

## Transhistorical and Transnational James Baldwin in “My Dungeon Shook”<sup>1</sup> or “The Instructional Manual for Black People”



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**ABSTRACT:** This review provides an analysis of the great social, cultural, political, intellectual and even anthropological contribution about race relations made by James Baldwin through the first essay of *The Fire Next Time*. Thanks to this valuable, thoughtful and meaningful contribution about race relations between the white people and the black people, James Baldwin can be characterized here as both a transhistorical and transnational writer, thinker and truth teller. Because his realistic good social, cultural, political, intellectual and even anthropological contribution about race relations in the United States goes beyond the developing issues at the time of writing (the historical context of the essay production, the period of the essay production and the borders of the United States) to become a real transhistorical contribution (meaning is out of historical context and historical period) and a real transnational contribution (meaning is out of the borders of the country mentioned). This retrospective on his essay and its re-evaluation shed light on the visionary quality of the writer and also explore the prophetic quality of his contribution. Due to its realistic message and its effectiveness and visionary qualities, the essay “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” may serve as a model-paradigm that can be utilized as an “Instructional Manual” by black people to deal with and to handle white people. And namely, it can serve as precisely “The Instructional Manual For Black People” to deal with and “to handle white people” in terms of useful instructions, guidelines and principles for the sake of the black race.

**KEYWORDS:** “Instructional Manual For Black People”, “transhistorical and transnational James Baldwin”, “to handle *them*”, White people, Black people, Race relations, “instructions, guidelines, and principles”, visionary writer, speak prophetically, racism, *Letter*

### INTRODUCTION

James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* is divided into two important essays about race relations in American history, and especially about black people and white people race relations in America. Subtitled “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*”, the first essay is an essay in which Baldwin uses the literary creation and rhetoric of a “*Letter*” (meaning something confidential / private) to address himself to his nephew (the coming generation) about some realities linked to their<sup>2</sup> existence and life in the United States. Dealing with the Negro problem or the fact of being a Negro in America, this essay is fundamentally a plea to his young nephew to transcend already simmering anger and adopt a broader perhaps even compassionate perspective toward life difficulties. That is why he shares with him his own perception, experience, and final conception (knowledge) about blacks and whites race relations in America. It is therefore such a kind of antidote to be alive in the white society, or in a society dominated and structured by white people as it is the case in America.

Indeed, this letter-essay focuses on African Americans concerns in America in general, and the realistic, thoughtful, prophetic and visionary qualities of its message render it (the content of this letter) a real transhistorical and transnational truth sayings. Of course, the content of this letter-essay becomes transhistorical and transnational when it transcends historical bounds, extending or going beyond national boundaries because it conveys some fundamental, existential and important messages, doctrines, principles about race relations between white people and black people which are still actual, topical, and real.

<sup>1</sup> The complete title of the essay is as following: “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” in *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin.

<sup>2</sup> Black people, represented here by James Baldwin and his nephew James.

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Thanks to an insightful exploration and interpretation, one observes that this important and meaningful essay may revolve or be summarized around nine (9) major instructions, guidelines and principles for the black people to know, follow, respect and perform “in order that the race might live and grow” and namely for his nephew to know, follow, respect and perform. And these different instructions, guidelines and principles addressed to his nephew and at a larger sphere to the black people may be considered as “The Instructional Manual For Black People”, a kind of metaphor that we use to say that the different instructions, guidelines and principles are in fact lessons, advice, warnings and consciousness awareness given by Baldwin as fundamental for the black people. So “The Instructional Manual For Black People” with its nine (9) realistic, thoughtful, foretelling and visionary instructions, guidelines and principles becomes fundamental in the sense that black people should or must know, follow, respect and perform them<sup>3</sup> “in order that the race might live and grow”.

Let us analyze those nine (9) instructions, guidelines and principles composing “The Instructional Manual For Black People” which represents a kind of antidote to be alive in the white society or in a society dominated and structured by white people supremacy, hegemony, and superiority. And to this end, the central problematic of this paper will be the following question: how the long history of black people predicaments at the hands of white people hegemony, superiority and supremacy has developed the necessity and existence of an “Instructional Manual For Black People” on the part of James Baldwin?

Then as far as the writer James Baldwin is concerned, the following question is of great importance also: how does the role of writer of James Baldwin reinforce the importance of such realistic, thoughtful, prophetic and visionary writing with its instructions, guidelines and principles in terms of ethnic literature, namely in terms of African American ethnic literature?

Being “something about how to handle *them*<sup>4</sup>”, this “Letter to *his* Nephew” representing “The Instructional Manual For Black People” or considered as “The Instructional Manual For Black People” arises some important questions. The first important question one may ask about “The Instructional Manual” is: what is the real need of “The Instructional Manual”? Or how does James Baldwin justify the need of “The Instructional Manual”? The second important question is the following: what are the different instructions, guidelines and principles composing “The Instructional Manual”? Of course due to the need of “The Instructional Manual”, it is important to know or identify the different instructions, guidelines and principles and their suitability and relevance. The third and last important question will be to know: how does “The Instructional Manual” through its instructions, guidelines and principles be still topical and actual and necessary for black people? Of course the topicality of these instructions, guidelines and principles is important in qualifying James Baldwin and the content (message) of his essay as transhistorical and transnational in terms of usefulness of those instructions, guidelines and principles for today’s black people all around the world.

The theoretical background that will be used in analyzing critically “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” and its quality as being “The Instructional Manual For Black People” will be theories such as Historicism and Sociocriticism. It is important to precise in terms of theoretical background that the title of the essay obliges us to refer to historicism through the meaningful and central word “*Emancipation*” and through the expression “*the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” because those two expressions and references are not simple one in the history of the United States. “The Emancipation” or better “The Emancipation Proclamation” being historically speaking “the freedom of all persons held as slaves”<sup>5</sup>; it should be known that the contextual explanation, analysis and interpretation of this *Emancipation* in relation to the “*Letter*” is very important for it shows the big contradiction<sup>6</sup> mentioned by Martin Luther King in this quotation:

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves [Audience:] (*Yeah*) who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. (*Hmm*) But one hundred years later (*All right*), the Negro still is not free. (*My Lord, Yeah*) One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. (*Hmm*) One hundred years later (*All right*), the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later

<sup>3</sup> The nine (9) realistic, thoughtful, foretelling and visionary instructions, guidelines and principles.

<sup>4</sup> *Them* represents the white people or the white race.

<sup>5</sup> EXCERPT : “[O]n the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.” On [https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/emancipation-proclamation-january-1-1863?gclid=CjwKCAjw0On8BRAGEiwAincsHOTxVg-rIm\\_WuvzofF8eGU7byWVDrCSf2rWXiayRdPHPmTvXkmp1hoC\\_NoQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/emancipation-proclamation-january-1-1863?gclid=CjwKCAjw0On8BRAGEiwAincsHOTxVg-rIm_WuvzofF8eGU7byWVDrCSf2rWXiayRdPHPmTvXkmp1hoC_NoQAvD_BwE). Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The contradiction of being free but still live under the weight of slavery and its aftermaths one hundred years later.

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(*My Lord*) [*applause*], the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. (*Yes, yes*) And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.<sup>7</sup>

The historical context permitted by the evocation of the *Emancipation* therefore permits the use of historicism which is a critical way of using historical contexts to interpret texts, because “*Historicism (or ‘historism’ in this translation of Currius’ Historismus) is a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds*”<sup>8</sup>. Historicism can be seen as an analytical instrument that brings together literary interpretation and historical explanation.

