

History is the Present

HOW POWER AND DISCOURSE HAVE SHAPED AMERICAN SOCIETY

Based on the documentary:
"I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO"

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SYNOPSIS:

In his documentary, James Baldwin explores the roots of America's history by examining how "race" and racism have been dichotomized and used for explicit separation politics. Baldwin reveals how racism is institutionalized and continues to be manifested in America to this day. Baldwin sheds insight into the history of black representation in the states and focusses on three key figures within his life experience that are incredibly important to black history – **Medgar Evers**, **Malcolm X** and **Martin Luther King Jr.** It is through these three stories Baldwin confronts deeper connections of how America functions on segregation and pushes a narrative of the "other."

CITATION:

Peck, R. (Director). (2016). *I Am Not Your Negro* [Documentary]. Velvet Film.
<https://uvic.kanopy.com/video/i-am-not-your-negro>



James Baldwin

August 2, 1924 –
December 1, 1987

The Author, The Voice



Medgar Evers

July 2, 1925 – June 12, 1963



Malcolm X

May 19, 1925 –
February 21, 1965



Martin Luther King Jr.

January 15, 1929 –
April 4, 1968

LEGACY

- What makes a Witness vs. an Actor?
- Providing justice for and investigating crimes against perpetrated Black people

LEGACY

- Fighting against white brutality
- Black freedom; A model for struggle against white supremacy

LEGACY

- LOVE as direct action; non-violent resistance philosophy
- Fighting racial inequality through civil rights

"I want these three lives to bang against and reveal each other... and use their dreadful journeys as a means of instructing the people whom they loved so much... and for whom they gave their lives." – James Baldwin

QUOTES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS TODAY:

"You are formed by what you see, the choices you have to make, what you discover..."

The way in which we create knowledge shapes us. We must pursue justice and realize the systems and institutions in which are guided may be based on false regimes of truth. We must actively deconstruct the racialized norms which structure our society and realize how privilege is maintained in Eurocentric discourse.

"History is not the past...it is the present - we are our history".

We must acknowledge history and how its classification systems persist today. We must understand the intersectionality of oppression and how it is institutionalized. "Race" as a weapon of power dynamics must no longer be an effective tool of segregation in western society. We must learn from history in the present by educating ourselves.

"White is a metaphor for power."

"Whiteness" is about institutionalized white supremacy. Being actively anti-racist means critiquing notions of racial homogeneity.

James Baldwin juxtaposes these men's lives as a means of critiquing American society. It is through Baldwin's and these men's journeys that reveal how from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter – America's history is still its present. The state of the country cannot improve unless we ask ourselves why these power systems function and persist.

KEY TERMINOLOGY:

► **"Race":** A societal process that maintains divisions amongst groups of people based on signifiers of difference. The groupings of individuals based on "race" are used to uphold white systems of power.

► **Intersectionality:** Refers to the interweaving and interconnectedness of varying forms of social categorization that oppress and discriminate against people. These social groups interdependently disadvantage people, they also empower and subordinate others. This theory demonstrates how power and privilege operate in social contexts.

► **Institutionalization:** the process by which something becomes normalized or conventionalized in a given culture/society.