

# Exclusive Interview with James Baldwin

By Joe Walker

NEW YORK — The most famous contemporary Black American writer continues to be James Baldwin. During a recent visit here he granted this **MUHAMMAD SPEAKS** correspondent an exclusive interview exploring his thoughts on Black literature and art today, events happening in the U.S. and the world, and his hopes and fears. The following is the third of a four-part series on that conversation which took place on two occasions and lasted two and a half hours. (Part I appeared in MS, Sept. 8, 1972 and Part II in MS, Sept. 15, 1972.)

## *Dealing on The fire this time; News notes of a native son*



M.S. NEW YORK Bureau Editor Joe Walker poses a series of tough questions to the tough - minded, brilliant, James Baldwin. (M.S. photo F. Joseph Crawford.)

**WALKER:** Since you wrote "The Fire Next Time" which was based on your reactions to an exclusive interview with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, have you had any further reflections on the Nation of Islam?

**BALDWIN:** The Nation of Islam is possibly the last remaining social force in America among Black people. I am looking at what has happened to the Black Panthers, the civil rights movement and a whole spectrum of movements which were operative until years ago and which in effect are not operative now.

I don't know to what extent Islam can work for most Black people. That is a question not a statement.

I have always been respectful towards the Messenger and his followers. What happens in the Nation of Islam and around it is very important...The Nation of Islam has survived and that is a very significant development.

**WALKER:** You have been an outspoken critic of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. President Nixon is withdrawing more and more U.S. forces, asserts that he is winding the war down and that in a matter of time the war will be ended and the U.S. will exit itself from Viet Nam. What is your reaction?

**BALDWIN:** We have heard that song so long now. I am one who never believed a word Nixon has ever said - even before he was President. Leaving that aside, I don't see quite how we can hope to do that without confronting at some point the reasons we

went there in the first place.

What Nixon is trying to avoid, I imagine, is an admission of defeat - that in fact we have been thrown out.

The reason we went in was to protect what we call our vital interests, didn't we? That is the only reason for that war - there isn't any other.

The problem of our vital interest, as conceived by Americans, still remains. The Vietnamization obviously isn't going to work. We are going to be forced to accept a coalition government and the fate of those people will finally be in their own hands.

So this costly adventure will have been not only a defeat but - what I always thought of it as being - a massacre for no reason.

**WALKER:** Turning to the Middle-East, how would you describe the conflict and issues there - especially having been one who has spent some time in that area?

**BALDWIN:** Israel, I have always felt, is a state created in the Middle East to protect Western interest. I never for a moment believed that it was created because England or America or Russia had a particular respect or affection for the Jews. But there they were and the conscience of the world was kind of bleeding because of the fate they had undergone not only under the Third Reich but in many other parts of the Western world. So that Jews were given Israel in order to help us control that part of the world. In fact the Arabs are now paying for the world's bad conscience about the Jews.

(Continued on page 30)



Continued:

# Baldwin on the firing line

WALKER: Didn't you live in Israel for a time?

BALDWIN: I didn't live there. I was there about nine years ago and stayed there maybe two months. Then I went there again when my play was on tour and stayed maybe a week.

WALKER: Did you come into contact with any of the Black Jews there from Africa or Asia?

BALDWIN: Yes, there was a sizeable number from Africa, Algeria and Egypt. What is curious about it is that these people are all technically Jews but a Jew from Russia, a Jew from France and a Jew from England are really a Russian, a Frenchman and an Englishman at least as much as they are Jews. When they are confronted with a Jew from Egypt or Algeria, the fact that they are Jews doesn't in anyway soften the cultural collision or make it any easier for them to get along, as now is being proven in Israel. The darker Jews are protesting their situation there.

WALKER: What about the freedom battles that are going on in Southern Africa - in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Namibia, Rhodesia and within South Africa? South Africa is the most heavily - armed and equipped country in that region and U.S. corporations have heavily invested there. Some people say that another Viet Nam will occur there because of its rich minerals and resources and the enormous Western capital investments. How do you see it?