Sociocriticism is important here because it is related to the characteristics of blacks and whites relationships or race relations in the same society (how white people interact with black people) through history since long time till today. So one can notice through the continuity in blacks and whites relationships or race relations that sociocriticism and historicism work together to help us better comprehend the sense and meaning of the *Letter* addressed to his nephew about blacks and whites race relations.

Sociocriticism is also important through the instructions, guidelines and principles of this *Letter* which should or must be known, followed and performed by black people in the society and in their relationships with white people. It is as well important thanks to the topicality of the content (message, lessons, advice) of the letter-essay due to today’s blacks and whites relationships in the American society and in the world. The notion of actual or topicality resides in the title of the essay because of the expression “My Dungeon Shook” for it “shook” because the sender of the letter realized that it is the same reality since long time. It is a state of mind when you realize a stark reality or when you make up your mind about something you didn’t realize at first.

Based on the hermeneutics approach, meaning the critical interpretation and analysis of the essay “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*”; the larger project of this review will dwell on those three important questions above which are specifically to know the need for “The Instructional Manual”, to know the guidelines<sup>9</sup> composing “The Instructional Manual”, and to know the topicality of “The Instructional Manual For Black People”. Those three aspects will constitute the blueprint of our analysis.

### THE NEED FOR “THE INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL”

The fundamental need for “The Instructional Manual” is embedded in the role played by “The Negro Mother” in the poem of the same title by Langston Hughes, a role that puts together the need for “The Instructional Manual” and justifies that need or important need.

Indeed, in this poem, one sees clearly the role and duty for the older generation to instruct, inform and guide the younger generations on what life looks like—precisely and particularly in the African tradition and custom; and to this end, the beginning verses of the poem *The Negro Mother* explain and justify this role so clearly that we cannot re-explain the fundamental semantic meaning linked to this role again.

Thanks to the Oral Tradition in Africa where knowledge is shared from generation to generation, and also thanks to the tradition, custom and culture in which there is the compulsory duty for the older generations to transmit beliefs, ideas, cultural materials, value, information, memories and other knowledge to younger and new generations. We can globally retain that “The Instructional Manual” is of important need so that “the race might live and grow” and without this “Instructional Manual” which in fact follows the pattern of the African traditional education and sharing of experiences and beliefs from generation to generation, the race and namely the black race cannot “live and grow”.

V 1 Children, I come back today

V 2 To tell you a story of the long dark way

V 3 That I had to climb, that I had to know

V 4 In order that the race might live and grow.<sup>10</sup>

One may observe through those verses above that the fact to “live and grow”<sup>11</sup> is so fundamental and necessary for the black people that “The Instructional Manual” becomes a useful reference book of instructions, guidelines and principles for the black race to know, to learn, to follow and to practice in terms of contents (message) and guidelines and in terms of race relations between them and the white race.

<sup>7</sup> <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hum Suryo Sudiro, “The Depiction of Native American in the Novels of Forrest Carter”, *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, March 2020 edition Vol.7 No.1 ISSN 2518-3966, pp 13-29 URL:<http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/llc.v7no1a2>

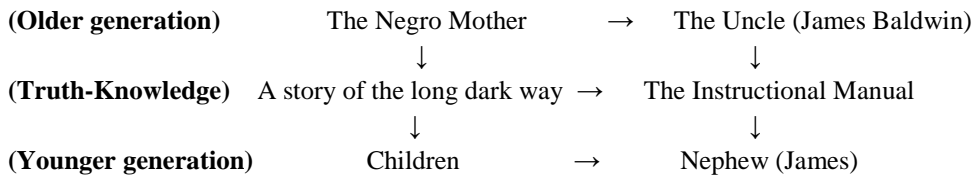
<sup>9</sup> By the only word “guidelines” in this sentence we mean the set: “the instructions, guidelines and principles.”

<sup>10</sup> Langston Hughes, “The Negro Mother”, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1979), p. 288-289.

<sup>11</sup> A metaphor to say to be alive and to develop oneself



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Going back to the text itself as far as the “*Letter*” is concerned, one may observe that the statement of Uncle James (James Baldwin): “I tell you this because I love you, and please don’t you ever forget it”<sup>18</sup>... “--but I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist”<sup>19</sup> in the choice of the words is very meaningful and of great importance because of the rhetoric he uses.

Indeed, another major and important aspect of the need for “The Instructional Manual” is that through the same statement of Uncle James, one observes that the function and role of “The Instructional Manual” is clearly stated through the expression “to tell you something about how to handle *them*” and namely through the meaningful expression “how to handle *them*”. Therefore it means that one should have the “Instructional Manual” to know, to learn, to follow, and to practice something about “how to handle *them*”. It means also in terms of connotation that the role and function of the “Instructional Manual” is to show to the nephew (and at a larger scale to show to the black people) “how to handle *them*”. It means also metaphorically speaking that the title of the “Instructional Manual” may clearly be “how to handle *them*”. And if the title of the “Instructional Manual” is metaphorically “how to handle *them*”, it means that the different instructions, guidelines and principles will help the nephew (and at a larger sphere will help the black people) to really “handle *them*”. In a word, the “Instructional Manual” is really a clue with the metaphorical title: “How To Handle *Them*”.

Pragmatically speaking, the fundamental utility and the fundamental need for “The Instructional Manual For Black People” is to preserve the black race, to permit the black race to “live and grow”, and to permit the black race “to handle *them*”<sup>20</sup>. And in this essay, the addressee who is the nephew James is indeed the microcosm of the Negro race while the real audience or addressee which is the macrocosm is the black race or the Negro race itself. It is like the figure of speech of metonymy in which James represents the black race and the black race is represented by James.

In conclusion, the Negro race or the black people need this “Instructional Manual” to live and grow, to handle the white race and to better manage or handle race relations between them and the white race that is why this “Instructional Manual” becomes therefore a necessity, a need. Because it is a useful and necessary reference book of instructions, guidelines, and principles entitled “How To Handle *Them*” for the black people if they think they must or they should “live and grow”.

The duty of preservation of the race through the meaningful expression “How To Handle *Them*” concerns the older generation and it becomes therefore a responsibility that the older generation should not avoid and cannot avoid because it is like something which strikes them, something “Which binds [them] like a heavy iron chain.”<sup>21</sup> That is why after several attempts to write this letter, James ended up by writing it: “Dear James: I have begun this letter five times and torn it up five times.”<sup>22</sup>

The other reason why James finally decided to write this letter is that he loves his nephew and thanks to his love for his nephew and his duty of preservation of the race he decided to write this “*Letter*” which is a real “Instructional Manual” so that his nephew can better deal with race relations between him and white people in the United States: “but I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*”<sup>23</sup>

So both Love and the consciousness of the race preservation and growth seem to be the alone heritage or the alone African heritage the older generation can leave to the new generation. Moreover, this notion of Love and this instinct of preservation are so sacred and secret that they need confidentiality about the truth (knowledge, information, message, instructions, guidelines, principles, lessons, advice, etc.) to be shared through the “story of the long dark way” ... “in order that the race might live and grow”; or again, about the truth (knowledge, information, message, instructions, guidelines, principles, lessons, advice, etc.) to be shared through the “*Letter*”/ “The Instructional Manual” about “how to handle *them*”.

And due to the fact that those “story” and instructions, guidelines, and principles should be preserved, the author or the storyteller (James Baldwin) uses the paradigm of a letter here to convey the symbolic sense of confidentiality because a letter is

<sup>18</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.4.

<sup>19</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.6.

<sup>20</sup> with *them* representing white people.

<sup>21</sup> Verses 1 and 2 of Claude McKay’s poem entitled “The negro’s tragedy” : “It is the Negro’s tragedy I feel / Which binds me like a heavy iron chain”

<sup>22</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.3.

