Panel A: “James Baldwin and Political Activism” with Leila Hassan Howe, Margaret Busby, Bill Schwarz, chaired by Rob Waters.

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RW: I want to welcome you to our first panel. I'm Rob Waters. The first panel of the day takes the dauntingly open title of Baldwin and Political Activism. But we're taking the view of this from Britain, and we're thinking, among other things, about what James Baldwin meant politically for Britain, and what he continues to mean today as we're witnessing a clear revival of his work and the clear sense that Baldwin speaks to our political present, just as he spoke to political presents past, although perhaps in different ways.

It would of course be a reduction to call James Baldwin a political writer, still more to call him a political activist, even while he was at many times both of these things and more than them. But what's undeniable and part of what we ought to explore, is that Baldwin's writing, his words, his personality even, had a formative place within political movements in Britain, within political formation or political becoming, as well as a way of navigating and sometimes challenging or defamiliarising politics.

James Baldwin was a for a whole generation here in Britain, just as in the US, the voice of the Civil Rights Movement, and his books brought that politics close and made it intimate, I think. His essays in particular, but his novels also provided ways of making sense of the big political questions of his age, not simply as questions about the law, about institutions, about the social order, but also as questions of lived experience, personal relations, culture, inner life of the psyche. And one of the beauties of his work is how he connects up these different levels on which politics works. And again, I think that that's a promise from his work which is as vibrant in his reception in Britain as it is elsewhere.

So, to discuss James Baldwin and political activism, I'm joined by three excellent panellists. We've provided handouts that you should have hopefully got when you came in that have got fuller bibliographies, so I'm not going to do a full introduction now, but you can please read more about them there if you wish to. But we'll begin by thinking about James Baldwin today and how his work is responded to today, and for this we'll hear from Bill Schwarz, sitting closest to me here, who until recently taught here at Queen Mary, in this very building in fact, and introduced a very popular graduate module on James Baldwin. And he's written at length on Baldwin as well.

Following Bill's talk we will hear some more personal reflections from Leila Hassan, at the far end of the room, on her engagements with Baldwin's work from a different political moment in London in the late 1960s through the 1970s and into the 1980s. Leila Hassan Howe is an editor, an activist and a founder member of the Race Today Collective in the early 1970s, later editor of the journal *Race Today*, among much else. And again, please refer to the bibliographies if you want to read more.

And finally joining the conversation will be Margaret Busby, a writer, editor and critic, co-founder of the publishing firm Allison & Busby in 1967 and still publishing now. And her memoires are due to be published later this year as well.

So, without further delay, I will hand over to Bill Schwarz to kick us off.

BS: Well, my friends, here we are, 2025, and we still need to talk about James Baldwin. I'm very, I don't know if happy is the right word, but I'm very pleased indeed that this conference, symposium, whatever it is, is scheduled for now, because we have Trump in North America already wreaking unbelievable havoc in a short period of time, and then that can be replicated across many European nations. And what this requires of us minimally, minimally is talking together, because if we don't talk together, we are stuffed. And we also have to think, keep thinking. So, in a sense my very short talk today will touch on some of those issues. I realise that by the time I'd finished what I'd written I realised that what I'm addressing is how we can think about Baldwin and use Baldwin today.

Let me just begin with a more personal memory, a more anecdotal memory. I came to Queen Mary to teach English literature in 2004, and I was determined – I don't know quite where it came from – that I was going to introduce a course on James Baldwin. I'd never taught literature before; I was teaching James Baldwin and I was also doing courses on Caribbean writing. I hadn't taught at any literature before but, Jesus, I found it an absolute struggle to begin with. I really suffered greatly. But of course, the thing about Baldwin effectively is he, kind of, teaches himself. You don't need a teacher there because it's all there on the page.

And then a few years later, 2007, with a dear, dear friend who has now died, Cora Kaplan, who eventually came to teach here, we organised a James Baldwin conference here. Doug was here. I was really surprised that there were barely any UK people attending the conference. The English department at Queen Mary had never seen so many Black faces in a single room; they were all North American. I couldn't believe it. There were a few, there was a small handful of white folk, maybe four or five. And then Doug, I don't know if you remember this, there was also a heavy metal Norwegian. He was a lovely guy. He came and he loved Baldwin, he loved talking about Baldwin. And he came to some of the follow-up conferences and so on. He was terrific. But it did worry me in the sense that there were so few people from Britain, I couldn't quite understand it. But it was very good to have that interaction with really, really, really smart people, Black folk from North America. Including, I'd just like to mention, Cheryl Wall who died a few years ago, and of course the deaths begin piling up.

I'm not going to say any more about this. I'm not actually going to address the question of Baldwin in Britain, although how he's been in both Britain and in Europe and in North America, how Baldwin is simultaneously remembered and forgotten I think that, kind of, needs someone to think about and write something just to clarify exactly that complex process of trying to check how he operates in the present. Because it is undoubtedly the case that more or less from 1972 until the ending of the Obama presidency he was, kind of, out of action in a way or out of memory.

But just in case there are any visitors that don't know this part of London at all what you can do, if you're so inclined, there are clearly some inveterate sleuths here who like to follow every bit of Baldwin footsteps, if you get the 277 bus from just out here it will take you to Dalston Junction where not

long ago under the auspices partly of Margaret Busby here, Hackney put a blue plaque over the old Dalston Library so that James Baldwin is remembered, right next to the CLR James Library.

Now, this panel, as has been intimated, is about James Baldwin, political activist. Well, James Baldwin was active politically; he was never an activist. It's just who he wasn't. He had brilliant ideas, he loved chatting to folk, he loved involving himself in campaigns. An activist? He wouldn't know, kind of, what to do. So, I think we have to rule out the sense if we're looking for James Baldwin the activist, I think we'll go to bed without anything flourished.

But if you read Baldwin's books now, particularly from 1972 or thereabouts, what you will find is his sense of impending doom was really bloody powerful. There's not a sentence he wrote where, even how he was trying to buck himself up and buck up his sisters and brothers, there was never a moment when he wasn't conscious that the United States, all the Western world, was not heading potentially for really drastic bad times. And I think it will pay us to go back and rethink those old Baldwin texts which we've read just to see exactly what he's thinking about the future dark times.

Now, I say that Baldwin wasn't a political activist, he wasn't, but where I think he was most productive, there's massive debate about whether this is political or not, but where he was most productive was thinking about the relationship between politics and the inner world, the inner psychic world, the interior human world. And he was always trying to think those two things together. And there are loads of times in North America, but not only, where Black militants were frustrated by Baldwin's seeming political indolence. And how people read that now is entirely open. I tend to give Baldwin the benefit of the doubt and think that something here politically is important for us to relay.

