

Framing, Transposing, and Celebrating James Baldwin: An Analysis of Raoul Peck's

Adaptation Techniques in *I Am Not Your Negro*

BA Thesis

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30 October 2017

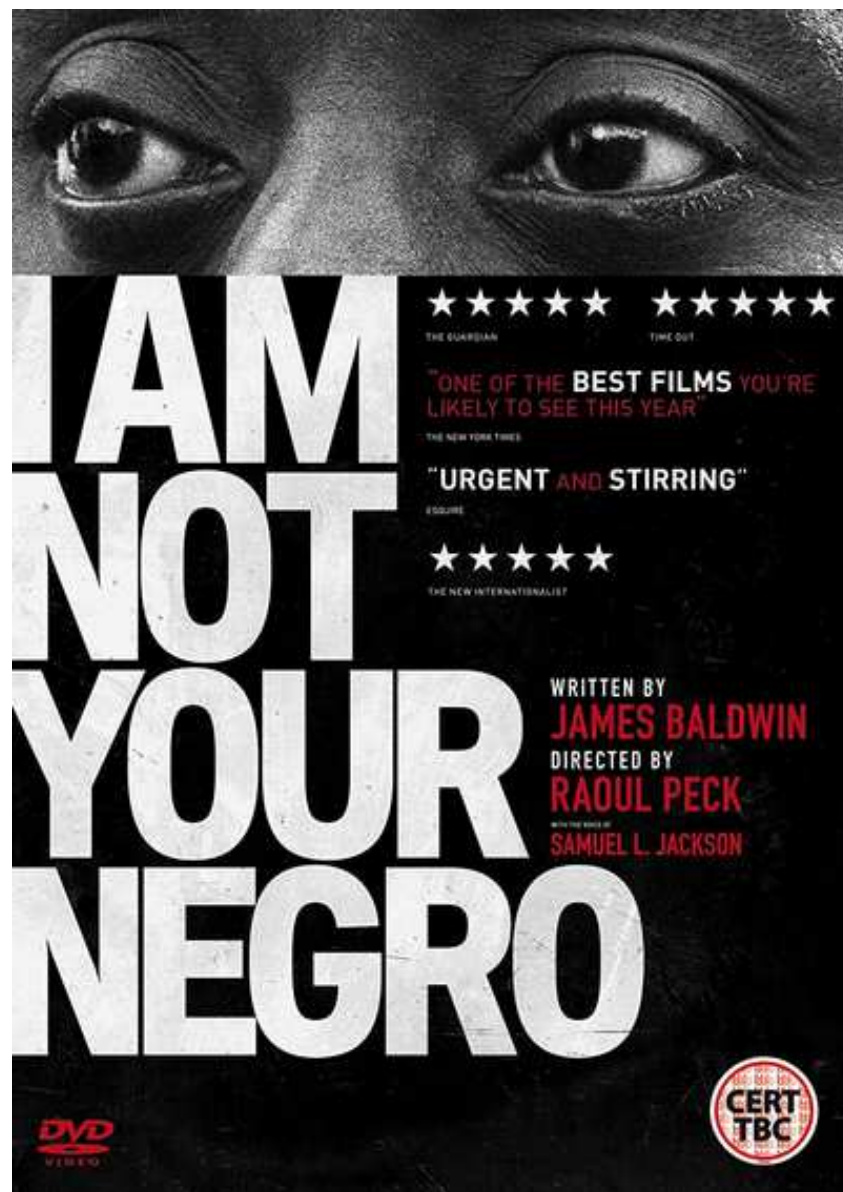


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## Introduction

In February this year, the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* by filmmaker Raoul Peck was released. The Oscar-nominated film focusses on James Baldwin's life and writing, since Peck based the film on Baldwin's unfinished and unpublished memoir *Remember This House*, in which he writes about his memories and thoughts about the murders of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. This thesis will argue that *I Am Not Your Negro* is framed to make the viewer reflect on the present state of racial relations in America and to celebrate Baldwin as an important thinker and writer. A key strength of the documentary is that it brings Baldwin's writing directly to the viewers by transposing his words to the screen and proving its fidelity to Baldwin's work, which allows the viewer to form their own opinion of Baldwin's relevance to the present state of racial relations in the U.S.

To provide arguments to support this thesis statement, I will present a close reading of three aspects of the documentary which are central to this aim: the use of a narrator and intertitles to adapt Baldwin's writing to the screen; Peck's choice to include Baldwin's spoken voice by adding footage of his interviews and speeches; and Peck's use of modern footage, such as the images of African-American children who died between 2010-2014. I will undertake the close readings with the help of the following theoretical background which draws on adaptation and documentary film studies.

