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WHITE POLE DILEMMA IN JAMES BALDWIN'S ANOTHER COUNTRY

Abstract: In his essay collection entitled *The Cross Of Redemption*, James Baldwin pens, “There are Poles: in Warsaw (where they would like us to be friends) and in Chicago (where because they are white we are enemies). [...] It bears terrifying witness to what happened to everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket. The price was to become ‘white.’ No one was white before he/she came to America” (167). These words testify to the complex phenomenon of Polish redefinition of identity that specific racialized American environment incites. Polish immigrants undergo white racial identity development, the stages of which Helms terms as Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy, each encompassing individual attempt to define one’s place amidst predominantly black/white racial dynamics. The process evokes a broad range of emotions towards one’s self and the black other. Polish-American might feel confused and puzzled upon first encounter of strict racialism, anxious about being forced to adhere to a racial group, guilty of being a representative of white race (the epitome of oppressive power structure), superior over black people, or proud of being white but eager to confront racism. This constitutes an emotional and attitudinal dilemma that a character Richard Silenski in Baldwin’s novel *Another Country* faces. The objective of this paper is to estimate what stage of white racial identity development the character attains and in what way Baldwin envisions the American city as a specific cultural environment that compels immigrants to redefine their identities over against racialized categorization.

Keywords: cultural identity, racial identity, racial consciousness, Polish-American, American city

Introduction

Polish American identity formation is a complex cultural phenomenon, particularly with respect to the development of racial consciousness accompanying this process. Historically, most Polish immigrants did not regard assertion of Polish national identity as a primary concern upon arrival to the United States. “Their concern was limited to seeking fulfillment of a few basic educational, cultural, and religious aims conceived in purely instrumental terms to help them function in the new environment” (Lyra 68). However, with time, they began to feel compelled, or became subconsciously vulnerable, to redefine their identity. Many realized that in addition to their former identification with the Polish nation, the Slavic ethnic group, the Catholic Church, their place of birth in the Tartar Mountains or any other Polish geographical region such as Silesia, Cuyavia, and Masuria, they also had to reconsider racial identity. This is a phenomenon that testifies to the reality of identity as a changeable process determined by culture. In this

context, culture is referenced as “the semantic space, the field of signs and practices, in which human beings construct and represent themselves and others, and hence their societies and histories” (Camaroff & Camaroff 1992, 27). Cultural experience encompasses all collective experience within a particular context. Immigration, therefore, is a facet of cultural experience because it involves a shift from one context to another, in which individuals define approaches to new conventions, beliefs, and customs, as well as satisfying yearnings to belong to the existing groups.

Toni Morrison designates the cultural space that migration generates “Foreigner’s Home,” represented, among many other countries, by the United States as a location, where

Everybody was from some place else. Thrown out or exiles. So the idea of home for Americans is fraught with yearning. It’s a romantic place. It’s a kind of utopia, just out of reach. So it’s less a place than a mental state that you acquire when you are in a place where you are safe and nobody is after you, and people will help you (“Morrison Interview”).

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison elaborates on the same issue in the following way,

The flight from the Old World to the New is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility. Although, in fact, the escape was sometimes an escape from license – from a society perceived to be unacceptably permissive, ungodly, and undisciplined – for those fleeing for reasons other than religious ones, constraint and limitation impelled the journey. All the Old World offered these immigrants was poverty, prison, social ostracism, and not infrequently, death [...] In the New World there was the vision of a limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, dissatisfaction, and turmoil left behind. (34)

Morrison’s observations are also applicable to Polish Americans who fled post-World War II poverty, and totalitarian communist oppression.