And this was founded, Baldwin's sense of the importance of the relationship between interior life and politics, it was founded on his conviction, which was and is very unusual, that what occurs in the interior life, in our deepest psychic moments, internal moments which we are only barely aware of ourselves, that there is indeed a profound relationship between that and our political lives. And that is extremely difficult to actually clarify what either of these are, what's politics and what's the interior life. It's even more difficult to think how they can work together, how can we imagine that they should work together. And indeed, people may legitimately ask the question, well why should we put them together. I'll come back to that in a moment.

So, I don't know if people have seen Colm Tóibín's new book on James Baldwin. Tóibín is a queer Irish novelist with a long, long time interest in James Baldwin. He was here in 2007 for the Baldwin conference we had. And Tóibín says this about Baldwin, 'He saw the dilemma his country faced as essentially an interior one that begins in the interior of the psyche, that his fellow citizens suffered from a poison that began in the individual, the poison that begins in the individual, and then it makes its way to politics'. So, that would suggest that one reason for thinking about this is actually it's

in the interior unconscious, in the interior psyche that Baldwin proves the question of the relation between the two.

Now, you read there are hundreds of books on Baldwin, you read some of the secondary academic literature, and people talk about soul and this, and you think, well maybe that's a legitimate because Baldwin did write in that way in some sense. But what is going on? Why should Baldwin have been so curious about the interior life? Why did he pay such great attention to his own subconscious, his dreams and fears and hopes and wishes and that sense of a dashed future?

Well, I think it all looks slightly different now. It looks very different in fact to my mind now that we have Trump. And when I say Trump that's shorthand for a whole bloody associated crew wherever they operate, tyrants they're everywhere we look. So, I just Trump as one, as a shorthand. What on earth can we do with Trump? Can the politics we embrace deal with Trump? What happens when Trump says in all seriousness – well we assume in all seriousness but who bloody hell knows – that Haitian immigrants are coming and eating American suburban, you know, eating the dogs of the white suburbs? And what happens when seeing people, from saying such a thing, and we see people cheering him on? What is going on there? And I think that we don't have a politics that is able to address that question. And we won't have a politics unless we find some way of trying to unravel our own interior lives and the interior lives of our friends and contemporaries.

I have become increasingly conscious in the past while in 1933 or in the years after in Germany that there were a whole variety of new Marxism's which developed which actually faced precisely the question of how do you deal with a state formation which appears to us fundamentally irrational? What are the properties of that state? Even when people know that Trump's lying and people still sign up in ever greater numbers for him what process can we use to begin to unpack that?

Now, Eddie Glaude in his new book on James Baldwin he says, 'Don't get seduced into the idea that the best thing to do is to talk to the Make America Great body. You can't talk to them. It's kind of suicidal for a start, but we don't need to talk to them, we can't talk to them'. And I think his principal refusal to entertain that idea is completely right. However, I think the one thing which we are obliged to do, however unbearable we find it, is to listen to what they're saying and try to work out what is it that consoles people, that works in people's favour, how can they achieve some kind of harmony or inner harmony or inner [recording breaks] by addressing those questions.

Now, when I started teaching James Baldwin here when I was considerably younger and I didn't need spectacles and I had hair and all that kind of stuff, I began by teaching Baldwin to try and work out what he thought, what did Baldwin think. Which is how academics always begin teaching things. So, what were Baldwin's ideas? Well, of course that's a necessary step. And if you're teaching the students need to know that and they want to know that, and so they should know that. But that question is itself limited.

I now want to shift the argument. I think one of our jobs now is to shift the argument and to think rather well, what did Baldwin say, well there's endless debate about what Baldwin said, but we want to shift the emphasis to ask: how can we think with Baldwin? How can we think with Baldwin? And it's that question I want to move onto next in relation to three new books on James Baldwin. Eddie Glaude, *Begin Again*, which came out in 2020. Do people know that book? All being very reticent. When the book came out, I really liked it. It was reckoning with Trump and with COVID. He claimed it was written to appease his own despair and to work his way through that. It was written in largely the first person, which I think when you're writing Baldwin is probably a smart way to say it. It's emphatic that the central dynamic of the new authoritarianism in the United States is to make America white again. He said right at the beginning, 'If we fail to linger on the dark moments in our past we do so at our peril'. So, I liked the sense that this is a book which absolutely is fore-fronting our own authoritarian times.

Then when I went back to read it on this occasion, I wasn't so certain about the book. I kind of thought it was often clunky. More than anything I think that halfway through he, kind of, gave up thinking and he just relied on a whole number of concepts which he'd introduced and then didn't develop so that he just kept on repeating them. And those concepts were after times, like what happens after authoritarianism: trauma, trauma becomes a hanger on which he puts everything; elsewhere, by which he means a dream for somewhere, some different situation; and self-creation. In the beginning when I saw these concepts I thought they would be rather fruitful in trying to uncover where we go from there. But they just become, kind of, off the shelf, unthought of ways to get him through the next paragraph. I think he got tired when he was writing it and lost control of his own manuscript.

But the other thing I find is that if one is going to take seriously the question of interiority and to read it politically well then if you're writing in the first person you need to confront your own interiority and use yourself as a kind of case study in order to see how an external politics connects or doesn't connect with your internal life, your internal fantasies and wishes and hopes and desires and so on.

And there's a very, very interesting moment where he says when he was younger one of the first things which drew him to James Baldwin was the fact that when Eddie Glaude himself had been growing up, he had an abusive, wretched father, and when he read Baldwin talking about his stepfather, he could exactly recognise this dynamic of a damaged masculinity. And actually, what he says about his relationship with his father is over in one sentence. He just says, 'I had a terrible time with my father'. That, kind of, leaves all the work to be done. So, when I came back and I reread this, even though there's much I like about it, I thought in the end it was disappointing. It is a lesson to us all about how difficult it is to keep on thinking, keep on fresh thinking. Don't rely on ideas which have just been stored in the back of our mind for God knows how long. Look at the world as clearly as we can and then [inaudible].

Then Colm Tóibín, who I've mentioned before, the queer Irish writer who has spent his whole life very, very moved by Baldwin. He's a brilliant novelist. What I liked about this book was that Tóibín says that when he first read James Baldwin, he hadn't realised that his early work was about the great Black migration was from the South to the North, he just didn't see it. Well, of course, for Tóibín as an Irishmen, also exiled from Ireland for much of the time, but with a house in Ireland, he lives there [inaudible]. That is his sense of exile, he realised conforms exactly to Baldwin's sense of exile when Baldwin was in Paris and London and Istanbul et cetera, et cetera. So, what he does is he creates his own James Baldwin where Baldwin transmogrifies into an Irishman. And actually, I think it's rather enticing and it's rather intriguing, and it does make you see that relationship between the interior life and the exterior life.

And Tóibín says this, 'Baldwin's essays and articles come first from the self, from the body, from the beating heart where the spirit feeds. And with his own experience he becomes political and becomes public'. So, he's trying to put this as closely as he can to the relationship between the interior life and politics.