<sup>23</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.6.

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confidential. That is why the confidentiality of this “Instructional Manual For Black People” in order to “live and grow” is imbedded in the title of the essay which is: “*Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*”.

James being by means of metonymy the microcosm of the black race and also the new or younger generation, the confidentiality James<sup>24</sup> shares with James<sup>25</sup> is the same confidentiality James shares with the whole black people because by the act of writing this “Instructional Manual” and by playing the role of the statesman of the whole black race as writer, he (James Baldwin) addresses himself to only the black race.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, one of the reasons why James Baldwin writes or “tells” to his nephew this “Instructional Manual” is simple: “I tell you this because I love you”<sup>27</sup> Of course “love” for his nephew and by means of metonymy, “love” for his race is one of the fundamental reasons why James tells the “story of the long dark way” to his nephew. And both his love and his story or his letter will help the race to live and grow, both his love and his story or his letter will help his nephew to live and grow. That is why it is very important to never forget “The Instructional Manual” if the nephew or the black race wants to live and grow: “I tell you this because I love you, and please don’t you ever forget it.”<sup>28</sup>

Being something of great importance, being “something about how to handle *them*”, a reference book for the nephew and for the black people which they should never forget, it is very useful to know, to learn and to follow the different instructions, guidelines and principles composing “The Instructional Manual For Black People” by responding to the question: what are the different guidelines<sup>29</sup> composing “The Instructional Manual”? Of course due to the need for “The Instructional Manual”, it is important to know or identify the different instructions, guidelines and principles, their suitability and their relevance.

### THE GUIDELINES<sup>30</sup> COMPOSING “THE INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL”

“The Instructional Manual” that we can also entitle metaphorically speaking “How To Handle *Them*” because its function or role is “to tell something about how to handle *them*”<sup>31</sup>; is in reality considered as a useful and necessary reference book in which we are supposed to have fundamental instructions, guidelines and principles which are useful for black people to “live and grow”.

In the analysis before this one, it has been question of the need for “The Instructional Manual” and for this concern, it has been said that there is a need and a real need for “The Instructional Manual” because the black race must “live and grow”, because the black race should “live and grow”. But it has also been said that there is a need and a real need for “The Instructional Manual” because black people should know “something about how to handle *them*”, because black people must know “something about how to handle *them*”, with “*them*” representing the white race or the white people.

As far as this part is concerned, two major and important logic questions linked to the need for “The Instructional Manual” and to the reasons of this need (“live and grow” and “how to handle *them*”) are why the black race should / must “live and grow” and why the black people should / must know “how to handle *them*”. Those two important questions are of great importance because they oblige us in the process to make an incursion into some historical contexts to better comprehend their suitability and relevance.

Indeed, it should be known that historically speaking white people supremacy, hegemony and racism toward black people had conditioned and constructed any kind of relationships between the two races or the two groups of people. There was an atmosphere of white supremacy versus black inferiority and white people “have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men.”<sup>32</sup>

The White writer has invented and perpetuated a stereotype of the African which depicted him as “physically unattractive, intellectually incompetent and spiritually degraded. Africans, according to the Whites are barbarians, born slaves, great singers, loyal servants, hard workers and true Christians. Only very low and inferior roles are assigned to the Blacks. The African is considered to be a conglomeration of mere arms and limbs, bones and eyes and as meaningless as his forests, rivers and silence.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James Baldwin

<sup>25</sup> James, the nephew

<sup>26</sup> Because (V5 Only a thorn-crowned Negro, and no white / V6 Can penetrate into the Negro's ken, / V7 Or feel the thickness of the shroud of night / V8 Which hides and buries him from the other men. /V9 So what I write is urged out of my blood.) in «The Negro's Tragedy» by Claude McKay.

<sup>27</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.4.

<sup>28</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.4

<sup>29</sup> By the only word “guidelines” in this question we mean the set: “the instructions, guidelines and principles.”

<sup>30</sup> By the only word “guidelines” in this title we mean the set: “the instructions, guidelines and principles.”

<sup>31</sup> “I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*”

<sup>32</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> [https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/64079/7/07\\_chapter%201.pdf](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/64079/7/07_chapter%201.pdf) / CHAPTER ONE / ASSERTIVE BLACK POETS/ p. 7. VISITED ON 4 July 2020. Visited on January 4, 2021.

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Such ideas of “a worthless human being”<sup>34</sup> and of “an inferior black man” surrounding this quotation were unfortunately the main atmosphere (environment) which characterizes the relationships and all the relationships between black people and white people or the race relations between them. So in clear terms, the context was a context of denial and nihilism of Africans and African Americans’ status as human beings. And in our context, as far as this “*Letter*” is concerned with regard to its title, we can admit that it had been the same situation, context, and environment for almost one hundred years meaning at the time of writing this letter in December 1, 1962 despite the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1, 1863. That is why the full title of this essay “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” is so meaningful through the expression “*on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” and also through the expression “the Emancipation Proclamation” because due to their culture of hegemony, supremacy, and racism, white people have always got bad relationships with other groups of people and namely with black people who they consider as inferior to them.

President Abraham Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation** on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The **proclamation** declared “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “are, and henceforward shall be free.” ... As a milestone along the road to slavery's final destruction, the Emancipation Proclamation has assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom.<sup>35</sup>

Since the beginning with the practice of slavery, black people have always got dramatic and traumatic experiences in their relationships with white people. Being used to and being indoctrinated into this culture of racism, hegemony and supremacy, white people will live the contradiction of the Emancipation Proclamation<sup>36</sup> and this till “*the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*”. It is in this respect that the full title of the letter is so meaningful but also the context of writing and the time of writing this letter are also important and meaningful. James Baldwin wrote this letter “on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” as a landmark to say that this is now one hundred (100) years that black people live the same situation, this is now one century (100 years) that black people live the aftermaths of slavery, this is now five scores years (100 years) that black people are not really free. Because simply black people are free in document and words which are symbolized by “the Emancipation Proclamation” document itself but not in reality, not in the real life for they still live and experience other forms of slavery and the aftermaths of slavery itself.

That is why this “*Letter*”, the publication of this “*Letter*”, the truth of this “*Letter*”, the content of this “*Letter*”, the sense of this “*Letter*”, the sense of the title of this “*Letter*”, and the testimony in this “*Letter*”; all these are of great interest as symbols and are corroborated by what happened in August 1963 at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (August 28, 1963) with the memorable Address delivered by Martin Luther King entitled “I HAVE A DREAM” in Washington, D.C.. It means simply that this “*Letter*” in its content and message is symbolically a truth and a real testimony.

Indeed, in this iconic speech at the Lincoln Memorial for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Martin Luther King urged America to “make real the promises of democracy.”

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. [applause] Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves [Audience:] (Yeah) who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. (Hmm) **But one hundred years later (All right), the Negro still is not free. (My Lord, Yeah) One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. (Hmm) One hundred years later (All right), the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later (My Lord) [applause], the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. (Yes, yes) And so we’ve come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the**

<sup>34</sup> “you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity.” James Baldwin, *The fire next time*, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation#:~:text=President%20Abraham%20Lincoln%20issued%20the,and%20henceforward%20shall%20be%20free.%22>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> As a milestone along the road to slavery's final destruction, the Emancipation Proclamation has assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom

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architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence (*Yeah*), they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that **all men, yes, black men as well as white men (*My Lord*), would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.** It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. (*My Lord*) Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds. [*enthusiastic applause*] (*My Lord, Lead on, Speech, speech*) But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. (*My Lord*) [*laughter*] (*No, no*) We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. (*Sure enough*) And so we've come to cash this check (*Yes*), a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom (*Yes*) and the security of justice. (*Yes Lord*) [*enthusiastic applause*]<sup>37</sup>

In view of this long experience of bad relationships with white people, in view of this long experience under the hegemony, supremacy and racism of white people, in view of these contradictions between the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the realities of Racism, Discrimination, Segregation, withering supremacy, white hegemony, injustice, abuse etc. all the time until in 1962-1963, James Baldwin will write a precious “Letter to *his* Nephew” and by the process of metonymy to all black people in order “to tell *them* something about how to handle *white people*”.

