

James Campbell: James Baldwin and Britain in Ten Objects

‘James Baldwin and Britain’ Symposium, Queen Mary
University of London, Friday 21st of March 2025

JC: Thank you very much, Isabel. If only all that were true, life would be so much easier. I'm going to approach the topic of James Baldwin in Britain. Am I audible at the back, by the way?

I'm going to approach the topic of James Baldwin in Britain via a collection of relics, we might say. These books tell us a history of something in 100 objects, they're very common now. A history of Great Britain in 100 objects, a history of Napoleon in 100 objects, the World Cup, and so on. I'm not against it. A history or a biography of James Baldwin in 100 objects would be quite a good idea. But you will be relieved to learn that I'm going to limit myself to ten. And the ten I've chosen, form a kind of arc of his experience in this country. I think I'm obliged to say that Baldwin didn't really have a deep relationship with Britain. He was here quite often. But he didn't have a deep relationship with London in the way that he did with Paris, Istanbul in the 60s. And towards the end of his life, Saint-Paul-de-Vence in the south of France. But over the course of 30 years, he made regular appearances here and some of those I'm going to illustrate here. The whole thing should take no more than 40 minutes, I hope, after which there will be time for questions, should anyone ask one.

The first relic, object, miraculously it turns up there. It emerges from Baldwin's second visit to London in 1955. And just to put things in context to anyone not fully familiar, I'm sure most people, Baldwin was born in New York in 1922 and moved to Paris in 1948, remaining there for nine years on and off, and a very important part of his development. This letter was written after he returned from London to Paris. And it concerns his play, *The Amen Corner*, which was written in 1955. Parts of the play had appeared in a different form in the magazine *Zero*, which was edited in Paris by Baldwin's friend Themistocles Hoetis. We'll come back to him at the end. And naturally enough, Baldwin was now looking into the possibility of a production of his play. Where?

An English language play by a little-known author would stand very little chance in Paris and so he decided to go and see if he could get something in London. He had a lead actor in mind, Gordon Heath, who was raised in Harlem, like Baldwin himself, and was now also living in Paris. Gordon Heath at the time was quite a successful actor. He played Othello in a BBC production in 1955, directed by Tony Richardson. Kenneth Tyne had a hand in it, too. Filmed in London studios. And remarkably, it was broadcast live. Gordon Heath playing Othello, broadcast live. But it was filmed, and it was preserved. And you can actually watch it on YouTube, amazingly.

Possibly because of that, and because of the London connection there, it maybe gave Baldwin some hope of seeing his own play produced there. And he had Gordon Heath in mind for the male lead in *The Amen Corner*, the part of Luke. Baldwin didn't always date his letters, but luckily, Gordon did. He pencilled July 1955 at the top of this one. You can't actually see it there. And here's a very brief extract. I'm not going to read all that. This is written to, 'my dear Gordon [...]' I'm by no means sure that I could possibly get in New York, now, the kind of production *Amen* ought to have. Without,

for a moment, supposing the English, of all people, be free of prejudice, I yet suspect that they have fewer misapprehensions concerning Negroes. And the holding on to these misapprehensions is not for them, as it is for us, a matter of life or death. This is not because they are more intelligent or more moral, simply because they have not had, until very recently, anything resembling a Negro problem on that island. So, I think it might be easier to get something approaching what I and I think we want'.

So, there you have the young playwright, fresh from scouring London's West End in search of a theatre for a play. I was lent this letter by Gordon himself in 1988, one of a batch he gave me when I called on him at his apartment in Paris. All Baldwin originals. Take them away, read them, copy them if you want to, and give them back to me when you're ready. It was a wonderful act of generosity. I took them straight across to a shop across the road and photocopied them. Whisked them immediately back to Gordon's place to return them. It didn't come off. *Amen Corner* waited many years for its first London performance. But and this is the way life goes, Baldwin went to London in search of one thing, didn't find it, but came away with another thing, a more important thing. While in London, he met in person for the first time the man who would be his lifelong British publisher, Michael Joseph. And this brings us to the second of our objects.