### **Fidelity**

The principle of fidelity is a helpful tool in examining Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro*. The term has been defined by Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon as an adaptation's "faithfulness or closeness to the 'original' or 'source' text" (444). Although an adaptation will never be completely faithful (see the explanation of transpositions below), filmmakers can decide to stay as close to the original as possible, or to use the source text merely as a starting point and create something new entirely; and many degrees of faithful adaptations lie between

these two extremes. Many reviewers will critique an adaptation based on its fidelity or lack there of. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon explains that “[o]ne of the reasons for this emphasis [on fidelity] was the fact that much of the early work in the field [of adaptation studies] had been based on comparative case studies of particular works, rather than attempting to theorize more broadly the phenomenon of adaptation” (16). She adds that fidelity hardly ever makes its way into the study of adaptation today. However, other critics such as Casie Hermansson have argued that

[i]t is time to include fidelity [...] in the intertextual toolbox of adaptation criticism. It is one tool among many, and sometimes not the right tool for the job. But at other times, and perhaps in combination with other tools, it is the only one that will do. [...] Just as announcing the ‘death of the author,’ pace Roland Barthes—while freeing— proved premature and in many ways costly to literary studies, so too claiming the ‘death of the source,’ while it undoubtedly catalyzed adaptation studies, now needs to reckon with what has been lost in the process (156).

In this thesis I will apply the concept of fidelity not to assess the quality of the adaptation, but as a tool to help the process of understanding and researching the adaptation. This is important in relation to my research because understanding the differences between the source text and the adaptation allows me to more clearly identify the framing choices Peck has made. These framing choices play a key role in Peck’s ability to provide the viewer with direct access to Baldwin’s writing, trigger the viewers’ thoughts about current racial issues in the U.S., and how it celebrates Baldwin as an important thinker and writer.

### **Transposition**

One reason why an adaptation can never be completely faithful to its original is because there is always a change of medium. A text can also be transposed through time and

place; or through more than one of these three formal elements. A film adaptation, for example, has changed the medium of written text into the medium of film. The writer of the film adaptation could then also alter the time in which the story takes place, think of numerous Shakespeare adaptations that take place in a modern world, such as *10 Things I Hate About You*, which is an adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*. This particular adaptation is also a transposition through place, since Shakespeare's source text is set in Europe, but the movie adaptation takes place in the United States. When multiple formal elements of a source text are transposed, the adaptation becomes less faithful to its original. The simple change of place could mean there are cultural differences, climatic differences – if the weather is important to a particular plot, then a change of location could have drastic consequences – different names, food etc. In their book *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Ray Cutchins claim that “by declaring some films ‘transpositions,’ adaptation theorists have simultaneously declared themselves useless. There is no need to interpret a film or novel if the two [adaptation and transposition] are ‘essentially’ the same thing” (16). Hutcheon confirms this: “an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (7). However, being able to distinguish between the three formal entities that have been transposed in a specific adaptation will help understand the changes a source text has gone through and help to identify the adaptation as a new version that stands on its own. By distinguishing the transpositions that the source texts for *I Am Not Your Negro* have gone through, I will be able to recognize the adaptation techniques Peck has used which allows me once again to identify the framing choices Peck has made, and to demonstrate how direct access is the result of transposing Baldwin's writing.

### **Framing**

Both concepts of fidelity and transposition will help to understand an adaptation and, more importantly for this particular research, the framing choices of the filmmaker. This is

where the theory of framing is relevant. In their book *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Reese et al. explain that the most influential authors on framing, such as Gitlin, Goffman and Tuchman, have “continued [Gregory] Bateson’s thought by emphasizing framing as a process by which potential elements are either included or excluded from a message or its interpretation by virtue of a communicator’s organizing principles” (Reese et al. 86). In other words, although a documentary filmmaker claims to be objective and factual, as I will discuss below, his or her message can still be framed to steer viewers’ thoughts in certain directions by the inclusion or exclusion of other facts, footage, examples etc. Additionally, Reese et al. claim that framing extends itself to more than media messages as it “integrates the discursive, political, and sociological subprocesses in public deliberation” (58). Similar to what Goffman implies in his *Frame Analysis*, they refer to the inevitability of framing. The question is not whether *I Am Not Your Negro* is framed, but how it is framed. In his book *Genre*, John Frow explains that a “shift of frame” between texts consists of “a different structure of address, a different moral universe, and different truth-effects” (9). To research the framing in *I Am Not Your Negro*, I must look at the inclusion and exclusion of specific elements, such as archival and modern footage; and at other possible framing choices. For example, if certain footage is included, why was it placed at a certain moment in the film? This understanding of framing therefore allows me to determine how Peck has framed his documentary in order to steer viewers’ thoughts into thinking about current racial issues in America, and furthermore making them able to form their own opinion because of the direct access to Baldwin’s writing in the film.

