. We miss you desperately at Princeton, you and Professor Schmidt. Let's forget the formalities, you and Leigh. It's been wonderful to be back here to see old friends, to break bread with new friends. I want to thank Debra Kennard and Sandy Jones for making all of this happen. Thank you, I appreciate you.

These are troubling times, yes? So I'm just gonna read from the book. No I'm not. [laughter] I'm delighted to be here. I got a chance to see Dean Mitchell – Diane Mitchell and Vernon Mitchell, who are very close friends. Professor Lerone Martin is around here somewhere. I remember him from his old days. You get to naming people and you're going to mess up, so let me stop. So I'll just jump into this is that okay?

On September 4th 1957 Herman Counts, a professor at North Carolina's Johnson C. Smith University planned to drop off his daughter in the circle of Harding High School, which she was attending for the first time. Located off of West 5th Street at the edge of downtown Charlotte, Harding was built in 1935 and stood as an important part of the city's landscape. It had been segregated since its founding, but in 1957, Harding finally faced the difficult challenge laid down by the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education. Like most schools in the

south, Harding resisted desegregation and the students were prepared to resist the arrival of this first black student, Dorothy, Dot, Counts. In anticipation of unrest, Charlotte police barricaded the main road to the school, so Dot had to get out and walk. Herman's friend, Edwin Tompkins, rode in the car with them and offered to join Dot as her dad parked. Herman looked at his daughter as she opened the door and reminded her of what he always told his family: hold your head high. He knew what she would face on her way into the building. Daily threats had set the stage for what was about to happen. With Tompkins walking slightly behind her, Dot, wearing a new red and yellow dress made by her grandmother with a long bow that flowed beyond her waist, waded into a sea of white rage. She was only fifteen years old, one of four black students chosen to integrate the schools in Charlotte. The other three didn't face much resistance because the White Citizens Council had chosen Harding as the place to make it stand, and stand they did. Dot Counts confronted a wave of hatred that morning, all captured by the camera of Don Sturkey, a photographer from the Charlotte Observer. As she walked toward the school, white students, their faces contorted with hatred and unmistakable glee screamed, "go back home." And "go back to Africa." They threw sticks and chunks of ice. They spat on her new dress. The police refused to protect her, staying at the other end of the street and watching the spectacle from a distance. No school officials or teachers were present to calm the crown or escort Dorothy to class. Instead with her head held high on her lanky near six-foot frame, her brow furrowed with an intense stare that perhaps hid her fear and her mouth twisted in a manner that revealed her horror and utter disgust, Dot walked a racist gauntlet into Harding High School. She made the walk for just three more days before deciding never to return.

Don Sturkey's photos of Dot's harrowing experience soon traveled around the world, to great effect. A no-name in the street, James Baldwin, claimed that seeing newsstand images of Dorothy Counts while at the Sorbonne in Paris during the first international conference of black writers and artists led him to return to the United States after years of being away from home. He was covering the conference for the literary magazines *Encounter* and *Purview* and he recalled the photos confronting him as he walked from the meeting hall, "facing us, on every newsstand on every newspaper kiosk on that wide tree-shaded boulevard were photographs of 15 year-old Dorothy Counts being reviled and spat upon by the mob as she was making her way to the school in Charlotte, North Carolina. There was unutterable pride, tension, and anguish in that girl's face. It made me furious. It filled me with both hatred and pity and it made me ashamed. Some, one of us should have been there with her. I dawdled in Europe for nearly yet another year, held by my private life and my attempt to finish a novel, but it was on that bright afternoon that I knew I was leaving France. I could simply no longer sit around in Paris, discussing the Algerian and the Black American problem. Everybody else was paying their dues and it was time I went home and paid mine." Makes for a galvanizing moment, doesn't it? With Baldwin moved to leave Paris by the cruelty visited on a child. But this was not quite the case.

It could not have been the image of Dorothy Counts that spurred Baldwin to give up France. The ordeal at Harding High School happened in the fall of 1957, a year after the 1956 conference in Paris. In fact, the article Baldwin wrote at the time for *Encounter*, later published in *Nobody Knows My Name* in 1961 doesn't mention the Counts photograph at all. In that essay, his memories reached for a different kind of sensory experience "as night was falling, we poured into the Paris streets, boys and girls, old men and women, bicycles, terraces, all were there and the people were queuing up before the bakeries for bread." No mention of a photograph. No

momentous decision. Baldwin's reflections on the photograph or the photo of Dorothy Counts in *No Name in the Street* cam some 16 years after the events in Charlotte and his memory failed him. In a sense, this was not a remarkable failure, throughout the beginning of that book, Baldwin warns the reader not to trust his memories: "much much has been blotted out," he writes, "coming back only lately in bewildering and untrustworthy flashes." But it would be wrong to read this caution as a mere reference to the fading memory of an aging mind, instead it is a consequence of trauma, not merely Baldwin's own, but the collective trauma experienced in the course of a decade and a half of betrayal of the civil rights movement. Over the 16 years since Dorothy Counts attempted to desegregate Harding High School, Baldwin witnesses up close the horrors of American racism. So many black children, in the south and in the north, had been subject to what she had experienced. Others had endured campaigns of violence against black people and the beatings and murder of protestors. Who knows how many black people lined the bottom of the Mississippi River simply because they wanted to exercise the right to vote? Black leaders had been assassinated. Terror and disappointment had become defining features of the intervening years and through it all, America was still stuck in the morass of the lie. Baldwin's mistake in recalling why he returned to the United States revealed how trauma colored his witness, memories fragmented or repressed, painful moments were triggered by random encounters, grief and loss often overwhelmed everything. In *No Name*, he tries to capture, at the level of form, the effect of this trauma. The book reads like the reflections of someone who has been traumatized, folding back on itself and twisting time, as past and present collide and collapse into each other. Memories flood and recede after recalling the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and how King's death and funeral affected him. Baldwin wrote "the mind is a strange and terrible vehicle and my own mind after I had left Atlanta began to move backward in time to places, people, and events I thought I had forgotten. Sorrow drove it there." That's a sentence, isn't it. "Sorrow drove it there and a certain kind of bewilderment." Here, in the after times, witness and trauma were inextricably linked. Witness and trauma were inextricably linked. So much of Baldwin's life was filled with traumatic experiences that left permanent scars: the difficulties of his childhood, the dangers of sexual predators, his experiences with white police in Harlem, and his own feeling of being trapped by it all weighed heavily on how he navigated the world. Those wounds shaped his artistic vision. The trauma guided his eyes and his pen to the pain that lurked in the shadows of human experience and the various ways we all try to avoid it.

