

Religion in African Americans Live: A Harrowing Comment in Richard Wrights "Black Boy" and James Baldwins "The Fire Next Time"

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ABSTRACT

Religion has been a key fact in black Americans slaves daily life, as it fills a gap. Religious practices when slaves were not in plantations appeared as psychological relief that helped endure their fate out of resignation, as their helped the slaver control their slaves. Richard Wright and James Baldwin have exposed the role played by religion in the slavery institution, respectively in *Black Boy* and *The Fire Next Time*. The present paper aims to highlight some positive impacts of religious practice as lived by slaves on the one hand, and to reveal how religion helped slave masters subjugate their slaves to permanent needs in God's name. The methodological approach in the study has been a documentary and analytical since the work has allowed moving from the fictional works described in the two novels to historical facts in America. In the process of understanding, interpreting and analyzing the message shed by Wright and Baldwin through their here works, three literary theories have been found adapted: the New Historicism championed by Stephen Greenbalt and Jonathan Goldberg which examines through the books the history as well as the main factors they point out, the Psychoanalysis Literary Criticism, a doctrine by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacon, and the Marxism which has allowed displaying the cultural and intellectual heritage of the United States during the fight for African Americans' emancipation and total integration in America, and the Psychoanalysis Literary Criticism which has permitted exploring the role of consciousness and the unconsciousness in literary expression of historical facts, including the authors, the readers and the characters, mostly those who are really involved in the plot.

Keywords: religion, Black Americans, psychology, domination, abuse.

RELIGION AS A PILLAR OF THE SLAVERY INSTITUTION

African religions played a significant role in the emancipation and liberation of African Americans in the United States in various ways. They provided a sense of identity, community, and cultural continuity for enslaved Africans. They preserved African cultural practices, beliefs, and values, fostering a sense of resilience and resistance against the dehumanizing conditions of slavery.

The preservation of African cultural practices, beliefs, and values among enslaved Africans played a critical role in fostering resilience and resistance against the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. Moreover, African music and dance were central to community life and spiritual expression. Enslaved Africans adapted these traditions to their new environment, creating musical forms like spirituals, gospel, blues, and jazz. These art forms provided emotional solace, a means of covert communication, and a way to maintain cultural identity. While many African languages were suppressed, elements of African languages and oral traditions survived. Storytelling, proverbs, and oral histories were crucial for maintaining a sense of identity and continuity. Griots (traditional storytellers) and elders played vital roles in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge.

African religious beliefs emphasized a connection to ancestors, nature, and the spiritual world. This spirituality provided a framework for understanding and coping with the harsh realities of slavery. Enslaved Africans often blended their traditional beliefs with Christianity, creating syncretic religions that were unique and empowering. Cultural practices often served as tools for resistance. Songs, stories, and rituals sometimes contained coded messages about escape plans or acts of rebellion. These cultural expressions also served as a form of psychological resistance, asserting their humanity and agency. Simply maintaining African traditions was an act of defiance against the slaveholders' attempts to strip them of their identity. It was a way of asserting that they were more than slaves they were people with a rich cultural heritage and a right to freedom.

Dealing with the implication of Richard Wright and James Baldwin on African religions, the issue is dealt according to their personal experience and target to reach. Richard Wright for instance, throughout his novel *Black Boy*, focuses primarily on his personal experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South, his struggles with racism, and his journey toward self-discovery and intellectual freedom. Wright's narrative delves into the oppressive social, economic, and racial conditions of the time, and how these forces shaped his identity and worldview.

Therefore, African religions are not mentioned because Wright's upbringing and the cultural environment he describes are largely influenced by Christianity, specifically Southern Baptist Christianity, which was predominant in the African American community during his childhood. His family's religious practices and the broader religious environment he experienced were shaped by this context.

Additionally, Wright's work is deeply personal and reflects his own experiences and perspectives. His focus is on his immediate environment and the impact of institutionalized racism and poverty on his life, rather than a broader exploration of African cultural and religious heritage. His lack of reference to African religions can be seen as a reflection of the specific cultural and religious landscape in which he was raised.

During Wright's childhood, the African American community in the South was predominantly Christian, especially Southern Baptist. This was a result of centuries of enslavement and the subsequent integration of African Americans into the dominant Christian religious framework imposed by their enslavers and later, the broader society. By the early 20th century, African

traditional religions had largely been supplanted by Christianity among African Americans, especially in the rural South.