Indeed, since the first contact with black people, white scholars formulated collective behavior and related theories to explain white people hegemony, superiority and supremacy over black people all around the world. These theories argued that black people were inferior to white men and worthless human beings. Resource mobilization and political process theories reconceptualized those stereotypes and sought to ameliorate race relations between white people and black people but unfortunately, the so cast stereotypes along history are stubborn. That is why this so called “Instructional Manual For Black People” will be for utility and will play a key role in generating this paradigmatic shift in blacks’ relations with white people because of its rich empirical base that led scholars and readers to rethink social, political, economic, intellectual, even anthropological race relations between black people and white people.

So in conclusion, this black contribution by James Baldwin which is this “*Letter*” and which represents “The Instructional Manual For Black People” to “handle white people” is really of precious need and necessary to rethink social, political, economic, intellectual, even anthropological race relations between black people and white people.

With regard to this letter, it incorporates in itself (in its content) several instructions, guidelines and principles about “how to handle white people” but those ones are not “visible” or “perceptible” at first look. One should decode the encode message or content and decipher the meaning in order to discover the real instructions, guidelines and principles linked to the way to “handle white people”. Due to the fact that the different instructions, guidelines and principles are not directly conveyed but incorporated into the meaning and the content of this letter through some codes, one should practice the technique of hermeneutics<sup>38</sup>. One should therefore apply a critical interpretation to the content of this letter in order to detect, to know, to make out the different instructions, guidelines and principles composing “The Instructional Manual For Black People” which may also be metaphorically entitled “How To Handle *Them*”.

Considered as a useful and necessary reference book of instructions, guidelines and principles, we observe that around nine (9) fundamental guidelines, instructions and principles<sup>39</sup> compose “The Instructional Manual” that James Baldwin gives to his nephew<sup>40</sup> (or to the Negro people or furthermore to the black race) about race relations between white people and black people. And even though those instructions, guidelines and principles or to better say “truths” about race relations between white people and black people may be considered as not true by the “innocents” as James Baldwin himself made it clear when saying “I hear the chorus of the innocents<sup>41</sup> screaming, “No! This is not true! How bitter you are!”<sup>42</sup> We realize that it is still “The Instructional Manual

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<sup>37</sup><https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>38</sup>Hermeneutics (/ˌhɜːrməˈnjuːtɪks/) is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts.

<sup>39</sup> on the basis of the précis of the different advices and lessons given by James Baldwin to Big James (his nephew) in this short essay

<sup>40</sup> Under the format of a letter.

<sup>41</sup> To refer to white people in this sentence: “But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent.” P. 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.6.



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For Black People” to deal with race relations and white people because Baldwin insists on this fact by saying “I hear the chorus of the innocents<sup>43</sup> screaming, “No! This is not true! How bitter you are!”—but I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*”<sup>44</sup>.

In fact, it is still “The Instructional Manual” because it is “something about how to handle *them*” and in this context of experiences and life memories, it may be considered as the conclusion, the précis of the “story of a long dark way” about one hundred years of race relations and also the précis of his own life experience as well as the précis of the life experience of the whole black community. For more insight into this conviction, we can refer to this assertion when saying:

How could he know such things about poverty and pain if he had not experienced them? Can a poet be that accomplished a liar? Can a poet invent history so well that his audience is completely fooled? Only if they want to be fooled ... each great book was the Holy Bible, and each great author was a prophet.<sup>45</sup>

Let us therefore decipher, decode and make out the different instructions, guidelines and principles composing “The Instructional Manual for Black People” to “handle *white people*” from the content, message and meaning of the “Letter to his Nephew”:

Guideline 1- Principle 1- Instruction 1: You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*. (p.4)

Original context of production:

Well, he is dead, he never saw you, and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him. This is one of the reasons that he became so holy. I am sure that your father has told you something about all that. Neither you nor your father exhibit any tendency towards holiness: you really *are* of another era, part of what happened when the Negro left the land and came into what the late E. Franklin Frazier called “the cities of destruction.” You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*. I tell you this because I love you, and please don’t you ever forget it.<sup>46</sup>

Concept directed or derived: Internalization by black people of black inferiority and stereotypes about black people created by white people, as an example one can read the poem entitled “Bad Man” by Langston Hughes.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “Well, he is dead, ... and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him. This is one of the reasons that he became so holy.”

Guideline 2- Principle 2– Instruction 2: They have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. (p.5)

Original context of production:

I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. One can be, indeed one must strive to become, tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been best at since we have heard of man. (But remember: most of mankind is not all of mankind.) But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.<sup>47</sup>

Concept directed or derived: They are actors and agents of the destruction of black lives and black humanity on purpose and for interests without regret because they don’t consider it a wrong deed. As an example one can read «Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States (1919)» by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it... One can be, indeed one must strive to become, tough and philosophical concerning

<sup>43</sup> To refer to white people in this sentence: “But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent.” P. 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.6.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman Alexie, *Ten Little Indians*, Grove Press, New York, 2003, p 39.

<sup>46</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 5-6.

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destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been best at since we have heard of man. (But remember: most of mankind is not all of mankind.)”

Guideline 3- Principle 3- Instruction 3: Most of them (white people) do not yet really know that you exist. (p.6)

Original context of production:

Now, my dear namesake, these innocent and well-meaning people, your countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago. (I hear the chorus of the innocents screaming, “No! This is not true! How *bitter* you are!”—but I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist. I *know* the conditions under which you were born, for I was there. Your countrymen were *not* there, and haven’t made it yet. Your grandmother was also there, and no one has ever accused her of being bitter. I suggest that the innocents check with her. She isn’t hard to find. Your countrymen don’t know that *she* exists, either, though she has been working for them all their lives.)<sup>48</sup>

Concept directed or derived: White people consider black people as humanless persons, as worthless human being, as inferior persons, as third degree persons, and as an example one can refer to “Invisible Man” and to the novel entitled *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and namely to the notion on black people invisibility in this novel through the prologue.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “Your grandmother was also there. Your countrymen don’t know that *she* exists, either, though she has been working for them all their lives.”

Guideline 4- Principle 4- Instruction 4: if we (Black people) had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children. (p.7)

Original context of production:

Well, you were born, here you came, something like fifteen years ago; and though your father and mother and grandmother, looking about the streets through which they were carrying you, staring at the walls into which they brought you, had every reason to be heavyhearted, yet they were not. For here you were, Big James, named for me—you were a big baby, I was not—you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children.<sup>49</sup>

Concept directed or derived: Promotion of difficult but necessary Love among and between black people for the only weapon, the only antidote that black people can have against white people’s racism, hatred and destruction is love. Black people must and should love themselves to be united and to protect their lives; there is a necessity of love between black people and among black people to be a whole against the white man project of destruction of black lives and black humanity. Only love because love combats destruction and black destruction by white people. With Love black people can protect themselves each other. Through love black people can achieve great goals. If black people don’t love themselves and each other white people will always attain their goals.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you.”