By the year of Dorothy Counts's first day at Harding in 1957, nearly a decade had passed since Baldwin had fled Harlem for the City of Lights, in fear of what might come to pass if he remained. In December of 1946, his close friend Eugene Worth had committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. Whatever had driven Worth to that fatal choice, something about his life, perhaps, and about this country, Baldwin understood it. He felt that if he didn't leave the states, he too would end up at the bottom of the Hudson River, alongside the wedding rings he had tossed into the river two years earlier when he rejected the life everyone expected of him. "My luck was running out," he said in a 1984 interview in the *Paris Review*, "I was going to jail. I was going to kill somebody, or somebody was going to kill me." Paris gave Baldwin the freedom to find or better, to create a different self, released from the stifling assumptions about black people in the United States and the dangerous contradictions of the streets of Greenwich Village. Baldwin found breathing room in Paris to imagine himself anew. "I didn't have to walk around with one half of my brain trying to please Mr. Charlie and the other

half trying to kill him," he recalled. Excuse my language, but this is Baldwin. "Fuck Mr. Charlie. It's his problem. It's not my problem. I felt that I was left alone in Paris to become whatever I wanted to become." Ya'll alright? I just want to check on you. You good? Alright. Those early days—these early days in Paris as, his biographers note, marked Baldwin's manic attempt to become a writer. He was not so much overburdened with the racial politics of the United States. The tumult of the civil rights movement had not quite begun, as he was shadowed by the existential consequences of growing up black and poor in a society that despised you because you were black. In Paris, he embarked on a high-stakes quest for individuality, heightened by the pressing need to stay alive in a foreign country with little to no money. During these years, Baldwin worked relentlessly to vomit up the profound, almost ineradicable self-hatred America had lodged in his guts, a sickness that had started in his childhood home.

So much of Jimmy's early life is bound with his stormy relationship with his stepfather, David Baldwin, an itinerant preacher who came to New York from New Orleans in the early 20s, one among the millions of black migrants who left the south and transformed America's northern cities. Baldwin famously wrote of his efforts to escape the tyranny of his stepfather in a 1955 essay entitled *Me and My House*, which would be reprinted as *Notes of a Native Son*. David Baldwin, the only father Jimmy ever knew, was consumed by his hatred of white people and his inability to provide for his ever-growing family. That hatred often spilled over into violence. He terrorized his children. Eventually, along with tuberculosis, the hatred drove him mad. As the oldest child, Jimmy caught much of the hell and spent much of his time coming to terms with his effects on him. Imagine, as a child, grappling with the hurtful words that say you're ugly. He intimates to Fern Marja Eckman, his first biographer, "you take your estimate of yourself from what the world says about you. I was always told that I was ugly. My father told me that and everybody else, but mostly my father. So, I believed it, naturally, until today I believed it." The wound never fully healed. Baldwin said in the introduction to *The Price of the Ticket* in 1984 "I was to hurt a great many people by being unable to imagine that anyone could possibly be in love with an ugly boy like me." As a boy caught in the throes of abuse, Baldwin struggled to find the space to be otherwise, amid the challenges of being poor, black, and partly responsible for eight siblings. The mindless jobs he took in the scripted future he was expected to fulfill, a wife, kids, a job at the post office, ate at his spirit. Friends like the artist Beauford Delaney offered him a glimpse of how to be different and to see the world differently, but Baldwin continued to struggle with his sexuality and his desire to become a writer. That the hatred that consumed his stepfather threatened to him and though he often directed that hatred and anger back towards David Baldwin, he was already beginning to understand the pointlessness in these feelings. No matter how much David Baldwin frightened his stepson, he was the victim of America's lie. He died believing, tragically, what white America said about him. Jimmy understood that. He also knew that hating his stepfather only imprisoned him. He had to leave that hate behind and confront his pain and trauma if he was to ever truly be free. "I had told my mother that I did not want to see him because I hated him," he wrote of his stepfather in *Notes of a Native Son*, "but this was not true," he continued, "it was only that I had hated him and I wanted to hold on to this hatred. I did not want to look on him as a ruin. It was not a ruin I had hated. I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain." Hallelujah. Walk with me, I'm trying to get someplace.

Still, once he got to France, Baldwin came to understand that leaving America behind would not be so simple. “It turned out that the question of who I was,” he said, “was not solved because I had removed myself from the social forces which menaced me anyway. Those forces had become interior and I had dragged them across the ocean with me. The question of who I was had at last become a personal question and the answer was to be found in me.” America and its racist assumptions had indelibly shaped who Baldwin was, but he insisted, we are not the mere product of social forces. Each of us has a say in who we take ourselves to be. No matter what America said about him as a black person, Baldwin argued he had the last word about who he was as a human being and as a black man. This conclusion was the result of what Socrates called the examined life and it served as the foundation of Baldwin’s broader witness. Just as we must examine our individual experiences and the terrors that shape how we come to see ourselves, together as a country, we must do the same, he argued. The two are bound together. Such a realization set the stage for Baldwin to become the kind of poet he imagined himself to be. Someone who could transform the daily experiences of being black in the world into the stuff of art. Someone who could mold his individual suffering, even the vexed relationship with his stepfather, into a universal statement about what it means to be a fragile and fallen human being. In the dank corners of Paris, a young Baldwin worked relentlessly to make himself into the kind of poet Ralph Waldo Emerson imagined in 1844. One who “shall draw us with love and terror,” who sees through our comforting illusions, chants our times, and social circumstances, Emerson wrote, and speaks of the unique genius that is America. For Emerson, “America is a poem in our eyes” and what was needed, required even, was a poet to bring that vision to the page. Whitman answered, yes?