By Wright's time, African Americans had been in the United States for several generations, and many African cultural practices had been blended or replaced with those of the dominant culture. The retention of African religions was more common in regions like the Caribbean or parts of Latin America where African cultural practices persisted more strongly. In the American South, however, the assimilation into the dominant Christian culture was more pronounced.

Broadly speaking, Wright's lack of reference to African religions reflects the specific cultural and religious landscape of his upbringing, where Christianity, particularly Southern Baptist Christianity, was the dominant religious force. His personal narrative is deeply intertwined with the social, economic, and racial struggles of African Americans in the early 20th-century South, a context in which African religions had largely faded from everyday practice. This absence is indicative of the broader process of cultural assimilation and the focus of his literary work on critiquing the oppressive structures of his time.

As far as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, it is a powerful exploration of race relations in America during the mid-20th century. Unlike Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Baldwin's work does touch on African religions, but it does so in the context of a broader discussion on religion, identity, and the African American experience. Baldwin was deeply interested in the role of religion in African American life. He was critical of Christianity, particularly how it had been used to justify racism and oppression. Baldwin's exploration of African religions can be seen as part of his broader critique of the religious landscape that shaped African American identity.

Baldwin contrasts African religions with Christianity to highlight the cultural and spiritual heritage that was lost or suppressed through slavery and colonialism. So, his exploration of African religions versus Christianity in *The Fire Next Time* serves as a profound commentary on the cultural and spiritual heritage of African Americans, and how it was impacted by the history of slavery and colonialism.

Before the transatlantic slave trade, African societies had rich and diverse religious traditions. These included various forms of ancestor worship, animism, and spiritual systems that were integral to their communities and cultural identities. The transatlantic slave trade forcibly removed Africans from their homeland, severing their connection to these traditional religions. Enslaved Africans were brought to the Americas, where they were systematically stripped of their cultural and spiritual identities. Colonial powers and slave owners imposed Christianity as a means of control, using it to justify slavery and to enforce social and racial hierarchies.

Baldwin highlights how African spiritual traditions were suppressed by the violent imposition of Christianity. This suppression was not merely an attempt to convert Africans to a new religion but was also a strategic move to dismantle their cultural identity and community bonds, which could foster resistance to slavery.

By contrasting African religions with Christianity, Baldwin emphasizes the loss of a rich cultural and spiritual heritage. African religions were deeply tied to the people's ways of life, social

structures, and worldview. The forced conversion to Christianity resulted in a disconnection from these roots, leading to a sense of cultural dislocation and spiritual disempowerment among African Americans.

Baldwin's contrast between African religions and Christianity is a powerful critique of the historical and ongoing impacts of slavery and colonialism on African American spiritual and cultural identity. It highlights the profound loss of a rich heritage and calls for a reclamation of that heritage as a means of achieving personal and collective liberation. Baldwin's work encourages readers to reflect on the deeper spiritual and cultural dimensions of the African American experience and to consider the importance of reconnecting with ancestral roots in the journey toward empowerment and self-discovery. He points out how Christianity, as practiced in America, often failed to address the needs and realities of black people, whereas African religions offered a more authentic connection to their ancestral roots.

Enslaved Africans were deliberately stripped of their languages, customs, religions, and social structures. This erasure was a tool to weaken their sense of identity and make them more controllable. They were forced to adopt Western cultural norms, including Christianity, European languages, and Western social structures. This forced assimilation aimed to reshape their identities to fit the needs of a colonial and slave-based economy.

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin uses references to African religions to highlight the complexities of African American identity and the search for spiritual and cultural roots. His work contrasts with Richard Wright's "Black Boy" in that Baldwin explicitly engages with the idea of reclaiming African spiritual traditions as a way to combat the dehumanizing effects of racism and colonialism. Baldwin's nuanced discussion of religion, including African religions, reflects his broader themes of identity, liberation, and the struggle for equality.

RELIGION: A MYSTIFICATION AND ILLUSION TOOL

Both Wright and Baldwin critically examine the role of religion in African American communities. Wright often portrays religion as a tool of oppression and escapism in *Black Boy*, while Baldwin, in *The Fire Next Time*, discusses the church's role in both sustaining and challenging racial injustice. Richard Wright and James Baldwin critically examine the role of religion in African American communities, but they do so in different ways and with different perspectives.

