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Tweets of a Native Son: The Quotation and Recirculation of James Baldwin from Black Power to #BlackLivesMatter

Melanie Walsh

On August 9, 2014, around noon, a police officer, Darren Wilson, shot and killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. That night, hundreds of miles from Missouri, the San Diego–based community organizer Kim Moore (@SoulRevision) added a voice, via Twitter, to the national chorus of grief and protest that was swelling over Brown's death, an outcry that had been sparked, both online and offline, by the residents of Ferguson.[1] This voice was not, or not only, Moore's own, but also that of the civil rights literary icon James Baldwin: "#MikeBrown & #EricGarner's death speak to James Baldwin's quote; 'to be black a[nd] conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.'"[2] Moore's framing of Baldwin's words placed them in angry, mournful dialogue with both the fate of Brown and the passing of Eric Garner, another unarmed black man who had died at the hands of the police weeks earlier in Staten Island, New York. One hundred and seventy different users "retweeted," that is, reshared and recirculated, the tweet that contained Baldwin's ventriloquized rage, passing that rage to each user who "followed," or subscribed to receive the tweets of, those 170 users in turn. These Twitter users collectively recirculated Baldwin's words throughout the social media network, but in the process they also used Baldwin's rage to forge a network of social, political, and historical connections: between individuals rallying around a common political cause; between the similar fates of different black people under a system of institutionalized racism and state-sanctioned violence; and between multiple moments in American history from the civil rights era of Baldwin's prime to Ferguson on August 9, 2014.

Though Moore was among the first to quote and recirculate Baldwin's words in relationship to the constellation of hashtags and online activism that later became known as #BlackLivesMatter, she was far from the last. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was first coined by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in July 2013, just after Trayvon Martin's killing and George Zimmer-

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man's acquittal, but it exploded into popular online circulation on the night of Wilson's nonindictment in late November 2014.[3] Both with and without a hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter came to serve as a banner for the national protest movement against police brutality and the American criminal justice system that had arisen in the wake of Brown's death. The phrase came to signify, at one and the same time, a slogan that affirms black life; an official chapter-based organization founded by Garza, Cullors, and Tometi; an unofficial movement of people who espouse antiracist sentiments in different spaces and capacities; and the third most used hashtag in Twitter's history, representing a broader assemblage of social media activity that helped document and organize on-the-ground protests as well as facilitate conversations, emotional expressions, and historical narratives about the systematic elimination of black life in America.[4] Scholars such as William Maxwell suggest that Baldwin has been resurrected across these many groups and spaces "as the movement's literary touchstone, conscience, and pinup," as well as its "most-tweeted literary authority."[5]

Other scholars such as Zandria Robinson, Douglas Field, Eddie Glaude Jr., and Ernest Gibson have similarly noted the widespread recirculation of Baldwin's words in digital spaces, on social media platforms, and within the #BlackLivesMatter movement.[6] They have all in separate ways asked: Why Baldwin? Why Twitter? Why now? Today, on the other side of influential Baldwin-inspired works such as Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* (2015) and Raoul Peck's Oscar-nominated documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016), Baldwin's pervasive social media presence seems heavily indebted to these adaptations, which have landed Baldwin's legacy (thanks to Coates) on the *New York Times* best-seller list and showcased Baldwin's words, voice, and visage (thanks to Peck) on movie screens across the country. But in April 2014, before the publication of *Between the World and Me* or the debut of *I Am Not Your Negro*, before Brown's death or the national emergence of #BlackLivesMatter, the *New York Times* journalist Felicia Lee had claimed that Baldwin's presence seemed to be "fading" from high school classrooms, in part because of "the perception that he ha[d] been eclipsed by other African-American voices."[7] This doubt prompts us to revisit the contingency and uncertainty of Baldwin's popular reception only months before Brown's death, and to freshly ask why it was Baldwin, much more than other African American writers, whose voice was consistently summoned by those tweeting about Brown, #Ferguson, and #BlackLivesMatter.