Guideline 5- Principle 5- Instruction 5: -You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. (p.7)

Original context of production:

This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, for the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.6.

<sup>49</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.7.

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Concept directed or derived: Racism and hatred and supremacy are the foundation of white people existence and are the characteristics of white people humanity and self for without racism and hatred they are nothing and they become holy persons. As an example one can refer to the recent interview of Toni Morrison’s about white people racism in “Toni Morrison on White Supremacy”<sup>51</sup> when saying:

Don't you understand that the people who do this thing, who practice racism are bereft. There is something distorted about the psyche. It's a huge waste and it's a corruption and a distortion. It's like it's a profound neurosis that nobody examines for what it is, it feels crazy. It's crazy and it leaves it has as just as much deleterious effects on white people and possibly equal as it does to black people. I always knew that I had the moral high ground. All my life, I always thought those people who said I couldn't come in the drugstore and I had to sit in this funny places, I couldn't go in the park. And I thought that they knew, that I knew, that they were inferior to me morally. I always thought that. And my parents always thought that. - You said your father was racist because he always felt he was superior. That's right. He always felt superior. And that was a form, you know of a defensive racism. But if the racist white person. I mean the person who is examining his consciousness and so on doesn't understand that he or she is also a race. It's constructed, it's also made and it also has some kind of serviceability. But when you take it away. I take your race away. And there you are, all strong out. And all you got is your little self. And what is that? What are you without racism? Are you so good? Are you still strong? Still smart? You still like yourself? I mean these are the questions. Part of it is. Yes the victim. How terrible it's been for black people? - But you don't like that? I'm not a victim. I refuse to be one. -And the victim is the other person who is morally inferior and who... That is a serious question. ... Has to hold on to racism to somehow for his or her own self esteem and definition ? If you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees then you have a serious problem. And my feeling is white people have a very very serious problem. And they should start thinking about what they can do about it. Take me out of it.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason*. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity.”

Guideline 6- Principle 6- Instruction 6: You have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. (pp. 7-8)

Original context of production:

Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and *how* you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this, and I hear them saying, “You exaggerate.” They do not know Harlem, and I do. So do you. Take no one’s word for anything, including mine—but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.<sup>52</sup>

Concept directed or derived: white people plan to have the total control on/of black lives and future, on black people actions and thoughts, on black people destiny and development, on black people welfare and wellbeing. They are the one to tell and who want to tell where black people should go, what black people should do, how black people should do, where black people should live, and with whom black people should be in contact etc. As an example one can read the poem entitled “Tiger” by Claude McKay or the poem entitled “Barrier” by the same poet.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “They do not know Harlem, and I do. So do you. Take no one’s word for anything, including mine—but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.”

Guideline 7 - Principle 7 - Instruction 7: The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. (p.8)

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<sup>51</sup>Soapbox a publié une vidéo dans la playlist BACK THEN 7 Aout 2019.  
<https://web.facebook.com/SoapboxStand/videos/421821298432636>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 7-8.

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### Original context of production:

Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words acceptance and integration. There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*.<sup>53</sup>

Concept directed or derived: Eurocentric view and Western Civilization view that favors it over non-western civilizations with ideological control, cultural control, scientific control, historical control, religious control, economic control, power control etc. focusing on European culture or history which implies the exclusion of a wider view of the world. This Eurocentric view is implicitly regarding European culture as pre-eminent with an apologetic stance towards European colonialism and other forms of imperialism with the exclusion of contradiction. As an example one can read how they (Europeans) have deliberately constructed the life and history of indigenous or native Americans to make us believe what they said in the past about native Americans in the book entitled AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE S ‘HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. Identified as "A must-read for anyone interested in the truth behind this nation's founding" by VERONICA E. VELARDE TILLER, this book about the life of indigenous or Native Americans at the hands of European in America with their Eurocentric view supplemented by ideological control, cultural control, scientific control, historical control, etc.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*.”

Guideline 8- Principle 8- Instruction 8: *You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope.* (p.8)

### Original context of production:

The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature.<sup>54</sup>

Concept directed or derived: black people should/must adopt humanism to avoid chaos, black people should be tolerant to avoid chaos, black people should pardon, black people should be humanists, it is an obligation, it is a must. In face of white people Racism, Black people should perform love and retaliate with love and wisdom. Black people should possess the courage to respond to white people racism with love. Black people must perform the superhuman power toward white people for they are desperate people. As an example one can or should read the poem entitled “The white House” by Claude McKay.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity.”

Guideline 9- Principle 9- Instruction 9: If the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become. (p.10)

### Original context of production:

<sup>53</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.8.

<sup>54</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 8-9.

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Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. You, don’t be afraid. I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man’s definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality. But these men are your brothers —your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become. It will be hard, James, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of 4 the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer. One of them said, *The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off.*<sup>55</sup>

Concept directed or derived: like Rosa Parks action, like the March on Washington on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963, black people need to distrust white authority and white system, like the different movements for the Civil Rights, black people need to act and to express themselves. But aside the promotion of the distrust of white system, aside from the promotion of rejecting fear, black should look for equality and justice by all the means valuable and worthy. There is also the idea of black people intelligence through important black deeds and cornerstones which dedicated the Black History Month each February. Black people contribution to the development of America, black people acts, actions, inventions, creativity but also struggles for the becoming of the American nation. From slavery time to the Civil Rights movement passing by Rosa Parks’ action and the March on Washington at Lincoln memorial, black people have achieved great thing and have contributed to the future of the nation, the American nation. Black people should address American society and problem.

Truth, prophetic or proverb characteristic and explanation in the letter (by the text itself): “Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. You, don’t be afraid. I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man’s definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality.”

With reference to the critical interpretation above, one may observe that from the beginning to the end of this letter, there are nine (9) fundamental guidelines, principles and instructions. And for each fundamental guideline, principle and instruction, there is a concept which is directed to the meaning or there is a concept which derived from the meaning. And also for each fundamental guideline, principle and instruction, we have a portion of the text itself which explains or characterizes the part of truth, or the part of prophecy or the part of proverb associated with this fundamental guideline, principle and instruction. It is as if the given guideline, principle and instruction is justified by a part of the text or a portion of the text itself in order to show its veracity, its foretelling characteristic or its proverb characteristic.

Even though James Baldwin contextualizes (American society) and periodizes (his living time or until one hundred years) his guidelines, principles and instructions in the message of this “letter to *his* nephew” by saying: “And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them”<sup>56</sup> or by saying also and later “we can make America what America must become”. It is very important to precise that those guidelines, principle and instructions (or metaphorically speaking those “truths” or those “prophecies” or those “proverbs” or those “truth sayings”) composing “The Instructional Manual” are still topical and concern all the white people both inside and outside the United States. That is why they are still actual and need to be followed and practiced and also they are important to “never forget” as “cult member” for they transcend historical bounds and extend or go beyond national boundaries to be still topical as “The Instructional Manual For Black People” to be applied in the blacks and whites relationships or in race relations between the two races both by today’s African-Americans and by today’s African people.

<sup>55</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp. 9-10.

<sup>56</sup> James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p.5.

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Indeed, when we consider a pragmatic reading of the essay, or when we consider a biblical reading of the essay or when we consider a visionary reading of the essay; we observe that it applies to any black people and this essay in its core message is considered as a prophetic message addressed to the black people in the world in general. And with regard to this concern, the following question is of great importance: how does “The Instructional Manual For Black People” through its guidelines, principles and instructions be still topical for black people?