Michael Joseph had published *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in 1954, a year before Baldwin's London trip. And so it was natural that Baldwin would call on him while he was in the city. Baldwin now had a second novel at the ready, *Giovanni's Room*. But his New York publisher, Knopf, had turned it down. Various tales regarding this rejection, most of them deriving from Baldwin himself. And they tended to change in the telling, from one telling to another. I overheard at a party once telling a group of avid listeners that his New York publisher had said we couldn't possibly publish a novel with a same-sex relationship at the heart of it. But if you change the gender of one of the main characters and re-title it *Giovanna's Room*, that could probably...

One way or another, it was regarded as too risky. And I think another thing that's worth noting is that *Giovanni's Room* is a novel with not a single Black character. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* had been a novel with not a single white character and the same goes for *The Amen Corner*. And it is another branch of that tale that he didn't fit the image that Knopf had in mind for him. But I think the main thing we can probably assume is that it was too risky. But Michael Joseph in London offered to risk the risky book. He gave Baldwin £400 pounds, not a bad sum in 1955, and a promise. And Baldwin told this story many times. Against this, he said, this is Baldwin speaking in Michael Joseph's novel, against this, handing over the cheque, and whatever else you write [break in recording]. That was quite a promise to a young author with a manuscript in his bag, which his prestigious New York publisher told him was unpublishable.

So *Giovanni's Room* was first accepted in Britain. It was accepted in Britain before it found a publisher in the United States. As things turned out, it

came out in the US, first of all but it was initially accepted here. That's the cover. This is the book, by the way. I brought along the book. This is the first Michael Joseph edition, which I bought in a second-hand shop sometime, it's got £1.50 pencilled in it. But it doesn't have a dust jacket. But it is the first edition. And so I thought we'd project this, just to have a look at the dust wrapper. It's a bit perfumey. But nevertheless, there it is.

We skip forward a decade to 1965. Baldwin arrived in London in January or February on a week's visit to promote the English paperback publication of his next novel, *Another Country*. It had been published in hardback in 1962. And it was a huge bestseller. Baldwin, by this stage, had hit the big time. So there were two collections of essays which went into the bestseller list. So he had three books in the *New York Times* bestseller list, all at the same time. But the British paperback of *Another Country* waited until early 1965. It wasn't unusual to have that gap in those days. So here he was in London again to publicise the Corgi edition. And this is the photograph on the back of that edition. I'm not counting it as one of our objects. Let's call it a support object, number three. But I've always liked to photograph. And I've always liked the nice, neat Corgi edition. So since we haven't had yet one picture of Baldwin himself, I thought I'd show it.

As with *The Amen Corner*, however, this visit has become historic for a different reason. A debate at Cambridge University Student Union. And this is what gives us our third object. It came about almost by accident. It was almost cancelled. Yet it now stands as a monument to Baldwin's oratory. His opponent was the conservative author and editor, William F. Buckley, Jr. And the notion to be debated was the American dream is at the expense of the American Negro. In an ideal world, the actual object would be the film itself that was made of the debate and broadcast again by the BBC, but that would take an hour. So what we have here, rather unusually, I think, is an advertisement for the debate, which was printed in the university magazine *Varsity*. Baldwin made dozens of public appearances, as you all know, in which his rhetoric thrilled by live audiences.

And what sets this Cambridge event apart is that it was recorded, and it is now available on YouTube. Well, that's only happened quite recently. It was unseen for decades. But the film was preserved and with the arrival of the internet, it turned up, and so everybody [break in recording]. For example, when I was writing my book, it would have been impossible to see this BBC film on this. I don't even know how I would have gone about it. But later on, I was criticised for not including it in my book, but in the sense, it didn't exist, it was a feature of Baldwin archaeology, and it was dug up. Anyway, that's great. It's become celebrated many years after the event. And most people here, I would imagine, have seen it. And for any who haven't, I thoroughly recommend it. It's memorable for many things, not the least of them the expression on Baldwin's face at the end, when he's, what kind of reception he's getting from the students at Cambridge. It's really worth it.

