



I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO

"ONE OF THE BEST MOVIES YOU
ARE LIKELY TO SEE THIS YEAR."

MAUREN LEVY, THE NEW YORK TIMES

WRITTEN BY

JAMES BALDWIN

DIRECTED BY

RAOUL PECK

STORY BY

SAMUEL L. JACKSON



GRACE UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

**REFLECTION &
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

"I Am Not Your Negro" – Reflection & Discussion Guide

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Grace United Methodist Church

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In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Additional Resources

- James Baldwin vs William F Buckley: A legendary debate from 1965 - "Has the American Dream been at the expense of African Americans?" - View on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/5Tek9h3a5wQ>
- James Baldwin's 1962 "Letter To My Nephew" - <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>
- The Enemy Within: The making and unmaking of James Baldwin, By Hilton Als, February 9, 1998, The New Yorker - <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/16/the-enemy-within-hilton-als>
- CNN's United Shades of America, with W. Kamau Bell - <https://www.cnn.com/shows/united-shades-of-america>
- "Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race," Book by Debby Irving <https://debbyirving.com/the-book/>

Ground Rules for Creating Brave Space in Conversations¹

Adapted by Isabel N. Docampo

1. **Controversy with Civility** – Encourages you to accept that conflict is a natural outcome in a diverse group and is to be expected. Work towards continued engagement to understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions.
2. **Own your intentions and your impact** –Encourages you to acknowledge and reflect how the impact of your actions is not always congruent with your intentions and, also, that positive or neutral intentions do not trump negative impact. Continued engagement is encouraged to understand intentions and impact.
3. **Challenge by choice** – Encourages you to be especially attentive to the degree to which your daily life is affected if you choose not to challenge yourself by entertaining a different perspective or by opting out of a conversation. Does privilege enable you to make the choice not to challenge yourself to listen to and/or enter into conversations that offer different perspectives? If so, how does this factor into decisions about how and when you choose to challenge yourself?
4. **Respect** – Anita Robertson-Farber² defines respect as believing that the other person wants to learn and grow and, therefore, your curiosity (asking open-ended questions) about their position will help challenge assumptions that you and they may have regarding the topic. It also allows the person to see where there might be gaps in their reasoning. Trust is garnered only when you, too, share your reasoning, your assumptions and open yourself up to receive their curious, open-ended questions. It is important to engender a spirit of mutuality.
5. **Be Brave to Receive Challenges to your worldview.** Challenges to beliefs are uncomfortable. You are urged to have the courage to remain quiet and listen attentively while you experience these. **A good example of how to offer a challenge respectfully after the person has spoken is:** “What you said made me feel angry because ...” or “I find that idea to be racist because....” While a challenge is uncomfortable to receive, it opens the space for deeper conversation. A challenge must be specific to be helpful and it must avoid being personalized into an attack on the person.
6. **No attacks** – Know the difference between a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual’s idea or belief or statement. An attack on a person is unacceptable. Example of an Attack: “Your statements – Your idea is worthless, you’re a jerk.” This makes the other person feel defeated, unheard, injured and defensive.
7. **Be brave to explore your reactions.** After the session, be brave to explore more fully your uncomfortable feelings by identifying the feelings you experienced (anger, fear, uncertainty, shame, doubt) and to ask yourself, “why am I so uncomfortable?” “why am I having this reaction?” “where did I form my belief that is being challenged?” “how and why is my experience and/or belief so different?” It’s important that you own those feelings and move beyond them to get clarity on yourself and the person speaking. Unexplored feelings prevent growth and learning.

¹These ground rules are based on “Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens in *The Art of Effective Facilitation*, 2013 Stylus Publications.