BALDWIN: It is hard to answer that because, I haven't been there for one thing. But I would think that it could very easily become another Viet Nam because of the reasons you stated and suggested and because the whites in Southern Africa are so completely marooned. They are surrounded by Black people after all and not all of them can be bought - in fact most of them can't be bought because there is nothing to buy them with. And because of the whole structure of white people's minds - they can't make any concession to (Blacks) - they are afraid to.

So, of course, the freedom fighters are becoming more and more intransigent. Sooner, or later there will be great trouble with American investment. It must be happening now. Then everything depends on what the U.S. decides to do about it. If we decide to go in and protect the investment or decide to make some kind of concessions. But I don't see what kind of concessions can be made in such a situation. And

I don't think American businessmen - unless we have learned something from Viet Nam - are gifted enough to understand the nature of the struggle which will inevitably overthrow them.

WALKER: Will anything short of a bloodbath in South Africa itself change conditions there?

BALDWIN: I wish I could say yes, but in fact I can't. Again though, if you have never been in a country you don't know what is really going on in it. What kind of forces are being created. But I do know the economy is lock, stock and barrel in the hands of the West. And you know what that means.

WALKER: How would you assess the issues in the conflict in the Communist world between the Soviet Union and China?

BALDWIN: It is a question I really don't know how to answer. I don't think of Russia as a Communist country when one speaks of a desirable form of socialism. I never had any respect for any of the Communist parties I've been in contact with.

If you strip the apparent ideology, it becomes just a very brutal question of conquest or control. In which case it would seem to be that Russia and America will have to go back to bed together, and I am sure this will happen. They will form a coalition to prevent the effect of China.

WALKER: What is the effect of China?

BALDWIN: The effect of China being at this moment anyway, the only faint hope that the Third World has. People in truncated revolts occurring all over the world can't look to Russia and America for aid.

WALKER: But Russia reportedly gives substantial aid to Third World countries and freedom movements - so says the giver and the receivers.

BALDWIN: Maybe in a given situation Russia will give aid to (Blacks) (U.S.) up but they aren't interested in those wars of liberation at all. Maybe China isn't either but at the moment it would appear that she is.

So the effect of China - much more than what is going on, on the Chinese mainland - in terms of freedom fighters all over the world is something I think both the U.S. and Russia would be determined to check and destroy if they can. Does that make sense to you?

WALKER: It seems that what you are saying is that the three giant states in the world are maneuvering for spheres of influence or control over the

developing and dependent nations. If so, that leads to the question - can any small country aspire to rule its own destiny unless it in some way links up or aligns with the Soviet Union, the United States or China?

BALDWIN: It would seem to be something like that for the foreseeable future. I think the Cuban revolution would have developed differently if it hadn't had the most powerful country in the world on its doorstep and as its enemy.

WALKER: But Cuba has survived attacks, boycotts and threats from the U.S. because of the will of its people and the military and other support - material, expertise and diplomatic - that it has received from the Soviet Union. Is this not true?

BALDWIN: Those are interesting observations and no doubt with much truth but I haven't been there myself and I don't know what kind of options people have had or what the price has been for their proximity to the United States.

WALKER: You have been to and lived in Turkey - one of the oldest inhabited regions on earth. What is life like today for the Turks? How does that country fit into the international picture?

BALDWIN: Turkey is a U.S. satellite on a Russian border and facing Greece. It is trapped in its past and very



ARTISTIC AUTHOR James Baldwin speaks his mind. (M.S. Photo F. Joseph Crawford).

poor and mainly illiterate.

If the populace becomes educated there is no telling what it will do. It would certainly break away from America and maybe not turn to Russia. But they can hardly hope to survive alone either.

WALKER: Are you saying that underdeveloped and developing nations have to sucure "Big Brother" assistance from large countries in order to make any go of it?

BALDWIN: I suppose there has to be some grim coalitions between superstates and evolving entities.

WALKER: Evolving entities? BALDWIN: I don't know what else to call them (the so-called emerging nations - JW.) You can scarcely say evolving countries. When you break up the society you find you are dealing with tribes and languages, habits and histories and so the nation becomes a

(Continued on page 31)

## MPs assault marine in Okinawa: he gets six months for 'rioting'

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa (LNS) - Private First Class W.E. Vance was found guilty August 18 by a Marine Special Courtmartial of resisting arrest and was sentenced to six months confinement, a loss in rank, a bad conduct discharge, and forfeiture of all but \$20 a month, in spite of the fact that his wife is about to give birth.