The intricate ingredient of immigration process in American context is defining one’s position in a consciously racialized context. In an interview “The Pain of Being Black,” Toni Morrison states,

If there were no black people here in this country, it would have been Balkanized. The immigrants would have torn each other’s throats out, as they have done everywhere else. But in becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me – it’s nothing else but color [...] Every immigrant knew he would not come as the very bottom. He had to come above at least one group – and that was [black people] (Taylor-Guthrie 255)

Historically, particularly from the beginning to the end of the Great Migration, “the native-born African American population, including many [...] migrants from the South, coexisted with, and possibly competed against, large numbers of [...], foreign-born arrivals in the same urban settings” (Adelman and Tolnay 180). Polish immigrants also found themselves caught up in America’s racial dilemma, especially in the

multicultural context of American Northern cities, where people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds struggled for employment and social advancement. Within this competitive environment, the Polish immigrants sought to locate the more privileged group and aspire to attain the same status and recognition. For instance, James Baldwin made a telling remark regarding Polish identification with Chicago white supremacists, an American metropolis that had, and still has, the highest Polish immigrant population. In *The Cross of Redemption*, Baldwin contended that

There are Poles: in Warsaw (where they would like us to be friends) and in Chicago (where because they are white we are enemies). [...] It bears terrifying witness to what happened to everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket. The price was to become "white." No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country. (167)

Considering cultural and psychological perspectives, Polish immigrants continue to undergo developmental stages of white identity, the processes manifested to a certain degree by the attitudes and emotions that Richard Silenski, a character of Polish descent in Baldwin's novel *Another Country*, holds towards black people. The identity crises that the character experiences evidence the cultural dimension of Silenski's racial identity in that they turn out to be very changeable, fluid, and fragile psychological conditions, indicative of "the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution" (Hall 228).

Developmental stages of white identity as cultural phenomenon

Beverly Daniel Tatum elaborates on six stages of white identity development defined earlier by Helms (1990). These are Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. The first one entails knowledge of racial stereotypes, but unawareness of systemic, institutional racism. Moreover, a person undergoing this stage does not discern his/her belonging to a privileged group and the need to interact with people of other races. "The Contact stage often includes naive curiosity about or fear of people of color, based on stereotypes learned from friends, family, or the media" (400). Nevertheless, if a person brought up in such an environment finds himself/herself in a more racially diverse context and begins to observe more complex and direct forms of racism, he/she is likely to enter the Disintegration stage, which is accompanied by emotional discomfort that the person feels upon becoming aware of white privilege and the racist system that this privilege fosters. Coping mechanisms that are likely to enable the individual to overcome the sense of guilt and anger are denial, in effect of which the person may deny the existence of real racism; projection, by blaming racism on its victims; avoidance, by "avoiding contact with

people of color and the topic of racism” (401). Sometimes, just in contradistinction to the above, “response to the discomfort of Disintegration, [...] involves attempts to change significant others’ attitudes toward African Americans and other people of color” (401), an effort that, more often than not, fails in a context of deeply inculcated racial bias. The person that is unfortunate to live under social pressure constituted by systemic maintenance of racial prejudice and oppression and does not want to lose one’s privileged status may experience Reintegration that involves conformity to the belief system “more congruent with an acceptance of racism” (402). At this particular stage, projection is intensified to the point that the individual blames black people, or people of other races, not only for the existence of racism but also for his/her own emotional discomfort. In effect, peculiar resentment towards black people emerges. Certainly, whether the person remains at this stage or not depends on individual value system as well as on the extent to which and the manner in which the person has an opportunity to interact with the underprivileged, victimized group. If one is sensitive to human misfortune, resistant to injustice, and empathetic towards the suffering, and, additionally, has an opportunity to maturely and critically observe racialized environment, a shift from the Reintegration to Pseudo-Independent is viable. At this instance, the individual is vulnerable to conflicting emotions, because, on the one hand, he/she seeks to abandon white supremacist mindset and to affiliate with black people, and, on the other hand, exhibits patterns of behavior relative to white supremacist system. As a result, one “experiences a sense of alienation from other whites who have not yet begun to examine their own racism, yet may also experience rejection from Blacks or other people of color who are suspicious of his or her motives” (403). The uneasiness that the individual feels in relation to the generally understood whiteness and being associated with it compels one to reexamine and reevaluate racial misconceptions and stereotypes in search of positive connotations of whiteness. “Learning about whites who have been antiracist allies to people of color is a very important part of this process” (403). In other words, confirmation of the fact that not all white people are racist is comforting. This stage is labeled as Immersion/Emersion and might lead to the redefinition of whiteness and one’s sense of self as white, which manifests the stage defined as Autonomy. “The positive feelings associated with this redefinition energize the person’s efforts to confront racism and oppression in his or her daily life. Alliances with people of color can be more easily forged at this stage of development than previously because the person’s antiracist behaviors and attitudes will be more consistently expressed” (404).