The debate took place on February 18th, 1965. It presents Buckley in a poor light. I don't think anyone would argue. On that score, I think two things should be said in Buckley's defence. Forty-eight hours earlier, his wife had suffered a serious skiing accident in Switzerland and it would have been understandable if he'd withdrawn from the debate, but he didn't. And second, the BBC version, which we see on YouTube, was edited to fit an hour-long slot. Baldwin was the undisputed victor in the debate, but according to someone who has seen the full recording, which lasts considerably longer, many of Buckley's better moments, including his answers to student questions, were cut. Imagine if that had been the other way around. But the Cambridge debate deserves its place in the catalogue of objects by which we know in Britain.

Two years later, he set up a home, briefly, in Chelsea. This is 1967 now. And the address was 36 Tedworth Square, just behind the King's Road, about as fashionable a place as it was to find in London at the time. Baldwin's mind was on other matters, among them his film treatment of Alex Haley's book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. It never reached the screen, or not really. It gets a credit at the end of Spike Lee's film. But it was either a courtesy or it was a legal obligation, I don't know which. But Spike Lee's film doesn't really depend on Baldwin's script. However, it was published as *One Day When I Was Lost*. And that book, too, was published by Michael Joseph in Britain before it came out in the United States.

It's quite a significant thing, these books by a major American author coming out. And it does constitute part of his relationship with Britain, I think. And he writes about the period in his memoir, *No Name in the Street*, his memoir of the same name, briefly about being in London. It's not terribly interesting in itself. He wasn't being very chuffed about London, or about quite a lot of things, actually, at the time. So he stayed at 36 Tedworth Square, which, unfortunately, we can't have here. Obviously, we can't have it here as a nod to a large part of the campus. But we can't even have a photograph of the house where he stayed, because the house appears to have been demolished. I went there one day last month in search of it. I found numbers 33, and 35, and 37, but not number 36. It's the most confusingly numbered place I've ever known. Parts of the square are numbered in sequence, one, two, three, four, five, squares sometimes are. But other parts of the square are numbered in pairs, two, four, six, eight, ten, 12. And I wandered around, I mean, talk about *No Name in the Street*.

I wandered around, but I didn't find it. But this gives us an idea of what the house probably looked like. So that's 35, and that's 37, not 36. And odd traces of Baldwin's London life turn up from time to time. And one of them is this envelope. And it's a little bit faint, actually, since the screen is so big, it's much better, much more easy to read than I was assuming. But I'm showing it because the sender is Alex Haley, the author of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and of *Roots*, of course. And the letter in this envelope, which I think possibly doesn't exist anymore, but the envelope survives, it most likely concerned Baldwin's film treatment of Haley's book, which I just mentioned, which turned out to be *One Day When I Was Lost*.

Haley typed his own address at the top left. We can just make it out. And it's just a little coincidence that he was living in Provence at the time, and Baldwin was about to move to Provence in, I think, 1970. As a substitute for the real thing, because I haven't got the real thing here, I typed out myself, got my old typewriter out. And that's it here. I've got the address of the sender up at the top left, and James Baldwin, 36 Tedworth Square. And I've stuck on something extra, a James Baldwin US postal stamp to the value of 37 cents. It was issued in, it's a real stamp, it was issued in 2004. And I was the consultant for it, as it happens. So here's my duplicate of Alex Haley's envelope. And if anybody would like, at the end, I brought along about half a dozen of these airmail envelopes with a James Baldwin stamp stuck on. And anyone who'd like one would be more than welcome to have one, not when the address is typed out, I have to say. But you can, actually, you could write your own address on it and put it in the post and see if it gets there. It might be returned to sender if we return to Alex Haley. So that's object number four.

And the next object is the magazine *Encounter*. Please don't anyone mention the CIA. We'll only have an argument. Baldwin made several appearances in this journal, the best known being his report from the Paris Conference of Negro African Writers and Artists in 1957, which took place at the Sorbonne. And he published a couple of articles in the 60s, as well. And in 1972, the magazine printed a conversation transcribed from a television programme in London. He was invited into a London television programme, Thames TV, ITV and a transcript was printed in the September issue of the magazine. It's this particular copy here. And it stands for our fifth object. And so you can see, arguing on the box with James Baldwin and others, Peregrine was the horn, who was a frequent contributor to *Encounter*.