In some parts of *Black Boy*, Wright painted religion as a weapon of oppression, suggesting that it reinforces submission and distracts from the pursuit of real, tangible change. Wright describes how religion is used to indoctrinate and control individuals, particularly within the African American community. He sees religious teachings as reinforcing a sense of passivity and acceptance of one's social position. For example, Wright depicts religious figures and institutions as promoting the idea that suffering in this life is to be endured passively with the promise of heavenly rewards in the afterlife, thereby discouraging resistance against injustice. In Richard Wright's memoir, *Black Boy*, religion is portrayed as a tool of illusion, reflecting the complexities of racial and personal identity in the American South. Wright critiques how religion is used to manipulate and control, rather than to genuinely guide or inspire. Through this novel several key ways in which this theme is developed. They include: hypocrisy of

religious figures or leaders, religion as social control, personal alienation, intellectual rebellion, religion and racial oppression...

They have been mystified, blinded from hair to toes. Those African Americans believe anything blindly and follow without any critical analysis. Tackling the autobiographical novel *Black Boy*, it portrays the naïve belief of Granny and the unfair behavior of religious leaders. They invite people to God, promote love and get rid of hatred, violence and injustice. But they are enrooted deeply in these vices.

If there is another high repressive force in Richard Wright's life, it was his grandmother's religious fanaticism and exaggeration he spent his crucial period of childhood with his devoted Christian grandmother, with whom pleasure in playing with mates, playing baseball and marbles is not possible "above all, no reading of fiction. All literature, except for the bible and religious tract, was denounced as the work of devil" (Skaggs, 276). For religion sake, Granny made Wright confine and deprive him all pleasure any young of his age normally may have. Even though she has been known as well-meaning woman in her church and neighborhood, Granny was a very raging tyrant woman.

Granny for instance, imposes all the family members the prayer before each meal and none of them is allowed to work on Saturday.

She had grown tired of the strict religious routine of Granny's home; of the half dozen or more daily family prayers that Granny insisted upon; her fiat that the day began at sunrise and that night commenced at sundown; the long rambling Bible readings; the individual invocations muttered at each meal; and her declaration that Saturday was the Lord's Sabbath and that no one who lived in her house could work upon that day. (Wright, 69).

Moreover, "No pork or veal was ever eaten" in this house". (Wright, 119). No matter how their living conditions are, no matter how their suffering and hunger reach, and no matter how urgent and demanding the occupation is, working on Saturday is considered as a sin that Granny will not tolerate. they must neither work on Saturday even if the occupation requires it, pork and veal are not eaten either.

It is true that any human being must follow God's prescriptions, rules and live as the lord recommend it. But if it happens to deny others in needs to work some special days, it is too critical. Granny as a devoted Christian in Seventeenth Day Adventist, she is always at loggerheads with whoever neglects her religion's principles. It is why she is always in conflict with Richard who is a potential faithless. Granny has done whatever she can to bring Richard to Jesus. She would like to direct him into the right and blissful way before he enters the Precincts of sin at the public school.

Richard's struggle with religious faith also generates guilt. His lack of belief and skepticism towards the religious practices and fervor of his community make him feel alienated. The pressure to conform to religious expectations and his subsequent rejection of faith lead to internal conflict and guilt with Granny. For there is no way for him to believe and trust in God

if he doesn't have a proof. He has this foolish idea because he is not ready to follow the prescriptions and preaches from those men of God who order something and do the contrast. They think first of all about themselves and the love they promote is just and utopia. Other can be suffering they don't care about it.

Richard also denounces "wherever I found religion in my life, I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name God"(Wright, 159-160). This clearly expresses a sentiment that personal encounters with religion have often been accompanied by conflict, struggle, or discord. Wright suggests a direct correlation between their experiences with religion and the presence of conflict or trouble. Every time religion has played a role in their life, it has led to some form of strife. For him religion has been a source of conflict in his family. Religion, normally has to bring peace, happiness, harmony. But in this novel Richard Wright has shown how evil religion is, how he has suffered with her devoted Christian family. They are always in trouble. Richard painted religion as a strife. Those worshippers who must behave well and maintain this love and peace in their families have become so harsh and rude towards their family members there is also a great and sad contrast between the living conditions of those religious leaders (men of God) and the ones their followers. In churches there are "Potbellied Black Bishop" with "skinny Old marks" (Wright, 178).

This critical comparison appears to contain layers of imagery and potential symbolism, which can be interpreted in several ways. It highlights the contrast between the affluent (potbellied) and the impoverished or neglected (skinny) within the same religious institution. It points to a critique of inequality and hypocrisy, where those in power (the bishops) live in excess, while others bear the marks of suffering.