² *Leading while Learning* by Anita Farber-Robertson, Alban Institute

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR – RAOUL PECK

I started reading James Baldwin when I was a 15-year-old boy searching for rational explanations to the contradictions I was confronting in my already nomadic life, which took me from Haiti to Congo to France to Germany and to the United States of America. Together with Aimée Césaire, Jacques Stéphan Alexis, Richard Wright, Gabriel García Márquez and Alejo Carpentier, James Baldwin was one of the few authors that I could call “my own.” Authors who were speaking of a world I knew, in which I was not just a footnote. They were telling stories describing history and defining structure and human relationships which matched what I was seeing around me. I could relate to them. You always need a Baldwin book by your side.

I came from a country which had a strong idea of itself, which had fought and won against the most powerful army of the world (Napoleon's) and which had, in a unique historical manner, stopped slavery in its tracks, creating the first successful slave revolution in the history of the world, in 1804.

I am talking about Haiti, the first free country of the Americas. Haitians always knew the real story. And they also knew that the dominant story was not the real story.

The successful Haitian Revolution was ignored by history (as Baldwin would put it: because of the bad niggers we were) because it was imposing a totally different narrative, which would have rendered the dominant slave narrative of the day untenable. The colonial conquests of the late nineteenth century would have been ideologically impossible if deprived of their civilizational justification. And this justification would have no longer been needed if the whole world knew that these “savage” Africans had already annihilated their powerful armies (especially French and British) less than a century ago.

So what the four superpowers of the time did in an unusually peaceful consensus, was to shut down Haiti, the very first black Republic, put it under strict economical embargo and strangle it to its knees into oblivion and poverty.

And then they rewrote the whole story.

Flash forward. I remember my years in New York as a child. A more civilized time, I thought. It was the sixties. In the kitchen of this huge middle-class apartment in the former Jewish neighborhoods of Brooklyn, where we lived with several other families, there was a kind of large oriental rug with effigies of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King hanging on the wall, the two martyrs, both legends of the time.

Except the tapestry was not telling the whole truth. It naively ignored the hierarchy between the two figures, the imbalance of power that existed between them. And thereby it nullified any ability to understand these two parallel stories that had crossed path for a short time, and left in their wake the foggy miasma of misunderstanding.

I grew up in a myth in which I was both enforcer and actor. The myth of a single and unique America. The script was well written, the soundtrack allowed no ambiguity, the actors of this utopia, black or white, were convincing. The production means of this Blockbuster-Hollywood picture were phenomenal. With rare episodic setbacks, the myth was strong, better; the myth was life, was reality. I remember the Kennedys, Bobby and John, Elvis, Ed Sullivan, Jackie Gleason, Dr. Richard Kimble, and Mary Tyler Moore very well. On the other hand, Otis Redding, Paul Robeson, and Willie Mays are only vague reminiscences. Faint stories “tolerated” in my memorial hard disk. Of course there was “Soul Train” on television, but it was much later, and on Saturday morning, where it wouldn't offend any advertisers.

Medgar Evers died on June 12, 1963.
Malcolm X died on February 21, 1965.
And Martin Luther King Jr. died on April 4, 1968.
In the course of five years, these three men were assassinated.

These three men were black, but it is not the color of their skin that connected them. They fought on quite different battlefields. And quite differently. But in the end, all three were deemed dangerous. They were unveiling the haze of racial confusion.
James Baldwin also saw through the system. And he loved these men. These assassinations broke him down.

He was determined to expose the complex links and similarities among these three individuals. He was going to write about them. He was going to write his ultimate book, *Remember This House*, about them.

I came upon these three men and their assassination much later. These three facts, these elements of history, from the starting point, the "evidence" you might say, form a deep and intimate personal reflection on my own political and cultural mythology, my own experiences of racism and intellectual violence.

This is exactly the point where I really needed James Baldwin. Baldwin knew how to deconstruct stories. He helped me in connecting the story of a liberated slave in its own nation, Haiti, and the story of modern United States of America and its own painful and bloody legacy of slavery. I could connect the dots.

