

WIND

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### Sonny's Blues Essay

The story Sonny's Blues by the author James Baldwin takes place in Harlem, New York in the 1950's. During the 1950's African Americans were forced to live of prejudice, discrimination, poverty, and suppression. The author James Baldwin is an African American writer during the era of civil rights activism in the 1950s and 1960s, grew up in poverty, developing a troubled relationship with his strict, religious stepfather. As a child, he cast for a way to escape his circumstances. As he recalls, "I knew I was black, of course, but I also knew I was smart. Throughout the story James Baldwin explains how people from the era copes with suffering, pain and try to find a way to not suffer. The author Baldwin's uses the life of two African Americans brothers with similar personal struggle with society.

The short story of Sonny's Blues by the author James Baldwin is about two African Americans a jazz musician an Algebra teacher from Harlem who are deeply affected by poverty, discrimination and suppression. Drugs are a central part of the story, but it's also about family, music, and trying to overcome life's struggles. Sonny is an African American young jazz musician who becomes addicted to drugs and heroin because he feels trapped lack of opportunities in his community and in what he's *supposed* to do versus what he *wants* to do. He's trying to find his way in the world. The Narrator is an Algebra teacher who comes to assimilate into white society as much as possible but still feels the pain of institutional

racism and the limits placed upon his opportunity to succeed. The two brothers sort of reconnect after they both try to deal with their anger towards each other.

The narrator of the story Sonny's brother tries to insulate himself against the problem the African Americans would not succeed, he believes that by denying his true self and closing to what brings him pleasure and satisfaction he would succeed and fit in with white society, the author James uses the symbol of a trap to show how African American were really limited to opportunities, "Some escaped the trap, most didn't. Those who got out always left something of themselves behind, as some animals amputate a leg and leave it in the trap. It might be said, perhaps, that I had escaped, after all, I was a school teacher."(7) . The author Baldwin explains the narrator feelings towards denying the problem, "A great block of ice got settled in my belly and kept melting there slowly all day long, while I taught my classes algebra. It was a special kind of ice. It kept melting, sending trickles of ice water all up and down my veins, but it never got less. Sometimes it hardened and seemed to expand until I felt my guts were going to come spilling out or that I was going to choke or scream."(SB pg.1). The narrator assimilates into white society as much as possible but still feels the pain of institutional racism and the limits placed upon his opportunity.

The character Sonny uses his emotions and the feeling of suffering to understand the world around him. He comes to the understanding that people use art, music, alcohol, drugs or anything to get through their suffering because it gives them a transformative power and the all of humanity suffers at one point or another during the course of their lives. The author James uses the connection of suffering to unite humans and ways to cope with

individuals pain to brings them together. "...heroin feels like sometimes-when it's in your veins. It makes you feel sort of warm and cool at the same time. And distant."(20). Sonny uses drugs as a way to deal with the world around him because he was against the social views and felt that society was wrong in the way they looked at African Americans and that life was always going to be a struggle for them because they would never enjoy the success of whites. Sonny drug use was because he was trying to escape reality and finding a way in life to obtain happiness.

At the end of the story Sonny and the narrator come to understand each other as Sonny is trying to explain his addiction to heroin and his passion for music. Suffering is shared between the African Americans and society separate them and music brings them together. Sonny tells the narrator that everyone tries to find a way to not suffer even the narrator itself. James addresses the foreboding power of pain where African Americans cope with their suffering. In the article *Michelle Obama Cites View of Growing Segregation* By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG it points out the Americans school are not equal and the that segregation of schools between ethnicities has being slowly and steadily increasing like before, segregated schools are hurting schools of low-income and minority districts. Michelle Obama says ,*"Today about four in 10 black and Latino students attend intensely segregated schools, the federal Department of Education reported on its official blog on Friday, adding that only 14 percent of white students attend schools that could be considered multicultural."*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/17/us/mrs-obama-cites-view-of-growing-segregation.html>

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