“Though the process of racial identity development has been presented here in linear form, in fact it is probably more accurate to think of it in a spiral form” (Tatum 400). The stages of white identity development discussed manifest a particular scheme that leads to a positive white identity development. However, one must take into consideration

the fact that the entire process of racial identity development is a precisely individual issue and depends on both internal and external factors, i.e. individual predisposition and intentions as well as the cultural and socio-political context in which one confronts the issue of racism and racial thinking. What is more, a given individual may never experience a shift from the first stage to another, not to mention undergoing all the stages. Or just the opposite, once one attains the last stage, under particular circumstance may return to the previous stage. Since the context plays a significant role in white identity development, the process itself is fluid, and an individual is likely to be left with, as previously cited, "the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution" (Hall 228), the nature of white identity can be categorized as cultural.

American city as a space of racial hierarchical confusion

In *Another Country*, James Baldwin locates his characters in late 1950s Greenwich Village. By that time, a number of black people from the South had migrated to Northern cities during the Great Migration, and many European immigrants had settled down in Northern metropolitan areas in flight from post-World War II crises. Baldwin portrays this multicultural milieu as a competitive space, where formerly marginalized people seek to attain recognition and establish positions on the social ladder. In this process, the racial mindset of the characters distorts both self-perception and inter-personal relationships. In the novel, a group of apparently good friends constitutes a kind of social circle. There is Rufus, a brokenhearted, self-contemptuous black man, who projects his frustrations resulting from racism upon his white girlfriend, Leona. Both characters come to a tragic end. Psychologically devastated Leona has to be consigned to a Southern mental institution, and Rufus commits suicide due to severe depression. While the storylines covering the lives of the two characters end in midpoint in the novel, the continuing plot focuses upon their friends, mainly Vivaldo, the married couple Richard and Cass, as well as Ida, Rufus's sister. Both Vivaldo and his Polish immigrant friend, Richard, have sought to write for more than a decade publishable novels. When Richard succeeds and begins to socialize with literary and show business elites, the relationship between the two deteriorates. Apparently, Richard even attains twofold status enhancement, in contradistinction to Vivaldo, by marrying up and becoming a renowned writer. Later, however, Richard's marriage is in crisis, when Cass has a love affair with a former friend of theirs, Eric, who has returned to New York from France. Added to his marriage problem, Ida, who is a self-conscious and socially-aware black woman, particularly sensitive to racial discrimination, has liaisons with two white men, first, Vivaldo, and then Ellis, a major television producer, who intends to launch Richard's career. In the end, all the characters, to a lesser or greater degree,

undergo emotional devastation, confusion, and identity crises. The critic Kevin Gates restates the dynamics among the aforementioned characters:

In *Another Country*, Baldwin gives a sobering portrayal of an ostensibly integrated circle of friends in New York City. The novel is driven by its meditation on the psychological distance that separates the most intimate of friends, lovers, husbands, and wives. A crucial manifestation of that distance is the gulf between what African Americans know from their racialized experience and what white Americans refuse to know about African Americans and their plight. In the novel, desire is a double-edged wild card of sorts, carrying the promise of either self-acceptance and love or the betrayal of love through self-hatred and a perverse and dangerous will to power. (181)