### THE INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL AND ITS TOPICALITY FOR BLACK PEOPLE

It is very important to tackle this important aspect of James Baldwin’s essay which is this part concerning the topicality of the “The Instructional Manual” because we need to reconsider the different guidelines, principles or instructions of this “The Instructional Manual” in today’s life while revisiting and reevaluating this *Letter* in today’s life because of these assertions giving evidence about or testifying the topicality of James Baldwin sayings 50 years later: “James Baldwin’s thoughts on his nephew’s future—in a country with a terrible history of racism— first appeared in *The Progressive* magazine in 1962. Over 50 years later his words are as powerful as ever.”<sup>57</sup> And also as observed in this similar assertion of the same *The Progressive* magazine “James Baldwin’s thoughts on his nephew’s future—in a country with a terrible history of racism— first appeared in *The Progressive* magazine in 1962. Over 50 years later his words are, sadly, more relevant than ever.”<sup>58</sup>

We can therefore say that the topicality of the content of the essay or the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” is of great importance for this present moment because James Baldwin speaks prophetically about race and racism but also about race relations in the sense that black people should/must know “how to handle *them*(white people)”<sup>59</sup>. And the essay “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” in a metaphorical way is his lessons, his advice, his “truth sayings” for our own time in managing race relations and in dealing with white people.

Indeed, in this essay, James Baldwin is a kind of “truth teller”, a kind of visionary writer who gives some “instructions” about race relations between white people and black people and on the national sphere today (meaning America), his words are more prescient than ever today as the country confronts mass protests over the latest killings of black men and women, most famously Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd.

**EG:** It’s an evasion. People tend to think of race as a kind of bounded subject that can only be evidenced in moments of explicit discrimination or the loud screams of obvious bigots. It often happens that people want to ignore the ways race continues to overdetermine our lives in this moment, and how it has driven our political process, particularly since 2008 and the election of Barack Obama. The kind of deep racial anxieties that define our country as white, working people who feel that they’ve lost a step and the country doesn’t reflect the country that they remember, that they’re a part of, and they feel like they’re being left behind.<sup>60</sup>

The value of this *Letter* in terms of message, in terms of instructions, in terms of guidelines, and in terms of principles for this present moment is one of the things that one may think is so important for the validity of reevaluating this essay (and its nine (9) fundamental instructions, guidelines and principles constituting “The Instructional Manual”) because James Baldwin is characterized by Eddie Glaude<sup>61</sup> as:

**EG:** Jimmy’s anger, his rage, his love, his generosity, his vulnerability, his insistence of his own individuality. He was fond of saying he had no antecedents. He, for me, represents this extraordinary black democratic perfectionism, this attempt to create a self in a world that denies that act. He does so not with the aspiration toward wholeness,

<sup>57</sup> The Progressive, a voice for peace, social justice, and the common good. A Letter to My Nephew by James Baldwin December 1, 1962. <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> The Progressive, a voice for peace, social justice, and the common good. A Letter to My Nephew by James Baldwin December 1, 1962. <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> “something about how to handle *them*”

<sup>60</sup> “Lessons from James Baldwin: An Interview with Eddie Glaude” By Marie Griffith | June 2, 2020 in *Religion & Politics*. <https://religionandpolitics.org/2020/06/02/lessons-from-james-baldwin-an-interview-with-eddie-glaude/>. P2. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Eddie Glaude is a scholar and a pundit. His latest book, due out in August, covers the life and work of the writer James Baldwin, delving into their lessons for our own time. Last fall, Glaude visited the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics to discuss his new book and give a lecture entitled, “James Baldwin and the Moral Crisis of American Democracy.” Eddie S. Glaude Jr. is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor at Princeton University, where he is the chair of the African American Studies department. He is the author of *Democracy in Black* and most recently of *Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*.

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but with the understanding that he’s broken. ... But then there’s the truth-teller, his searing account of America. I think there is no other critic who understands the country, who understands us, who can come close to Baldwin. I’ve been thinking about him since graduate school. I’ve been running away from him for a while, but he’s always in my work. He’s always been present. I just made him explicit finally. The later Baldwin work, the nonfiction in particular, for me, offers a blueprint for our own moment.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed nationally speaking, one aspect of the topicality of the “The Instructional Manual” may also reside in the fact that in the same interview of June 2, 2020, entitled “Lessons from James Baldwin: An Interview with Eddie Glaude” By Marie Griffith; Eddie Glaude, a scholar who covers the life and work of the writer James Baldwin, declares answering to a question:

**R&P: In the description of your talk, in describing Baldwin’s era, you wrote, “Choices had been made, and were continually made, to believe that ours was a country where white people were valued more than others.” What similar choices do you see facing our country today?**

**EG:** I think it’s the same choice. It’s insidious. We have this view that racial justice is a zero-sum game. That in order for us to be a racially just society, we have to take something from deserving white people and give it to undeserving people of color. And it’s just wrong. It’s not a zero-sum game. We simply have to expand the pot. We are the richest nation in the history of the world, and people hoard opportunity, they hoard so much. Part of what we’ve seen is that people think whiteness ought to accord one a certain kind of advantage, and when it doesn’t, there’s a kind of backlash. We have to build a world where whiteness doesn’t matter, where it has no effect on the outcomes of one’s life. Just as we would want to build a world where blackness doesn’t matter, it’s just a part of who we are. This is where I translate Jimmy’s insight. We want to build a New Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup>

Coming back to the text itself, the essay itself, one may observe that on the textual level, the idea of the topicality of the “The Instructional Manual” through its guidelines, principles and instructions is present and is of great importance. Indeed, the very first idea of the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” of James Baldwin is imbedded in the title of the essay itself when he says: “*Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*”. Of course, this part of the title of the essay is very meaningful about the idea of topicality of “The Instructional Manual” in the sense that between the time of the present “*Letter*” and the time of the Emancipation<sup>64</sup>, there is one century ago, meaning one hundred years have passed: “You know and I know that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too early. We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, James, and Godspeed.”<sup>65</sup>

And due to its content and usefulness and necessity for his nephew and the other blacks of the new generation “to handle *them*”, we realize that still at the time of this “*Letter*”, it is clear that the Negroes are not really emancipated and their situations and conditions have not changed. The new Negro generations represented symbolically his nephew are not still free from the bondage of their fathers. They still suffer the same situations, the same worthless human conditions. And they are still trapped in “the cities of destruction” because they are “born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago”<sup>66</sup> as it is described clearly in this poem entitled “Enslaved” which symbolically summarizes the Negro situation since one hundred years after the *Emancipation* or at the *One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*:

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<sup>62</sup> “Lessons from James Baldwin: An Interview with Eddie Glaude” By Marie Griffith | June 2, 2020 in *Religion & Politics*. <https://religionandpolitics.org/2020/06/02/lessons-from-james-baldwin-an-interview-with-eddie-glaude/>. P3. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> “Lessons from James Baldwin: An Interview with Eddie Glaude” By Marie Griffith | June 2, 2020 in *Religion & Politics*. <https://religionandpolitics.org/2020/06/02/lessons-from-james-baldwin-an-interview-with-eddie-glaude/>. P4. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>64</sup> President Abraham Lincoln issued the *Emancipation Proclamation* on January 1, 1863.

<sup>65</sup> The Progressive, a voice for peace, social justice, and the common good. A Letter to My Nephew by James Baldwin December 1, 1962. <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, New York, The Dial Press, 1963, p.6.