But Baldwin’s vision of America was bound up with the lie that resided at the country’s core. Its images could be nightmarish, lynched bodies with their private parts gone, swayed from poplar trees, men and women nodded in piss-stained alleys, children played in trash heaps, boys were cuffed and beaten by police for no other reason that because they were black, but more horrific than these crimes was the country’s steadfast refusal to confront the truth that made them inevitable. “I’m not talking about the crime. I’m talking about denying what one does. This is a much more sinister matter,” he wrote in *The White Problem*. America was more than its ample geography that dazzled the imagination, it was a place that denied the contradiction between its commitments to freedom and democracy and its practice of slavery and white supremacy. Baldwin bore the scars and wounds of that idea and relentlessly questioned the contradictions that threatened, like two warring souls, to tear him and so many others completely apart. It is from that deeply personal standpoint that he answered Emerson’s call. Going to France ultimately freed Jimmy to become the poet who—I love this line—who could describe us to ourselves as we are, without the debilitating crutch of the lie. What’s the lie? The lie is that America is committed to the principle that all men are created equal. That’s a lie. In practice, it’s a lie. The idea that this country is an example of democracy achieved, that’s a lie. The idea that no matter one’s station in life, no matter the color of one’s skin, no matter who you love, no matter what your zip code are, that you can achieve the American—it’s a lie. That’s not in the book, that’s not on the page, you know. That would could describe us to ourselves as we are now, without the debilitating crutch of the lie, which Baldwin thought doomed every American’s attempt to establish an identity free from the category of race that imprisoned us in the first place. As he wrote in his poignant 1953 essay *Stranger in the Village,* listen to this. “At the root of the American negro problem is the necessity of the American white man to find a way of

living with the negro in order to live with himself and the history of this problem can be reduced to the means used by Americans' lynch law and law: segregation and legal acceptance, terrorization and concession, either to come to terms with this necessity or to find a way around it, or most usually, to find a way of doing both these things at once. The resulting spectacle, at once foolish and dreadful, led someone to make the quite accurate observation that the negro in America is a form of insanity, which overtakes white men. In this long battle, the white man's motive was the protection of his identity. The black man was motivated by the need to establish an identity." The political and social reality that results from what's at the root of the American negro problem overruns our moral sense and distorts any substantive idea of who we are as individuals. This is the real American dilemma, acknowledging the moral effects of a way of life emptied of genuine meaning because of a lie that denies the things we have done. Bad faith at the heart of who we take ourselves to be. We are trapped like flies on sticky paper and the spectacle of our struggles has led some to lose their minds and others to hate themselves for being stuck on the flypaper in the first place.

These, then, are the twin purposes at the heart of Baldwin's poetic vision—you know I'm paranoid, so I don't know what you were—no, I'm just kidding. Just playing. Just messing with you. Just messing with you. Just messing with you. These, then, are the twin purposes at the heart of Baldwin's poetic vision. He's not only motivated to transform the stuff of experience into the beauty of art. As a poet, he also bears witness to what he sees and to what we have forgotten, calling our attention to the enduring legacies of slavery in our lives, to the impact of systemic discrimination throughout the country that has denied generations of black people access to the so-called American dream, to the willful blindness of so many white Americans to the violence that sustains it all. He laments the suffering that results from our evasions and refusals and passes judgement on what we have done and not done in order to release ourselves into the possibility of becoming different and better people. He bears witness for those who cannot because they did not survive and he bears witness for those who survived it all, wounded and broken. As Emerson said, the poets are liberating gods. They unlock our chains and admit us to a new scene. That's Emerson. Whereas Baldwin put it in his essay *Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare*—I love that title—the poet is called to "defeat the labels and complicate all battles to bear witness as long as breath is in him to that mighty unnamable, transfiguring force which lives in the soul of man," he said, "and to aspire to do his work so well that when the breath has left him, the people, all people who searched in the rubble for a sign or witness will be able to find him there."

In Paris, Baldwin sought the critical distance necessary to reimagine himself, apart from the assumptions and stereotypes of race that saturated American life. He needed the space to see himself and the country differently. However, this wasn't an abstract or academic exercise for him. His very life depended on it. Jimmy knew he could not survive accommodating to the way black people were forced to live in this country. Only madness or murder awaited him there. So, his return to the U.S. wasn't simply a political choice, as he seems to suggest in *No Name*. He needed the family he loved so dearly but had left behind. He wanted the comfort of black American culture, the sounds of the language, oh my god, the beautiful sounds of the language, the taste of the food. I guess he wanted some greens and some fried cornbread, his joys and pains. He wanted to experience, again, the elements of black life that danced around in his imagination and made its way into his writing. You know, he first returned to New York for a

period of nine months in 1954, bringing his play *The Amen Corner* and the essay that would become *Notes of a Native Son*. He felt out of place, though. His years in Paris had created what felt like an unreachable distance between himself and the life he had left behind when he first moved to France. Old friends felt like strangers and, of course, they didn't know him any longer. He had been gone for six years, but he returned to Paris only to find that it was no longer the same either. "Until I came back to America, I didn't realize how many props I'd knocked out from beneath me and among them, as it turned out, was the prop of Paris. I was almost as lonely in Paris when I went back as I had been here. France had not become home." Baldwin's return to Paris in the fall of '55 was riddled with a mixture of excitement about his modest literary success in the States and deepening depression. An intense love affair had finally ended, and Jimmy could only see ahead of himself "a life of fantastically unreal alternatives to my pain," where even if he achieved fame, he would not have love. Alone and desperate, he took an overdose of sleeping pills, only to call his friend Mary Painter to tell her what he had done. She rushed to his side with a friend and helped save his life. Even in despair, Baldwin realized as he looked back on that time, that something profound had changed in him. "I guess I was making up my mind in some interior, strange, private way about what I would do with the rest of my life," he said, "and I think I was suspecting, though I don't think I could have put it that way then, that I couldn't really hope to spend the rest of my life in France. The attempt would kill me." It was in late September of 1956, after his attempted suicide that he found himself at the Sorbonne, covering the International Conference of Black Writers and Artists.