THE CHARGES arose out of an incident in Henoko outside of Camp Schwab, Okinawa May 9 in which Marine MPs assaulted a number of Blacks from this base. None of the MPs were brought to trial. Vance went to trial on charges of riot, assault of an MP, and resisting arrest. The military judge appointed to the case was a career officer rather than one of the captains normally assigned to such trials, and the jury was picked right out of military colleges.

In the first session of defense motions, every motion was

denied - including motions to dismiss on grounds of denial of counsel, illegal pre-trial procedures, and requests for witnesses. The second day the jury was empaneled and three challenges to remove members were denied by the military judge.

These challenges were on the grounds that they were MPs or that they were willing to believe an MP over a Black enlisted man or that they were in the habit of scrutinizing Blacks to see if they were "shady characters."

After the close of the government's case, the military judge dismissed the riot charge for lack of evidence. The defense then presented its case which consisted of several marines not involved in the incident - such as a white staff sergeant - all of whom testified that the MPs started the riot and assaulted Private Vance.

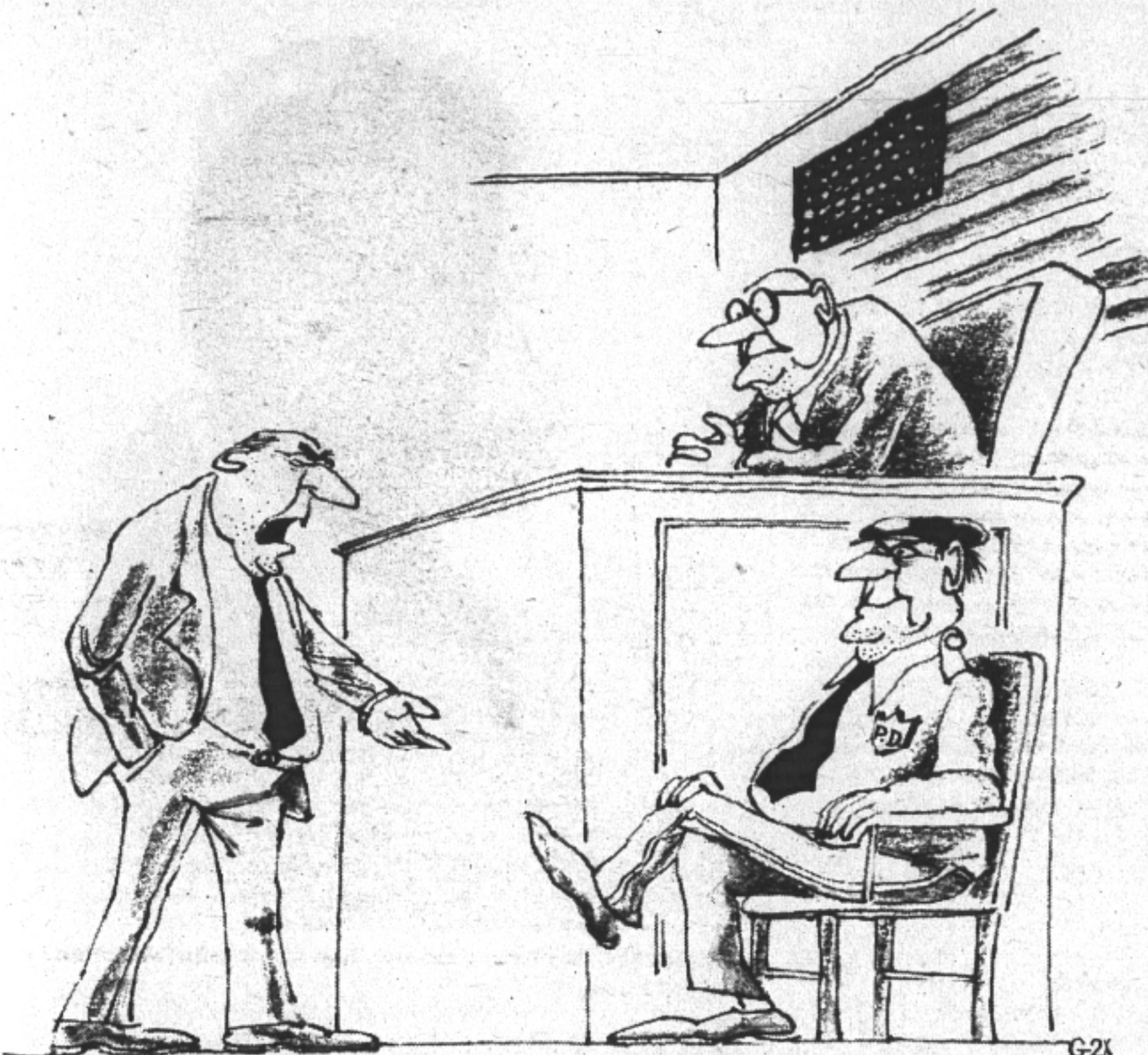
Three defense witnesses testified that Vance was severely beaten while in handcuffs.