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Oh when I think of my long-suffering race, For weary centuries despised,  
oppressed, Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place  
In the great life line of the Christian West; And in the Black Land disinherited,  
Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,<sup>67</sup>

If James Baldwin thinks that this letter is really necessary for his nephew one hundred years after the *Emancipation*, it means that there is a sort of continuity. If James Baldwin thinks that this letter is really important for his nephew, someone who will “live” after James himself, it means that his message and lessons are of actuality. If James thinks that this *Letter* and its instructions, guidelines, and principles are necessary to his nephew at this “present time” so that he can “handle white people”, it means simply that James Baldwin is conscious that the situation has not changed since “his own lifetime” and it will still be the same after “his own death”, meaning during his nephew lifetime: “You know and I know that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too early. We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, James, and Godspeed.”<sup>68</sup>

James Baldwin's thoughts on his nephew's future—in a country with a terrible history of racism— first appeared in *The Progressive* magazine in 1962. Over 50 years later his words are as powerful as ever. *James Baldwin's thoughts on his nephew's future—in a country with a terrible history of racism— first appeared in The Progressive magazine in 1962. Over 50 years later his words are, sadly, more relevant than ever.*<sup>69</sup>

In a word, if James Baldwin conceives that the future will be the same likewise the past, this conception reinforces the idea and notion of the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” because the situations occasioning this “Instructional Manual” are still ongoing or present even one hundred years later and symbolized by the idea and quotation above: “my long-suffering race”.

The second idea about the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” of James Baldwin is imbedded in the fact that on the grammatical level, James Baldwin uses both the present perfect tense<sup>70</sup> and the present continuous tense<sup>71</sup> namely to recall and reinforce the idea and the fact that the destruction of the Negro people by white people still continues and still exists when saying: “they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.”

And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.

On the one hand, by using the present perfect tense, James Baldwin informs us that the destruction of the Negro people by white people started in the past and still continues in the present time but also he is talking about his life experience up to the present time of the publication of the *Letter*. On the other hand, by using the present continuous tense, James Baldwin remembers us that the destruction of the Negro people by white people is the activity at the moment of his speaking (the *Letter*<sup>72</sup>) but also he uses the present continuous tense to foretell that the destruction of the Negro people by white people will be part of future plans or arrangements.

Generally speaking, the topicality of the bad situation justifies the need and topicality of the message of his essay meaning by the same way justifies the need and topicality of “The Instructional Manual” and its guidelines, principles and instructions or by the same way justifies the need and topicality of the essay itself when he says: “*Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” because this part of the title of the essay is very meaningful.

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<sup>67</sup> Claude McKay, “Enslaved”, *Selected Poems of Claude McKay* (San Diego-New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publisher, 1953), p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> The Progressive, a voice for peace, social justice, and the common good. A Letter to My Nephew by James Baldwin December 1, 1962. <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> The Progressive, a voice for peace, social justice, and the common good. A Letter to My Nephew by James Baldwin December 1, 1962. <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. Visited on January 4, 2021.

<sup>70</sup> The present perfect is formed from the present tense of the verb *have* and the past participle of a verb. We use the present perfect for something that started in the past and continues in the present: *They've been married for nearly fifty years. She has lived in Liverpool all her life.* We use the present perfect when we are talking about our experience up to the present: *I've seen that film before. I've played the guitar ever since I was a teenager. He has written three books and he is working on another one.*

<sup>71</sup> The present continuous is made from the present tense of the verb *be* and the *-ing* form of a verb. We use the present continuous to talk about activities at the moment of speaking: *I'm just leaving work. I'll be home in an hour. Please be quiet. The children are sleeping.* We use the present continuous to talk about future plans or arrangements: *Mary is going to a new school next term.*

<sup>72</sup> When he is writing the letter (meaning at the moment he is writing the letter to his nephew)



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This consciousness of a situation which is the same since the past to his own lifetime to the future (meaning his nephew lifetime) justifies the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” in the sense that as well as these instructions will be useful to his nephew or are supposed to be useful to his nephew to “handle *them*” (white people)<sup>73</sup>; those same instructions will be or may be useful to us (today’s African Americans and today’s Africans) to “handle *them* (white people)<sup>74</sup>” “in order that the race might live and grow”. We need to live and we need to grow. This senseful ideal is really a deep metaphor encompassing many meanings at two levels (live and grow) but also hiding the essential idea that the white race will prevent us by any way to “live” and “grow”. Of course, if this visionary writer had thought the instructions useful to his nephew and topical for his future lifetime, we can also say that “The Instructional Manual” in its core value is still topical for black people nowadays because the Negro problem is also still topical in our daily lives.

When we refer to the second idea of the topicality of “The Instructional Manual” we just mentioned, we observe a movement through the use of the two important tenses which are the present perfect tense and the present continuous tense and their combination. Indeed the combination at the same time of the present perfect tense and the present continuous tense gives us a movement of three steps:

**One:** something happened and still happens (present perfect)

**Two:** something happens and will still happen (present continuous)

Then the combination of the present perfect tense and the present continuous tense (present perfect tense + the present continuous) at the same time gives:

**Three:** something happened and still happens and will continue to happen or will still happen

PAST → PRESENT → FUTURE

### THE NOTION OF CONTINUITY

So in terms of topicality of “The Instructional Manual”, when we study the different guidelines, principles and instructions under the light of this system of continuity or under the light of the trilogy: Past-Present-Future; we can admit when coming back to the nine (9) different guidelines<sup>75</sup> (or when coming back to some of the different guidelines) that the following table is very expressive and relevant:

<u>Guideline 1- Principle 1- Instruction 1:</u> You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a <i>nigger</i> . (p.4)	
<u>PAST</u>	It had worked in the past and it is an evidence, it is obvious
<u>PRESENT</u>	This principle still works today and nowadays
<u>FUTURE</u>	And necessary this principle will work tomorrow if you continue to believe that you really are what the white world calls a <i>nigger</i> .
<u>Guideline 2- Principle 2- Instruction 2:</u> They have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. (p.5)	
<u>PAST</u>	It had been a sad reality and the history of the encounter between the two races is full of events about such destruction
<u>PRESENT</u>	It is a sad reality that we experience even today through wars and massacres, through imperialism and capitalism
<u>FUTURE</u>	It will be a necessity due to the demands of imperialism, capitalism and domination and due to the trend toward power and powerful army
<u>Guideline 3- Principle 3- Instruction 3:</u> Most of them (white people) do not yet really know that you exist. (p.6)	
<u>PAST</u>	Since the beginning black existence had been a matter of debate through racial theories
<u>PRESENT</u>	Today black people experience and live their invisibility and claim that their lives matter all around the world. The dramatic and sad problem of immigration plays also in favor of black people inexistence and invisibility
<u>FUTURE</u>	And necessary tomorrow Most of them (white people) will not yet really know that you exist for they will promote and struggle for their survival instead of being human (humanity)
<u>Guideline 4- Principle 4- Instruction 4:</u> if we (Black people) had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children. (p.7)	
<u>PAST</u>	It is through love among black people and thanks to love for each other that this race still exists since the beginning till today otherwise white people would have eradicate it through massacres and evil deeds

<sup>73</sup> “the authors of devastation” p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> “the authors of devastation” p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> By the only word “guidelines” in this sentence we mean the set: “the instructions, guidelines and principles