It would have been a year after that, if indeed he saw at the time, when Baldwin noticed Don Sturkey's photo of Dorothy Counts, with her slightly twisted mouth, her unshakeable pride, on the covers of newspapers. Her photo was not the reason he decided to leave Paris, but when Baldwin finally went to the south in 1957 at the suggestion of *Partisan Review*'s Philip Rahv, he found Dot's story. He arrived in Charlotte in the fall after she had withdrawn from Harding High School. A woman he reported, told him of the mob and of the spit that dripped from the hem of Dorothy's dress. Several white students, he was told, begged Dot to stay, but even when Baldwin wrote about this trip two years later in an 1959 article for *Partisan Review*, he did not mention the particular image of Dorothy he later claimed made such an impression on him. He offered, instead, a description of the end of Dorothy's ordeal, her decision to leave the school and the regrets and trauma that accompanied it. Years later, in *No Name,* he would start at the beginning, with the image of her amid the hatred on her first day and used the famous photo of Dorothy to justify his own decision to join the fray. Looking back after the deaths of Medgar Evers and Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., the photo with all of its pathos, anguish, and pride represented for Baldwin in 1972 the demand to bear witness to what was happening in 1957 and to what had transpired since, which led to his recollection in *No Name in the Street*. Dot's eyes captured the trauma of that journey. Baldwin sought to narrate what happened on the eve of a social movement that would attempt to transform the country and to testify to that odd combination of trauma and grit, which he now knew so well, seen in a 15 year-old black girl's courage that spurred him, so he believed, to leap into the fire. Narrating trauma fragments how we remember. We recall what we can and what we desperately need to keep ourselves together. Wounds, historical and painfully present, threaten to rim the soul and if that happens, nothing else matters. Telling the story of trauma in fits and starts isn't history in any formal sense. It is the way traumatic memory works, recollections caught in the "pitched battle between remembering and forgetting." That's Toni Morrison. Facts bungled on behalf of much-needed

truths, we try to keep our heads above water and tell ourselves a story that keeps our legs and arms moving below the surface. By 1972, Baldwin can be forgiven foe forgetting some things. He was trying to hold himself, hold us, together. After all, four years into Nixon and the reassertion of the lie in the name of the silent majority, the previous decades of struggle for equality was already receding into history, having changed laws, but done little to address the belief that white people matter more than others in this country. In *No Name,* Baldwin moved from the image of Dorothy Counts to the events of the civil rights movement and in the shadow of the dead and broken sought to tell a story about the past that would at least give us some sense of direction in a certain moment—in an uncertain moment. His misremembering sought to orient us to the after times of the civil rights movement and to call attention to the trauma and terror that threatened everything, to call attention to the trauma and terror that threatened everything. What he says—what did he say? He said what one does not remember is the serpent in the garden of one's dreams. Baldwin's view of traumatic memory is pretty consistent. Y'all alright? I know I'm taking too much of your time, but…

In *Many Thousands Gone,* written in 1951, he makes the point about the relationship between memory, trauma, and the past. Listen. "Whenever the negro face appears, a tension is created. The tension is a silence filled with things unutterable," you know you experience this sense at WashU. It is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead. It means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that bound his feet. Nevertheless, the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him. The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him as a child. Nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remained with him, indivisible from himself forever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take flight. Some 30 years later, in his book *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* about the Atlanta Child Murders, Baldwin begins with a meditation on the difficulty of remembering the patterns of the past and separating that from what he imagines himself to be able to remember. "Terror cannot be remembered," he writes, "one blots it out. The organism, the human being blots it out. One invents or creates a personality or persona beneath this accumulation rock of ages, sleeps or hopes to sleep that terror which the memory repudiates." The cruel—the irony, of course, the cruel irony of course, is that terror moves us about. We dig trenches to redirect the memories, to get them to flow away from us, but like the waters of the Mississippi River, the memories always return, flooding everything, no matter how high we build the stilts. Although he was writing about the murdered and missing children of Atlanta, Baldwin revealed the deep fears that shaped his own memory—I'm coming home—his own memories. "It has something to do with the fact that no one wishes to be plunged, he writes, "head down into the torrent of what he does not remember and does not wish to remember. It has something to do with the fact that we all came here as candidates for the slaughter of the innocence. It has something to do with the fact that all survivors, however they accommodate or fail to remember, bear the inexorable guilt of the survivor." Jimmy had survived the storms of the modern black freedom movement and lived, no matter the burden of guilt, to tell the story, especially on behalf of those who could not. He wrote "my memory stammers but my soul is a witness." In the end, we cannot escape our beginnings. The scars on our backs and the white knuckled grip of the lash that put them there remain in dim outline across generations and in the way we cautiously or not so cautiously move around each other.

