



## RACISM AND HOMOSEXUAL IN "GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN" NOVEL BY JAMES BALDWIN

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### Abstract

This study explores the development of Baldwin's racial and homosexual identity in his novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. It examines how Baldwin's experiences as both a homosexual and an African American shaped his identity and his efforts to engage with society. Baldwin's awareness of racism and homophobia in America positioned him as a public figure advocating for both black and LGBTQ+ communities, deeply influencing his writing. The study uses Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) to understand how Baldwin's identity was formed. The first stage explores Baldwin's self-awareness as part of social groups like the black and homosexual communities. The second stage analyzes his shift from recognizing his identity to actively defining it. The third stage looks at the psychological and social impact of his group identity, highlighting how racism and homophobia shaped his work and the messages he conveyed. The study concludes that Baldwin's identity was shaped by his environment and the double oppression he faced—both as a homosexual and as a black man. SIT provides a valuable framework for understanding how group affiliation influences individual identity and broader social dynamics.

**Keywords:** Racism; Homosexual; Self-Identity; Social Identity; Society

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perkembangan identitas rasial dan homoseksual Baldwin dalam novelnya *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pengalaman Baldwin sebagai seorang homoseksual dan Afrika-Amerika membentuk identitasnya serta upayanya untuk berinteraksi dengan masyarakat. Kesadaran Baldwin terhadap rasisme dan homofobia di Amerika menjadikannya sebagai tokoh publik yang memperjuangkan komunitas kulit hitam dan LGBTQ+, yang sangat memengaruhi karyanya. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Identitas Sosial (SIT) yang dikembangkan oleh Henri Tajfel dan John Turner untuk memahami bagaimana identitas Baldwin terbentuk. Tahap pertama mengeksplorasi kesadaran Baldwin tentang dirinya sebagai bagian dari kelompok sosial seperti komunitas kulit hitam dan homoseksual. Tahap kedua menganalisis pergeserannya dari sekadar mengenali identitasnya menjadi berusaha mendefinisikan identitas tersebut. Tahap ketiga melihat dampak psikologis dan sosial dari identitas kelompoknya, menyoroti bagaimana rasisme dan homofobia membentuk karya dan pesan yang disampaikan dalam tulisannya. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa identitas Baldwin dibentuk oleh lingkungannya dan dua penindasan yang ia hadapi—sebagai homoseksual dan sebagai orang kulit hitam. SIT memberikan



*kerangka kerja yang berharga untuk memahami bagaimana afiliasi kelompok memengaruhi identitas individu dan dinamika sosial yang lebih luas.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Rasisme; Homoseksual; Identitas diri; Identitas Sosial; Masyarakat*

## 1. Introduction

A novel is a literary work that contains stories about human life, both fiction and nonfiction. (Amanda P., 2019) A novel is a work of prose fiction narrative that tells about certain human experiences over a fairly long period of time (Tukam, 2013). In addition, a novel is a form of literary work that contains social, cultural, moral, and educational values (Rostamaji, 2022) A novel is a form of literary work that has two elements, namely extrinsic elements and intrinsic elements, where both elements are interrelated and influence each other in a literary work. So, it can be said that a novel is a reflection of human life experiences or even a society that has various stories and genres. Novels often depict the values and issues of their time, providing insight into societal attitudes and behaviours (Duhan, 2014)

Talking about novels cannot be separated from the author's autobiography. James Baldwin is one of the novelists whose works tell a lot about his life. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) is Baldwin's first novel. This novel tells the life of John Grimes. This novel is one of the African-American cultural heritages that tells the life of John and his homosexuality. In *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Baldwin tries to provide insight and a picture of teenage gay sexuality at that time. In this way, the novel depicts the intertwining motivations of one character in the sexual, social, and racial contexts of America. In his first novel, James Baldwin carefully explores and disguises the theme of homosexuality through the character of John who is searching for his existence or identity.