Polish-American search for identity

To a large extent, as seen in the above, the identity crises of the main characters have racial dimension. Particularly intriguing case is that of Richard Silenski, who, initially, struggles to climb up the social ladder in terms of class and then imbibes racial, or rather racist, perspective, and exhibits the sense of racial superiority as a white man. Eventually, his obsessive and forceful pursuit towards self-development within the racialized realm turns out too overwhelming for him and for those around him. On the whole, his experience of racial stratification compels him to undertake behavioral and attitudinal patterns that represent particular stages of racial identity development.

Just upon his arrival in the United States, Richard probably was not race-conscious. Cass recalls him as a Polish immigrant, who, during the war, served in a quartermaster depot in North Africa, defending poor Arabs from the French occupation. They married after he returned. She was twenty-one, and he was twenty-five. Although he might have developed a sort of racial consciousness in Africa, it is not clearly stated whether he did. Instead, he was much more preoccupied with his low economic status, as Cass recalls, “he had been very conscious, in those days, of his poverty and her privilege” (213). Therefore, from the very beginning he sought to live up to his wife’s social class. Although marrying her was a way up in itself, he believed he had to do more to prove to be worthy of her commitment and misalliance. His success was already conspicuous in the fact that he took up the position of an English instructor, whom his student, and then a friend, Vivaldo, idolized. Moreover, apart from his professional achievements, he aspired to set a family life, based on traditional gender roles, by means of which he would prove to be a reliable family breadwinner. On the surface, he appears to have attained his objective. After all, he and his wife are regarded as a “model couple” (179) in many terms. When they met, they were both first lovers to each other, as Cass remembers, “[h]e was the first [...] the very first man I ever had, and I was the first for him, too – really the first, the first girl, anyway, he ever loved” (199). When

they were marrying, "[s]he had then been the most beautiful, the most golden girl on earth. And Richard had been the greatest, most beautiful man" (195). After twelve years of marriage, they still make enviable impression on others. On the jacket flap of the novel that he manages to publish, there is an image of an "open, good-natured face. The paragraph beneath the picture sum[s] up Richard's life, from his birth to the present: Mr. Silenski is married and is the father of two sons, Paul (11) and Michael (8). He makes his home in New York City" (110). Vivaldo, for instance, perceives Richard and Cass as a mature, successful couple, who thrive "in the blazing haven of their love" (221). Therefore, at first glance, Richard has attained two major objectives, mainly a respectable position and stable family life, while withdrawing from the development of racial consciousness and involvement in racial tensions. What he possesses and to what extent he efficiently fulfills his role as a family man determine who he is. In other words, to a certain degree, he formulates his identity more in patriarchal terms than according to racial categories.

Nonetheless, Richard's pursuit of success and elevation of his social status turn out to have a racial dimension, because at a number of instances he utilizes the presence of black people as a referent against which he ascertains his racial superiority. Therefore, the exploration of his particular approach towards black people helps to estimate the stage of racial identity development that he reaches.

Richard does not live in isolation from the black community. Not only does he encounter black people on the streets of New York, but he also welcomes them at his home. At least this is what one of the conversations between the black man Rufus and Richard's wife implies. When Rufus greets Richard and says that he wants to visit Richard and Cass, she responds in an openly inviting tone, indicating that they missed him for some time. The impression is that the white couple and the black man are close friends.