The legacy of trauma is an inheritance of sorts. An inheritance of sin that undergirds much of what we do in this country. It has never been America's way to confront that trauma directly, largely because the law does not allow for it. At nearly every turn, the country minimizes the trauma, either by shifting the blame for it on to fringe actors of the present, "these acts don't represent who we are," you know we always clutching our purses, this who we are, or the relative values of the time, you know, everyone back then believed in slavery. Not everybody. Or worse, back onto the traumatized. They are responsible for themselves. There's never been a mechanism, though, through something like a truth and reconciliation commission for telling ourselves the truth about what we've done in a way that would broadly legitimate government policies to repair systemic discrimination across generations in this country. Instead, we pine for national rituals of expiation that wash away our guilt, without the need for an admission of guilt. We celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day or point to the election of Barack Obama and in the process, doing further damage to the traumatized through a kind of historical gaslighting. This is the sinister work of denying the crime Baldwin wrote about. We lie and cover up our sins and mute the traumas they cause. We disassociate trauma from our national self-understanding and locate it, if at all, in the ungrateful cries of grievance and victimization among those who experience the pain and loss. The biggest bigots "are the people that call other people bigots" George Wallace declared in 1968. By this logic, we identify scapegoats to bear the burden of our sins. Undocumented workers and Muslims become the n****** to fortify sense of whiteness. We find security and safety and fantasies of how we're always, no matter what we do and what carnage we leave behind on the road to a more perfect union. The lie works like a barrier and keeps the nastiness of our living from becoming a part of the American story, while those who truly know what happened remember differently. "What is most terrible is that American white men are not prepared to believe my version of the story, to believe that it happened" Baldwin declared, "in order to avoid believing that they have set up in themselves a fantastic system of evasions, denials, and justifications, a system that is about to destroy their grasp of reality, which is another way of saying their moral sense." Oh, the marks of Oedipus's thongs remain and some, like a Greek chorus, can see exactly where all of this is leading us. I smiled when I wrote that sentence.

When Baldwin returned—I'm coming home, I promise—when Baldwin returned to the United States in 1957, he knew he couldn't readjust to the country's racism. "The whole system, the whole set up, I knew I had to be in opposition to it. I couldn't adjust to it. That was why I went south, I thought, the thing to do, you know, if you're sitting around in the hotel room for a month or two months, wondering what you're going to do next and drinking too much and really terribly occupied with yourself, that thing to do is to, at any price, whatever, is to get in touch with something which is more than you. Throw yourself into a situation where you won't have time to weep. So, I went south because I was afraid to go south." Baldwin, forever the bluesman, ran towards trouble, but later, from the vantage point of 1972 and all that happened since, he could not help but say, in the words of the old gospel song, my soul looks back and I wonder how I got over. Ever since the first journey to the American south, Baldwin understood exactly what his calling required—just so you know, I'm not lying to you—ever since that first journey, he knew exactly what his calling required, even when the times became dark and sullen. "I think I really understood and probably for the first time that what you're doing as a writer, as a kind of artist was not designed to make you special or even to isolate you. What your role was, it seemed to me, was to bear witness to what life is, to what life does, and to speak for people who cannot

speak. That you're simply a kind of conduit." This isn't the work of a spokesman. He would later clarify in an interview with Julius Lester. He wasn't a partisan of any particular ideology or a leader of some civil rights organization. Baldwin had to capture what moved in the guts and what was desperately desired among the people, what happened in the country and in the moment. He had to write about all of that and about what and who was lost. Baldwin put it this way "You're at the mercy of something. You're at the mercy of something, which has nothing to do with you, nothing to do with your career, nothing to do with your career, nothing to do with your career, nothing to do with your ambitions, nothing to do with your loneliness, nothing to do with your despair. It had to do, simply, with the division of labor in the world and this was your job. This is what you were here to do, you know, to translate somehow, if you could, but whatever means you could find. The way I see it, in any case, you know, I found myself in the south, looking at the eyes of black boys and black girls, you know, of 10 years old and to make it real, to force it on the world's attention, to make it real and force it on the world's attention." In so many ways, these last two sentences best illustrate what Baldwin means by being a witness.

Tell the story. Tell the story of what you know, of how this place in St. Louis is what it is. Tell the story of what you know, of all the evils that you see around you. Don't ignore, tell the story of all those who suffer in the shadows. Tell the story that reveals the lie that's at the heart of who we take ourselves to be. Tell the story to release us from the lie, so that we can imagine ourselves anew. Make it real for those who refuse to believe that such a thing can happen, has happened, is happening here. Bring the suffering to the attention of those who wallow in willful ignorance. In short, shatter the illusion of innocence at every turn and attack all the shibboleths that the country holds sacred. Don Sturkey's image of Dorothy Counts, find their inheritors and pictures and videos we see today of the suffering of black people at the hands of police. We've become a world of people using their cell phone cameras to bear witness, filming the brutality of police or recording the callousness of white people who feel threatened by black people who they believe don't belong in their space. A brief search of the internet could easily pull up footage of racist encounters in parks and grocery stores, incidents that unfold while black and brown people are simply walking down the street or trying to move into an apartment or attempting to check into a hotel. The footage reveals the insults and the cuts, the danger and the death that happen daily in this country, that many white Americans don't want to know about. You don't cross those tracks for a reason. It's a kind of willful ignorance to protect your innocence. It's an illusion of safety. I saw police in Arizona accost a family at gunpoint because a baby allegedly stole a doll from the dollar store. We saw Eric Garner over and over again say "I can't breathe." We witnessed in real time on Facebook live the shooting and death of Philando Castile, remember that baby? "Mama, I'm here. Mama, I'm here." We saw Mike Brown in the street for hours. Who are we? Where a [unintelligible] asked a beloved what are we? What are these people? And we heard the babies in cages on the borders crying for their parents. The footage shatters the innocence, but just as in Dot Counts's time, it does not guarantee anything like justice. In fact, we're inundated with the horror and risks, becoming numb to it all. Most people seem to just click the next thing, but we cannot become numb. We're told every day not to believe what we see happening all around us or what we feel in the marrow of our bones. We are told that, for example, Trumpism is exceptional. A unique threat to our democracy. This view that Trump and Trump alone stresses the fabric of the country lets you and me off the hook. It feeds into the lie that Baldwin spent the majority of his life trying to convince us to confront. It attempts to explain away as isolated events what today's cell phone footage exposes as a part of our everyday experience.

Exceptionalizing Trump deforms our attention. It becomes difficult to see what is happening right in front of us and secures our self-understanding from anything he might actually represent. If anything, Trump represents a reassertion of the belief that America is and will always be a white nation.

