

Abstract:

The Paradox of White Innocence in the Early Works of James Baldwin responds to what writer James Baldwin observed as White America's apathy of the heart during the African American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968). I offer a reading of Baldwin's early fiction as companion pieces that chronicle the writer's evolving critiques on post-WWII American Whiteness. As an ensemble, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962) and *Going to Meet the Man's* "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" (1965) respond to shifting discourses surrounding race, sexuality and nationhood that dominated the post-WWII era. By adopting a Critical Whiteness Studies approach, I explore how the demands of post-war White identity both psychologically alienate Baldwin's White characters and create institutions that inadequately respond to anti-Black violence. I use *White Innocence* as a discursive tool to underline how innocence becomes a marker of self-identification that masks the brutality of Whiteness and Western power. Whiteness proposes to protect its bearer from the reality of the present by effacing the history which has produced it. Paradoxically, this act of protection renders Whites ill prepared to face the moral challenges of the 20th century.