James Baldwin was an African-American novelist and social critic. He was born the illegitimate child of a black child. However, he became a well-known writer in the field of bisexual and queer in African-American literature through his novels. Baldwin's recognized novels are *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room*, *Another Country*, *Tell Me How Long the Train Been Gone*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and *Just Above My Head*. Baldwin's narrative challenges the notion of a singular Black experience, emphasizing the complexity of racial identity as inextricably linked to sexuality and nationality (Hove, 2022)

James Baldwin had a challenging childhood. He did not realize who his father was. He struggled and had a complicated relationship with his stepfather. His father was seen as a harsh and abusive father figure. He damaged his son's self-esteem. Baldwin grew up in a Harlem Renaissance style home. For gay people, literature is an essential part of their existence. The process that gives rise to literature is nurtured and supported by literature. Literature promotes queer gay relationships in society. Baldwin believed that literature and art could be used to influence social change because he had personally experienced injustice and oppression. In his society, he experienced fear and alienation. Baldwin's characters often embody his own lived experiences, particularly his turbulent relationships with religion and race, which he seeks to exorcise through his writing (Sims, 2023)

Freud's childhood theory revolves around the idea that early experiences in life significantly influence personality development, behaviour, and psychological health. Central to his theory are the psychosexual stages of development, the concept of unresolved conflicts (fixations), and the impact of parental relationships (Choirunnisa, 2022)

Because of his unusual sex and skin tone, Baldwin had racism and a bad attitude toward society. One of the societal ills of his town is racism. Pinder-Hughes in detail Racism is defined as "the entire social structure in which institutions and policies interact and reinforce one another in order to deprive and cripple many people of colour while providing white people with opportunity, preparation, and support." Religion has an impact on gays' lives as well. The majority of LGBT African Americans have religious backgrounds. It brought about a great deal of suffering and



perplexity. African-American sexuality was founded and expanded by the black church. According to Ron Simmons, "homophobia is not a fear of homosexuals, but a fear that homosexuality will spread in society." Simmons attributes the development of prejudice and fear of gays in African-American literature to a set of religious ideas from the traditional black church. As a result, the majority of LGBT people kept their queer relationships hidden.

Racism is the belief that one race is inherently superior or inferior to another race. Racism manifests itself in many forms, including individual attitudes, systemic inequalities, and institutional practices. Racism can result in social, economic, and political disadvantages for marginalized groups, affecting their access to opportunities, rights, and resources. Racism can also perpetuate stereotypes and foster a culture of intolerance. Racism in modern societies is perpetuated by a complex interplay of psychological mechanisms that are influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Understanding these mechanisms reveals how biases are formed and maintained, ultimately contributing to systemic racism. Systemic racism is rooted in historical political and economic structures established during colonization, which continue to shape contemporary racial dynamics (Tarlow, 2024)

Racism is defined as discrimination based on racial or ethnic groups, rooted in historical contexts and manifested in various forms across contemporary societies. Racism evolves with socio-cultural, economic, and political changes, affecting both targets and perpetrators. Racism encompasses beliefs in a hierarchical order of racial or ethnic groups, leading to systemic inequalities (Caller & Gorodzeisky, 2021).

Racism is characterized by interpersonal discrimination and institutional practices that perpetuate racial injustice (Elias, 2024). While racism is often viewed as a social problem, some argue that racism can also limit the social relationships and economic opportunities of perpetrators, suggesting a complex interplay of effects on both sides.