The "potbellied black bishop" symbolizes corruption or moral decay within the church, indicating leaders who indulge themselves while failing to address the needs of their congregation. The "skinny old marks" might represent the congregation's long-standing neglect and suffering. If the "black" in "black bishop" is a racial reference, the quote addressing racial dynamics within the church, contrasting the power and authority of a black bishop with the marginalized, perhaps suggesting that despite his position, there are still visible signs of historical oppression ("old marks") within the community.

There are sweet talkers and very skillful that if they speak to someone they easily convince them. Therefore, they blind and mystify the worshippers by any means necessary till they get what they like. Overall, Wright portrays religion mainly as a tool of oppression and escapism, emphasizing how it can reinforce submission and distract from the pursuit of real change. He critiques the ways religion is used to control and limit the intellectual and personal freedom of African Americans.

As far as Baldwin is concerned, he recognizes first of the church as a vital source of strength, community, and identity for African Americans. He reflects on how the church has historically provided a space for solidarity, mutual support, and the preservation of African American culture and dignity. Baldwin's own early life in the church is marked by the sense of belonging and empowerment it provided. He acknowledges that the church has been a refuge from the hostility of the outside world and a place where African Americans can affirm their humanity and worth.

James Baldwin invites the African Americans to believe in God, follow his prescriptions and principles and obey his defense as well. He also shows the unconsciousness and heartlessness of the so-called men of God. Richard through his novel shows how African Americans have been blinded to the bitter end of blind assertion. For James uncle, African Americans cannot do anything by their will, they are powerless and can't be able to change the sad fate they have. In his mind, if they are always brought to feel humiliated and segregated it is because "God decreet it so" (Baldwin, 40). They have just condemned to undergo suffering and ill treatment.

Aware of their incapacity to change their dark and sad soul, African Americans will do nothing to change their pitiful living conditions. They think they cannot do anything no matter how their lives are. If God did not permit it, they would never be victim of it. So, the racism, segregation, injustice and murders they are daily suffering from, it is because God allow it. He chooses them as fatidic victim and their eternal oppressors are the most favored and the loved people.

Whites also cease this opportunity of Backs powerlessness and hopelessness to drive the nail deeply in their yawning wound. They harden and worsen those African Americans and do it joyfully. But they ignore "behind their authority stands another nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomless cruel." (Baldwin, 40).

Baldwin seems to critique what can be perceived as a form of religious imperialism the imposition of one religious worldview on others, often accompanied by cultural, social, and political domination. Critics argue that this approach disregards the diversity of human beliefs and cultures, and can lead to oppression and conflict.

The love as heavily and daily chanted by the men of God, is normally the backbone of any devoted Christians. God is love and this love is spread to anyone who believed in Him, pray Him. Even though others don't believe Him and worship devil, the lord spread his love over them. It even happens he grants them more valuables and favors in this world. God's love and mercy is no limit and uninterpretable. In *The Fire Next Time*, James wonders "If His love was so great, and if He loved all His children, why were we, the blacks cast down so far? why?" (Baldwin, 46). This quote is a poignant expression of the existential and theological questions that arise from the intersection of faith and the experience of racial oppression. It likely emerges from the African American experience, particularly during periods of severe racial discrimination, such as slavery, segregation, and the civil rights movement in the United States. It also reflects a common struggle among oppressed groups to reconcile their faith with their lived realities. It addresses a fundamental question in theodicy, which is the problem of evil and suffering in the world: How can a benevolent and omnipotent God allow such suffering, especially for a specific group of people?

On the other hand, rather than faith, charity and Hope, the principles of churches "were Blindness, loneliness, and Terror" (Baldwin, 47). In this quote, James Baldwin critiques Christianity by suggesting that its principles of blindness, loneliness, and terror are deliberately cultivated to serve a purpose. He seems to argue that Christianity promotes a kind of spiritual blindness or ignorance among its followers. This blindness could refer to a deliberate suppression of critical thinking or questioning in favor of unquestioning faith. This might suggest a sense of isolation or separation from others or even from oneself. In Christian theology, there is often an emphasis on personal salvation and the relationship between the

individual and God, which could potentially lead to feelings of loneliness or alienation from the community.