This was a particularly difficult time in Baldwin's life, 1972. He suffered a breakdown in 1970. Journalists who inquired about his work in progress, he was apt to reply that he was trying to write between assassinations. He moved back to France but was in London in April of the year and invited onto this programme, it was called *Something to Say* and it was introduced by a man called Brian McGee, who was, at the time, one of those kind of TV intellectuals about introducing a kind of programme or fronting a kind of programme that doesn't exist anymore, unfortunately. And it's worth just mentioning it and mentioning the dialogue. It's actually quite long in *Encounter*, but it is worth digging up if any of you, you know, it goes over several double column pages. But if anyone is able to dig it up, it's worth doing so because it's interesting. And it's also kind of, it shows the gulf between these two men of the same age, Peregrine Worsthorne and James Baldwin, whose native language is English, are in the world of letters.

And just this dialogue illustrates a gulf between them as wide as the Grand Canyon. Baldwin tended to speak in the historic first person. So he would say, I picked the cotton and laid the railroad track. And Peregrine Worsthorne would say, you've never picked cotton in your life. And he'd

say, who, me? Yeah. And then, you know, there would be something else. And Worsthorne is rather, let's say, obdurate and Baldwin is very tempestuous. And every time Baldwin uses this historic first person, Worsthorne says, what are you talking about? You've never picked cotton in your life. And it ends up with being, me, Jimmy? But there's a note in the prologue to it, Worsthorne wrote a prologue to the transcript. And it's worth reading up because it does, I think, give an indication of the effect that Baldwin had on people, even when the encounter was tempestuous. [Break in recording] an encounter, Worsthorne says, I do not know what the viewer saw, the viewer of the programme, but I know what I felt. As our words took us further apart, as people, we grew closer. When the programme ended, we tearfully embraced, like friends who had just passed through some joint ordeal.

So we stay in the world of magazines for our sixth object. And this one is of particular importance to me because I'm responsible for it. It is the *New Edinburgh Review*, 1979, when I left university in Edinburgh and [break in recording] New Edinburgh Review in Edinburgh, I edited it for four years. And I'd only been in the job for about eight months or something when a big book came into the office called *The Making of Jazz* by a man called James Lincoln Collier. And I put it in an envelope, and I sent it off to Saint-Paul-de-Vence. I got Baldwin's address from Michael Raeburn, who's sitting up there at the back, and put in a note which said, which had the audacity to point out to Baldwin that he had made many references to jazz in his non-fiction writings, but he had never dedicated an essay to the subject. And maybe, it's the precise phrase I used, I remember, maybe you would welcome the opportunity to do so. Sounds funny to me now.

And I got a reply. It came back, and it said, and again, the phrasing is precise, would love to do a long piece, can't meet the deadline. There hadn't been a deadline. If we don't get this piece by the end of the month, we can't use it. And it said, call me in Saint-Paul-de-Vance. And he gave his telephone number. And so I called, working up courage for about two days. And someone picked up the phone and said, hello. I said, oh, may I speak to Mr Baldwin, please? Who's calling? Oh, my name is James Campbell. I'm calling from Edinburgh. Moments later, Baldwin came on the line. I said, hey, baby, how are you? I'm very well, thank you. I'd love to do that piece, baby. I'd love to do it. Call me Tuesday. I called him Tuesday. I said, hey, baby, how are you? I'm working on it, baby. I'm working on it. I said, don't let me hold you back. Call me Friday.

I called him on Friday. It was no small thing to make international telephone calls in 1978, 1979. I'm working on it, baby. I'm working on it. Call me Wednesday. I called. And it was, they got to know me down there. I phoned up and said, may I speak to Mr Baldwin, please? Who's calling? I said, my name is James. Oh, Mr Campbell, how are you, Jimmy's expecting your call. Oh, here he comes. And he was, I'm working on it, baby. I'm working on it. So the quarterly magazine, which means it comes out four times a year. So there was a long lead-in to issue. And we got the cover printed before we got the actual content, the interior of the magazine

printed. And of course, there you can see it there, a nice photograph, James Baldwin. So one time I phoned him. He said, I'm working on it, baby. And I said, well, that's great, because we've got the cover and it looks fantastic. And there was a pause, uncharacteristic pause. I'm on the cover, man. Or course you're on the cover. He said, oh, baby, I'd better get to work. And he did, and he wrote it. It came to my home address. This is the last page of the manuscript. You can see his signature there. And we printed it, and he was happy. And it was on that occasion, or at that time, that our acquaintance began.