I looked to the films of Haile Gerima. Of Charles Burnett. These were my elders when I was a youth. Baldwin gave me a voice, gave me the words, gave me the rhetoric. All I knew through instinct or through experience,

Baldwin gave it a name and a shape. I had all the intellectual weapons I needed.

For sure, we will have strong winds against us. The present time of discord and confusion is an unavoidable element. I am not naive to think that the road ahead will be easy or that the attacks will not be at times vicious. My commitment to make sure that this film will not be buried or sidelined is uncompromising.

We are in it for the long run. Whatever time and effort it takes.

HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This film explores historical, contemporary, and artistic themes relating to race and culture in the United States. While much of the film deals with events that took place half a century ago, all of it is still very relevant to this day. It is this relevance – this lack of societal evolution – that audiences should examine closely, in order to fight against our cultural inertia. Take a moment to think about one or all of the following themes. Consider your relationship to these themes. What opinions or thoughts do you have on these subjects already? Considering these topics, and your personal relationship to them before you view the film, will allow for higher level thinking during the viewing as well as more productive dialogue afterwards.

- What is the legacy of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow in our culture? How do these historical institutions affect contemporary society?
- What do you know about the original American Civil Rights movement? What do you know about that movement's leaders, in particular, Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, and Malcom X?
- How is your perception of the world influenced by what you see represented on television, in music, or in movies? How are these representations different, or similar, to your own life?
- In your opinion, why do you think some people hate other people? Where does this feeling of hatred originate?
- Can you think of a character in a movie or a popular film that looks like, lives like, and/ or acts like you and your family? If so, who are these characters, and how do they make you feel? If not, how does this lack of representation make you feel?
- What is a hero? Who are your heroes?
- What defines a "journey?" What's the difference between a journey and a trip? Have you ever been on a journey?
- Are you affiliated with a political, social, or religious group? If so, describe it. If not, is there a reason why?

- What is the American Dream?
- What is a song or a musical artist that speaks for your generation, or for the times?
- What is race?
- All of the leaders associated with the civil rights movement – from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Robert Kennedy – were murdered. Consider the impact that this had on the movement – and on society at large. What message did this send to the American people about civil rights in this country?
- What role does violence play in American history? In world history? When is violence perceived as acceptable? When is it not?

Use the following questions to reflect on, and tease apart some of your responses to the film. These prompts could be used to start a family conversation, a community dialogue, or for journaling, to process the emotions and implications that this film brings.

- The film begins with Baldwin saying “a journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do to you.” Explore the literary meaning of “journey” within the context of this film. What are some of the various literal and figurative journeys that are depicted in the film?
- In the film, Baldwin argues that any conversation about the ‘Negro in America’ is really simply a conversation about America, and that attempting to silo race not only hinders us from improving race relations, but also undermines growth for our society as a whole. How does this theory relate to the contemporary conversation about race in America?
- What does it mean to be a witness? How is the role of witness in history different from the roles of others – such as perpetrators, victims, bystanders or allies? What are the responsibilities of a witness, and why is it important that there be witnesses?

- What was the significance of including Baldwin's FBI file?
- At one point in the film, there was an audio montage of voices (some very recognizable) saying "I'm sorry." What was the purpose – and the impact – of this moment in the film, on both the narrative arc, and on you as a viewer?
- Baldwin notes that MLK and Malcolm X were "two men... poles apart, driven closer together. By the time each died, their positions had become virtually the same position. It can be said indeed, that Martin picked up Malcolm's burden, articulated the vision which Malcolm had begun to see and for which he paid with his life, and that Malcolm was one of the people that Martin saw on the mountaintop." These two men are often represented as opposites, or even enemies, in popular culture. How does Baldwin's depiction differ? Why is this difference significant?
- Baldwin loosely defines segregation as apathy plus ignorance. Explain what this means using real-life examples as well as paraphrases from Baldwin's words.
- At one point, Baldwin notes the difference between a white man with a gun (a romantic revolutionary, or an eccentric patriot) and a black man with a gun (a raving maniac). What examples of this was Baldwin referring to? What examples of this can you find in contemporary society?
- What does Baldwin mean when he uses the phrase "emotional poverty?"
- Analyze the following quote: "I can't be pessimistic because I am alive. To be a pessimist means that you treat human life as an academic matter. So I am forced to be an optimist."
- Discuss, explore, and analyze the following quote from James Baldwin: "It is entirely up to the American people whether or not they are going to face and deal with and embrace this stranger on whom they've relied for so long. What white people have to do is to try to find out – find out in their own hearts – why it was necessary to have a nigger in the first place. 'Cause I'm not a nigger, I'm a