The actual meetings of the apparent friends prove otherwise. When Rufus pays them a visit, "he and Richard [grin] at each other. Then Richard look[s] at Rufus, briefly and sharply, and look[s] away. Perhaps Richard had never liked Rufus as much as the others had and now, perhaps, he was blaming him for Leona" (50). Bearing in mind the fact that Rufus is black and Leona is white, Richard, who knows how devastating the relationship between the two was, exhibits solidarity with the white woman, while avoiding closer affiliation with the black man. That is why, he glances at Rufus quickly and sternly. He also avoids in-depth conversations with Rufus. In a way, he tries to communicate with him in the middle of conversation with other people, but the questions he asks are sudden, out of contexts, and surprising. When everyone focuses on Richard's coming success due to the publication of his novel, unexpectedly, Richard turns to Rufus, "What're you doing with yourself these days?" (55), and then he ignores

Rufus's admission of his struggle to regain psychological and emotional balance. It is Cass who takes over the conversation, nonchalantly stating that everyone undergoes the same inner struggle. Immediately afterwards, they all return to glorification of Richard's approaching fame. Then, at another meeting in the restaurant, this time Cass, out of the sudden, seeks to lift Rufus up by convincing him that he should not blame only himself for what happened to Leona and that he should forgive himself. When Rufus seems to appreciate her empathy, and the mutual understanding between him and Cass resurfaces, Richard instantly enters in and urges Cass to stop celebrating his success and leave the party. No wonder then that Rufus experiences discomfort in the white couple's company. "The air in the back room [is] close, he [is] aware of his odor, he wish[es] he had taken a shower at Vivaldo's house." (55) Further, he even feels "black, filthy, foolish" (57). The episodes expose how effectively Richard draws the line of demarcation between himself as an educated, relatively well-off, self-fulfilled man and the impoverished, confused, and actually lost black man. Moreover, he conspicuously avoids deeper, more intimate conversations with and about Rufus, which testifies to the fact that he avoids closer relationship with the black man.

Richard's attitude towards the news of Rufus's disappearance and then death is also peculiar in that he exhibits striking nonchalance. When the black man's anxious sister, Ida, informs Richard and Cass about Rufus's absence, Richard does not share the others' concern. Prejudiced towards Rufus and driven by the anger in memory of the abuse that Rufus had inflicted upon the white woman, Richard refrains from empathy towards Ida and rebukes, "Bastard's probably found some other defenseless little girl to beat up [...] Well, she hasn't got a very nice brother; she'll probably run into him someplace one of these days" (67). Further, without a flicker of sympathy, he expresses his certainty regarding Rufus' wellbeing. His anger and hatred towards the black man overrides other people's preoccupations. Infuriated, he tells Cass, "Hell, Cass, we saw him last night, there's nothing wrong with him" (67). When Richard, Cass, and Vivaldo are expecting Rufus' sister, Ida, and Cass and Vivaldo are anxious about meeting the frustrated and worried black woman, Richard demeans their emotions, stating, "Take it easy [...] What're you looking so tragic about?" (71). Later, he repeats twice that after all, they all saw him the other day and he was alright, therefore, implying that they are all exaggerating and panicking unnecessarily. He finds all speculations senseless, especially since Ida has already checked the police, hospitals, and morgue. Finally, he reproaches Ida, who suggests searching for Rufus, "I don't see any point in rushing out in this damn Sunday-afternoon rain, when you hardly even know where you're going. And we all saw him last night. So we know he's around. So why not relax for a couple of hours? Hell, in a couple of hours you may find out you haven't got to go anywhere, he'll turn up" (74). In general, Richard does not exhibit any emotional involvement

when it comes to the disappearance of the black man. He remains indifferent to all the alarming allegations. He also exhibits arrogance and self-confidence in assessing that nothing wrong has happened with or to Rufus, although he does not have any factual evidence. Again, his skepticism and latent contempt towards the black man keep him emotionally distant contrary to the worry, concern, anxiety, and pity that the other people express. In a way, he looks down on them, particularly on the black people. He actually behaves as if the black man's case and all the turmoil around it disturbed his equilibrium.