But this question can be made fresh in still other ways. The scholarship about Baldwin's twenty-first-century digital recirculation has, until now,

largely relied on anecdotal evidence to establish and analyze the Harlem-born writer's widespread popularity. Yet tweets, which can be digitally archived and made computationally tractable at massive scales, offer the potential for more quantitative evidence and a more comprehensive picture of Baldwin's social media reception. This essay, and its companion digital project *Tweets of a Native Son* (www.tweetsofanativeson.com), brings large-scale social media data and computational methods to bear on Baldwin's twenty-first-century remediation, recirculation, and reimagination. By drawing on an archive of over thirty-two million tweets sent between June 2014 and May 2015 that mentioned #BlackLivesMatter or forty-four related hashtags and keywords (such as #Ferguson, Mike Brown, or #TamirRice), I find that "James Baldwin" was referenced in at least 7,326 tweets and retweets. This makes Baldwin the most invoked African American literary writer on this platform during this period when cross-compared to all other writers similarly listed in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (2014) and born after 1900, with the exception of Barack Obama (126,870 tweets), Martin Luther King (34,608 tweets), and Malcolm X (29,093 tweets) (see Appendixes A and C for full lists).[8] The present essay in particular seeks to understand Baldwin's 2014–15 resonance by computationally tracking, close reading, and historicizing the most frequent form of his tweeted presence: namely, quotations (which were indeed summoned to the point of parody: "*insert James Baldwin quote* #Ferguson").[9]

By employing both close and distant reading methodologies, and by taking the tweeted quotation as my fundamental unit of reception analysis, this essay hopes to make a contribution not only to postwar American literary criticism and the developing history of the #BlackLivesMatter movement but also to the digital humanities more broadly, weaving together some of the most exciting strands of recent DH scholarship: the computational tracking of text reuse and quotation by scholars such as Lincoln Mullen, Ryan Cordell, and David Smith; the exploration of popular readership, reception, and creative production through social media data by scholars such as Lisa Nakamura and Lev Manovich; and the intersection of the digital humanities and social justice social media activism offered by scholars such as Moya Bailey, Sarah J. Jackson, Brooke Foucault Welles, Jessica Marie Johnson, Mark Anthony Neal, and the #transformDH collective.[10] Braiding these approaches together, I contend that social media data can help bring greater depth to the representation of texts in the digital humanities, as Katherine Bode has recently called for, by better attending to how these texts "circulated and generated meaning together at particular times and places," at least in the recent past.[11]

To understand how Baldwin's words generated meaning on Twitter in 2014–15, this essay begins with a characteristically Baldwinian question: Which Baldwin, of "all those strangers called Jimmy Baldwin," as Baldwin once described himself, was most often summoned?[12] Which Baldwin, as Field puts it in his aptly titled *All Those Strangers* (2015), of all "the shifting and developing James Baldwins from the 1940s to the 1980s," of all his many novels, essays, plays, poems, short stories, interviews, speeches, and debates, of all his ever-evolving attitudes toward racial politics, sexuality, religion, music, celebrity, and America, was most often reproduced?[13]

Based on the most frequently referenced and widely recirculated quotations in the data set, 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter tweeters overwhelmingly resurrected an explicitly political, public intellectual, and 1960s-era Baldwin. But there was not a single reproduced Baldwin, just as there was not a single monolithic group of Twitter users. Though I sometimes refer to these users, for concision's sake, as "#BlackLivesMatter tweeters," I want to emphasize that they did not all include the specific hashtag #BlackLivesMatter—many tweeted hashtags such as #Ferguson or #MikeBrown before its national prominence—nor did they all use the hashtag(s) or Baldwin in the same way. Many users in fact presented competing visions of Baldwin, sometimes actively critiquing the way Baldwin's legacy was being used by others or critiquing aspects of the movement through Baldwin. To better capture these differing visions, my analysis thus examines the six most prominent of Baldwin's 1960s-era quotations and reconstructs the six subtly different Baldwins reproduced through them. Through this reverse engineering, I also hope to highlight some of the major factors influencing Baldwin's twenty-first-century recirculation. These factors include the collision of Baldwin's mass-mediated material with the new media age and with practices of user-driven "remediation"; Baldwin's resonant aphorisms with deep roots in African American written and oral traditions; Baldwin's sympathetic proximity to but never full embrace of black radicalism; and, most important, the Twitter users who brought Baldwin's words into resurrected being with every tweet, who excised, revised, botched, remediated, and wielded Baldwin's words anew.