And this article has an extra significance, which I've already suggested. It's the only essay Baldwin ever wrote on jazz, surprising as it may seem. He wrote a piece called *The Uses of the Blues* in *Playboy*, of all places, in the 60s. And he wrote the story *Sonny's Blues* in the 50s, which is jazz based, but that's fiction. So there's only one dedicated essay on the subject and this is it. It was later included in the book of Hitherto uncollected essays and speeches, edited by the late Randall Kinnon. That book is called *The Cross of Redemption*. And where did he get the title, from this essay. So I'm quite proud of it, as you can probably tell.

We stay in Edinburgh for object number seven. James Baldwin in Scotland, Doug, that's your next. If you read Baldwin's letters to his Turkish friend, Engin Cezzar, from the 1960s, you realise just how much time he spent in the air and how often he altered his plans. He changed his mind constantly about where he was likely to be in a week's time or a month's time. And he often changed it while he was in the air. Everybody wanted him. That was kind of the peak of his fame, in a way, in 1962. Everybody wanted him, even back then. And this is not counted as an object. We have gone back in time a little bit, again, it's a support object. I think it's worth putting up there, because it leads into the next one. He was booked to appear at the Edinburgh Writers' Conference in August 1962. He's in the programme - this is a page from the programme. And I remember seeing the programme much later, with a photograph of him in the programme.

The Edinburgh Writers' Conference was the forerunner of the present-day Edinburgh Book Festival. And Baldwin had agreed to attend. He was down in the programme to speak on a panel on the subject of censorship. It was quite a panel. Mary McCarthy was the chair, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, Hugh McDermott, and James Baldwin. And all these people were there at the conference but Baldwin didn't turn up, because in a letter to Engin, he writes, before I go further - and this was written on a plane. He was traveling with his sister. Before I go further, Gloria and I have just decided to skip the Edenborough Festival. He spells it that way, Edinburgh Festival. We're due near the end of August. When was that letter written? At the end of August 1962. I don't suppose he was able to let them know. He was on his way to Africa.

And the letter to Engin is taken from the only collection of Baldwin's letters that have been published so far. That's the good news. The bad news is that it was published in Turkish. The original Edinburgh Writers'

Conference occurred just twice, 1962 and 1963. But it was revived and became the Edinburgh Book Festival. And in 1985, James Baldwin was booked to take part. And this time, he made it. And here he is on stage at a packed venue in the city in August 1985, with your present host. I don't know where I got that tie, I haven't worn it since, I think. This photograph, the photograph used in the publicity for this present conference, where we are now, also comes from the event in Edinburgh. The photographer of both is Fanny Dubes, who's sitting up there at the back. And this photograph stands as object number seven.

What turned out to be Baldwin's last book had difficulty finding an outlet in America, not the first one. Once faithful Dial Press, which had been his publisher for many years, turned it down. But his London friends at Michael Joseph took it on. And it's this one here, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. The Atlanta child killings of the early 1980s. On publication day in April 1986, I met Baldwin for drinks in The Savoy, the bar of The Savoy, where he was staying. Also there was his devoted publicity director at Michael Joseph, Sheila Murphy, lovely woman. And the editor who had been assigned to the book, out of mercy, I will just call Max. The reason I'm showing this particular edition of the book as object number eight is that it is, in its own small way, a collector's item. Like a stamp, a postage stamp with a flaw. It's very valuable. I think these are quite rare, actually. The proper title is *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. A quotation from St Paul in the New Testament.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. *Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Here, as you can see, the definite article is missing on the cover. Also missing on the title page. Also missing with the copyright information on the jacket flap and anywhere else. There's also another blunder inside, which I won't bother [break in recording]. It might seem like a small blunder, but it's a blunder nonetheless. And no author likes to discover them, especially on publication day. When I arrived at the bar, Jimmy was sitting with Max and Sheila. The error had just been pointed out, and they were all putting a brave face on it. It was to be Baldwin's final book. Michael Joseph himself had long gone, and his wife, Anthea Joseph, took over the firm after his death, also had died. The firm, at this time, was in the process of becoming part of Penguin, entering the new world of corporate publishing, for better or worse. But Michael Joseph had stuck with him through thick and thin, and in 1986, it was quite thin, it has to be said.

