

James Baldwin—“On Being ‘White’ . . . And Other Lies”

- Explain what Baldwin means when he insists that “there is, in fact, no white community,” that “[n]o one was white before he/she came to America” (1).
- How did “denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation” cause America to become white (1)?
- Then, how is this a “genocidal” lie (2)? He uses that term twice: once to describe the lie, and then after to describe the history of America. How might the use of this powerful, connotative word be justified?
- What is the significance of Baldwin’s claim that “Blacks have no power in the labor unions” (2)? (And note what this claim follows in the essay.)
- What does Baldwin mean when he writes that White identity, identifying as white, is “a moral choice” (3)?
- Baldwin presents what he labels “a terrible paradox” twice—“in this debasement and definition of Black people, they debased and defamed themselves” (2), AND “those who believed that they could control and define Black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves” (3). Explain his paradox.