Homosexuality describes a person's physical and emotional attraction to people of the same gender. The American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) agree that homosexuality is not a disease or disorder, but a form of sexual expression derived from an environment or family conflict in childhood. LGBTQ individuals frequently encounter social prejudice, which can manifest in violence and discrimination, particularly in countries with high rates of anti-LGBTQ crimes (Oliviera, 2022)

There are two main theories about what causes homosexual attraction. The first is that homosexual orientation is determined primarily by genetics and/or biology, in other words, that some people are simply "born gay." The second is that homosexual attraction develops as a result of psychological and environmental influences and early experiences. In the public sphere, the latter theory seems to be fading, and the former has gained ground in recent decades. However, famed sex researcher Alfred Kinsey stated that by the late 1940s, he had recorded more than 450 cases of homosexuality, enough to convince him that psychologists had made things worse by starting to assume that homosexuality was an incurable disorder simply because it was innate. Kinsey believed that there was no fundamental reason for someone to have same-sex attraction that was hereditary or innate."

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that homosexuality is a variation of sexual orientation and not a mental disorder. Homosexuality is a sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex. According to experts, homosexuality is not a choice, but rather an aspect of a person's identity that is formed by a combination of biological, genetic, and environmental factors. Lack of familial support can lead to feelings of isolation and low self-esteem, further impacting mental health (Souza, 2020).



Freud argued that much of human behavior is driven by unconscious desires, particularly related to sex (libido) and aggression. Repression of these desires leads to internal conflict and psychological symptoms (Zhang, 2020).

This study aims to describe the development of Baldwin's racism and homosexual identity as reflected in Baldwin's novel entitled *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. How Baldwin's identity is formed and Baldwin's efforts to interact in society through his identity as a homosexual and to find out what the homosexual group really wants to show to society.

Significantly, this study highlights the inter-sectionalist between racism and homosexuality, two themes that are often marginalized in literary studies, especially in the context of literary works. Using the social identity theory (SIT) framework to provide a new perspective in understanding the dynamics of Baldwin's identity, both as an individual and a member of a marginalized group. Adding insight into how literary works can be a medium to explore and challenge social norms, racism, and homophobia. This study also aims to open a broader discussion about the importance of diverse identity representation in literature, as well as providing inspiration for future research to explore issues that usually occur in life.

## 2. Method

It is generally accepted that literary works have a structure that unites characterization, plot, setting, and story topic. This arrangement is referred to as an intrinsic component that establishes the existence of the work.

The data source for this study was collected from one of James Baldwin's novels entitled "*Go Tell it on The Mountain*". To complement the author's research, a number of references were also downloaded or obtained from the internet.

The following data collection methods were used in this study: (1) the author read every page of the book "*Go Tell it on the Mountain*"; (2) the author understood and experienced the narrative of the book; (3) Highlighting phrases or utterances that reveal and describe the protagonist's internal battle in the book, especially in the parts that discuss homosexuality and racism, then examining and summarizing them in paragraph form.

Descriptive analysis is the method used for data analysis in this investigation. All data will be identified, categorized and interpreted to determine the integration and relationship between data and theory. Therefore, the author will study the true significance of this study. The Social Identity Theory (SIT), created by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, was used to interpret the data collected at that time. This theory posits that individuals derive part of their identity from the groups they belong to, which can foster in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Yang, 2021). This theory will explain descriptively based on three important stages in the novel, each of which is based on providing a comprehensive understanding to the reader about how the idea of a group influences a person's self-identity and social behaviour through several stages, namely: (1) as seen from its fundamental idea; (2) as a process and mechanism; and (3) as influenced by and with implications. These three phases will reveal whether an individual's identity is significantly shaped by his environment, how the environment handles him, and how he struggles and tries to adjust by carrying the burden of double oppression within him.

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, explores how individuals derive a sense of identity from their group memberships. The following are the main components of the theory:

- 1) Social Categories: People categorize themselves and others into groups (e.g., by race, nationality, gender). This helps simplify the social world and provides a framework for understanding social interactions.