The most striking consistency discovered across these tweets was the fact that Baldwin's quoted words were being *used* by individuals—as a source of emotional catharsis, expression, and historical orientation, but also as sociopolitical material with which to forge relationships between individuals and across space and time. By quoting Baldwin's words with historical markers such as "1963" or the antiquated word "Negro," many #BlackLivesMatter tweeters renegotiated

with and between the racial justice movements of the past, with and between the civil rights era's legacies of nonviolence and its more radical challengers. How did, or should, the police killings, nonindictments, protests, and riots of 2014–15 America fit within a larger historical network? By quoting Baldwin's words with erased or collapsed historical distance, many #BlackLivesMatter tweeters also formed fresh affiliation networks of the present, spinning them out of Baldwin's anger, systemic critique, and perceived authority.

Just as important as the Baldwins reproduced, however, were the Baldwins obscured. The literary and explicitly queer dimensions of Baldwin's life and career were in little evidence in #BlackLivesMatter invocations and quotations in 2014–15, and sometimes actively suppressed. By tracing the most prominent quotations back to their original sources and historical contexts, I discovered that the most frequently referenced invocation of Baldwin on the night of Brown's death and throughout the following year—"to be black a[nd] conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage"—was in fact an apocryphal quotation first circulated in the late 1960s and 1970s by Black Panthers such as Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, black radicals who in this case had championed Baldwin's words but had elsewhere publicly and homophobically condemned Baldwin. The tweets discussed in my study thus reveal aspects of the recent present but also reopen the deeper past, providing fresh perspectives on some of the oldest, most fraught questions in Baldwin scholarship. Through the lens of these tweets, Baldwin's contested relationship to black radicalism, mass media celebrity, and political spokesmanship is both clarified and stripped of its characteristic ambivalence.

#BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin: Data, Methodology, Scope

In 2016 Deen Freelon, Charlton McIlwain, and Meredith Clark published *Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice*, an analysis of all the public, undeleted tweets published between June 1, 2014, and May 31, 2015, that mentioned—with or without a hashtag—Ferguson, Black Lives Matter, or the names of twenty other black individuals killed by the police during this period (see Appendix A for full list).[14] After a yearlong embargo, these researchers generously shared their data, which was first purchased from Twitter, for free with the public.[15] By using a computational tool developed by Ed Summers of *Documenting the Now*, I retrieved the full data for the 32 million available tweets and searched for tweets that mentioned "James Baldwin" by both his first and last name (e.g., #James-Baldwin; JAMES BALDWIN; james baldwin), revealing that "James Baldwin"

had been referenced in at least 7,326 tweets and retweets, more times than the intersectional black feminist poet Audre Lorde (1,634 tweets); the iconic Harlem Renaissance voice Langston Hughes (1,401 tweets); the inspirational poet and memoirist Maya Angelou (1,236 tweets); the Nobel Prize–winning novelist Toni Morrison (843 tweets); the MacArthur Fellow and *New York Times* best-selling poet Claudia Rankine (556 tweets); the Black Panthers Huey Newton (536 tweets) and Eldridge Cleaver (373 tweets); Baldwin's older mentor and adversary Richard Wright (126 tweets); and his contemporary and fellow Wright-rival Ralph Ellison (116 tweets) (see Appendix C for full list).

But Baldwin's prominence in these #BlackLivesMatter tweets is not the primary claim of this essay. Though comparatively large, the number of Baldwin invocations (7,326 tweets) still represents a very small percentage of the larger #BlackLivesMatter-related conversation (32 million tweets). These tweets do not, moreover, capture the full range or extent of Baldwin's influence and resurrected racial justice presence. Searching for Baldwin's first and last names next to a #BlackLivesMatter-related keyword misses tweets that mentioned Baldwin by last name alone, tweets that quoted Baldwin's words but did not provide attribution, tweets that mentioned Baldwin implicitly in relationship to #BlackLivesMatter, as well as any tweets that mentioned Baldwin by first and last name but were deleted before the moment of data retrieval in November 2017 (an unknown but possibly substantial number). These 7,326 tweets and retweets nevertheless compose a valuable record of 6,384 distinct users—many beyond the walls of the academy—discussing and debating Baldwin's legacy, quoting and revising Baldwin's words, and deploying Baldwin in a specific and urgent political context. These data significantly expand the archive for those who wish to explore Baldwin's #BlackLivesMatter-related reception beyond anecdotal searches, revealing broad trends and key individual voices, such as those who spoke through the words of Baldwin in the first hours after Michael Brown's death.