man. But if you think I'm a nigger then you need it – so the question the white population has to ask themselves is -- if I'm not the nigger here and you, the white people, invented it, then you have to figure out why. The future of this country relies on that. On whether or not I was able to ask that question.”

PROCESSING AND FURTHER REFLECTION

- How did you first react to the film upon watching it?
- Were you familiar with James Baldwin's literary work or civil rights activism before watching I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO? If so, how?
- Though I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO takes up the task of adapting Baldwin's unfinished work about his fellow civil rights icons, the film seems to center on Baldwin himself, as if it is a memoir. Did this delicate balance of subject matter work for you?
- I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO is an unapologetic and direct title. How did you react when you first heard the film's title? Why?
- Many of Baldwin's written works, overtly explore gay and bisexual themes, though I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO completely skirts the fact that Baldwin himself was a homosexual. Did you take issue with this fact? Why do you think the filmmaker chose to do this?
- Within the film, Baldwin's written word is read and embodied by the actor Samuel L. Jackson, whose interpretation sounds nothing like Baldwin himself. How did you feel about this juxtaposition?
- Of the three men—Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X—about whom Baldwin writes, which did you learn about most? Did you already know a lot about one or more of these men? If so, did you learn anything new from the film?
- In comparing archival footage from the 1950s and 1960s with footage of police violence shot contemporary with the film's release some 60 years later, director Raoul Peck seems to argue that the

quality of life for most African Americans has not increased much since the dawn of the civil rights movement. How do you feel about this?

- Structurally, I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO is an essay film, moving between archival footage, interviews, and readings of Baldwin's writings. Since Baldwin is known as one of America's greatest essayists, did you feel this was an appropriate cinematic tribute to him?
- What was your greatest takeaway from the film?

POST-VIEWING CONSIDERATIONS

This film can be appreciated on many levels: as a work of art, as an interpretation of a complex and under-documented history, or as a call to action, a story whose message is almost as painfully relevant today as it was in its own time. Use the following discussion starters to broaden your thinking about the film and the issues it depicts.

Media Literacy/ Film Studies

- What did you notice about the title treatments throughout? How does the art direction in the titles mirror the message of the film?
- Throughout the film, there are moments where seemingly random visuals appear on screen. For instance, young co-eds running in the sun, beautiful pastorals and sunsets – at one point there is footage of a rocket going into outer space. Why do you think the filmmaker made this artistic choice? What might these different images represent in the context of this film?
- There are title cards that come up periodically throughout the film. They read: "Paying My Dues"; "Heroes"; "Witness"; "Purity"; "Selling the Negro"; and "I am not a Nigger." Consider how these titles relate to the sections of the film. Is there a direct correlation, or a symbolic one, between the content explored in these sections and the title cards?

The Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations in America

- How do the lives of Malcolm, Medgar, and Martin "bang against and reveal each other" in this film? What do the portrayals of these men reveal about the people who 'loved and betrayed' them?