- 2) Social Identification: Individuals adopt the identity of the group they belong to, which influences their self-esteem and behaviour. This identification can increase their sense of belonging and solidarity with fellow group members.
- 3) Social Comparison: People compare their in-group (the group they identify with) with their out-group (the group they do not identify with) to enhance their self-image. This often leads to in-group favouritism, where individuals favour their own group over other groups, and can result in prejudice or discrimination against out-groups.
- 4) Intergroup Conflict: SIT explains how competition between groups for resources or status can lead to conflict and hostility. This is often exacerbated by stereotypes and perceived threats from out-groups.

SIT has significant implications for understanding prejudice, discrimination, and group dynamics, highlighting the role of group identity in shaping social behaviour and attitudes.

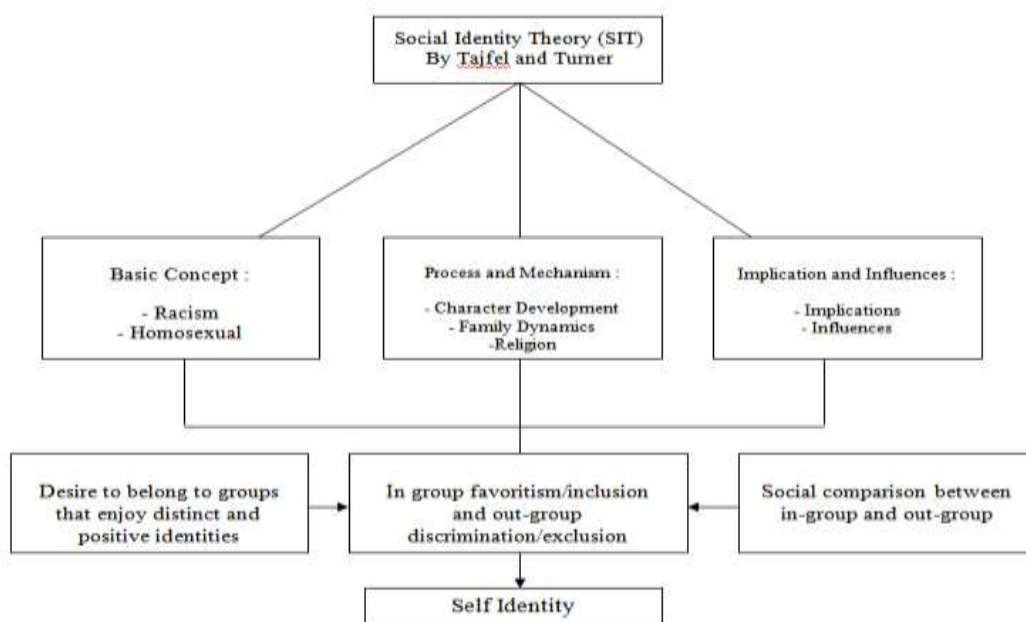


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Social Identity Theory (SIT)

### 3. Result and Discussion

James Baldwin's "Go Tell It on the Mountain" explores the themes of racism and homosexuality through the perspective of personal and social struggles. The following is a description of these themes based on the Social Identity Theory (SIT) created by Henri Tajfel and John Turner through several stages, namely: (1) seen from its basic idea; (2) as a process and mechanism; and (3) influenced by and has implications.

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Analyzing *Go Tell It on the Mountain* through the framework of Social Identity Theory reveals how Baldwin masterfully explores the intersection of racism and homosexuality as personal and social struggles. By understanding these struggles through SIT, we can see how John's identity conflict mirrors broader societal dynamics, emphasizing the need for both personal reconciliation and collective social change. Previous research on Baldwin's work and SIT reinforces this interpretation, highlighting the novel's enduring relevance in discussions of identity, oppression, and liberation.

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### 3.1 Basic Concept

**Racism:** The novel depicts the systemic racism faced by African Americans in early 20th-century America. Baldwin depicts the psychological and social impacts of racism on individuals and society.

**Homosexuality:** Baldwin explores the complexities of sexual identity in the context of a repressive religion. The main character, John, grapples with his sexual identity in an environment that condemns him.