The defense was confident of acquittal after having established that it was the MP's rather than the Blacks who were involved in a riot and in assaults. Even the military judge was surprised when the jury gave Vance the maximum sentence without even giving him credit for three months pre-trial confinement and restriction.

The judge, obviously upset at the verdict and the sentence, even stated afterwards that the case, in his opinion, would be dismissed on review before even going to Washington for appeal.

Vance now returns to the Camp Butler brig where he had been holding political education classes for the other inmates there until stopped by the authorities.





"HE CAN'T HELP IT IF HE MURDERED A BLACK MAN — IT'S NOT HIS FAULT THAT HE WAS BORN WHITE."

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Continued:

# James Baldwin

very arbitrary concept, especially under pressures like that.

WALKER: Do you think of Northern Ireland as a white colony of Great Britain?

BALDWIN: They certainly think so.

WALKER: How about you?

BALDWIN: Again never having been there - let me put it this way, the Irish people I have met from Ireland certainly have a mentality which I recognize as being part

of my own.

WALKER: Would you describe that mentality?

BALDWIN: The same kind of bitterness, the same kind of rage, the same kind of determination which finally has to become even extremely irrational, to be out from under the heel of an occupying power...Yes, I think Northern Ireland would have to be classified as a colony.

(To be continued.)



# MAJOR MIRRORS

"We hope to dramatize the need for Black people to deal with education as a top priority in the nation as we move towards saving the children. We hope, also, to use political enfranchisement as the vehicle as we move towards that and use economic development of our Black businesses so that we can grow into a community capable of saving its own children."

THOMAS TODD, Exec. vice president of Operation PUSH, speaking of the goals of PUSH Expo '72.

"The picture chronicles a kind of society—tells it like it is. It was well-researched; no one can say that it isn't accurate. The hustler is as much a part of the Black community as the doctor, lawyer or preacher. In the picture the hustler is portrayed as a man who wants to get out of the business from the start. "Super Fly" only intimates what is going on inside Harlem. If it gets people thinking, then it will do some good."

RON O'NEAL, 'star' of "Super Fly" giving his excuse for the current sick Black movie being dumped on the Black mind.

"Mr. Nixon has driven us further apart than ever before, playing on the sympathies and prejudices of people."

REP. RALPH H. METCALFE (D-ILL.) speaking at McGovern rally in Chicago.

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, 1857

"Whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness. It shows that something is wrong in the system of government that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved."

THOMAS PAINE, 1792

"Profits are the barometer of the country and the higher the better. There is NO WAY profits can be too high."

ALLEN P. STULTS, President of the American Bankers Association.

"It is such a sad time when the people, those who give us the confidence and spirit to function as a government, should be placed so far down on the list of national priorities. We must reorder our priorities. And this is an appropriate place to start. This administration has vetoed the Labor-Health, Education, and Welfare bill because money in that bill was in excess of what this administration thought should be spent to meet the human needs of our citizens and to improve the quality of life for all. And then it has the audacity to request approval of a budget for the Department of Defense which would be the highest since the end of World War II."