The next morning, I got a phone call from Sheila Murphy. She said, oh, Jimmy tells me you're seeing him in the bar at 1 o'clock at the Savoy, and you're going to take him around the studios for his publicity interviews for *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. It was the first I'd heard of it. But I was delighted, of course, and I pulled on some socks and shoes and brushed my teeth and dashed back to The Savoy. I can picture him now sitting there with a Bloody Mary in front of him. And I had one, too. And accompanied him to some studios. I think there was more than one interview in the World Service Building in Aldwych then an ITV studio on the South Bank. and at some point, in the afternoon, he complained that he was hungry, and that

maybe we could, and I can remember he said it a bit like a child, find some fish and chips. I've always thought it was only a moment worth recording of the experience of James Baldwin in Britain. Somewhere, I'd forgotten at that time that there was a small Italian wine bar on Theobald Road, which runs from Holborn to Parrington Road. It was called the Giovanni's Room. I used to pass it often. I never went in.

But I found this photograph on a website devoted to shop fronts, old and new. And the caption describes the design as faded 70s chic, with a name like a dodgy erotic novel. I'm not counting it as an object. Again, it's a support object. But wouldn't it have been great to take him up there and introduce him to the manager. Unfortunately, I didn't have the presence of mind at the time.

The ninth object in our display is at once a melancholy and a heartening one. It takes us to the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, at the beginning of 1987, where *The Amen Corner* was being revived. By the end of the year, Baldwin would be dead. But here he was in the theatre lobby, an opening night, looking tired but happy to have the drama stage more than 30 years after its composition. This programme actually comes from the show transfer to the Lyric, and this programme is from the West End version. I wasn't able to find the Tricycle programme. It probably exists, but I probably have it, I couldn't find it, but this will do. I can't say how many other Baldwin events there were that year, 1987, in London or elsewhere. Its critical standing was not nearly as high as it had been or as it has become once again. And so the appearance of Baldwin in Britain at the Tricycle in the year of his death is worthy of note. The director of the production, Anton Phillips, will be here tomorrow, I believe, unless he's here now.

The arc of James Baldwin in Britain, seen through these objects, kindly be seated. You can sit in the front if you like. The arc of James Baldwin in Britain, seen through these objects, returns us conveniently to *The Amen Corner*, where we initially found him in London in 1955, looking to interest someone in his play. He failed in that attempt, but in the course of it, he met the Englishman who offered to publish what had seemed to be an unpublishable novel. So think about that for a moment. It was a British publisher who set James Baldwin on course, free to write about whatever he chose to write about. Now, is it justified, you tell me, forgive me for showing this, but my hands are not on the screen. You can hold modesty if you like. Is it justified to count it as the tenth object in tandem with another book? This is my book. In tandem with another book, *Artist on Fire* by WJ Weatherby.

The reason I'm sticking my neck out and saying it counts as an object of Baldwin in Britain is that Baldwin's first two biographers were British. Weatherby's book came out, I think, in the middle of 1990, *Artist on Fire*. This one came out in January 1991. That's not counting Fern Marja Eckman, which I like very much, by the way, a piece of on-the-spot reporting. It's a kind of extended profile. It was originally, remarkably enough, a series of articles in the *New York Post* in 1966. It's a book I like.

Baldwin himself didn't like it, but I think it's worth reading for its present moment feel. David Leeming's book came out after Weatherby's and after mine.

I just want to conclude by saying that of course there was no internet at the time when I set about writing this book here, as there was no internet for every single biographer before then. And I set about it by knocking on people's doors and ringing them up and that's how I came into the possession of the letters to Gordon Heath and many others of the same sort. My main research assistant was the telephone directory, and the international directory inquiries and gratitude is limitless. I found numerous people that way, calling up from a corner telephone booth in New York or in Paris, sometimes being invited, just come right over. Gordon Heath, of course, and Ellen Wright, widow of Richard Wright, and numerous others.