### **Intertextuality**

*I Am Not Your Negro* is an adaptation that does not focus on a single source text. Although the documentary is primarily based on Baldwin’s unfinished manuscript *Remember This House*, Peck has used other works from Baldwin and the documentary is a combination

of many sources – such as writings, interviews, separate footage and more – combined. French linguist Julia Kristeva developed the term ‘intertextuality’ to refer to this concept of texts referring to and containing parts of other texts. This theory was further developed by influential Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Graham Allen explains in his book *Intertextuality* how De Saussure proposed that “[s]igns are arbitrary, possessing meaning not because of a referential function but because of their function within a linguistic system as it exists at any one moment of time” (Allen 9). The same can be said about texts; they gain meaning because of their relation to other texts. Similar to the manner in which linguistic expressions are developed on existing expressions, texts are built on previous texts. Today, contemporary literary studies assume that all texts refer to other texts and gain meaning by these texts (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney 100), which forms the basis of intertextuality. This is relevant to my research because understanding the adaptation’s inclusion or exclusion of certain texts and sources and its relation to them will enable me to identify the adaptation techniques Peck has applied and his framing choices. The analysis of Peck’s framing choices will demonstrate how Peck directs viewers’ thinking towards current racial issues in today’s society and how he is able to have the viewers form their own opinion because of their direct access to Baldwin.

## **Documentary**

Adaptation studies is often concerned with the adaptation of novels or texts in the form of a movie that has the main purpose to be entertaining. But how does an adaptation in the form of a documentary fit into the study of adaption? What characteristics are particular to a documentary that could influence the adaptation techniques it employs? In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols explains that “[t]he division of documentary from fiction, like the division of historiography from fiction, rests on the degree to which the story fundamentally corresponds to actual situations, events, and people versus the degree to which

it is primarily a product of the filmmaker's invention" (8-9). Instead of depicting a fictional story like many movies do, documentaries grasp subjects or ideas from our reality. And the story is not an invention of the filmmaker, although the way the story is presented will be creatively designed by him or her as "[d]ocumentaries adopt no fixed inventory of techniques, address no one set of issues, display no single set of forms or styles" (Nichols 11). Although documentary makers are fairly free in their choices, there are, as Nichols illustrates, certain conventions that characterize the documentary genre: "the use of a voice-of-God commentary, interviews, location sound recording, cutaways from a given scene to provide images that illustrate or complicate stated points (often referred to as B-roll footage), and a reliance on social actors in their everyday roles and activities" (15).

But how can the genre of documentary be linked to the field of adaptation studies? In her book *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel*, Sarah Cardwell explains that adaptations will most often not appear in the form of a documentary, and that researching a documentary requires different questions than researching an adaptation (69). For example, "[i]n the study of documentary there is theorising on the use of source material: how faithful to its sources the documentary is; how well these sources are structured; how the intentions of the maker have been realised through his or her manipulation of the material, and so on" (Cardwell 69). For the purpose of this particular research, I apply these questions to *I Am Not Your Negro*. I look at Peck's intentions and his "manipulation of the material" in order to find out how faithful he is to Baldwin and how he framed the original work. When studying an adaptation, Hutcheon explains that "[t]o deal with adaptations as adaptations is to think of them as [...] inherently 'palimpsestuous' works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (6). She adds, however, that adaptations should not be judged based on their fidelity to the original texts: it is simply important to be aware of its intertextual characteristic. Documentaries in



general do not focus on a single source text, and are an intertextual web of many sources, similar to a palimpsestuous adaptation.

Therefore, although Cardwell would disagree, documentaries and adaptations share characteristics that can be researched in similar ways. Researching the intertextual qualities of an adaptation and the framing choices of the filmmaker are no different than researching these qualities of a documentary and the choices of its maker. In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders agrees with Hutcheon that fidelity should not be the measure to judge an adaptation, and she describes that “[a]daptation studies are [...] about analyzing process, ideology, and methodology” (20). Both Sanders and Hutcheon emphasize the importance of looking at an adaptation as a transposition, and Sanders adds that viewing an adaptation as “commentary” is equally important: “adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new mise-en-scène, or both, usually by means of alteration or addition” (21). Therefore, to study an adaptation in the form of a documentary, a combination of the different approaches mentioned above is required. As I explained above, I will apply Cardwell’s proposed set of questions that can be used to research a documentary and link these to the approaches used in adaptation studies. For example, how are the intertextual sources in *I Am Not Your Negro* structured and how do these demonstrate possible framing choices Peck has made? The answers to these questions provide a clearer understanding of which techniques Peck has applied to frame the film and to what extent he has framed it in order to bring Baldwin’s writing directly to the viewer and to steer the viewer into thinking about current racial issues, while also celebrating Baldwin.