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<u>PRESENT</u>	Today the lack of love among the black community, among the black countries, and the black presidents is the source of their domination and massacre by white people because without true unity they are powerless
<u>FUTURE</u>	If black people don't love themselves or each other today and tomorrow, none of them will survive in the future
<u>Guideline 5- Principle 5- Instruction 5</u> :-You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. (p.7)	
<u>PAST</u>	Racism had destroyed the humanity of black people
<u>PRESENT</u>	Racism still destroys the humanity of black people
<u>FUTURE</u>	Racism will always destroy the humanity of black people because he is considered a worthless human being since the beginning, today and even tomorrow
<u>Guideline 6- Principle 6- Instruction 6</u> : You have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. (pp.7-8)	
<u>PAST</u>	Barriers, fences and social classes (master-porter) and human classification (white/black) had already structured and constrained the world
<u>PRESENT</u>	Today Barriers, fences and social classes (master-porter) and human classification (white/black) still structure, constrain and characterize the world and its opportunities and the bounties of the earth
<u>FUTURE</u>	Tomorrow and with an enforcement, Barriers, fences and social classes (master-porter) and human classification (white/black) will of course still structure, constrain and characterize the world and its opportunities, even food and life and the bounties of the earth
<u>Guideline 7 - Principle 7 - Instruction 7</u> : The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. (p.8)	
<u>PAST</u>	Since the past different Machiavelli plans have worked out till today to convince them that you are inferior even when being inhuman
<u>PRESENT</u>	Today everything work to perpetuate this duality (superior white-inferior black) and all the actions even the Machiavelli ones are useful in this purpose
<u>FUTURE</u>	The future will tell more in inhumanity or inhuman actions and Machiavelli ones than in the past despite the fact the world is more religious today
<u>Guideline 8- Principle 8- Instruction 8</u> : You must accept <i>them</i> and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. (p.8)	
<u>PAST</u>	You had been oblige to accept them with love and pardon
<u>PRESENT</u>	Today you accept them and are accepting them with love and pardon
<u>FUTURE</u>	You will accept them and will accept them with love and pardon as usually
<u>Guideline 9- Principle 9- Instruction 9</u> : If the word <i>integration</i> means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become. (p.10)	
<u>PAST</u>	Since long time black people are trying to create a rainbow (multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor) world of peace through love and acceptance and equality and namely a multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor America
<u>PRESENT</u>	Even today black people are still trying to create a rainbow (multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor) world through love and acceptance and equality and namely a multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor America
<u>FUTURE</u>	Tomorrow black people will still dream (or have this dream) of a rainbow (multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor) world of peace through love and acceptance and equality and namely a multiethnic, multiracial, multicolor America <sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> While ignoring this fundamental assertion by James Baldwin: “If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!*”, pp 105-106. In *The Fire Next Time*.

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It is frightening when we refer or take the history of black people and we realize that many events and actions of today’s world and of today’s blacks and whites relationships match with the “truth” in some of the guidelines, instructions and principles through this system of continuity or under the light of the trilogy Past-Present-Future of the table above; we realize the topicality but also the necessity of “The Instructional Manual For Black People”.

### CONCLUSION

Thanks to this thorough analysis of the first essay of *The Fire Next Time*, we observe that James Baldwin through his own life experience (but also through the collective experience of the whole Negro community<sup>77</sup>) found the need and necessity to produce a written statement (“*Letter*”) which is a good paradigm of an ethnic literature and through which formally and with an instructional tone, he tells the black people and namely his nephew “something about how to handle *them* (white people).” The exploration and interpretation of the message, content, advice and lessons of this essay, show that this “something about how to handle *white people*” is indeed a set of instructions, principles and guidelines that James Baldwin thinks necessary and useful for his nephew because he loves him: “I tell you this because I love you, and please don’t you ever forget it”<sup>78</sup>.

In light of this, being a set of instructions, principles and guidelines intended to help his nephew and all the black people, therefore entitled metaphorically “The Instructional Manual For Black People” as the title of this paper states it clearly, the essay “My Dungeon Shook: *Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*” is indeed a great racial didactic achievement on the part of James Baldwin.

First of all, this written statement (“*Letter*”) or this “Instructional Manual For Black People” or again, this reference book that we can once again metaphorically entitle “how to handle *them*” was of great need and necessity for his nephew and all the black people in the sense that precisely and particularly in the African tradition and custom; the role and duty of the old black generation is to instruct, inform and guide the young black generations on what life looks like. And here “The Instructional Manual For Black People” is of great need and necessity “In order that the race might live and grow”, that is the main good and suitable reason why black people need “The Instructional Manual”. Put simply, we can globally retain that “The Instructional Manual” is of important need so that “the *black* race might live and grow” and without this “Instructional Manual” (which in fact follows the pattern of the African traditional education and sharing of experiences and beliefs from generation to generation), the black people cannot “live and grow”.

Secondly, in this essay and precisely about the “something about how to handle *them*”, we observe, decode, decipher and make out in précis nine (9) different fundamental instructions, guidelines and principles which compose “The Instructional Manual For Black People”. So we have nine (9) fundamental instructions, guidelines and principles “to handle *them* (white people)”. Those nine (9) fundamental guidelines, principles or instructions composing “The Instructional Manual For Black People” to “handle white people” are very relevant, senseful and are the summary of the perception, experience and final conception (knowledge) of James Baldwin about black people and white people race relations in America.

Being a kind of antidote to be alive in the white society, or in a society dominated, controlled and structured by white people, the topicality of his instructions, principles, guidelines or the topicality of his lessons and advice in the today’s blacks and whites relationships or in the today’s blacks and whites coexistence is really of special emphasis, importance and significance.

When analyzing today’s relationships between blacks and whites both in the USA and in the world, we observe that those nine (9) guidelines, principles and instructions are still topical, useful, necessary and actual for any black community or country to deal with white people and to know “how to handle *them*”. In fact, those lessons and advice (incorporated in the nine (9) guidelines, principles and instructions) of “The Instructional Manual” transcend the historical bounds, and go beyond the national boundaries of the USA.

Those instructions encapsulated in the expression “to tell you something about how to handle *them*” being the result of his coexistence and life experience with the white community in the United States are so important and topical that we realize they go beyond the national boundaries and transcend the historical bounds. And these aspects justify why the content of the essay of James Baldwin is both transhistorical and transnational.

That is why this principal essay may therefore identify James Baldwin as a transhistorical and transnational writer, thinker, and “truth-teller”. Because characterized as “The Instructional Manual for Black People”, it is a real reference book to deal with white people in general and it is striking and frightening when we realize today that those nine (9) guidelines, principles and instructions are still topical.

In light of this, Black people should revisit “The Instructional Manual” or revisit the whole essay in order to update or contextualize the different instructions, principles and guidelines given to them in a spirit of African American ethnic literature

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<sup>77</sup> The experience being the same as far as their coexistence with white people is decreed by the same codes

<sup>78</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, New York, The Dial Press, 1963, p.4.

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because those instructions have been given to them “in order that the race must live and grow”. They should also revisit “The Instructional Manual” because the today’s blacks and whites coexistence (both in USA and in other parts of the world) seems to be like the past blacks and whites coexistence with little changes. And the big notion of love<sup>79</sup> in its largest sense: being humanist, being sensitive, think reciprocity of value and dignity, “A world where black or white, Whatever race you be, share the bounties of the earth”<sup>80</sup>; is still problematic in today world generally speaking.

Of course the topicality links to the transhistoricality and transnationality of this *Letter’s* content and message through its different instructions, principles and guidelines is observable through the value of the main advice or main lesson in each guideline, principle, and instruction. It is therefore very important to reexamine, reanalyze and reconsider the different instructions, guideline, and principle given by James Baldwin to his nephew and by metonymy to all the black people. And in this concern, the death of George Floyd which shuttered the world both inside the USA and outside the USA with the Black Lives Matter Movement or Demonstration shows that the race problem James Baldwin is dealing with in this “Instructional Manual” is both transhistorical and transnational to the United States.

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<sup>79</sup> “We, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it” (p. 10).

<sup>80</sup> Langston Hughes, “I Dream A World”, <https://allpoetry.com/I-Dream-A-World>.

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