And then, I'm coming to the end, the final example I want to take is the latest book by author Doug, who is sitting here, *Walking in the Dark, James Baldwin, My Father and Me*, published in 2024. And I have to fess up at this moment, when Doug first told me that he was working on the book, J*ames Baldwin, My Father and Me*, I thought come on Doug, what are you playing at, do we really need a book on your dad and James Baldwin and you. I mean, pull your socks up, my friend. Then I thought okay, I'd best read it. And I opened the first page, I promise you, the first page is the most arresting opening to a work of non-fiction which I can remember ever reading. It whacks you straight there and you think, what. I was tempted to read it out to you, but it's Doug's story, he's sitting there, I can't trespass on that. But I prevail on you all, at some time if there's a copy there just on the table, well if it's new you can buy it, but if it's not new, just for clearance, it is an amazing, amazing setting up. It's where the author, Doug, sets up his own interior life from which he attempts to read later on through the book a certain kind of politics.

What you'll find, I think this is one of the very, very few books on James Baldwin, let me start again, one of the very, very few books on James Baldwin written by an academic which doesn't resort to academicism in structure. And what keeps it alive or keeps the prose alive and keeps Doug thinking is exactly how he is thinking, how he interiorises James Baldwin. So, actually I think it's an extraordinary way, it's an extraordinary example of how today in the 21st century one can productively, fruitfully think about Baldwin, and the way of doing that is to think seriously in a complex way and never, ever an easy way about our own interior life and what we're expecting and what we hope to see. So, I think that this relationship between the interior life and politics is, kind of, taking a new form when the people writing about Baldwin are seriously addressing their own internal hopes and fears and how they live and how they experience things.

However, it remains, even though Doug I love the book – even after the first page which whacked me in bits, but I love the rest of the book – it still leaves open a larger question which hopefully we can address at some point today and tomorrow about how then do we make the move from the individual, in this instance Baldwin and Doug, Tóibín and Doug, could be Gaude and Baldwin, how do we make the move from that into the larger politics? I'll simply close by saying that it seems to me urgent that we think of some way we can use these insights into trying to explain the predicament or attempt to. Thank you.

LH: Okay, hi everybody. Thank you to the organisers for inviting me. As you know, I'm not an academic, I'm not I would say very well read on Baldwin. And the reading of Baldwin I have done, because it has actually influenced my political thinking and my political life, and of course, above all that, the question of race. And race in Britian and learning from Baldwin about race in America and its application and understanding probably thestrategies and the ways we could move forward in having a deeper understanding of the society in which we live.

So, first of all a bit about me. I was born in Britain, but for part of my life I lived in Tanzania in Africa. My mother is a white working-class woman, was; my father a seaman from Zanzibar. And I had lived in the period in Africa, the colonial period, the anti-colonial period, and so I've witnessed the British flag being taken down in Africa and the huge celebrations that we have got the British out of Africa. Because of the political situation in Africa and because the British handed over to the Arab elite in Zanzibar there was a revolution where the African masses violently overthrew the Arab dynasty that ruled. And so I came back to Britain.

And I came back to Britain in the mid-'60s when, if you know any history about the immigration to Britain you will know this is a time of mass immigration of immigrants from the Caribbean primarily and the Asian subcontinent, from India and from Pakistan, because then of course Bangladesh didn't exist. And we had at that time over 250,000 immigrants coming in to Britain and settling mainly in poor working-class communities. And when I returned to Britain, I returned to a poor East End working class community. My mother worked in a sack factory, and my white stepfather worked on the docks loading sugar for Tate & Lyle. And I came back to a Britain which I had left, growing up and having white mates and just growing up and being young, to a racial hostility that I had not experienced ever anywhere in growing up. And when I say racial hostility, I mean that at school young students would just refuse to play with you, you'd be ostracised, you would have a lesson on geography and someone would jump up and say, Miss, Miss why are these people coming here, my dad says they're coming here to get their jobs.

So, you have to imagine a young girl growing up in Tanzania primarily and Zanzibar, growing up as a Muslim, coming to England to a white working-class community and just meeting hostile racism. At the age of 16 I told my mother I couldn't stay at school. There were three Black girls, nobody would play with us. The teachers really were not concerned with the fact that we were being ostracised. And she just said to me, Leila, it's not what you

know, it's who you know in this society, and we know nobody, so if you're not going to go to school you need to go to work. And so I got my first job when I was 16. And even that had to be done through a personal relationship because at that time it was very difficult to get a job above being a manual worker or working in the NHS if you were a young person.

And so this is important because this is why I first met James Baldwin. I'm a young girl feeling extremely isolated, I've had the equivalent of a grammar school education in the colonies because, as you probably know, the colonies then all the teachers had come from England so we had very much a colonial education. The education I received in Zanzibar was in English, even though everybody spoke Swahili. And so I was not uneducated I would say in the sense I didn't have the education standards of many of the white working-class kids I was surrounded with. So, I am at home just trying to make out what is happening.

Of course, 1968 the dockers march, there's just huge antagonism, Enoch Powell Rivers of Blood speech, there's huge antagonism to us. And so I, being somebody who had an interest in politics and understanding the world from my kind of colonial African experience, I thought I have to start reading. And the person I turned to was James Baldwin. I try to remember now in '65, '66 why it would have been Baldwin. Was he the only Black author around who had any kind of currency in this society as to why I turned to Baldwin?

And the books I read when I was young were *Giovanni's Room*. Then I have to say I did not know what being gay was or homosexual; all I knew was this was a story about a man loving another man. I read *Another Country* and that fantastic relationship of trying to understand relations with white and Black people, then of course American Blacks. And of course, eventually *The Fire Next Time*. And I don't want to say that Baldwin saved my life, but Baldwin moved me so much that I wrote to him. I wrote to him through his publisher, and what I said to him was, and I've tried again to remember what I said, but I think what struck me was the issue of race, which was so paramount to me at that time in my life, that the only way I could make an understanding of society and relationships with white people and if there could be any hope of ever having a relationship with a white person that wasn't based on race and them believing that we were inferior, that Baldwin helped me to understand that.

So, I wrote to him as a young girl pouring my heart out. It was probably a load of rubbish, I have to say. But just said that he had given me through – those three books are the ones that stand out for me, I think I probably read more – but he gave me an understanding of what race was, that race had completely destroyed the white personality, it distorted the white personality, but through all this, relations were possible. And of course, his books, you talk about the interior, but the love, the theme of love that goes on throughout Baldwin's books kind of helped me appreciate my stepfather who I absolutely hated, and my mother who I was in absolutely dire conflict with because she just couldn't understand what was wrong with me.