Rather than "Blindness, loneliness, and Terror" some preachers use as principles in their churches in order to satisfy their cupidity and selfish desire, Baldwin "would love to believe that the principles were Faith, Hope, and Charity, but this is clearly not so for most Christians, or for what we call the Christian world." (Baldwin, 47)

Moreover, Baldwin said that: "The transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended, and salvation stopped at the church door" (Baldwin, 58). In this context, Baldwin is expressing a critical perspective on the limitations of religious experience and its impact on daily life. Because the transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ends as soon as the service ends and worse again the salvation stops at the church door. Once they come out from churches, barbarism, obscenities and savagery take control. The love they are asked to show to one another becomes a utopia. It is sometimes limited to one family or community. It doesn't include inter racial love.

With this Bible, rather than promoting love and mercy, white men use its verses to martyrize and terrorize Blacks. Their invasion of Africa touches two main points in Africans' life: the realm of politics and the realm of morals. Furthermore, the Christian church itself, as distinguished from some of its ministers sanctified and rejoiced in the conquests of the flag, and encouraged, if it did not formulate, the belief that conquest, with the resulting relative well-being of the only Western populations, was proof of the favor of God.

While both Wright and Baldwin severely critique certain aspects of religion based on their personal experience, they also acknowledge its profound positive impacts on individuals and the broader African American community. Religion serves as a source of community, moral guidance, inspiration, and a powerful force for social change in their works.

RELIGION IN AFRICAN AMERICANS' EMANCIPATION

Religion is a central force in the lives of the overwhelming most of African Americans. Therefore, psychology has been conspicuously silent about the role of religion in their political life. This work endeavors to challenge the longstanding argument that religiosity promotes an escapist, apolitical stance among African Americans as well. A particular attention is paid to the ways in which our understanding of the link between religion and African American political behavior is complicated by expanded definitions of what is political and by increased attention to various forms of religious participation.

In Richard Wright's memoir *Black Boy*, religion plays a complex role in the lives of African Americans. While the book often highlights the oppressive and restrictive aspects of religion, there are notable positive impacts.

Religion provides a sense of community and belonging for African Americans. Because, church gatherings are a central part of social life, offering a place where people can come together, share experiences, and support one another in the face of external racial hostility. Religious teachings offer a moral framework that helps individuals navigate their lives. For many

characters in the memoir, religious principles guide their actions and decisions, promoting values such as compassion, honesty, and resilience.

It offers the African Americans a sense of community. The church serves as a crucial communal space for them, offering them a sense of belonging and solidarity in a society that marginalizes them. It is a place where they can gather, share experiences, and support each other.

As religion can represent a moral foundation for non-believers, in this novel provides a moral framework that helps characters navigate the complexities of their lives. Wright's grandmother for instance, a devout Seventh-day Adventist, embodies this moral compass, influencing Wright and those around her to adhere to a set of ethical guidelines. She a fervent and devout Christian and at this rate she would like to shape anyone's character around her like the Holy Bible recommended. She tried her best to guide his family towards the righteous path so that none of them would live in insanity and conduct sinful life.

Even though it became a permanent battle between Granny and the intrepid Wright, she has tried many times to force him to be right boy, keep him far from obscenities and sin: "A religious revival was announced and Granny felt that it was her last chance to bring me to God before I entered the precincts of sin at the public school" (Wright, 132). Wright was the only rebellious person Granny had in her room. He was determined to avoid church and anything going with this matter. Even attending to church school, Wright refused. He gave a final and loud notice that he would no longer attend the church school.

Besides his Granny who devoted her time begging Wright to worship God, this affair became her mother matter. She clearly advised him: "Richard, you ought to know God through some church." (Wright, 132). Believing in God and devoting one's whole life worshipping Him will greatly help escaping some horrible and bitter situations. Because since at the outset if Wright accepted to follow God and left off his bad acts or intentional refusal, he would feel at ease and his soul might be saved as many people told him. It is common rule and philosophy all the African Americans had to abide to. Worshipping God as it is recommended and no matter which situations they faced, they will be solved by the grace of God.

Furthermore, religion offers hope and a sense of purpose, especially during times of hardship. The promise of a better life in the afterlife and the belief in a higher power provide comfort and strength, helping individuals endure the harsh realities of racism and poverty. Church activities often include Bible study and religious education, which contribute to literacy and intellectual development. This aspect of religious life can empower individuals by enhancing their ability to read, write, and think critically. Religion is a key component of cultural identity for many African Americans. It helps preserve traditions, songs, stories, and customs that are integral to their heritage and history, fostering a sense of pride and continuity.