## Chapter 1: Narration and Intertitles: Bringing Baldwin's Words and Concerns Directly to a New Generation

In this chapter, I will discuss the adaptation techniques that Peck has used that cause the viewer to have direct access to Baldwin's writing, namely the use of a narrator and intertitles on screen. I will also discuss Peck's fidelity to Baldwin's writing at the end of the chapter, to demonstrate to what extent Peck has framed Baldwin's original work. James Baldwin himself has expressed his opinion about adaptations and he claimed that "how faithful a translation [i.e. adaptation] remains to its original form depends, for the most part, on the root motives of the translator" (Henderson 8). According to this logic, the fidelity of *I Am Not Your Negro* to Baldwin's unfinished manuscript *Remember This House*, upon which the documentary is based, lies with filmmaker Raoul Peck. The framing of the documentary depends on Peck's purpose in adapting Baldwin's writing. Furthermore, Baldwin has written in his essay *The Devil Finds Work* that

the only way to translate the written word to the cinema involves doing considerable violence to the written word, to the extent, indeed, of forgetting the written word. A film is meant to be seen, and, ideally, the less a film talks, the better. The cinematic translation, nevertheless, however great and necessary the violence it is compelled to use on the original form, is obliged to remain faithful to the intention, and the vision, of the original form (560).<sup>1</sup>

Baldwin claims that an adaptation will harm the original work with its transposition of medium. But, he adds, an adaptation's intention should still be consistent with the intention of the original work. And Peck's purpose and Baldwin's original purpose do appear to correspond. Baldwin's purpose, as a humanist, was to make people aware of the problems in

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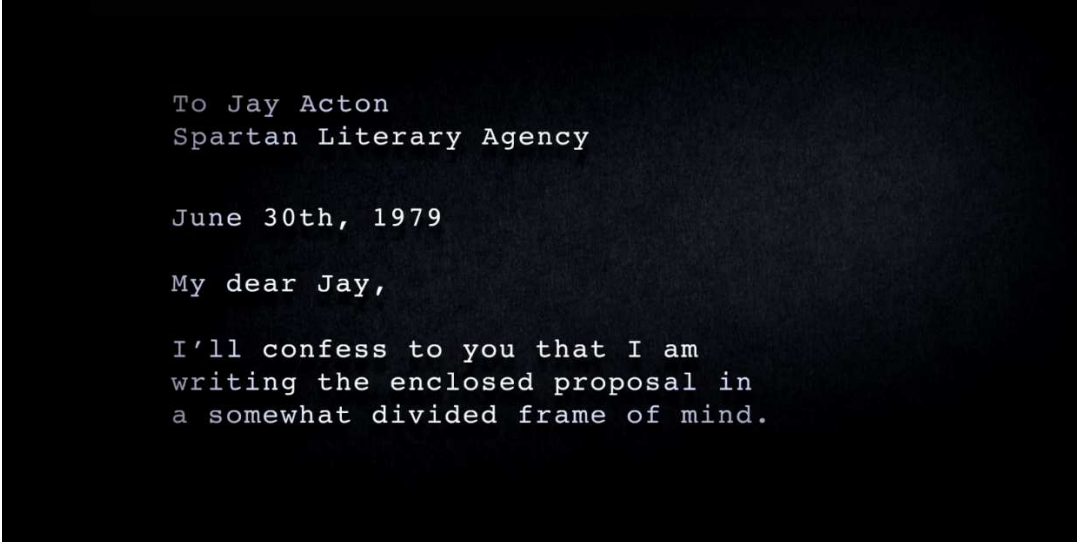
<sup>1</sup> *The Devil Finds Work* is one of the works that Peck has studied for *I Am Not Your Negro*, according to the bibliography in the print version, and he must have been aware of this excerpt while making the film.

his country, and the racial relations in particular. Peck's purpose seems to be, based on the documentary itself and what Peck has said in interviews, to make people aware of the racial issues in today's American society. Peck mentions in an interview with Gerhard Busch from the Dutch broadcasting network *VPRO* that nothing has changed over time in relation to the racial issues, and he states that the racial relations today might even be worse than they were in Baldwin's time. Baldwin's and Peck's main purpose coincide, although Peck has some additional purposes, such as celebrating Baldwin as a writer and thinker. Peck explains in the interview with Busch that he wants Baldwin's words to be remembered by bringing him to a new generation. But because times have changed and Peck's audience is not the same as Baldwin's audience, Peck has to frame the film in order to achieve a similar purpose to that of Baldwin. Peck does this by applying certain adaptation techniques – namely, using a voice-over to act as Baldwin, and the use of intertitles – which together create a key strength of the documentary: it provides viewers with direct access to Baldwin's writing resulting in the opportunity for the viewer to form their own opinion of Baldwin's relevance to the present state of race relations in the U.S.