That was how I tracked down Themistocles Hoetis, whom I mentioned at the beginning. He was the editor of *Zero* and Baldwin's early stuff was published. I found him in the London telephone directory. I didn't know he lived in London. Nobody did. He disappeared. He was delighted to be found. He was very friendly right away. What I remembered most from my first telephone call with Themistocles, not some high-minded literary talk, was him asking, what sign are you? So I told him, he told me what it was, and he said, Jimmy was a Leo. That was how our conversation started. We were friendly up until his death.

I'll end simply by saying I like that way of working, and I thank my good luck, and I thank you. Thank you.

M: That was amazing. Thank you, Jim. That was fantastic.

JC: Anyone would like some.

M: Do we have any questions for Jim?

Q: I can start with a question. I was kind of curious about your own personal writing, and if there was a kind of novel, or just people speaking about how they encountered Baldwin through *Giovanni's Room*. I just was curious about that, really.

JC: I first opened a book by James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, on a train from Stirling to Edinburgh when I was a student, I'd just been visiting my parents in Stirling. I was going back to Edinburgh, and *The Fire Next Time* was on prospectus for the coming week. A thin book. I thought, oh, how nice, a little thin novel. I started reading it on the train, and then I immediately discovered it wasn't a novel and that's how ignorant I was, but it hit me with a great force. And in a way, that force has never dissipated. It was always his essays that I liked most of all. Some of them, I thought then, and I think now, were really wonderful. They're models of passionate eloquence. So it was mainly his non-fiction book. It really thrilled me deeply. I always liked *Another Country* as a novel, and I like *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

There are things about *Giovanni's Room* that I like, and lots of things about it I find very intriguing. I don't think the later novels, although *Just Above My Head*, which is about a gospel singer, Arthur, which I think very cleverly weaves a gospel foundation for, a gospel foundation should be up here because it's *Just Above My Head*, for a rather troublesome, mundane, earthly story. I think that was very cleverly constructed. That would be the main things.

M: Okay, thank you. That was great. Thank you, Jim.

Q: I had just two things to ask you. Did you see any of the productions of *The Amen Corner*, either in 1987 or later in 2000?

JC: Both of them.

Q: You saw both, so you saw the one at Nottingham Playhouse as well?

JC: I think that also was at the Tricycle, actually. It started at the Tricycle, and it went on. So yes, I saw that, and I was at the 1987 one as well.

Q: Then I wondered about, there's a famous colour photo of you sitting around a table with James Baldwin, having, I don't know, drinks or lunch. I wondered, do you recall what you were talking about?

JC: I do.

Q: Can you tell us?

JC: I recall a lot of things. I'll just say this, by the way that I never had the intention of taking notes, and I never took notes. That has both good and bad things about it. For me, it would have been very useful to me if I had taken notes. Later on, when I told Darryl Pinkney about that, and I said, I never took any notes, and Darryl said to me, good. You weren't preparing for an article; you were just hanging out. I did quite a lot of hanging out, and that particular photograph you were talking about, it was actually, it was also taken by Fanny, who was up there, and it was when I was in Saint-Paul-du-Vence in 1984 to interview him for *The Times* on the occasion of his 60th birthday. And I think, I'm not sure if it's visible in the picture, but he has a copy, my copy, as it happens, of *No Name in the Street* on the outdoor table in front of him, and he reads the sentence from one of his essays. I can't remember which, but he reads something, something, something, and then he said, and nothing has changed. Then he reads something else. Nothing has changed. It was very dramatic. Baldwin was a very dramatic speaker, even in private, but very, very kind.

He talked to you, as you can imagine, so I can remember a little bit about that.

Q: Thank you.

JC: Yes.

Q: I think it's really telling that by the time we get to the evidence of [break in recording] that we've seen that James Baldwin is still pitching books to his US publisher, and I was curious about why they, do you have any insight about why that book was rejected, given, I imagine that these stories aren't national news, but it's timely. This is a book that is about a timely event that's happening in real time, that would be so, it just would make sense on so many levels, so why the US publisher rejects it?