The other thing that Baldwin gave me was that it was okay to be Black, and that what we didn't have to do was adopt to the white norms in order to find our own humanity. And that was hugely important to me because being surrounded by a loving East End family really, aunties, uncles, we were a huge clan, the Watson clan, who all loved me but didn't like Black people. And all the time I'm trying to work out well, should I even like them because they don't like Black people, but then Aunt Rosie really loves me. So, it's a real dilemma as a young person that you go through, somebody we call mixed race now of course – my late husband absolutely hated that term so I'm not going to use it anymore – but someone who was Black and who was white, who am I, where do I belong, and how do I navigate what's happening to me.

So, Baldwin was really essential to me at that time as a young girl and so I wrote to him. And he sent me a telegram back, and the telegram just said three words, 'Keep the faith. Jimmy'. And I remember that to this day. As my daughter reminds me, mum you still get emotional when you talk about it. So, I have tried to keep the faith.

That's my early life. And of course, coming from Africa, I read the *Daily Telegraph* because it was the only newspaper where you could get any international news. There was no point trying to read anything else, not even the *Guardian* could you get the kind of international coverage from the *Telegraph*. And so I kept my faith. I kept my faith with my kind of African origins of understanding what I had witnessed in Africa. And it stopped me becoming – and now there would be no understanding of this, but when you grew up in the East End environment that I did, or if you were a Black person at that time who was born there, the pull for you to become white, the pull for you to laugh at jokes that were being made about Black people, and to laugh at somebody being called a sambo or a nig-nog, the pull to want to belong within that white environment which was hostile to Black people was really strong. And so Baldwin is the person who I say really saved me from going down the path of being someone who really would not have had any identity.

And so later in life, which I think probably my biography up there attests to, I became a Black political activist. First of all, on the tail end of the Black Power movement of the late '60 and '70s. And of course meet Baldwin again, and I was speaking to Margaret about this, reliving the moment he went to the West Indian student centre, I think it must have been '69, which is now a Horace Ové film which I think you're going to show, and the debate he has with, you can see in the audience people beginning to struggle with what does Black power mean, what is the concept of Black power, how are we in Britain going to adopt Black power.

And what I would say is that you have to understand that the discussions we were having then is because we were in a community in transition. We were a community who our parents or some of has emigrated to Britain to work, and at that stage even if you were middle class many of you went into manual work, because as Darcus would say, he went with his degree to the civil service and they told him he was a liar, so he worked in the Post Office. He went to what was then Mount Pleasant, the big sorting office and worked

as a postman. And when the white foreman said to him, pick that up boy, he did. I mean, it's hard to imagine Darcus doing that, but that was how we lived. Linton says, we weren't second class citizens, we were beyond that, we were on the margins of society, and we were making our way.

And the importance of Black Power in Britain at that time is of course the American influence. And Baldwin is hugely part of that American influence on our thinking. For us it was the Panthers, it was Elridge Cleaver, it was James Baldwin, it was all these American writers because by then we had no home grown Black British writers who we could talk to. So, much of the literature and understanding of who we were, what we could do, what struggles we had to take came from America, came from the United States. And that's where again I meet Baldwin again.

But in terms, although Bill says he's not an activist, I have to say his responses to the deaths of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King that response in terms of what it did to the psyche of not only Black Americans but to I think Black people internationally is hugely, hugely important to understand, the blows that we felt with the deaths of those people.

So, our immigrant reality is changing because of course we realise that we're here to stay. The dreams of our parents of we will make enough money and go back home are being eroded, particularly by my generation and many of my contemporaries who were saying actually we're here to stay in Britain. And so we have to really shape our world in Britain. And here Baldwin's words really resonate because one of the things I remember us saying was you can't change reality unless you face it – and I think that's in one of his essays. And for us I think in that moment it's we need to face the reality in which we live because, unlike our parents, we're not going home so we are going to stay here and we are going to live or die in Britain because this is now our home. And it's that transition again which I think when you read Baldwin, although it's from the American experience, it gives you a deeper understanding of.

And the other thing of course about Baldwin and the slides that we were showing earlier and of course this tribute here you will see members from the British cast of *The Amen Corner*, is that we had to establish ourselves not only politically but culturally. So, we had to have our own theatre movement, we had to have our own poetry movement, our Black writers who were beginning to write, and although having difficulties – and this is where the great Margaret Busby comes in, publishers who would publish Black works – we are feeling our way in society, realising that the view of us as second class, third class citizens, marginal people is something which is not acceptable to us, something which we know only it is within our hands to change. You know Baldwin talks about the power relationships, we understood the power dynamic very, very well. We were supported by huge international movements for change at that time. And although we're living in a very pessimistic moment, and I agree with Bill, I think the movements for change are underneath, they are always underneath. And we have to try and make sure that the form in which they then come to the fore really do make real change for all of us who are involved in them.

So, again you will see why are we having a tribute to Baldwin with all these speakers and of course the British cast of *The Amen Corner* there, Baldwin's famous play, produced by Anton Philips, who are there. And this is us saying we have something in this country that we are connected with in terms of culture, arts, and of course the influence of Baldwin on America is hugely, hugely important to us.

I think for many of us in the Black Power movement at that time a lot of it was a lot of silly adoption of America and American ideas. But you have to imagine when you don't feel you have anything to draw on – now of course we have this huge wealth of literature and knowledge of what was going on in Africa at the time, Rodney's book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, all of this is coming out at this time. So, we were very much a community on the move. We were people who were seeking ideas.

And I would say for all the Black Power movements, and even when I move on into the organisation *Race Today*, reading and understanding our history is really, really important. And although I take the points you make about Eddie Glaude, Bill, I think the one thing that really, really is important and I think in today's movement is that people really do not know their history. It's so immediate and now that our references to understanding our history in order to understand how it can shape us going forward is really at the moment something that is really lost. And that's something again we visit in Baldwin. You need to understand, if we don't understand that history of slavery, colonialism, how we got here, what shaped us as a people. We are not, what can I say, white people but we have dark skins, which is what many in society today would want us to believe. We are not. We are people who have shaped our own destiny, who have our own particular history and culture, which we need to understand if we are to move forward. So, Baldwin I think speaks to that most definitely.

I cannot go in any detail into any of his books and discuss what they meant or what they didn't mean, but what I can say is that even for today's activists to have an understanding of where we have come, what has shaped us, then Baldwin is absolutely essentially important. He's essentially important I think not only for understanding that we're not empty vessels, we're not pigs who are just to be fattened and when you feed us with consumer goods that's all we are. We have a huge, you've called it interior, but there's a part of us that seeks to understand who we are, seeks to understand society.

So, for me I would say the lessons of Baldwin are understanding white people; understanding that, unlike the Nation of Islam would have told us, white people are not the devil; understanding that they themselves have been shaped by their own history; and the distortion in the white personality is around race. It's race that makes them believe, even the poorest white person who is probably unequal to the poorest Black person, believes they're superior because they are white – no question about that. And we saw that manifested recently in the recent marches in Britain.