In the nine months that followed Brown's death on August 9, 2014, the number of #BlackLivesMatter-related tweets that referenced Baldwin surged significantly—and then fell—three separate times (fig. 1). These tweeted invocations spiked in August 2014 after Brown's death and the initial Ferguson protests; in late November 2014 after Wilson was not indicted in the fatal shooting of Brown; and in April 2015 after twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray died from spinal injuries sustained while in police custody. This pattern mostly mirrors the 32 million tweets from which they were drawn, which is explored in-depth by Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark in *Beyond the Hashtags*. According

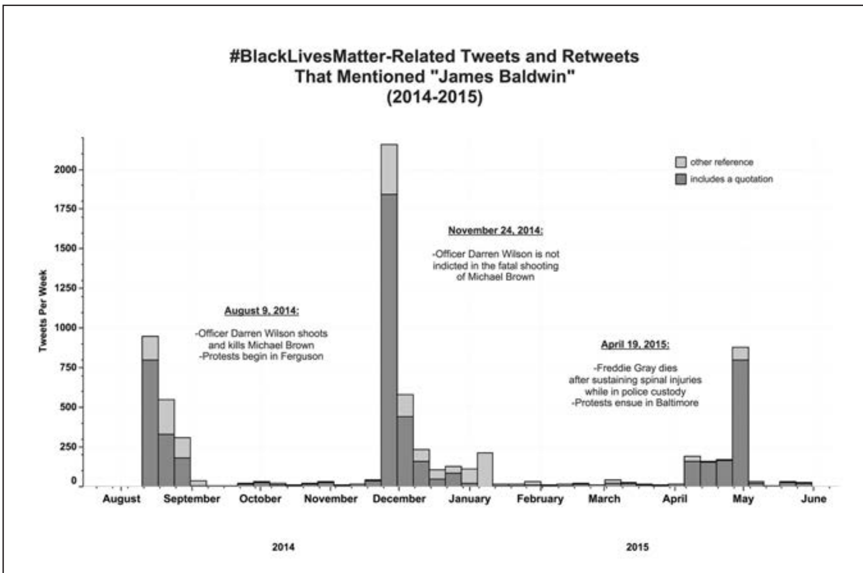

Figure 1.
This timeline shows the distribution of tweets and retweets that were sent between June 2014 and May 2015 and that mentioned "James Baldwin" as well as "Black Lives Matter," "Ferguson," or the names of twenty other individuals who were killed by the police. The chart also displays the proportion of tweets per week that included a Baldwin quotation (dark gray, 76 percent) or a nonquotation reference to Baldwin (light gray, 24 percent), such as an attached picture or video of Baldwin, an essay by or about Baldwin, or another invocation of his name and works.

to these authors, the timeline's shape "suggests that police violence only sporadically becomes a mainstream issue," directly linked to "major events . . . such as non-indictments, clashes between protesters and police, or the posting of explosive video," while the rest of the data instead reveals "a steady, low-volume conversation among those closely following the issue."[16]

More important to my analysis than the overall distribution of these #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin tweets is how and why Baldwin was invoked within them. The first and most prevailing trend was, as has been previously suggested, that both retweets and quotations proliferated (fig. 1). Retweets made up 82 percent of total tweets, a proportion that is relatively consistent with, though even slightly higher than, the pattern of retweeting across the larger data set (75.3 percent), again suggesting that the "re" of Baldwin's #BlackLivesMatter recirculation essentially defined his dissemination.[17] Twenty-four percent of total Baldwin references—categorized in figure 1 as "Other"—linked to essays written by or about Baldwin; included

images and videos of Baldwin; or mentioned Baldwin's name in some other way, such as tweets that hypothesized, debated, or desired to know what Baldwin would have said if he were alive in 2014 and 2015. The rest of the tweets (76.2 percent) instead spoke through and for Baldwin by including a quotation of his words either in the text of the tweet or within an embedded or linked image. These quotations were markedly drawn from Baldwin's 1960s nonfictional essays, radio discussions, and television appearances, as can be seen in figure 2.

