Arguments and Evidence

Part II: “Mr. Baldwin’s Aspirations”: On Buckley’s Understanding of James Baldwin

- Buckley portrayed Baldwin as a dangerous ideologue.
- He believed that Baldwin’s views were marked by “violent irrationalities” and that his views were “petrified in the corners of fanaticism.”
- Buckley was warning his audience about the potential danger of Baldwin’s rhetoric.

Part III: “I Think All Theories are Suspect”: Baldwin’s Skepticism of Ideology

- In “Notes of a Native Son,” Baldwin set two goals for himself: “I want to be an honest man and a good writer.”
- His engagement in rightist ideology and politics led him to be deeply suspicious of ideology.
- Baldwin warned his audience about the potential danger of ideology.

Part IV: “Freedom is Hard to Bear”: Buckley and Baldwin on the Meaning of Freedom

- “Liberty,” Baldwin writes, “is a genuine political possibility, in spite of the fact that the word is too often used as a slogan” and “freedom” is “beyond politics, though affecting politics and affected by politics.”
- The dominant person or group need not actually interfere with an individual to deprive him of his freedom; interference is not a necessary ingredient of their ability to control others.
- As true freedom, in short, is the liberation from delusion about oneself, others, and history.
- It is precisely because freedom, as Baldwin understands it, is so difficult and uncomfortable that most people have no interest in pursuing it.
- Myths, Baldwin argues, allow us to engage in “moral evasion.”
- To ask questions of ourselves and our communities and to exercise our “exceptionalism” as a nation.

Conclusion

- The mythologized narrative ignores or downplays the heroic triumph of African-Americans in the face of oppression.
- If the Negroes were not here, we might be forced to deal with ourselves and our own personalities, with all those stases, all those consummations, and all those mysteries with which we have invested the Negro race.

References

• James Baldwin, Questions and Answers, Wheeler Auditorium, UC-Berkeley, April 26, 1974.