And so I just really want to say that to understand Baldwin and his impact on me personally in my darkest time is very, very important. Growing up

reading his books and understanding the struggles he was facing in forging his relationships with different people, and reading him particularly in the '60s and that whole Civil Rights struggle and his essays, and understanding that when people say oh, Malcom X, Martin Luther King, now it's kind of said offhand. But the huge impact those people had on us as a Black community in Britain trying to find our ways cannot be underestimated.

And I'm going to end really now, because I don't have much else to say, is that Baldwin Black and white we're doomed to live together, we're going to live together or die together, it's up to us to be able to forge the new society and new ways of thinking. And in my darkest times, even to today, and certainly throughout my life and in our Black Power period when we faced huge opposition, and in *Race Today* against the police, with arrests, with beating up, with huge struggles around education and schooling and always being motivated to move forward, I think in our darkest times Baldwin came back to me. And of course it's the famous phrase, and it's only when I read *The Fire Next Time* again that I realised in fact Baldwin didn't say it, but of course it's the very, very famous phrase, 'The very time I thought I was lost my dungeons shook and my chains fell off'. Thank you.

RW: Thank you, Leila. And I should say, Leila also brought us these fantastic images from that event there, a tribute to James Baldwin. Was it Lambeth?

LH: Yeah, we did it in Brixton. And just to say about that, Baldwin died in 1987, we felt that we had to do a tribute to James Baldwin. So, I called Maya up personally and said, Maya, we don't have any money, but we want you to come over and do a tribute to James Baldwin. And she said, absolutely but you've got to put me up in a hotel – which was in Knightsbridge, I have to say – I like whiskey so you have to make sure there's some, and pay my fare, but don't worry about a fee. And at that time Maya Angelou was a huge, huge artist and writer. So, she came and did this fantastic show for us there. And also of course we had James Baldwin's brother there, David – there he is – and Linton Kwesi Johnson who was there. And that woman there is one of James Baldwin's closest friends, a lady called Florence Alexis who lived in Paris. So, all of these people gladly came for no money. And of course, Darcus, who there is reading Baldwin. So, we had this big event.

But the story of this event is it was so popular, and at that time there was no health and safety, so we just advertised we were having a tribute to Baldwin and hundreds of people turned up. So many people that we couldn't get them into Lambeth Town Hall, and Lambeth Town Hall at that time held about 400 and we couldn't get them in. So, we closed the doors, and we locked Maya Angelou out. It was pandemonium. We said we can't let anybody else in so we closed the doors quickly, and then somebody came running up to me and said, Leila, Leila, we've locked Maya Angelou, she's out there. So, Maya came in and she told me off, she said to me, what do you think you're doing, you're flapping around, you're flapping around, you are a Black woman and when you're a Black woman you take some deep breaths and you just deal with it. I said, it's all gone pear-shaped Maya, it's just chaos. And she just, kind of, said it to me again. So, that's the story.

And that's the cast of *The Amen Corner*, and you can see Carmen Munroe there. The story of how we got these photographs in the last two days is another story. This is organised by a Black organisation, and that's how we organised our tribute to James in Brixton in 1988.

RW: Okay. Margaret, we've heard about why we need to read Baldwin today and the, kind of, conditions we're working in today and why Baldwin felt so urgent then and still now. Did you have anything you wanted to say in response to Leila and Bill's?

MB: Well, what can I say? What I'd like to say, I started reading Baldwin because I discovered him, I'd read English at London University, Bedford College, we had a special course on American literature. I studied Falkner; that's the only place any Black people came into my course. So, I discovered Baldwin on my own. I graduated when I was a baby in 1965, by which time I had already started a publishing company or conceived a publishing company with somebody I'd met at a party. And so in 1968 I was connected with, I was actually already married to a jazz musician in the late '60s, and a friend of my husband who he'd met, an African American in Mykonos, the Greek island, and tried to get a novel published and had been turned down by every publisher on both sides of the Atlantic, and he was directed to me. I'd started a publishing company with this guy called Clive Allison. And we took on this African American writer whose name was Sam Greenlee. And his novel was called *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. This was the first novel that our company Allison & Busby published in 1969.

Now, we brought Sam over to London so I could work on it and manage it with him. And Sam was staying with a friend of his in Notting Hill. I was living in Notting Hill with Lionel, my husband. And this, I think he was Guyanese, Rudi Kizerman, I don't know where he is now. But I think Rudi was going out with Paula Baldwin, James' sibling, and Sam was also a friend of Baldwin, so Sam was staying with Rudi Kizerman. And that's where I first met David Baldwin. It was the musical collection. I've got photographs with David, my late ex-husband, various other musicians. Because Lionel, my husband, had a weekly gig at a coffee bar in Earls Court called *The Tubular* which is where I first met Darcus, well it was Radford in those days.

It would have been about 196[recording breaks] Reddy Red, an American pianist, a bass player, John Hart, he's gone, Paul Epstein, he's gone, Spike Wells, the drummer. And it was through David Baldwin that I met Jimmy, James. And I can't say that he was a close friend, but the impact of his writing followed me. And it was through the '70s and '80s I was obviously still in touch with David as a friend, and David was also a big jazz fan. I think he worked behind the bar in Mikell's a jazz club in New York. So, the connections with David continued, and the connections with James started.

I think when you referred to the plaque in Dalston, and when that was being put up, was it last year?

M: Earlier this year, I think.

MB: Outside the CLR James Library, or nearby, I looked up there and found that in 1978 I'd gone to an event at a friend's house, it was actually releasing Ngũgĩ and other political prisoners in Kenya, at which James Baldwin had been a guest speaker. So, it was from '78, I'd been to other things. In fact there's a photograph on the internet that goes around, me, my cousin Moira Stewart and James, and I think that was at some event in the late…I think it was when James was going to be on a television programme, I think it was the Frank Delaney show, and that would have been early '80s or late '70s. There are various points I was meeting him in the '70s and the '80s.

I think what was interesting is that now suddenly everybody knows about him. He's lauded, he's celebrated, he's hundredth birthday was celebrated, but actually when we lost him, when he died in '87 he was not that well known. He'd been politically ignored in a way. In fact, one of the things that I found interesting was James died, Jimmy, December 1987, now in January 1988 there was a statement in *The New York Times* book review signed by 48 African American writers and critiques who were celebrating Toni Morrison. But also, this was in the wake of Jimmy having died without having won a major award in the United States, he didn't win the National Book Award, he didn't win the Pulitzer.