Today, our task remains the same, no matter its difficulty or the magnitude of the challenge. Some of us must become poets, but we all must bear witness. Make the suffering real and force the world to pay attention to it and not place that suffering all at the feet of Donald Trump, but understand it as the inevitable outcome in a country that continues to lie to itself and to do so without the crutch of scapegoats and enemies. Baldwin wrote in 1967 "I would like us to do something unprecedented, to create ourselves without finding it necessary to create an enemy." Every time I read that sentence it brings me to tears. To create ourselves without finding it necessary to create an enemy. Even in the darkest of times, as he grappled with profound disappointment and disillusionment, Jimmy relentlessly deconstructed America's race problem as, at its root, a fundamental moral question, a fundamentally moral question with implications for who we take ourselves to be. We are living through, even with our cell phone cameras, what we're living through is not unlike what Baldwin and so many others dealt with as the black freedom movement collapsed with the assent of the Reagan revolution. This latest betrayal by the country joins with the underlying trauma caused by all the other previous betrayals. My mama and daddy went through this. Their mother and daddy went through this and their mother and daddy went through this. How long do we have to push this damn rock up the hill? This is the undertow of black politics, traumatic memories that cling to our choices like ghosts who can't find peace, as white America refuses to change again and again and again and again, and like Baldwin, we have to bear witness to it all and tell the story of how we got here and then just maybe, just maybe we can muster the resolve and push this damn rock up the hill again. Thank you. Thank you. I took up too much of your time and given that I'm a drama queen [bows]. Thank you. No, I'm just being silly, just to cut the edge. So, I think we're open to questions now. I have to stay up here. I wish I could come down there with you and interrupt this power dynamic but, we have microphones moving about. Could you raise your hands with microphones? If you have questions, please ask. If you don't—there's one right there in the mid row. Stand up, please. Thank you.

Audience Question #1:
I'd just like for you to expand more on your book. You talked about the value gap. Can you speak on that a little bit more?

Glaude:
Sure. In some ways, this book, *Begin Again*, is an extension. It's a kind of—it's the second volume to *Democracy in Black* and in *Democracy in Black*, I make an argument, or make a claim, rather, that at the heart of our troubles is what I call the value gap and the value gap is the belief that white people matter more than others and to the extent to which that belief obtains, no matter what the inputs are, the outputs will be the same and the value gap takes life in how we're habituated in the world, right. So, the way in which America is organized, politically, socially economically, the way in which American—the built environment, the space of the country is organized. It reflects that valuation, right, and until we address the value gap, it's—that is underneath, that's what's underneath the wealth gap, that's what's underneath the education gap,

that's what's underneath the empathy gap, right, all the gap talk, underneath it is this idea of the value gap which evidences itself in general disregard, as philosopher Paul Taylor would say, of black people and people of color or people who are not white and so, this is really important. One of Jimmy's moves is to—one of his important moves, and he does this very early on is to flip the general frame of race relations. The problem isn't black people. Problem isn't people of color. America's original sin isn't slavery. America's original sin isn't the decimation of native peoples. America's original sin is the ideology of whiteness. Baldwin says "I'm not a n••••, never have been one." Excuse my use of the—I'm just quoting him, I'm using the word, it just doesn't come off right, I'm not an n-word. Doesn't sound right. He says I'm not that. You created it and until we understand why you needed [unintelligible] in the first place, we will find ourselves on this racial hamster wheel over and over again. The problem isn't us. The problem is this particular idea of whiteness, right, that distorts and disfigures our character, that undermines democracy itself. It gets in the way of us becoming the kinds of persons democracy requires. Think about Abraham Lincoln. He can't even be the kind of human being his idea of democracy requires, precisely because of his racial commitments, right. He stops short of it, right, in interesting sorts of ways. So, part of what I'm trying to do with the value gap is to channel this insight, right, to flip it, alright, to flip it in a certain way and it's hard for some people to wrap their minds around that, but I know I tell my child that all the time—or he's not a child, he's a grown man now—probably ain't you. We just got a—our problem is having to deal with the problem that they unleashed. That's hard to wrap our minds around, yes? You could imagine what Joe Scarborough looks like when I tell him that. Yes?

Audience Question #2:
Okay, hi.

Glaude:
Hi, Morgan. How are you?

Audience Question #2:
Two things. One, thank you so much, what an incredible lecture.

Glaude:
Thank you.

Audience Question #2:
It was both—your rhetorical style was both extremely like individual but so familiar. I was just wonderful. This question kind of became a monster because every time you said something new I was like oh my god, so I'll try to be quick.

Glaude:
Okay, sure.

Audience Question #2:
So, I was thinking about the same thing we touched on at lunch, about the tendency of African American intellectuals and artists like Baldwin and St. Louis's own Josephine Baker in this period to flee to Paris and then I was also thinking about, like you know, like why and I was

thinking of what Malcolm X said when he said that the American negro does not exist anywhere else in the world, and like, perhaps, this is, you know, one of the things that drives people to leave and I was thinking about that in relation with the fact—sorry I'm very nervous, I'm sorry I'm quiet—how I didn't realize that I was black until I moved to America, until I was in a place where, you know, there's black people and there's white people and how I'm often treated better by even white Americans when I reveal myself to be Jamaican, which seems surprising for a country that with the election of Donald Trump has revealed itself to be so hostile to foreigners, and then I was just thinking, with the last thing that you said, that maybe it's not just a hatred of black people or hatred of some poisoned imagined African American archetype, but that it's actually easier to like non-American black people because they're not a threat to this ideology that American is a essentially a white nation and black Americans are some kind of, I don't know, existential threat to this ideology and I'm just wondering if that makes any sense as an idea.