The adaptation technique of a voice-over's reading of Baldwin's words gives viewers direct access to Baldwin's writing so that the viewer can form their own opinion of Baldwin's relevance to the present state of race relations in the U.S. Peck explains in a personal note in the written edition of the documentary that “the texts [used for *I Am Not Your Negro*] came from sources as diverse as personal notes not intended for publication, letters, manuscripts, speeches, and published books” (XV). These combined writings from a diverse range of Baldwin's works are adapted to the screen by having a narrator read the words out loud. Samuel L. Jackson, the narrator, reads Baldwin's writing out loud in the first person as if he is Baldwin himself. The words are transposed to the screen by audio, and the audience can listen to Baldwin's writing. By using this technique, Peck introduces Baldwin as the protagonist and

focalizer of the film and this gives the viewer direct access to Baldwin's writing. Peck transposes Baldwin's words by medium but maintains the original writing. This is ironic to some extent since Baldwin himself claimed that adaptations will "[forget] the written word" but Peck has chosen to draw the focus completely on the written word and alter the writing as little as possible. In addition, only the narrator and Baldwin himself in his interviews are speaking (and the occasional archival footage of people like Medgar Evers), but there are no outsiders who give their opinion about Baldwin and his writing. Peck explains this in an interview with Gregg Kilday of *The Hollywood Reporter*: "I knew I didn't want any talking heads; I didn't want anybody to interpret him, to speak for him. I wanted to be inside his head." If Peck had invited others to talk in his documentary about Baldwin and have them interpret his writing, they would have influenced the viewers' thoughts to such an extent that the viewers would no longer think for themselves about Baldwin's words. This analysis of the use of a voice-over as an adaptation technique demonstrates that by doing this, Peck adopts Baldwin as the focalizer of his film and maintains Baldwin's language by transposing his written words to aural text. This gives the viewer direct access to Baldwin's writing and this, together with the fact that there are no talking heads giving their opinion on Baldwin, allows the viewers to form their own thoughts and opinions.

The use of intertitles in the documentary is also an example of a technique employed by Peck to give his viewers direct access to Baldwin and form their own opinion on present racial issues in the U.S. accordingly, while also celebrating Baldwin as a writer. When Mr. Jackson begins his narration in the documentary, the very first words he speaks are accompanied by the written words on screen.



To Jay Acton  
Spartan Literary Agency

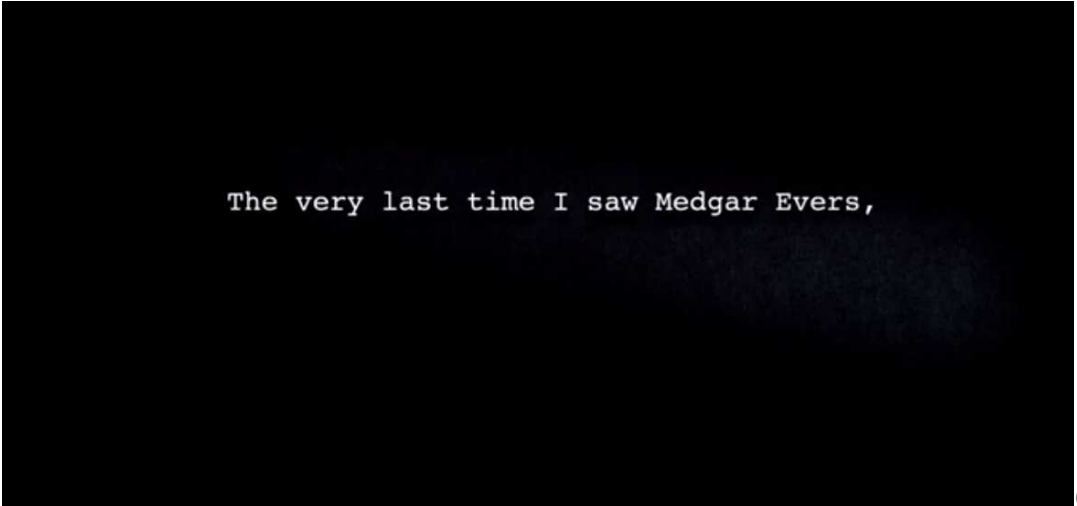
June 30th, 1979

My dear Jay,

I'll confess to you that I am  
writing the enclosed proposal in  
a somewhat divided frame of mind.