And there was an additional statement from the poet June Jordan and the critique Houston Baker who wrote, 'Even as we mourn the passing of so legendary a writer as James Baldwin, even as we may revel in the posthumous acclamations of his impact and his public glory, how shall we yet grieve, relieve or all together satisfy, how shall we explain the exile of this man who wanted to be loved so much at home? How shall we forget the declaration of this native son who once said, I'm worth more dead than alive? Celebrity is not a serious embrace – I'll go on reading this actually, it's quite long – it's a fact that James Baldwin celebrated worldwide and posthumously designated as immortal, and as the conscience of his generation. It's a fact that Baldwin never received the honour of those keystones to the canon of American literature, the National Book Award or the Pulitzer Prize, never. And so we have buried this native son, Jimmy Baldwin with a grief that goes beyond our sorrow at his death. We also grieve for every Black artist that survives him in his freedom land. We grieve because we cannot yet assure that such shame, such national neglect will not occur again and then again'.

That's why they're trying to laud praise on Toni Morrison, because at that point she hadn't won any major award. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970, so we're now in 1988 and she's won nothing. 'Throughout she has persisted in the task of calling her beloved, which was not beloved. She was insistent on the subjects of her stirring concern, my people, which are not my people, Black children and women and men variously not themselves, variously not yet free from the inexplicable, mad, impinging hatred that would throttle or derange all village, family, sexual love. And devoutly she has conjured up alternatives to such a destiny, political, skin-close means to a transcendent self-respect. Today all the literate world knows Toni Morrison.'

Well, that's what they said in 1988 in this statement in *The New York Times* book review. Which actually in 1988 Toni was over here to promote the new edition of *Beloved*. And she was doing various things around the country and there was a television programme that was going to have me and Toni on talking about publishing because she had been an editor, and at the last minute they dropped the item. Why was that? Because they decided Toni wasn't well enough known, because she hadn't won any major award.

And so there was a young filmmaker called Sindamani Bridglal who had just finished her film training. Toni had an hour free in her schedule, so I didn't have time to reread her books, and we did an interview with Toni Morrison. And she went on a couple of years later to win the Pulitzer Prize. I think we sold the interview back to Channel 4. It might have been [recording breaks] in 1988. And then Toni went on, she won the Pulitzer Prize. But that's how recent her fame was. Even in 1993 when she won the Nobel Prize, I remember somebody from a national newspaper, who I won't shame by naming, said to me, 'Toni Morrison, who's he?'

So, this whole thing of fame coming very belatedly and then suddenly everybody always knew who Toni Morrison was, always knew who James Baldwin was, is something we should address in our relations with writers who are with us still and not wait for decades to pass before we recognise how much they are.

So, that's what I take from what Jimmy had to go through. Now, I was trying to find some relevant quotes and here are one or two. There was one, love was something that came up quite often, and love wasn't just some bland, passive thing, 'Love takes off the masks we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within'. That was from *The Fire Next Time*. Here's another one, 'An artist is here not to give you answers, but to ask you questions', this is from an interview in the *Black Scholar*. And this is from a 1973 interview in *Muhammad Speaks*, 'I don't have any coherent political ideology, nothing very doctrine. I know more clearly what I'm against than I can say what I'm for. There's something about me which mistrusts that level of indoctrination. The danger of trying to indoctrinate a population is that you then cease to listen to them'. And here's another one, this is from *Nobody Knows My Name,* 'It's a terrible, inexorable law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own. In the face of one's victim one sees one's self'. Is that enough?

RW: Thank you. I made a mistake when I introduced memoires are coming out later this year, and actually it's *My Collected Writings*. But it makes me think that the memoires should be coming out. There's a lot to go into. This memorial in '88 was that the only one you know of that happened in the UK?

MB: I'd seen [recording breaks].

RW: And it's interesting that we have that point by the late '80s when Baldwin appears to have been forgotten, or not remembered, not the face that he was in the early '60s, not the voice of the Civil Mights movement. And yet now we are certainly witnessing this revival of interest in his work, and Bill

talked of a lot of new stuff that's coming out on Baldwin. I wonder whether we might think about to what extent this is the same James Baldwin that we're seeing now, and what feels different about the Baldwin that has come back to us now in the UK but outside of the UK as well. If anyone wants to?

BS: I'd need time to think about that.

MB: What do you think?

RW: It was easy when I was asking. I suppose what is quite interesting is that he's writing out of that historical moment, he's a part of the historical moment and he's taking us through what's happening as it's happening. And everybody knows that they're characters in everybody's life, Malcolm, Medgar, Martin. And even when he goes back to his father, and now we're, kind of, living with that, another historical moment in the present that we just don't have…it comes to us partly as history, if you see what I mean. And I suppose one thing I wondered about, Doug was saying at the beginning, James Baldwin mugs and James Baldwin clothes, and to what extent does an extraction of lines from Baldwin compared to, kind of, embed this sense of him as this historical figure that was present then?

LH: I think that happens, doesn't it? That co-option happens; you can't stop that. It happened with Che, it's happened to an extent with Angela Davis, the politics become irrelevant, the symbolism of who they are just becomes this, kind of, trendy image.

About Baldwin one would hope that in order to understand Baldwin you have to read him. Once you see the image it's something you've got to read to get a deeper understanding. For me the way he talks about relationships between Black and white people always to me is something I go back to and think about, because it's so easy now to take sides and be superficial about what he meant, and that deeper understanding. But I don't think you can stop the fact that he's going to be on mugs and pillowcases. I mean, look at Malcolm, Malcolm's everybody's best friend and anyone's got Malcolm X [recording breaks].

Angela Davis said, because somebody asked her that question, and she said it doesn't matter, you can't lament the fact that people get co-opted in this way by mainstream society. She doesn't think that that's necessarily a bad thing. At least people know the name, at least they know the name.

BS: Can I just ask a tiny little question? I was so moved when you talked about how Baldwin sent you a telegram, keep it up.

LH: Keep the faith.

BS: Keep the faith, Jimmy. But you didn't say how you felt getting the telegram. People in those days didn't get telegrams because they were so expensive. And you must have gone to a door, opened the door to a postman or whatever, opened it up and there's Jimmy writing to you.

LH: That's difficult. First of all, I don't agree with you about telegrams because in that period the only way was a letter or a phone call, so if it was urgent news, you did get a telegram. I mean, I got a telegram to tell me my father had died in Zanzibar.

BS: Well, in those, that's right.

LH: So, in those days telegrams weren't this big, big thing; it was a way of conveying urgent news. So, you did get a telegram. I think when I opened it and saw it, I think I was just stunned that he'd bothered to write to me.

BS: It's extraordinary.

LH: I thought that was what was amazing. It was shock that this person had even bothered to write to me. I remember picking it up at the door and my mum saying, there's a telegram for you. And I was thinking it had to be news from Africa, from relatives in Africa. And when I just saw that I was just stunned, I was stunned. But then I didn't think of him as the big lauded writer then. For me it was a writer I read who had helped me to understand myself, so I didn't have oh, James Baldwin. It was, well he bothered to write back to me, oh. So, it was shock.