- How did the film portray the struggle for school integration – the importance of school and access to books and learning – as well as the vitriol surrounding the effort to integrate?
- What impact did the early representation of Blacks in film have on Baldwin, specifically, Stepin Fetchit, Willie Best, Uncle Tom, and Clinton Rosemund?
- The film touches multiple times on the idea that African-Americans are not entitled to claim part of the society that they helped build. At one point Baldwin is quoted “I am not a ward of America. I am not an object of missionary charity. I’m one of the people who built this country.” Consider this statement and evaluate in within the context of the civil rights movement – then and now.
- There were many references to contemporary society throughout the film: a montage of young African Americans who have been killed in the past 10 years (Tamir Rice, Darius Simmons, Trayvon Martin, and others), as well as footage of riots in Los Angeles, Ferguson, and other cities. Why did the filmmakers choose to include these references, and how did they impact you as a viewer?
- Do you think the following statement is accurate? Explain your reasoning. “You cannot lynch me and keep me in ghettos without becoming something monstrous yourselves.”

Literature, Art and Culture

- What are the differences between one’s public persona and their private self? Why is this so?
- How does contemporary Hollywood culture affect the attitudes and behaviors of society at large?
- Explore the significance of Lorraine Hansberry and her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, within the narrative arc of this film, in American history and culture, and in Baldwin’s life.

- What significance does Baldwin give to the historical image of black slaves “singing songs on the levee?” What does he mean when he says “They require a song to justify my captivity and to justify their own.”
- Analyze the melody and lyrics to Bob Dylan’s song “Pawn in their Game.” Explore the lyrics as a poem – what do his words say about the society they came from? What is Dylan trying to import with this song?

“Only a Pawn in Their Game”
Song by Bob Dylan

A bullet from the back of a bush
Took Medgar Evers' blood
A finger fired the trigger to his name
A handle hid out in the dark
A hand set the spark
Two eyes took the aim
Behind a man's brain
But he can't be blamed
He's only a pawn in their game

A South politician preaches to the poor white man
"You got more than the blacks, don't complain
You're better than them, you been born with white skin,
" they explain
And the Negro's name
Is used, it is plain
For the politician's gain
As he rises to fame
And the poor white remains
On the caboose of the train
But it ain't him to blame
He's only a pawn in their game

The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the governors get paid
And the marshals and cops get the same
But the poor white man's used in the hands of them all
like a tool
He's taught in his school
From the start by the rule

That the laws are with him
To protect his white skin
To keep up his hate
So he never thinks straight
'Bout the shape that he's in
But it ain't him to blame
He's only a pawn in their game

From the poverty shacks, he looks from the cracks to
the tracks
And the hoofbeats pound in his brain
And he's taught how to walk in a pack
Shoot in the back
With his fist in a clinch
To hang and to lynch
To hide 'neath the hood
To kill with no pain
Like a dog on a chain
He ain't got no name
But it ain't him to blame
He's only a pawn in their game

Today, Medgar Evers was buried from the bullet he
caught
They lowered him down as a king
But when the shadowy sun sets on the one
That fired the gun
He'll see by his grave
On the stone that remains
Carved next to his name
His epitaph plain
Only a pawn in their game

VOCABULARY

Bias – prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Everyone has biases. Acting on them is not necessarily instinctive, though.

Microaggression – a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.

Racism – the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Stereotype – an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

Prejudice – an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude.

- Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred.
- Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an "ingroup" such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at "out-groups."

Discrimination – behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

For more Antiracism terms and definitions, plus a plethora of Racial Equity tools, you can access:

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#>

JAMES BALDWIN HISTORY

James Baldwin — the grandson of a slave — was born in Harlem in 1924 and became an American novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, and leader in the civil rights movement. The oldest of nine children, he grew up in poverty. After working for the railroad starting at age 18, Baldwin moved to Greenwich Village, where he worked as a freelance writer. He caught the attention of the well-known novelist, Richard Wright who helped him secure a grant so he could support himself as a writer. In 1948, at age 24, Baldwin moved to Paris. In the early 1960s, Baldwin returned to the US to take part in the civil rights movement. During this time he traveled throughout the south, writing about all that he witnessed. For many, Baldwin became one of the first – and most important - voices for civil rights. After the assassinations of too many of his close friends in the movement, Baldwin moved back to France, where died of stomach cancer in 1987 at the age of 63.