(00:03:18)

Only small parts of the writing are displayed on screen, and it is not limited to letters such as the one above. For instance, after Baldwin has heard that his friend Lorraine Hansberry has died of cancer, he starts again with the line: "The very last time I saw Medgar Evers, he stopped at his house on the way to the airport so I could autograph my books for him, his wife and children." (00:37:52). However, only the first part of this sentence is displayed as an intertitle.



The very last time I saw Medgar Evers,

(00:37:52)

During this part of the film, it has already become clear that the narrator is supposed to be Baldwin and that he is reading out his actual writing, so when intertitles appear in this stage of the film, it is included for the purpose of emphasis. When Baldwin's words can both be seen and heard, the film draws extra attention to this sentence and forces the viewer to think about

its implications. The fact that Peck uses intertitles at this particular moment suggests he wants to emphasize the shift of a subject, perhaps even the start of a new chapter. The death of Lorraine is not discussed any further, the screen turns black, and a new subject is brought up. However, at the beginning of the film, intertitles are used to make it clear that the words being spoken have actually been written by Baldwin himself. In a way, Peck set out to prove his fidelity to Baldwin's writing by showing the viewer the writing itself. As I explained before, many critics and viewers will either like or dislike a film based on its fidelity towards the original. Because the original manuscript that the film is based on is not available to the public, viewers cannot know whether *I Am Not Your Negro* is completely faithful to Baldwin. Therefore, Peck establishes the fidelity to Baldwin with the use of intertitles so that the film satisfies those who might reject the film by claiming it is not consistent with Baldwin's writing. Another reason for his use of intertitles to prove his fidelity to Baldwin is the fact that the documentary is celebrating Baldwin as a writer. I will elaborate on this idea of celebration in the second chapter. Peck has tried to remain respectful towards Baldwin and his writing by altering as little as possible, and the use of intertitles demonstrates that Peck is respecting Baldwin as a writer by showing his actual words and reminding the audience once again that everything that is being said is written by Baldwin. Therefore, the use of intertitles allows Peck to establish that he is maintaining fidelity to Baldwin's writing. It also gives the viewer direct access to Baldwin's writing by demonstrating the fidelity towards unpublished sources by presenting the text itself on the screen, which also allows Peck to celebrate Baldwin as a writer.

Since I have established that Baldwin's writing is such a prominent feature of the film, I will now focus on how faithfully Peck has adapted the writing to the screen and to what extent he has framed Baldwin's words. In the preface of the written version of the documentary, Peck writes that he has altered Baldwin's writing in some way: "From version

to version, I allowed myself more freedom, reversing paragraphs, phrases, or, more rarely, words” (XVI). Peck also explains that he

discovered advantageously that Baldwin often rewrote several times, in different documents, letters, or notes, the same sentence, idea or narrative, with slight modifications or different argumentations. This meant that in some instances I was able to use the version that best suited the purpose, after complicated digressions, or even mix the beginning of one version with the end of another (XVI).

Sadly, due to copyright laws, this unfinished manuscript will not be available to the public until 2027, according to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (a subdivision of the New York Public Library), where Baldwin’s unpublished letters and manuscripts are stored. Therefore, the primary source of the documentary cannot be researched by others and, for the next ten years, it is not possible to know how much Peck’s changes modified the original manuscript. However, Peck has also used other essays that have been published, such as *The Devil Finds Work*. With this essay, I can examine how the writing differs between the original and the documentary. For example, a passage in the essay where Baldwin writes about the actor Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones*:

Liberal white audiences applauded when Sidney, at the end of the film, jumped off the train in order not to abandon his white buddy. The Harlem audience was outraged, and yelled, *Get back on the train, you fool!* (525)

In the documentary, this particular passage is transposed to the screen as follows:

When Sidney jumps off the train, the white liberal people downtown were much relieved and joyful. But when black people saw him jump off the train, they yelled, “Get back on the train, you fool.” (00:49:27)

Notice that Peck shifted clauses and words, which creates a shift of emphasis; “liberal white audience” puts the emphasis on “liberal,” whereas “white liberal people” emphasizes “white.” Peck emphasizes skin color since he is trying to make his audience aware of racial relations, both in the past and in current society. Also, Peck changed “Harlem” to “black,” possibly for clarification. In Baldwin’s time, Harlem was practically a synonym for African-Americans, but today, as Sam Roberts wrote in the *New York Times* in 2010, the majority of Harlem is no longer African-American. A contrast between black and white is emphasized even more by this change to “black,” and this again shows that Peck draws attention to race. Baldwin’s language and ideas are still brought directly to the viewer by the techniques discussed above, but they are framed to stimulate the viewer to think about Baldwin’s relevance to the present state of race relations in the U.S. Peck emphasizes race and even clarifies a racial synonym such as Harlem in order to bring the writing directly to a new generation. Lastly, because Baldwin wrote his essay to be read, and Peck was working on a text that was meant to be spoken and heard out loud, some of the alterations will have been made for the text to sound more rhythmic and fluent. In the passage above, for example, “when Sidney jumps off the train” is more fluent than “when Sidney, at the end of the film, jumped off the train.” Overall, my analysis of one of the published works that I am able to examine demonstrates that Peck frames Baldwin’s writing by putting emphasis on race which causes the film to steer the viewers’ thoughts to racial issues in America, while also bringing the texts directly to a new generation by clarifying Baldwin’s words for them.