BS: And then when you subsequently met him did you remind him?

LH: No, because then he was, although not popular, he was always in an entourage.

MB: What year was that?

LH: I'm trying to think of the year, and as I said my memory's going, but I think it was through Florence. But I never said, you wrote to me, because why would he remember? Do you know what I mean, why would he remember a telegram? Maybe his publisher sent it.

MB: I think the good thing about Jimmy in the '80s he was interacting with ordinary people. I mean, the photos I have of Jimmy at Creation for Liberation exhibition, there's Linton, there's Audry [recording breaks], there's T-Bone Wilson, there's all these people and he's just one of the crowd; he's not some sort of figure on a pedestal.

RW: Was he a frequent visitor to Britain in this period? We've been trying to piece this together, but sometimes he just, kind of, pops up and you don't know the norm.

MB: He was at various events in the '80s. As I said, I found this old diary, I'll see what was… There was that thing, the Ngũgĩ. was in '78, the thing at Friend's House to release Ngũgĩ. There was something in the Frank Delaney programme in '84. He opened the Horace Ové exhibition in '85 at Brent Town Hall, so I've got this. I've got something about the Groucho Club in 1985.

BS: Which club?

MB: The Groucho Club it says, James Baldwin Groucho. Maybe I was meeting him at the Groucho Club. But the Groucho Club it wasn't a big deal. I was invited to be part of the start-up for that, but I didn't do it. Then other things, David Baldwin. Then there's *The Amen Corner*. So, throughout the '80s he was doing events in London.

RW: Are these from your diaries, is that how you're getting the dates?

MB: Yes, I can tell you the exact date. Friend's House was 21st March 1978 talking about Ngũgĩ being in prison for days.

RW: Interesting. It's a different James Baldwin than we get through our digitised newspapers and we can search and he was there being interviewed by the *Daily Mail* or *The Times* or *The Guardian* and don't see that other side that's moving through other networks that are just not in the papers, not reported on in the same way.

LH: I don't think that event was reported on anywhere.

MB: No, I don't.

LH: That was just how it was then, the Black community would organise these events.

MB: And it cost three quid to get in that.

LH: Yes, I saw. I laughed at that. That's what I'm saying, being on the margins of society as we were then, we had to do things for ourselves. But the mainstream media completely ignored us.

MB: That book fair was again something that was important in that year, 1982 and 1995, bringing all these international writers and playwrights with no recognition anywhere happening.

RW: I think we're still to have something on the Black Book Fair to remember it, other than what came out of the people involved with it at the time.

Something that I've always been curious about, Leila you said about reading Baldwin when you were involved in the tail end of Black Power, and named those other writers. If you read people talking about that period or you find the bookstores or the libraries, Baldwin is always there and so, as you said, is Cleaver, and so is Malcolm X. And I wondered firstly how important Baldwin was for that Black Power politics, but also how he fitted. Because there's always that sense reading back on it now, that famous Cleaver's attack on Baldwin, and as Margaret said Baldwin was not a political ideologist and suspicious of, so how he fitted into that Black Power which was quite committed at times, quite doctrinated about things, how his writing fitted into that.

LH: So, the thing about the Black Power movement was we had a hunger to read anything that was written by a Black person, it didn't matter, politics,

no politics, art, culture, literature, any play. Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyne Brooks, these early Black writers who were maybe not overtly political, but for us we had a hunger to understand who we were, so we read everybody and anything. So, Baldwin fits into that, not that we wanted to find politics in Baldwin to motivate us; we wanted to understand ourselves, understand our history. And at that time, because there was nothing much about Britain or the colonialism in the Caribbean we turned to Black America. So, that's how we get into understanding and understanding people who'd had the history of slavery, and for us because of civil rights and that whole movement were trying to reshape America and reshape their own reality. And Baldwin comes in that understanding of who are the people we can read to get an understanding.

The other almost bibles were *Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James, *Minty Alley*, I mean we read novels as well as political tomes because all of that contributed to our understanding of who we were and where we had to go.

M: And Baldwin was Baldwin as a novelist. You mentioned *Giovanni's Room.*

LH: And *Another Country* are the two I remembered.

M: One imagines people wielding *The Fire Next Time* and, you know.

LH: I think *Another Country* as well hugely impacted me.

RW: It's interesting that of that generation there isn't a revival of Eldridge Cleaver; that Baldwin continues to speak in a way that others of that generation, which were equally powerful on the bookshelf and in those spaces, have felt more out of time than Baldwin.

LH: Baldwin was a writer. I think that's the difference, isn't it?

MB: Another writer was Richard Wright of that era.

LH: Oh yes, of course. That was huge, yes.

MB: I was going to Paris from the '60s and for the next 30 years and Ellen Wright, Richard Wright's widow became friends [recording breaks]. But that falling out between Baldwin and Wright is interesting. It was almost in that era where you had one prominent Black writer at a time. It was Baldwin, then it was Wright, then it had to become Baldwin. I'm not sure, I don't think Baldwin actually fell out with Wright in the way that was depicted; he still respected him.

RW: How did Wright feel about him? I think Wright was more scathed by it. Okay, we've got about 15, 20 minutes left so I want to have time to bring people in from the audience. Has anybody got questions?

Q: My question is directed at Leila and it's in response to a statement that Bill made during your address. You said on numerous occasions that James Baldwin is not a political activist, which I find quite incongruous with his work and especially what he is to the Civil Rights Movement in the UK. And of

course, when you were speaking, Leila, I was moved. I was moved by your engagement with Baldwin's work, but more importantly the impact of Baldwin's work on you. And I don't know, that statement irked me; I think irk is a strong word but it just didn't sit with me. But I'm asking for your response to do you think James Baldwin is or was a political activist given your encounter with hm and also your work as a political activist?

And I'd say for Bill, to be fair to you, I'd like you to please, how do you define political activism in this context?

BS: You don't have to be fair to me.

Q: No, I think it's only right to be fair. How do you define political activism in this context?

BS: Can I just clarify what I meant to say? Whether I said it or not I don't know. But what I meant to say is that Baldwin himself would never have regarded himself, never have called himself a political activist, even though I drew the distinction he was often politically active, and I think that's a, kind of, enigmatic. Baldwin is always trying not to conform to your sense of who he was, he's always trying to, it's a kind of queer thing as well, always trying to surprise you. Of course he was politically active, but I think that's different from Baldwin imagining himself or ever calling himself an activist. But I can't hear him say that. You looked puzzled.

Q: No, not puzzled. I'll have a conversation with you after.

LH: Also I think Bill's right, he was politically active. I mean, I call myself an activist because I have devoted much of my life to activism. Baldwin devoted himself to being a writer. I think that's the thing. But most definitely he was politically active; it's impossible not to know and read and understand, of course he was politically active, absolutely. And understood politics and understood race in America in a way I don't think anybody has equalled, his writing on race and understanding what racism has done to white people. There's no writer in the world that does it like Baldwin.