REP. RALPH METCALFE, (D-ILL.) speaking before the House of Representatives on a proposed defense bill.

## Civilians target of Army spying

WASHINGTON — Massive and uncoordinated spying on millions of American citizens by Army Intelligence agents was revealed by a Senate subcommittee here.

The Constitutional Rights Subcommittee termed the surveillance "far more extensive than first imagined" and said the dossiers served no legitimate purpose.

The army began collecting this information in 1940 to prepare for predicted civilian disturbances.

Following the Newark, N.J. riots in 1967, the activity became massive. It continued until the Defense Department ordered a halt in 1971, after considerable Congressional criticism.

The subcommittee's report indicated persons under surveillance were both "great and obscure." Among them were "priests, lawyers, singers, comedians and politicians."

No incident was too small to escape the Army's notice.

MUHAMMAD SPEAKS

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OCTOBER 6, 1972

By Joe Walker

NEW YORK — The most famous contemporary Black American writer continues to be James Baldwin. During a recent visit here he granted this MUHAMMAD SPEAKS correspondent an exclusive interview exploring his thoughts on Black literature and art today, events happening in the U.S. and the world, and his hopes and fears. The following is the final installment of a four-part series on that conversation which took place on two occasions and lasted two-and-a-half hours. (Part 1 appeared in MS, Sept. 8, 1972)

WALKER: Does the Black struggle in the United States need to be internationalized? Should Black North Americans struggling for bread and butter issues here be concerned with what is happening in Southeast Asia, in the middle-East, in Southern Africa, in Latin America, and elsewhere?

BALDWIN: What is happening there will determine a great deal about their bread and butter here... If one doesn't understand the global trap, then you can easily fall into such weird dreams as becoming a Black capitalist. That simply means that a certain number of Black people will be allowed to make a certain amount of money. But you can't be a Black capitalist unless you have a colony of your own. Unless you have people you are exploiting, you aren't really a capitalist. You are only a member of the club and they can always throw you out of the club.

WALKER: Is it necessary for a Black involved in the Liberation struggle here to have a political ideology? Can revolutionary change be brought about without a political philosophy or outlook?

BALDWIN: I don't have any coherent political ideology — nothing very doctrinaire. I know more clearly what I'm against than I can state what I'm for.

WALKER: Does this result from what you earlier called "the colonial mind?"

BALDWIN: I think it results from a certain kind of experience. What you have made of your experience. What your experience has made of you. So by and by without having thought it through, you have arrived at a political position, whether or not you have a political ideology. It is the way you have reacted to your life.

I don't think one can expect most people to have a political philosophy as such. There is something about me which mistrusts that level of political indoctrination.

People in some senses know better than their leaders what they need. The danger of trying

to indoctrinate a population is that you then cease to listen to them. The lines have to be kept open so that you can be able to hear what the junkie has to say. He may not have a political philosophy but a great deal of political wisdom.

The whole point is to address yourself to the needs of the people. Any political philosophy should be open-ended—which is always evolving. The situation demands that.

I also think with attempts to indoctrinate populations, you alienate so much of the population that you destroy the purpose of the indoctrination.

WALKER: How do you react to the projection of our literary figures and sports stars as Black leaders?

BALDWIN: That is a part of America — I don't know what—I guess naive.

WALKER: You have been so projected even though you disclaim being a politician or organizer. How do you deal with being unwillingly thrust into a "Black leadership role?"

BALDWIN: The only way to deal with it is to accept it.

WALKER: To accept what?

BALDWIN: You accept that what you do and say has an affect on other people, especially young people. It is not that you think of yourself as a leader, but that you have found that you are placed in a certain position where it would be criminal to not be responsible.

I'm a novelist, not a politician. People are not at all what politicians think they are, or what their leaders think they are. They are better and worse than that.

WALKER: You consider yourself responsible in relationship to your work, don't you?