Scholars such as Kathryn Bond Stockton have analyzed Baldwin's work in terms of queerness, noting how his characters embody "minority subjectivities," in which intersecting oppressions shape identity formation. Similarly, research on SIT suggests that marginalized groups face complex struggles because of the multiple identities that are devalued in society. (Stockton, 2009)

### 3.2 Process and Mechanism

**Character Development:** Baldwin uses internal character conflict to highlight the impact of racism and oppression. John's struggle with his identity and societal expectations shows how racism intersects with sexual orientation.

**Family Dynamics:** The relationships within John's family reflect broader social issues. His father's authoritarianism and his mother's religious fervour serve as mechanisms that enforce traditional values, suppressing individuality and self-acceptance.

**Influence of Religion:** The church serves as a double-edged sword. While it offers community and solace, it also perpetuates guilt and shame around race and sexuality, complicating the characters' identities.

Studies on Baldwin's works, such as those by David Leeming, highlight the role of the church as both a source of identity and a site of repression. Similarly, SIT research demonstrates how individuals in stigmatized groups experience identity conflict when they fail to align with dominant in-group norms.

### 3.3 Implications and Influences

#### a. Implications

**Psychological Impact:** Baldwin shows how racism and homophobia lead to internalized oppression, contributing to feelings of shame and alienation. John's journey reveals the impact of living in a society that marginalizes racial and sexual identities.



**Social Critique:** The novel serves as a critique of social norms that limit personal freedom. Baldwin challenges the intersections of race, religion, and sexuality, and advocates for a more inclusive understanding of identity.

**b. Influences**

**Cultural Context:** Baldwin's experiences as a gay Black man inform his narrative, influencing his depiction of intertwined struggles. His insights contribute to broader discussions about race and sexuality in American literature.

**Literary Impact:** "Go Tell It on the Mountain" has influenced many writers and thinkers in the areas of race and sexuality. Baldwin's exploration of these themes has paved the way for future dialogue around identity, paving the way for LGBTQ+ representation in literature.

James Baldwin's exploration of race and sexuality in his novels provides a rich context for applying Social Identity Theory (SIT), particularly in understanding the intersection of racism and homosexuality. Here are some points that reflect this in Baldwin's work:

**Identity Intersections:** Baldwin highlights how individuals navigate multiple identities, particularly as a Black gay man. These multiple identities create unique challenges and experiences. Baldwin examines the conflict between societal expectations of masculinity and the desire for love and acceptance, revealing the struggles faced by those in marginalized groups.

**In-Group vs. Out-Group Dynamics:** Baldwin often felt alienated from both the Black and LGBTQ+ communities. Feeling caught between these groups is crucial to understanding their internal conflicts and quest for acceptance. The characters in his novels often grapple with their racial and sexual identities, often facing rejection from their racial peers and the broader society.

**Social Comparison and Self-Perception:** Baldwin discusses how societal standards impact self-esteem and identity. Characters struggle with feelings of inferiority, especially in a racially biased society that stigmatizes both racism and homosexuality. This can lead to internalized racism and homophobia, which Baldwin movingly depicts.

**Intergroup Conflict and Solidarity:** Baldwin often explores the tensions between racial and sexual identities, emphasizing how systemic oppression affects individuals differently. He advocates solidarity among marginalized groups, urging an understanding of the shared struggle against societal prejudice.

Through this lens, Baldwin's work highlights the complexities of identity formation in the face of racism and homophobia, showing how individuals navigate their sense of self within and across these intersecting social categories.

In Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, themes of racism and sexuality are interwoven with the complexities of identity, faith, and societal oppression. Baldwin, through his characterizations, discusses how racial and sexual identities intersect and how marginalized individuals experience rejection and acceptance from society. While Baldwin's novel primarily focuses on the protagonist, John Grimes, his struggles with his religious and family life, racism and the complexities of sexuality are also integral parts of the story. Baldwin explores how these themes shape John's relationship with his family, especially his father, Gabriel, as well as his internal conflicts. Baldwin, a gay man, often explores his hidden desires, oppression, and struggle for identity.