Q: I think it's about who defines how people are defined versus how people define themselves.

BS: Absolutely.

Q: And the import of definitions. Because when you said it, and I think we all have things that ignite and just go off in our minds.

Q: Thank you, Sarah, that was going to be my question.

Q: Was it?

Q: The two-part question that you had, that's what I was going to ask, so thank you.

Q: Yes, because I think that there is a title we give ourselves and where we define, and there are ways in which other people define our works and define it. And there's also a third element how other people are reading these definitions. And I thought it was important to raise that, given today's society when dissent is not always encouraged. And yes, James Baldwin was a dissenter but he was also I see him as an activist, but anyway.

RW: But I think there's also that thing about Baldwin would never of course deny that there's a frontline and there's a need for a political, and he talks about this about his own guilt at not going back at times, knowing that people are out there dying, going to prison, being killed. And that is the frontline of that political struggle. But also his writing is about trying to expand the conception of where politics happens or where the struggle has to happen as well as and on top of. And I see that as where was Baldwin most active politically wasn't sitting in lunch counters or marching; it was a different kind of politics that he was insisting was part of confronting that racial order at that time.

I can see, as Bill says, Baldwin's own discomfort with describing himself as a political activist, even without that being a rejection of political activism or his times of involvement in a much more hands on.

Q: Thank you all very much. I [recording breaks] during the lecture because I grew up in Gloucester with the sort of racism that you talked about, very centre to the condition of life there. And I remember reading, my sister had *Another Country*, and I read it, didn't understand a lot but there was the fundamental [recording breaks] was the struggle to define oneself outside of the context within society and structured us, but to find something that was specific, unique to our own [recording breaks]. Well, I was asked to write something. I was in a school and I think there were two children from [recording breaks] and the racism was just sort of something [recording breaks]. I wrote something, and for some reason I was starting with the little that I could remember from the book, citing some of the things that Baldwin had written in *Another Country*. And for the first time she took me seriously. I mean, it was difficult. I still have a depth of gratitude to James Baldwin because he helped me to define myself and to think that I could have a space for myself outside of the racialised school structure.

And it was interesting when you said that Baldwin didn't talk so much about it or was conscious of not being as involved as others felt that he should have been in America. But all the major events, he was there. Every so often I go back to reading him, and I'm reading *Another Country* and I'm learning something new and I'm trying to [recording breaks]. I don't know. I can't [recording breaks] connection with how people see Baldwin, well not how people, I don't have a sense that a lot of young Black kids know so much about James Baldwin as, say, my generation did, because maybe that space has moved on and people are writing about race in different ways. I don't know if you have any connection with the contemporary, with the now and then, in the connections that we draw Baldwin back into? I don't know if that makes sense?

LH: I mean, right now there's quite a lot about Baldwin everywhere.

Q: For people who know.

LH: No, even for people who don't know.

Q: Okay, right.

LH: His name is now coming back up again. Radio 4 did a beautiful adaptation of *Giovanni's Room*. That was just brilliant. So, I think slowly again, as Margaret says, it ebbs and it flows, it comes and it goes. And I've been to a couple of things with young people where they're talking about Baldwin and the impact of Baldwin. So, I think it is growing, definitely.

Q: I did listen to *Giovanni's Room*, but I felt that the Giovanni's Room that I read when I was much younger wasn't something that was sort of general, and it was much more problematic I think then. And I sort of get the impression now that young people are much more attuned with the versatility of sexuality. But I don't know if that's the case.

LH: It's definitely the case, yes.

BS: Can I just make a quick observation? I taught here in this institution, I taught Baldwin probably from 2004 to probably '19, something like that. And in the department of English, we used to have a significant number of associate students who would be from the United States. As soon as they knew that there was a course on Baldwin, they would join it. And the amount of young Black Americans who would come here and say, we are never taught Baldwin at home, and how bizarre it is, this is what they said, that we have to come to London to find about Baldwin. I'd never expected to hear that because I assumed that Baldwin was just part of the curriculum of the United States. At schools, pupils might read *Sonny's Blues*, a short story, but apart from that he wasn't taught during this period. I don't know after Black Lives Matter if that has changed. I don't know if anyone knows more than me? I don't know. But it's perplexing that; I never quite grasped it.

Q: That's typical though, isn't it, when you go away to learn about your own stuff in another country. It's the same with Black British literature, we had to go to America, Americans were putting it on their curricula.

Q: I was also going to add the current climate. I can imagine that James Baldwin definitely won't be studied in American schools and universities after the abolition of EDI [recording breaks]. I just can't imagine young people reading him in the classroom.

Q: And the banning of books as well. I mean, they [inaudible].

Q: It's not so surprising that Baldwin is not being taught in schools in America. I think writers that are challenging the status quo and what's happening usually don't get that exposure in the same way, just as Walter Rodney is not being taught in Guyana or C.L.R. James. Somebody who's gone to university in Trinidad and says who's C.L.R. James. We have this problem in the world because these writers are challenging the status quo as it were.

Q: I was just going to add onto what people were saying, this might be just my algorithm, but I think there are [recording breaks] clipped up more than James Baldwin. There are very often two or three-minute videos of his interviews circulating on Instagram and Twitter. So, I think he is quite popular in some of those circles online, I think. I think that's where a lot of people are finding out about him, including people I know who aren't really interested in history or literature that much, they [recording breaks].

RW: It's interesting. That's the thing that's interesting, everyone might have been walking around with Baldwin in their pocket as a book, and now it's the visual Baldwin, the oratory Baldwin that we encounter, you know, through social media so much more.

Q: I just wondered, given your moving account, Leila, of the foundational story that James Baldwin's writing enabled you to build, and it's created the possibilities for people to build their own foundations, like [recording breaks] because he knew America's foundational story and [recording breaks] and he described that as, 'We've made a legend of a massacre, a narrative designed to reassure us that no crime was committed'. And because he had that deep-rootedness in a story that he sees the consequences of I just thought, yes is that something you think of in terms of him as a foundation because he owned foundations?

LH: For me I have to say the way I look on Baldwin is, I understood he understood the foundations of race. So, the point you give about Native Americans I understand. But for me as the writer he illuminated race for me out of the, kind of, superficial. The deep impact it has on people's psyche, the deep impact it has on shaping your personality, what race does to people, not only to white people but to Black people, how race has shaped us as well in our response to how we live. So, the foundation for me for Baldwin has been that deep, deep, deep connection to the impact of race on white and Black people.

RW: We've got time for one more if anyone would like to? Okay, well I think we can give ourselves a slightly earlier finish so we have a bit of time to refresh ourselves before the next session which will start at 12. Let's just say thank you to the panellists again.

End of transcript