JC: Well, it started, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, it started as an article on the Atlanta Killings, an article that was published in *Playboy*. Seems strange, I know. They paid very well. And, in fact, the very first time I met him in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, we went to La Colombe d'Or and bar, and he got a phone call there while I was there from his assistant down at the house, Bernard Hassell, who was relaying a phone call from his editor at *Playboy*, about the article, and they were saying that they liked the article that he had submitted. And I can remember very well, just referring back to you, about conversations. I was with James Baldwin, and his reaction to this phone call was like a first-time author. He said, they liked the article. Loved it. It was lucky for me, because, you know, suddenly he was in a great mood. James Baldwin, and it matters to him as much as it matters to any author when he's told that the editor likes the piece, you know.

And I think it's quite a good article, but I think he didn't really have enough to make it into a book. Someone must have suggested it to him, I imagine, or he might have suggested it himself, but there wasn't really enough, and by that time, certainly, he didn't have the journalistic chops to go out and do a full investigation in Atlanta. He didn't really have the desire, to use that word. So when he went there, he didn't really come up with enough to do. And I think that was one of the reasons that Dial Press, and also his value had, by 1984, when he was trying to do that book, his value had sunk quite a bit. But Michael Joseph was loyal, speak up for him.

Q: First, I wanted to say thank you so much, Mr Campbell. This has been an entertaining talk. I really enjoyed your impression of Baldwin, first of all. That was entertaining.

JC: I always wanted to play him in a...give me some controversial aspect.

Q: My question for you is, is there any way that we can get our hands on a copy of the *Edinburgh Review* of him talking about jazz? Even if it's a digital copy, for example.

JC: Maybe Doug can answer that. I'm not sure.

D: Yes.

JC: It is in that book.

D: I've got a digital copy. I can..., yes.

Q: That would be great. Thank you.

JC: It is in that book, *The Cross of Redemption*. Of course, it'd be nice to see it in this. I've only got a couple of copies, so I can't really sort of hand them out I'm afraid.

Q: Yes, I just want to endorse what was said previously about your presentation.

JC: Thank you very much.

Q: It's something really fascinating about seeing things through [break in recording]. I wanted to ask you about in 1965, a production of *The Amen Corner* came to London, brought by Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager, with an American cast. Do you know much about the impact of that and what the journey was of getting that production to The Saville Theatre, I think? And it included, if I'm correct, an amazing American actor, Diana Sands, who was a close collaborator of Baldwin's, going back to the actual studio. But how did that production of *The Amen Corner* in 1965, produced by Brian Epstein, at the height of Beatlemania...

JC: Well, George, Paul and Ringo in the cast. It would have been great. I don't know...I, at that time, 1965, Diana Sands was in *Blues for Mr Charlie*. You're quite sure it was not *Blues for Mr Charlie*, which came on a tour with, I think, the Cherry Orchard. That was the studio.

Q: That was a production.

JC: I've got a picture of the programme.

Q: There was a production of *Amen Corner* as well.

JC: Yeah. I can't tell you about that. The lady here is the source.

Q: Mr Burt Caesar, I've got the picture of the programme.

JC: I'll have to look that one out.

M: Thank you. Are there any more questions before we finish?

D?: Just a quick one. It's great to imagine Baldwin eating fish and chips. Thank you for that. I enjoy the opportunity very much. There's one anecdote that you've shared with me, and I wonder if you're happy to share it with everyone else and it's Baldwin on Margaret Thatcher. They're the more curious ones, but do you remember the...

JC: I do, yeah. It was peculiar, it was one time when I was in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, and there were riots in Britain, and they had spread. So the *International Herald Tribune* came, and it was always a day behind, and there were riots in Britain. It was probably 1984. It spread up to Dundee, I remember. And there was something about Margaret Thatcher that Baldwin said something like he would like to coat her in chocolate. He'd like to make her into a Cornetto ice cream.

D: Eclair, wasn't it?

JC: Chocolate, and coat her in chocolate. I can picture him saying it. I had no faintest idea what he was talking about. I don't really know, really.

D: It was just something that stuck in my head.

JC: It was an odd image, definitely an odd image.

M: I was just going to say, is there any more questions? I just want to say thank you, Jim.

JC: Thank you very much.

M: It's so generous also with sharing material with us. It's great. Thank you so much. We now have a free lunch which is in the gallery space, all vegetarian. Then we're going to return here at two, I think. We're then going to have a panel with Denise Noble and Jason Okundaye. If everyone could join me in thanking Jim.

End of transcript