Here are some relevant passages from the passage that relate to identity and societal oppression, specifically as they relate to John's struggles:

A passage from *Go Tell It on the Mountain*:

*"He was a man, a black man, and to be a black man in this world was to be less than human. But to be a black man with a deep, secret longing to touch another man's body—he couldn't face it. He couldn't face it and he couldn't run from it."*



In this passage, Baldwin encapsulates the deep conflict John feels about his sexuality. While he struggles with his identity as a black man in a racist society, he also confronts deep and secret longings that challenge societal norms of masculinity and heterosexuality, particularly in the context of his religious upbringing. This dual burden of racism and the suppression of his sexuality creates intense psychological and emotional tension for John. This passage shows how Baldwin highlights the intersection of racial and sexual identities, as John's sense of self is fractured by external and internal forces. The racism he faces in a society that dehumanizes black people and the oppression he experiences in confronting his homosexual desires become central to his development throughout the novel.

James Baldwin's use of autobiographical elements in 'Go Tell It on the Mountain' intricately reflects his struggles with self-identity and racial identity. Through the protagonist's journey, Baldwin explores themes of love, racism, and the search for belonging, reflecting his own experiences as a Black gay man in America. This interplay between personal and collective identities is crucial to understanding Baldwin's narrative. While Baldwin's treatment of homosexuality in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is subtle and often veiled within broader identity struggles, his writing clearly demonstrates the complexities of living as an individual marginalized for reasons of race, sexuality, or both and the painful internalization of societal rejection.

Literary critics such as James Smethurst argue that Baldwin's works call for a radical reimagining of identity politics, emphasizing inter-sectionality. SIT literature also supports this, showing how empowerment comes from embracing multifaceted identities rather than conforming to limiting group norms.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In "Go Tell It on the Mountain," Baldwin weaves themes of racism and homosexuality into a powerful narrative that examines the consequences of personal and social identity. Through character development, family dynamics, and the influence of religion, he presents a trenchant critique of social norms that have left a lasting impact on literature and discussions around race and sexuality. Baldwin is a major figure in American and African-American gay literature. His art questions the dominance of obsessive heterosexuality and white tyranny. In his city, white men rule. He addresses homosexual and bisexual topics in his books in a frank and direct manner. Baldwin wrote about homosexuality and considered sex between two men as work as a wonderful tool and revelation to free those who follow the rigid criteria of social categorization. Baldwin's books subtly address the issues of racism and homosexuality. His early books give a strong political edge to homosexuality; however, in his later works, he refined his conception of sexuality and built a new platform for thought-provoking African-American gay writers.

The works of African American gay writers clearly illustrate the inter-sectionality of their identities, revealing the complex interplay of race, gender, and sexual orientation. These writers typically face multiple layers of oppression and privilege, often using their art to articulate their unique experiences and advocate for social change. The following sections highlight key aspects of this inter-sectionality. African American gay men often describe their identities as intertwined, with race and sexual orientation shaping their experiences of discrimination and belonging (Bowleg, 2013). While the inter-sectionality of African American gay writers highlights their struggles, it also emphasizes their resilience and the potential for transformative change in their communities. This duality underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse identities in broader discourses of social justice. While this study provides a nuanced understanding of Baldwin's work through SIT, it is limited by its reliance on a single theoretical framework. Other perspectives, such as psychoanalytic theory or inter-sectionality, could offer additional insights into the psychological and structural dimensions of John's struggles. Moreover, this discussion primarily focuses on John's



experiences, potentially overlooking the complex narratives of other characters in the novel who also reflect significant themes of oppression and identity. Future analyses could incorporate a broader scope of theoretical and character-based approaches to enrich the understanding of Baldwin's multifaceted narrative.

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