James Baldwin had many famous friends in political, entertainment, and intellectual circles, including Miles Davis, Sidney Poitier, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Bob Dylan and Lorraine Hansberry. *I Am Not Your Negro* begins in June, 1979, when James Baldwin wrote a letter to his literary agent explaining his intention to write a new book that “tells his story of America through the lives of three of his murdered friends: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.” In this book, Baldwin wanted, in his own words, “these three lives to bang against and reveal each other as in truth they did, and use their dreadful journey as a means of instructing the people whom they loved so much, who betrayed them, and for whom they gave their lives.” He never got past an original truncated manuscript of 30 pages, but in that short document, Baldwin was able to explore, with cutting clarity, their complex and painful journey, and the many intertwining, ambiguous, toxic, and sometimes conflicting themes that affected – and still affect – the development of both the individual and society at large in the United States of America.

FILM SUMMARY

At the time of his passing in 1987, James Baldwin left behind just 30 pages of an unfinished book project titled "Remember This House." It was to be a personal account of the rise and fall of fellow civil rights icons Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and Malcolm X, each of whom he had come to know personally before their assassinations. Picking up where Baldwin left off, director Raoul Peck attempts to weave together these remaining loose narrative threads using only Baldwin's words, via startlingly clairvoyant video clips of Baldwin in interviews or lectures, and earthily interpreted readings of Baldwin's texts by Samuel L. Jackson. The result is an interpretive essayistic documentary that surveys how the civil rights movement and America's failures to wholly embrace it are still frighteningly relevant and continue to shape our current times.

James Baldwin has long been an eloquent voice on race relations and the African-American experience, appearing in panel discussions alongside his more well-known contemporaries throughout the 1960s while publishing novels, essays, and scripts for the stage until his death in the 1980s. He also wrote a considerable amount of film criticism, culling from his memories of watching Doris Day and Gary Cooper or the films of Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier to analyze the inequalities depicted and perpetuated in racial representations on screen. Pulling from Baldwin's writings, as well as the clips from the movies he wrote about, Peck gives Baldwin his big-screen due with crystalline lucidity and a deeply emotional sense of cultural purpose.

FILM THEMES

James Baldwin once stated on national television that he was not a "nigger," but in fact, he was a man, and if you thought that he was indeed a "nigger," that meant that you needed this hateful term and you needed to figure out why, as the future of the United States was depending on this very fact. This core idea of racial inequality haunts the entirety of *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*.

SOCIAL JUSTICE REMAINS TO BE SEEN

Above all else, *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* is a searing indictment of America's failure to rectify its shameful history of racial inequality. Baldwin's personal account of the civil rights movement and its trio of outspoken icons on the vulnerable vanguard reminds us that there is still much work to be done. As if to hammer home just how little we've moved forward since the violence committed against civil rights activists throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Peck cuts away from the disturbing black and white archival footage to recent images of the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, where riots broke out after the fatal 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, an African-American man, by a white police officer.

RACIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

Over the course of his lengthy and productive career, Baldwin wrote a considerable amount of cultural criticism, including many essays on racial representation in cinema. Peck uses this fact to his advantage throughout *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*, using film clips and Baldwin's impassioned writings, the film manages to show just how subtly racial inequality was ingrained in films from the birth of the movies onwards, and how they were perceived differently by Black and White audiences all along the way.

PEOPLE ARE NOT SO DIFFERENT

Midway through *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO*, Baldwin is quoted expressing just how different Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. were, but in writing about their differences he was really attempting to

express just how similar their beliefs and personal struggles actually were. These three men gave their very lives fighting for the same exact thing—the basic civil rights of their fellow man, no matter that they each went about it in their own, if politically contradicting, way.