## Chapter 2: Celebrating and Framing: Use of Different Types of Footage

In the following chapter, I will discuss two different types of footage which are included in *I Am Not Your Negro* to each achieve different aims: modern footage which shows that Baldwin's ideas are still relevant today, and archival footage of Baldwin speaking in interviews and speeches which celebrates him as an important thinker and writer. First, I will argue that the inclusion of modern footage in *I Am Not Your Negro* makes the viewer think about the present state of racial relations in America. I will provide evidence for this claim by using two examples from the film. The first is when footage from Baldwin's speech at the Cambridge University Debate is intercut with contemporary footage. When Baldwin discusses growing up as an African-American boy in Harlem and mentions that many young children around him died on the streets, images of African-American children being killed on the streets in the U.S. from 2010 to 2014 are displayed. The first of many images of these children is twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, who was killed in 2014.



He appears on screen at the same moment Baldwin explains that “you [a black person growing up in the U.S.] watch as you grow older, and it’s not a figure of speech, the corpses of your brothers and your sisters pile up around you” (00:43:01). Baldwin continues by saying that “they were too young to have done anything” (00:43:07) whilst numerous images of other

African-American children who recently died in the same circumstances are depicted on screen. The display of these children alongside these words cause the viewer to specifically think about whether the racial relations from Baldwin's time are any different from those of today's America. Peck transposes Baldwin's writing not only by medium, but also by time by including these recent images. The fact that it was relatively common for an African-American boy in Baldwin's time to see African-American peers and friends being killed on the streets; and the fact that this still happens in present-day America on a regular basis is being emphasized by Peck. This analysis of the inclusion of the recent images of African-American children who have been killed on the streets of the U.S. demonstrates how Baldwin's words resonate with the modern footage and a relation is implied between the two, which allow the viewer to think about racial relations in current society.

The second example of how *I Am Not Your Negro* makes the viewer think about the present state of racial relations in America is the modern television footage shown when Baldwin discusses television in his own time. When Mr. Jackson reads Baldwin's comments on television in his time, footage from recent television shows is displayed. The narrator explains that

[t]o watch the TV screen for any length of time is to learn some really frightening things about the American sense of reality. We are cruelly trapped between what we would like to be and what we actually are. And we cannot possibly become what we would like to be until we are willing to ask ourselves just why the lives we lead on this continent are mainly so empty, so tame, and so ugly. These images are designed not to trouble, but to reassure. They also weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are (01:10:01).

Baldwin believed that the American people needed television for them to escape to a fantasy world without them having to deal with reality. At this moment, several different segments

from television shows that have aired in the past decade accompany these words. The shows range from talking items on Trisha Goddard's show and people fighting each other on The Jerry Springer Show, to fragments of people winning big prizes on quiz shows whilst wearing crazy costumes.



(01:10:22)



(01:10:25)

Similar to the images of the African-American children, this modern footage that accompanies Baldwin's words implies a lack of change over time. While the images of the children imply a lack of change of race relations in America, this modern footage implies a lack of change of people's attitude towards reality and their reliance on television to escape their own problems. This implication is caused by Peck transposing Baldwin's words in time.

Peck shows how Baldwin's words are still relevant today, as the footage complements Baldwin's statements seamlessly. Baldwin's idea that "[t]hese images [...] weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are" is transposed in time by means of the footage of drama on television. By displaying this footage at this particular moment, Peck suggests that Americans watch talk shows where other people's drama is discussed, and watch other people fighting, to not have to think about their own problems and the issues in their own reality. This analysis of Peck's decision to accompany Baldwin's passage about television with footage from modern television demonstrates how *I Am Not Your Negro* transposes Baldwin's writing in time and argues that very little has changed over time on these issues.

Next, a second kind of footage is included in the documentary: archival footage of Baldwin. Peck's choice to not only adapt Baldwin's written words, but to include archival footage of his speeches and interviews is a key aspect of the documentary which shows that it is a celebration of Baldwin as an important thinker and writer. The very first footage that appears in the documentary, even before the narrator begins speaking, is an interview with Baldwin on The Dick Cavett Show in 1968.