BALDWIN: Well, yes. But there it is something I more or less chose. What came with it, I hadn't thought of. And I didn't in that sense choose it. I don't mean I'm complaining but it wasn't something I saw coming. You know, you write a book and you hope to get it published but you don't expect to become a leader because of that.

WALKER: More than your novels, your essays have had tremendous political impact.

BALDWIN: I never used to think of them as political essays but now I see that they are. I was only trying to clarify a situation — first of all for myself and then for others. What happens once you've done that, the implications of where you are force you to move in a certain direction. That's politics. In that sense all action is politics.

WALKER: Where do you see the world going from today onward?

BALDWIN: I have too much faith in people to be hopeless but we are in for some very difficult times. The whole great power syndrome may be obsolete but nobody knows it yet. The world is heading for a certain kind of decentralization which I think is its only hope. But the powers that still rule the world don't see it that way or envision it that way. If I'm right, it will have to come about through one form or another of a holocaust. In a sense we wouldn't know where we are going until this present tension has been one way or another resolved.

WALKER: Do you think the United States will go through a fascist stage before significant changes are realized here?

BALDWIN: It could very well happen. It is such a strange and unwieldy country. Though it is a little difficult to imagine it, because partly one doesn't want to. A weird kind of decentralization could take place — concentration camps in California, concentration camps in New York, concentration camps in Philadelphia.

WALKER: Many people say the U.S. is very close to it now.

BALDWIN: True, but there is something else happening.

WALKER: A counterforce?

BALDWIN: Yes, which makes me doubt finally that America will really become the concentration camp, which so many people would like it to become. I don't know but I think a lot of the white citizens



Continued:

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of this country have undergone a kind of awakening — through the war more than anything else.

**WALKER:** Do you consider yourself anti-capitalist?

**BALDWIN:** I suppose to put it briefly I would have to say

that. I think capitalism costs the world too much. I don't think that the economic arrangements of the world should be such that a Mexican peasant or a Turkish peasant should barely manage to live or nearly starve to death while

so much of the world is eating far too much. It is not only a blatant injustice, but pure folly.

**WALKER:** Do you consider yourself anti-Communist?

**BALDWIN:** Yes. I was anti-

Communist when America and Russia were Allies in fact. But again all the terms have to be revised. I'm anti-Stalinist to be more accurate. I'm anti-Communist because the C.P. in the U.S., as I have witnessed it, is a party whose record

intellectually and internationally is shameful.

**WALKER:** Is there hope for meaningful Black advancement within the Democratic or Republican Parties?

**BALDWIN:** Not as they are constituted.

**WALKER:** If there was a genuine Conservative and a genuine Labor Party, would that make a difference?

**BALDWIN:** That might help to clarify things. At the moment we have something like four major parties — two Republican parties and two Democratic Parties.

## Despite popularity broadcasters fired

**DETROIT** — The only viable way of Black people communicating with each other through the news media is slowly tightening its grip on the dissemination of information to the Black community.

Within the past year, three Black newscasters were abruptly and disrespectfully fired from their jobs in Detroit in a vulgar display of racism by station management.

Ron Scott, radio broadcaster and producer of a highly informative program called "Soul on Sunday," was fired from his position by station WRIF management by

telephone, a violation of the union contract.

In a disgusting display of racism, the station management cut back Scott's broadcast hours in spite of his increasing popularity. Management made detrimental changes in his program, intercepted and opened his mail, encouraged police to heckle Black guests on his show and never gave the necessary staff or budget to make for better work relations for Scott.

Gloria House, editorial writer for the Detroit Free Press, and a popular Black cultural figure and writer, was fired for

attending a rally in which Blacks were protesting police brutality. She, too, was fired by telephone.

Another Black broadcaster, Ernie Durham was fired from station WJR, under secretive conditions.

Congressman John Conyers (D.-Mich.) has criticized the firings, saying the removal of Black voices from the airways and other media represents rampant racism in the media.

Conyers asserts that daily bombardment of Black people with white-owned, white-produced and white-directed programs exhibits to the Black viewers a world which has no relationship to their

lives.

Conyers is calling for a city-wide Detroit conference on the media where media owners will be asked to appear and discuss Black hiring, promotions and firings.

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