Glaude:
I mean, we could tell a long story, I mean a long story about the way in which black people from the Diaspora and how they navigate the American landscape. It is certainly the case—give you a historical example by way of the point, in order to illustrate the point. Before July 4th was celebrated or when July 4th—when it became the day that it is, in the early 19th century, right, when African Americans would show up to those celebrations, they would literally be attacked, would be attacked. Our bodies represent the contradiction of the country's self-representation. So, if America sees itself as, right, the embodiment of democracy achieved or an example of the empure of right or an idea of freedom, to have these particular people show up in that ritual space is to call attention to the fact that it's not true. So, Baldwin—remember that line whenever the negro's face shows up, there's silence? What he's trying to suggest is that there's something about our presence that calls attention to the contradiction at the heart, at the core of the country. Alright? That we expose something and unless we're read in a charitable way, as an example of Americans' progress or America's movement to a more perfect union, right, unless we get kind of narrated in that way, right, we present, I think, a fundamental interpretive problematic for the nation's self-conception. That's kind of abstract, but I think we can begin to tell a story about that. There's another way in which we can come at it to talk about black—proximity to blackness, right, having once proximity to blackness defines one's proximity to the bottom rung of American society. So, there's a way in which blackness registers something in the American psyche and how one occupies that space, how one is read or interpolated, how one is seen and then how one responds to it is a very complicated story to tell. That's not an answer, but we're going to talk about it over soda. Yes? Hi.

Audience Question #3:
Hi. I'm wondering if you've heard of the documentary *The Long Shadow*?

Glaude:
No.

Audience Question #3:
I happened to grow—to live about 20 miles from the person that put it together. She was the descendant of our founding fathers and who put into the Constitution that black people were 3/5

of a person and she had a black mammy who took her everywhere and she loved her immensely and she asked her mammy why she couldn't sit with her at the drugstore when they had lunch and so, she decided to research what happened to us as a country and she—yeah, it took her six years to put this together and it has everything in it. It has the lynchings, it has the whole story of slavery and I have a granddaughter who teaches history and government here in Webster Groves and I'm going to send her a copy of *The Long Shadow*, which has two versions, a short version for such venues as high schools and I would love to have you take a look at this documentary, so of the long version is over two hours and it goes into her family and what she discovered about her ancestor who was—

Glaude:
I will watch it. I promise you.

Audience Question #3:
Yes, okay.

Glaude:
I have to see this. I'm signifying right now.

Audience Question #3:
It's called *The Long Shadow*.

Glaude:
I got you. I'm gonna watch it. I'm signifying right now, but I'm gonna watch it. I sure am. Yes?

Audience Question #4:
So, do you think one way to help get over all these issues and problems is to also witness individual—because I believe there are probably a lot more than we know about—individual situations of relationships where there is no value gap, that white and black person, whatever, they're friends, whatever kind of relationship is, it truly is there is no value gap. They don't [unintelligible] that and having more witness to those can help people deal with whatever those issues are of the white people to see that you can overcome that. You don't have to have that value gap, even though there's centuries of however it's [unintelligible] you as you're growing up or in our country that having witnesses of those types of relationships can help, in addition to seeing the pain and the trauma that it doesn't have to be that way and that that might help folks to come around, change, I don't know what the word is for that.

Glaude:
I think, you know, examples of genuine mutuality are always important. I think it's absolutely key to tell stories of—I mean, when we think about the civil rights movement, for example, there are extraordinary examples of courage, of black and white facing down racial violence in an effort to transform, you know, racist south in very clear, concrete ways. I think oftentimes we want to find those stories so that we can soften the blow, you know, so that we don't—you know, it's like Hollywood tells this, you know, you ever watched Biko, right, you tell the story of Biko and then suddenly you get this heroic white person that shows up in the film, like what is that about, right, or you know even *Hidden Figures*, right, he's gonna knock down the sign. That

didn't happen, right, because we want to find—we want to be able to tell ourselves a story in such a way that white people are morally redeemable. I want us to tell a story in such a way that the aim is not to redeem white people. Let me just say this and this is gonna to be really controversial. I'm gonna—and if you allow me to give you a hug after I say it, you'll understand what I mean. We—the idea of white America is not redeemable at all. We have to create a world—Jimmy calls it the New Jerusalem—we have to create a world where these categories that bind our feet, no longer obtain, where they—how do we create a world where whiteness doesn't accord advantage and disadvantage, where it's meaningless so that people won't inhabit it as an identity. So, if whiteness doesn't accord you benefit, I have a sneaking suspicion that a lot of folks won't find it valuable. So, I'm of the mindset that when we tell stories of genuine mutuality, right, instead of telling those stories about white people and black people being together, I'm more interested in telling a story about the complexity of human doing and suffering together, right, and how, then, those categories that often, right, lead to a misdescription of what's actually happening, can be put to the side. I—you know, this is what—let me show you what I mean again. I have no interest of committing—convincing Trump supporters to hold other—I'll say it differently—I have no interest in trying to convince Trump supporters to hold different commitments. I want to spend most of my energy building a world where those commitments can't breathe. You see the difference? So, the one—the stories we tell about genuine moments of mutuality, where love actually obtains, right, aren't stories to release us from the horror of who we actually are, right, those stories are, at least in my mind—and this is [unintelligible]—to aim to get us to think beyond the categories that imprison us, right. So I don't—Jimmy—there's not a sentimental bone in Jimmy's body, right, and so, oftentimes when we point to these examples of mutuality, they drip with sentimentality, right. See? Kumbaya, my Lord. No, no, no, right? So, I think—so, I'm with you in this sense that we have to point to examples of genuine mutuality, like I used this language I get from Jimmy from *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, I happen to love a lot of people who happen to be white and then they're whit people and understanding the substance of that distinction and how we imagine a politics predicated on that distinction. Does that make sense? But the key point I want to say is this: the idea of white America is irredeemable and we have to understand that for most of our country, men and women, to concede that claim is to stand at the precipice of chaos. We wouldn't know what the hell to do with ourselves and it's precisely how to get us to that space that I'm trying to work towards, right, because I believe these categories, like Jimmy, right, got us by the throat, right. They have us by the throat. So, in my work, I'm actually kind of critical of identity politics in a certain kind of way, right. Not in the way of, you know, hardcore leftist or these folks on the right, but just simply because I'm suspicious of the way these categories work in shutting down the complexity of who we are as human beings, right, because at the heart of Jimmy's aesthetic is a certain reading of Henry James and Henry James's aesthetic is rooted in the fact that we can't see the human being right in front of us, alright, just read *The Ambassadors* if you can get through that thing. Oh, it's a boring—that book has defeated my four times. But, I'm gonna get—I have—if you allow me, we have a hug. Yes? Yes? I'm sorry, it's the last question, if this is—unless there's a student, another student who wants to ask. Yes? No? What's going on? Who? What? Where?