(00:17:12)

Throughout the rest of the film, additional archival footage from his speeches or interviews is

included, such as his speech during the Cambridge University Debate in 1965 where Baldwin talks about the emotional journey an African-American child experiences growing up in America (00:16:45); his interview *The Negro and the American Promise* with Dr. Kenneth Clark, where Baldwin points out Malcom X's strengths and discusses the future of their country (00:31:12); and Baldwin on the Florida Forum in 1963 where he discusses segregation (00:33:43). As a writer, especially so in his memoir *Remember This House*, Baldwin adopts a version of himself in his writings. His personae in the interviews and speeches therefore differ, perhaps only slightly, from him in his written words. Therefore, the narration of Baldwin as a protagonist and focalizer through his written words is alternated with a second character: real-life Baldwin during public appearances. For the sake of the documentary's reception, the inclusion of this archival footage is not necessarily beneficial since two different personae of Baldwin now coexist alongside each other, and this might be considered confusing. However, the language and complex ideas that Baldwin expresses so eloquently in his speeches and interviews does strengthen the overall image of Baldwin and aides Peck in making the audience see Baldwin as the great speaker and thinker that he considered him to be. Peck explains in his interview with Rahsan-Rahsan Lindsay from *Made in Hollywood TV* that Baldwin "for a long time [was] the only black face on national TV" and that "to have more than forty minutes talking to America [on The Dick Cavett Show], and saying the words he's saying" was rare. Displaying this footage in the film is Peck's way of showing the audience how important Baldwin was in his time and how many people he could reach with his words. Another important aspect of the inclusion of this archival footage is the intertextual characteristic it brings to the film. The interviews and speeches are additional sources that Peck has combined in an intertextual web of an abundance of sources. By including this real-life footage of Baldwin, the film simultaneously refers to the television shows that Baldwin appeared on; to the people that appeared on these shows with Baldwin,

such as Paul Weiss who responded to Baldwin on The Dick Cavett Show; but also to literary sources that Baldwin himself is referring to in his speaking, such as the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 and films starring Gary Cooper. This intertextual characteristic demonstrates the cultural range of the documentary and how important and well-known Baldwin was to these cultural figures and institutions. Overall, my analysis of the archival footage of Baldwin's interviews and speeches shows that by including these footages in the film, Peck celebrates Baldwin by highlighting the fact that he was an important social figure in his society who possessed the talent of presenting complex ideas in an eloquent manner using beautiful language.

## Conclusion

The fragments from *I Am Not Your Negro* that have been discussed demonstrate that *I Am Not Your Negro* makes the viewer contemplate the present state of racial relations in America while also celebrating Baldwin as an important thinker and writer. Furthermore, the arguments illustrate that a key strength of the documentary is that it gives viewers direct access to Baldwin's writing so that the viewer can form their own opinion of Baldwin's relevance to the present state of racial relations in the U.S. Peck's choice to transpose Baldwin's writing to the screen by means of a narrator and intertitles offers the viewers direct access to Baldwin's writing and allow them to form their own opinion of Baldwin's relevance to the present state of race relation in the U.S. At the same time, because Baldwin's writing is preserved in the film and Peck proves his respect and fidelity to the writing by using intertitles, Baldwin is celebrated as an important writer. The modern footage that accompanies Baldwin's words, such as the images of recent African-American children who were killed on the streets of America and the recent television footage, causes the viewer to think about the current racial issues of their society. The archival footage of Baldwin has the purpose of celebrating Baldwin as an important thinker and writer. By showing how eloquently he is able to speak in public and how intelligent his spoken words are as well, the documentary illustrates Baldwin's strengths as a person. In addition, showing how much air time Baldwin received as an African-American in his time emphasizes his importance in society.

Further research of *I Am Not Your Negro* would be to look into the effect music has on the documentary. The lyrics of certain songs that accompany images and footage influence the viewer's understanding of these images. For example, when the documentary is displaying images of African-Americans protesting and fighting police officers, singer Buddy Guy's "Damn Right I've Got the Blues" accompanies the images with the following words: "I can't win, cause I don't have a thing to lose" (00:02:35). These words suggest a certain passion on

the part of the African-Americans, but also a realization that they cannot win. Another area of further research could be the fact that Baldwin's words, in the written version of the documentary, are written in verse, as follows:

As concerns Malcolm and Martin,  
I watched two men, coming from  
unimaginably different backgrounds,  
whose positions, originally, were poles apart,  
driven closer and closer together (37).

Assuming Baldwin did not write his notes for *Remember This House* in verse, and knowing he did not write other works that Peck used in verse, why would Peck have the written version of the documentary written in verse? These additional studies could lead to an even better understanding of Peck's adaptation choices and his framing intentions.



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