At first glance, Richard's stance towards Rufus' disappearance seems to stem solely from his cold-heartedness or desire to project himself as a tough man. However, in the middle of other people's conversations and lamentations over possible tragedy, Richard's statements testify to his alliance with the white power structure. When Ida relates the racist and neglectful attitude of the police that claim that "it happens all the time – colored men running off from their families. They said they'd try to find him. But they don't care. They don't care what happens – to a black man!" (73), Richard refuses to acknowledge Ida's statement regarding racial prejudice of the police and says that certainly "they'll look for him just like they look for any other citizen of the city" (73). In other words, he denies the existence of racism.

Not only does Richard deny believing in permeating racism, but he blames black people for their misfortune and interracial conflicts between black and white people. When Cass falls into guilt and grief upon finding out about Rufus' suicide, Richard reservedly contends, "He was heading that way [...] nothing, no one, could have stopped him" (76). Then, he goes on to accuse Rufus of egocentrism, stating, "I thought he was a pretty self-centered character, if you want the truth" (77). Finally, he poignantly articulates contempt he has held all the time towards Rufus,

I didn't love Rufus, not the way you did, the way all of you did. I couldn't help feeling, anyway, that one of the reasons all of you made such a kind of – fuss – over him was partly just because he was colored. Which is a hell of a reason to love anybody. I just had to look on him as another guy. And I couldn't forgive him for what he did to Leona. (77)

Richard's hatred towards Rufus obviously is not of color-blind nature, although he maintains that he approaches Rufus without paying attention to race. He is clearly discomforted by the fact that Rufus is a black man, and he discerns it as the only reason why other white people sympathize with Rufus. Therefore, Richard's self-acclaimed colorblindness serves only as a means whereby he avoids facing racism.

Similarly ambiguous attitude Richard exhibits towards the black boys that one day attack his sons on the street. First, when his son, Paul, asks his father whether their whiteness and the attackers' blackness were the reasons, surprisingly Richard avoids putting the conflict in racial perspective, so he replies, "The world is full of all kinds of

people, and sometimes they do terrible things to each other, but – that’s not why” (176). When Cass, in turn, gets emotional by the very fact of their sons’ assault, Richard rationalizes the incident, stating, “All kids get into fights [...] let’s not make a big thing out of it” (176). Nevertheless, when his wife and the children are away, what he tells his visitor, Eric, manifests his racial consciousness and, again, blaming the black boys, and the black community in general, for the interracial tensions within their neighborhood. Enraged, he exclaims, “Little black bastards, [...] they could have killed the kid. Why the hell can’t they take it out on each other, for Christ’s sake! [...] This whole neighborhood, this whole city’s gone to hell. I keep telling Cass we ought to move – but she doesn’t want to” (177). Therefore, again, he only pretends to be color-blind, as he latently holds racial hatred towards black people.

Finally, Richard’s encounter with a racially stratified milieu ends up with his identity crisis. It reveals itself in two spheres. One is his articulation of ambiguous, inconsistent stance towards the black community. As presented above, on the one hand, he feels compelled to exhibit color-blindness, on the other hand, he expresses contempt and prejudice towards the members of the black community when he feels free to do so. Concurrently, his racial confusion overlaps with his marital crisis. His pursuit of success in a white dominated context leads to obsession that renders him more and more emotionally distant to his family members. He chooses to spend most of his time completing the book instead of interacting with his wife, children, and friends, although he claims that his intentions were different. He testifies to his endeavor to establish a stable family life: “And I’ve worked, I’ve worked very hard, Cass, for you and our children, so we could be happy and so our marriage would work. Maybe you think that’s old-fashioned, maybe you think I’m dumb, I don’t know, you’re so much more – sensitive than I am” (277). As a result, paradoxically, when he attains professional success, he falls into identity crisis, and the inauthenticity of his hitherto life resurfaces. At one point, his wife muses, “If Richard doesn’t know what kind of world he wants, how am I to help him make it?” (202). When Richard finds out about Cass and Eric’s love affair, in despair he expresses his dependency on Cass: “By the way you look at me, by the contempt in your eyes when you look at me. What have I done to deserve your contempt? What have I done, Cass? You loved me once, you loved me, and everything I’ve done I’ve done for you” (273). This outcry evidences the fact that his marriage to Cass was a means whereby he sought to elevate himself. Assuring himself of Cass’s recognition motivated him to pursue his career. All in all, he submerged himself in the obsession of playing certain conventional roles to the point that he lost control over his feelings and emotional relationships with others. He actually experiences the loss of himself, a state that his marriage to Cass has contributed to. Cass even comes to the realization

of the destructive nature of the relationship between her and her husband, or even the expectations she imposed upon him:

[...] how much responsibility I must take for who he is, for what he's become [...] I score him, after all, for being second-rate, for not having any real passion, any real daring, any real thoughts of his own. But he never did, he hasn't changed. I was delighted to give him my opinions; when I was with him, I had the daring and the passion. And he took them all, of course, how could he tell they weren't his? And I was happy because I'd succeeded so brilliantly, I thought, in making him what I wanted him to be. And of course he can't understand that it's just that triumph which is intolerable now. I've made myself – less than I might have been – by leading him to water which he doesn't know how to drink. It's not for him. But it's too late now. [...] He doesn't have any real work to do, that's his trouble, that's the trouble with this whole unspeakable time and place. And I'm trapped. (298-297)

The outcome of Richard's inauthentic life is his disappointment, despair, and confusion that lead to his drunkenness and sense of insecure future.

Conclusions

In *Another Country*, a novel that to a certain degree might be considered to represent "the so-called novel of white life" (Rasberry 85) authored by a black writer, Baldwin's character, Richard Silenski, exhibits a number of attitudinal and behavioral patterns that are characteristic of particular stages of racial identity developments. Certainly, for a person of Polish descent, racially diverse encounters would have been a new experience. Therefore, naturally, at a certain point Richard undergoes the Contact stage. This is most observable when he accentuates colorblindness even though he does not exhibit particular willingness to interact with the black community. Moreover, he regards Rufus's offbeat personality as the reason for his misfortune, which evidences the character's unawareness of institutionalized racism. This stance then reflects Disintegration. When Rufus's sister is outraged at the nonchalant attitude of the police towards her missing brother and reports of their racist, stereotypical statements about black family dissolution, and when Richard's wife, Cass, expresses a sense of guilt upon learning that Rufus has committed suicide, Richard denies even more explicitly that racism contributed to Rufus's misfortune and even blames Cass and other white people for misleading, exaggerated concern with Rufus's blackness. He even appears to be jealous of their concern for Rufus, which, he believes, is owed to Rufus' blackness. Concurrently, Richard does not want to lose mainstream acceptance within the white dominant cultural arena, especially since his writing career is about to flourish, which leads to Reintegration stage of identity development. He reaches even a point where he blames the black community itself for the permeating interracial conflicts and for

disturbing white milieus, which is particularly conspicuous in his reaction to an assault on his sons by the black boys in their neighborhood.

Since he does not manifest a flicker of sympathy or empathy with oppressed black people and consistently withdraws from acknowledging racism, he does not reach further stages of white identity development labeled as Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. In his overall posture, he becomes a new Pole as an outcome of his endeavor to assimilate with white mainstream society. James Baldwin goes on to inscribe Richard Silenski among the gamut of Polish characters typical of novels that deal with Polish American racial dilemmas.

Assimilation and acculturation are, in fact, the major but subtle themes of all these novels, which feature the courtship and marriage of Yankee and Pole as a plot device. Through their union, a new type emerges, a new man who foreshadows an America of the future. In most of these novels, the new American Pole is decidedly more Yankee than Pole. Even as his characteristics are designed to ease fears of ethnic fusion, they are also meant to exemplify the inevitability of Anglo-Saxon racial dominance. (Gladsky 71)

On the whole, Richard manifests the above recapitulated stances interchangeably. Therefore, the development of his racial identity may be said to take place more spirally than linearly.

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