As far as Baldwin is concerned, he discusses his experience with both the Christian church and the Nation of Islam, emphasizing how these religious experiences were pivotal in his personal development. The church, initially, provided Baldwin with a sense of identity and purpose, which was crucial during his formative years.

Talking about the religious ludic side is concerned, the religious fervor and spiritual songs of the church are sources of inspiration and emotional strength. Wright depicts how the church's emotional intensity and the fervent faith of its members can uplift and empower individuals, even if he personally feels disconnected from it.

Religion, particularly the Black church, is portrayed as a cornerstone of the African American community, fostering unity and collective strength which can help them to reach the common goal. Through *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin acknowledges how the church has historically been a haven and a source of resilience for African Americans facing systemic oppression. Since it was Islam was not known by the great majority of African Americans, they embraced Christianity through, they hoped to save their souls. And this church was their real catalyst for social change.

Baldwin highlights the church's role in the civil rights movement, portraying it as a platform for advocating social justice and equality. They guided their claiming and complaints following religious norms and prescriptions. Religious leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr., emerged from the church to lead and inspire significant social change. And successfully he impacted African Americans' living conditions.

As a spiritual and emotional strength, religion offers spiritual solace and emotional support to those grappling with the harsh realities of racism and discrimination. Baldwin recognizes the church's role in providing a space for emotional expression and spiritual healing. Even though Wright himself criticized religion and its role in his life, he acknowledges these positive aspects helps provide a more balanced understanding of its impact on the African American community as depicted in *Black Boy*.

Starting with trans-Atlantic slavery, which forced thousands of people into what is presently the United States, religion among African Americans consistently featured a complex of efforts toward innovation, preservation, and agential intervention rooted in efforts toward survival against various structures of racial domination and humiliation. All these factors including slavery, black responses to a range of political conflicts, highly influences of immigration, and the varieties of genealogies that have constituted religious formations among African Americans contributed to the creation of formal Christian denominations, intentional communities of Orisha in some areas; and transnational movements of Islam in others.

The insurgent challenges are also important that African Americans have proffered as a rejoinder to social oppression. But this progressive tendency has been paralleled by sharply conservative religious formations that check any easy generalization of African American religions as being predisposed toward social justice movements. Social sources of autonomous church formation, the role of Black Nationalism, anticolonial forms of religion greatly impact African Americans' living conditions.

Historically, slavery has been regulated, supported, and opposed on religious grounds. In Judaism for instance, slaves were given a range of treatments and protections. They were to be treated as an extended family with certain protections, and they could be freed. They were property but could also own material goods. These advantages are very appreciated by some Blacks held as slaves in American societies for those who came across masters who believes in

God. This mercy offered to African Americans is developed in both Richard Wright and James Baldwin's novels. They emphasize some favors granted to Blacks just because of religion. Even though the opposite aspects are highly dealt with, it's no doubt that churches impact positively their lives.

Religion also aids in the preservation of African cultural identities and practices. Despite being forced into Christianity, some black characters retain elements of their African spiritual heritage, blending them with Christian beliefs to maintain a sense of identity and cultural continuity. Religion provides a moral and ethical framework for the characters, guiding their decisions and actions. This framework often conflicts with the brutality of their circumstances, highlighting the tension between their spiritual beliefs and the realities of their lives. Morrison uses religious references and symbolism throughout the novel to deepen the narrative and explore themes of redemption, suffering, and liberation. These elements enhance understanding of the characters' struggles and resilience.

CONCLUSION

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* serve as profound reflections on the role of religion in the lives of African Americans, revealing its complexities as both a source of solace and a site of struggle. Wright's portrayal of religion highlights its often-oppressive nature within the oppressive socio-political landscape of the Jim Crow South, illustrating how institutional faith can perpetuate suffering while simultaneously shaping individual identity and resilience. In contrast, Baldwin offers a more nuanced exploration of spirituality, emphasizing the potential for faith to foster hope and social justice, even amid deep disillusionment.

Together, these works underscore the duality of religion in African American life: it can be both a harrowing commentary on systemic injustice and a beacon of hope for liberation and self-affirmation. As both authors grapple with their personal and collective experiences, they invite readers to reflect on the broader implications of faith, resilience, and the quest for dignity in the face of adversity. Ultimately, Wright and Baldwin compel us to consider how religion, in its many forms, continues to shape the African American experience, urging a reexamination of its role in the ongoing struggle for equality and self-definition.

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