Sonny's Blues

Name:

Instructor:

Course Title:

Date:

**RACISM AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN SONNY'S BLUES**

**Introduction**

"Sonny's Blues" is a story by James Baldwin about a young Jazz musician by the name Sony from Harlem. In the story, Sony gets addicted to heroin and his later arrested for selling drugs. After serving a sentence and then getting out of jail, he moves in with his older brother the story's narrator. During this time, the brothers try to reconnect in a tense environment created by their anger towards each other. Of importance, is that the stories capitalize on drugs but moves about to talk about family, jazz music and racial identity as well as overcoming of life struggles. *Hence, the aim if this essay is to outline the significance of racial identity in the story as well as how the story is about racism and racial or cultural heritage.*

Notably, from the story, it becomes evident that racial identity plays a crucial role in defining how people respond to cases associated with racism. For example, while in a conversation with his elder brother (the narrator), Sonny outlines that "I was all by myself at the bottom of something, stinking and sweating and crying and shaking, and I smelled it . . . . My stink ... I thought I'd die if I couldn't get away from it and yet . . . I knew everything I was doing was just locking me in with it. (116-17). Sonny outlines that he was caught in his own stink. He says, "I didn't know. . . Something kept telling me that maybe it was good to smell your own stink, but I didn't think that that was what I'd been trying to do—and—who can stand it?" (117). in this conversation, Sonny outlines a self-discovery based on racial identity. Notably, Sonny discovers his own personal shadow that enables his to acknowledge his racial identity and grasp its good. For example, because of racial identity, Sonny can escape victimization associated with racism. In addition, racial identity makes it possible for Sonny to be on the receiving end in cases related to racial oppression by owning own personal shadow. By developing a personal shadow, Sonny is then able to join in with other as equal with the capacity to do equal evil such as murder. Racial identity opens new chapters to one life. For example, having faced his own stink, Sonny can bring the transformative magic of shadow integration to his piano when playing.

In the story, Baldwin employs the use of redemptive aspiration that outlines transformative psychological power of an artist dealing with racism in the American cultural shadow as well as his personal shadow. The story opens up with the narrator reading about his brother Sonny, the Jazz piano player bring in jail for selling drugs. The narrator then stares into the subway window where he sees his reflection "trapped in the darkness which roared outside" (86). Here, Baldwin employs the use of framing image of entrapment to display cultural shadow. Notably, the respond the narrator gives after reading the newspaper about is brother jailing outlines the narrator two main vulnerability that affects him later in the story. For example, the narrator first acknowledges that fact Sonny became real to him again, (86). In this, it becomes evident that Sonny brother personal shadow is characterized to not experiencing like others that are real. Second, the flaw is fed by another weakness that involves is the lack of ability to deal with his emotions. Apparently, after reading the newspaper, the thinking about his brother Sonny becomes real. He fears for Sonny so much that he ends up being seized by physical pain. Thus, Baldwin does a good job of contextualizing this character as a strategy to ensure that his difficulties are represented. For example, Baldwin outlines that his fear is associated with the price he has to pay for living up in Harlem. Of importance, however, is that he makes his claim clear by utilizing the narrator, the algebra high school teacher, compare his student to Sonny as well as himself, begging with the fully of his students being deprived a real hope. For example, he says that "These boys, now, were living as we'd been living then, they were growing up with a rush, and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities. They were filled with rage," (87). Seemingly, he recognizes that his range is associated by how students treat each other. After the end of his class, he sits in the classroom listening to the sounds of boys as they leave from school and associate it with thinking about his brother and himself. Notably, through these comparisons, Baldwin can outline a life of the suffering of racism that black males experienced when growing up in Harlem in the mid-twentieth century by showcasing Sonny's and narrator's story. The two characters as outlined by Baldwin are posted on how to deal with their feeling associated with American racism. They have a psychological as well as cultural work of carrying the pain as well as rage caused by racism. Hence, "Sonny's Blue" emphasis on the describing the patterns of response to racism employed by the two brothers in their lives.

The two brothers react differentially to racism. For example, the narrator responds to racism by dissociating. Notably, despite having promised his mother that he would reach out to Sonny and take care of him, he fails to do so. Of importance, is that the narrator had made this story after his mother told his a story about the random murder of his uncle (his father's brother). After dancing and guitar playing the uncle run the hill in sheer spirit to the affectionate amusement of the narrator's father. A car full of drunk white, for fun, aimed their car at him and killed him, (100). The narrator mother tells him, "Your father says he heard his brother scream when the car rolled over him, and he heard the wood of that guitar when it gives . . . And he heard them white men shouting, and the car kept on a-going and it ain't stopped till this day" (100). Seemingly, this story initiates the narrator into an experience of racial atrocity in his family. The story outlines to the narrator that his family too was a victim of racist atrocities associated with black suffering in America. The narrator's father being a witness in the case paid dearly though psychological distress leading to the emergence of his own personal shadow. The narrator's mother then says, "Your Daddy never did really get right again. Till the day he died he weren‟t sure but that every white man he saw was the man that killed his brother" (100-01). The incidence locked the narrator-father into racism, where he associated every white with murder intent.

**Conclusion**

In the "Sonny's Blues" racism is the dark undercurrent that flows through the entire story. However, racism is not mentioned directly in the story but is outlined by the suffering both the narrator and Sonny had to undergo through while growing up in Harlem. Hence, though the term racism is not used in the story, his pull can be felt. For example, Baldwin outlined the housing project that rises out of Harlem like "rocks in the middle of the boiling sea" (112). By employing these terms, Baldwin can highlight the segregated housing policies utilized in Harlem. Of importance, is that these policies outline the result of racism to a downturn community. In addition, the anxiety possessed by the narrator on behalf of his students can be associated with the fact that the students just like Sonny are living in a ruthless system that discriminates against them without consequences. The constant influence of racism to black people in Harlem is outlined by the story the narrator mother narrates to him about the death of his uncle. The story describes a murder committed by white men on a black person with any consequences. She then tells the narrator that she fears that Sonny may undergo the same fate hence; the narrator should take care of him. Of importance, is that this shows the extent to which racism is a threat to the family. However, Baldwin puts emphasis in outlining that America's cultural shadow of racism infects the victim as well as the persecutor. Racism engulfs the victim to hatred and rage as seen in the case of the narrator-father.

**Reference**

Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues." Going to Meet the Man. 1957. New York: Dell, a Laurel

Edition, 3rd printing, 1981.