THE POWER OF WORDS

Author Ta-Nehisi Coates recently posed the question as to whether or not James Baldwin was the greatest essayist of all time. Some of his written work undisputedly stands among the great American publications, and *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* takes pains to lend Baldwin's voice enormous gravity, having his written word read aloud by none other than Samuel L. Jackson, while Baldwin himself comes across as exceptionally eloquent when speaking publicly and on camera. The film wholly rests upon the power of his words, as the entirety of its construction is formed from his writings and his on-camera appearances. This is by no means a fault in the film, but its strength.

FILM FACTS

- *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 10, 2016, winning the People's Choice Award. It went on to screen as part of the New York Film Festival, AFI Fest, the Berlin International Film Festival, CPH:DOX, and many other prestigious festivals the world over.
- The film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature, but lost to Ezra Edelman's 8-hour epic "O.J.: Made In America." However, *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* was awarded the Creative Recognition Award by the International Documentary Association, as well as the Amnesty International Award from the Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, the Gilda Vieira de Mello Award from the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, and the Panorama Audience Award from the Berlin International Film Festival.
- The three subjects of Baldwin's unfinished work "Remember This House" were civil rights activists Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., each of whom was assassinated. Evers was killed on June 12, 1963 at his home in Jackson, Mississippi, at age 37. Malcolm was killed on February 21, 1965 in Manhattan, New York, at age 39. King was killed on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, at age 39.
- James Baldwin's first novel, "Go Tell It on the Mountain," was published by Knopf in 1953. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked it 39th on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.
- Director Raoul Peck was born in Haiti in 1953. He eventually moved to the Congo and went to school in the United States, France, and finally, Germany, where he earned a degree in film in 1988. From March 1996 to September 1997, he was Haiti's Minister of Culture.

- Following Baldwin's death in 1987, the publishing company McGraw-Hill sued his estate to recover the \$200,000 advance they had paid him for the unfinished book "Remember This House," which I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO is based upon. The lawsuit was eventually dropped in 1990.
- By the end of its theatrical run, I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO had become the greatest documentary box office hit of 2017, netting over \$7 million in ticket sales. Surpassing "Food Inc.," the film became the highest-grossing non-fiction release to date for its distributor Magnolia Pictures.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

- **Read** James Baldwin's written works, from his monumental essays like "The Fire Next Time," to his novels "Go Tell It on the Mountain," and other relative Antiracism/Black works.
- **Join** a local social justice organization to help build strong, diverse, sustainable communities.
- **Engage** your family, church members and friends in these types of critical conversations, to end the sinful cyclical historical patterns of learned racism, biases, and other -isms and phobias that propagate division and degradation.
- **Know** your civil rights movement history. There are countless fiction films, documentaries, and books on the subject that are deserving of your attention.
- **Spread** the word on Twitter and Facebook. #BeTheChange you want to see in the world. #IAmNotYourNegro is now available on VOD and Blu-ray/DVD!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- IANYN Film Website – <http://www.iamnotyournegrofilm.com/>
- The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture – <http://nmaahc.si.edu>
- Teaching Tolerance – www.teachingtolerance.org
- Facing History and Ourselves – www.facinghistory.org
- Color of Change – www.colorofchange.org
- The King Center – <http://www.thekingcenter.org>
- National Visionary Leadership Project – <http://visionaryproject.org>
- NAACP – <http://www.naACP.org>
- National Urban League – <http://nul.iamempowered.com>

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION GUIDE SOURCES

- Influence Film Club; accessed 15 July 2020, www.influencefilmclub.com
- KERA Curriculum Guide, accessed 15 July 2020, http://learn.kera.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/I-Am-Not-Your-Negro_curriculum.pdf
- Magnolia Pictures; accessed 15 July 2020, <http://www.magnpictures.com/iamnotyournegro>