Audience Question #5:
Hello?

Glaude:
Hello. I heard that you guys are really sticklers about time in the Midwest but go ahead. See, that's a sign. Nope?

Audience Question #5:
[Unintelligible].

Glaude:
He asked a question yesterday. I was on Morning Joe and dealing with Donald Trump likening his—the impeachment inquiry to a lynching and then, Senator Lindsey Graham doubling down by saying that it was a lynching in every way, shape, and fact—in every way, that it was, in fact that. What I tried to convey in that moment, and I understood exactly what—I understand exactly what Trump is trying to do politically in terms of divert our attention from what is actually going on. We know they have him with the Ukraine stuff, I mean, it was, in fact, arms for dirt, we know this. It's clear, but I thought it was an important moment because I think people play fast and loose with our dead. There's something about the way in which America expects black folk to get over stuff. You know, one of the things I—you know, I have tenure, I don't care, I'ma say what I want to say, you know. I love Marie, she might get in trouble, but I won't, you know. You know, but there's a presumption, right, that our orientation—our relation to our suffering, to our dead, right. We have to suck it up, right. On Twitter, all yesterday what I was receiving was it's just a word and I'm like really? It's just a word? If you just simply go to Montgomery and go to the lynching memorial, you'll see that it's not just a word. You have folks walking around here with family members who have been lynched, right. You have folk—it's not tattooed on their arms. It's in their spirit. It's in their brains. It's not—you know, it's the way in which we navigate this space and there's this expectation, I guess because some people think we got this super ordinate moral gene or something that we're supposed to just forget and forgive and so part of what I was doing is that lynching references, unless one is being very deliberate and indelicate, is just simply off-limits. Just period it's off limits. As a simile it doesn't make sense to me. This is like a lynching. Whether it comes out of the mouths of Clarence Thomas or Joe Biden or, you know, Donald Trump, it should be off limits in terms of a kind of analogy for how one thinks about this, but the main thing is, we have to insist, and when I say we in this instance I'm talking about black people, we have to insist on the sacredness of our dead. We can't let these people play fast and loose with it. Yes?

Audience Question #6:
[Unintelligible].

Glaude:
That was so powerful. Just stand up and tell me to shut up.

Audience Question #6:
Sorry. I want to reiterate my friend Morgan's praise of your speech earlier. I particularly found your rhetorical style inspiring to say the least. Okay, so, the part of your talk that I found most interesting was the part about forgiveness, specifically in Baldwin's forgiveness of his stepfather for the abuse that he endured, when he said that hating his stepfather only imprisoned himself. He found the strength to forgive his stepfather for those actions. The quote that I found

particularly amazing was people hold on to hate because once hate is gone, they'll be forced to deal with pain. I really really appreciated that line, but my question is you seem to suggest that Baldwin was able to forgive his stepfather because he realized that his stepfather's abuse really stemmed—was a product of American racism and the experiences that his stepfather and other black Americans experienced there. However, when you concluded that section on forgiveness, you then moved on with the line we are not the mere products of social forces, so this seems to highlight this tension between social and systemic oppression and individual agency, and I was wondering how do we acknowledge the full weight of systemic oppression while allowing room for individuals to still have agency in their own lives and if you have like maybe a practical example as to how we should do that today?

Glaude:
Alright, I expect to see your application at Princeton for graduate school. No, I think this is really important, right. So, I'll be quick because I see you over there. So, it's important that we understand the interior lives of black folk, that we're not just simply moved about by social forces and this is really important. If you ever get a chance to read Nell Painter's classic essay *The Soul Murder*, she insists on understanding the trauma that the institution of slavery called, particularly for children, children and for women in particular and what she's doing in that moment is trying to address what typically slave narratives and accounts of that period keep out of view and that is the interior lives of these people, because we get reduced to our condition of living and not understand that there's something happening on the inside. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is an extraordinary attempt to give voice to what happens, that there's wound, right, that what does it mean to be broken, what does it mean to be moved about by harm, right, and if you don't—see, there's literature about, you know, doctors thinking that, you know, they don't prescribe enough medicine to black people because they think we can take pain, right. There's ways in which they think black children that, you know, you see Tamir Rice and you see a 21 year old. How the hell is that possible, right? So, there are ways in which the stereotypes render. They render us which blocks off the interior. Jimmy refuses it upfront. So, even as he gives an account of his stepfather—his father, let's call him his father because that's the only father he knew—even as he gives an account, he says the tragedy is that he succumbed to it. Now, what is the—what must I do, right, and you know the thing is—I'll say this really quickly—the thing is, and we talked about this earlier, the objective is not wholeness. I say this as someone who's broken. The objective is not wholeness. Pursuing wholeness can get you in trouble. The question is finding beauty in one's brokenness. My daddy can't be whole, grew up in Mississippi. It's angry and he put it in me. I could be a little different, but just like, you know what—what was it—that form of Japanese pottery we talked about. Remember it? What was it called, katsuya? What is it called? That form of Japanese pottery when something breaks? The ideais not to fix it and bring it back to what it was, but we're gonna pour gold in the cracks. We're gonna pour gold in the cracks and then suddenly the broken pottery is more valuable than what it was. You feel me? So what Jimmy is making in that moment, he's trying to call attention to those systemic and structural forces that try to box us in, but he wants to insist that we have the capacity to imagine ourselves otherwise and so, for all of the students here understand, for all of the students of color at WashU, understand that the world conspires to make you small and the question is question is whether or not you will be complicit. That means you have a choice, and don't ever give it up. Hallelujah. Alright, see you all later.

Griffith:
Thank you all so much for being here and please join us and meet Professor Glaude at a reception in Umrath Lounge.

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