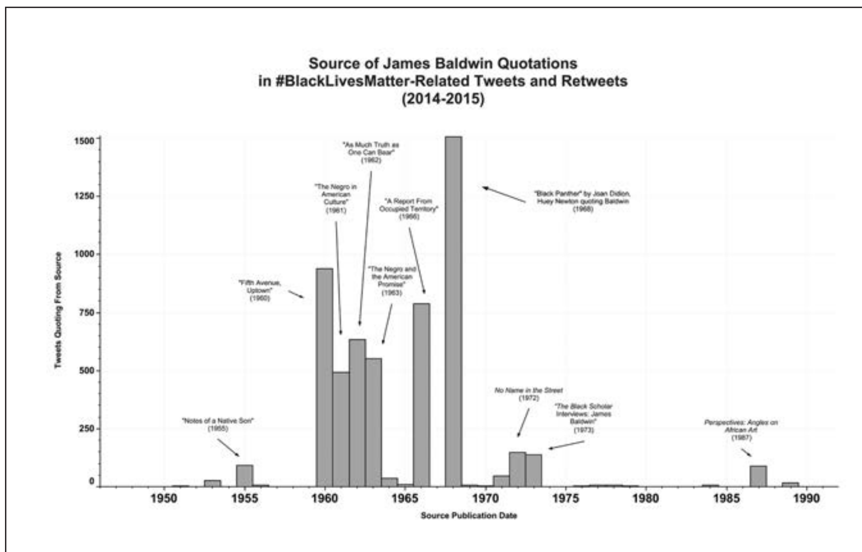

Figure 2.
Of the 7,326 #BlackLivesMatter-Baldwin tweets and retweets sent between June 2014 and May 2015, 5,587 tweets included a quotation of Baldwin's words. This chart shows the year in which each tweeted Baldwin quotation was originally published, which reveals that the 1960s were the decade most heavily drawn on from Baldwin's career. The source titles listed in the chart indicate the most frequently quoted source title for that given year. The publication dates in this chart have been assigned based on the first publication date of a given source, such that Baldwin's essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," though it later appeared in Baldwin's 1961 collection *Nobody Knows My Name*, is displayed in 1960, when it was first published in *Esquire*. The source of the prevalent misquotation—"to be black a[nd] conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage"—has been assigned to Joan Didion's 1968 essay "Black Panther," though I want to acknowledge that this is an interpretive decision and that a legitimate case could be made for tracing it to the 1961 radio discussion "The Negro in American Culture," which is when the original form of the quotation first appeared.

But how did individual tweeted quotations travel? Which 140-character reproductions of Baldwin resonated and rippled throughout the social media network? Why? To understand Baldwin's reception at the level of the individual tweet and quotation, I next used two different methods: (1) identifying tweets with the highest number of retweets, a metric for how many other users directly recirculated the tweet, often considered indicative of endorsement (fig. 3); (2) identifying the text that appeared most frequently across the tweets, regardless of date, retweet status, hashtags, or other accompanying commentary (fig. 4). The results of these two methods again revealed the persistence of Baldwin's 1960s material in 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter tweets. The same quotation that Moore shared on the night of Brown's death—"to be black a[nd] conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage"—was reproduced in slightly different forms in four of the top ten most widely recirculated tweets, the origins of which I trace (at least its most influential print origins), to a misquotation spoken by Newton in Joan Didion's 1968 essay "Black Panther" (to be discussed in greater detail below in the section "Black Power Baldwin").[18] Quotations drawn from Baldwin's 1960 essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," his 1963 television interview in the series *The Negro and the American Promise*, his 1966 essay "A Report from Occupied Territory," and his 1963 speech-turned-essay "A Talk to Teachers" round out the rest of the dominantly retweeted quotations.

Because the extent of a tweet's recirculation is influenced not only by the content of the tweet but also by other factors such as the user tweeting it and the size of that user's audience, the most retweeted #BlackLivesMatter invocations of Baldwin also reveal that artists and activists of color with already significant Twitter followings were major facilitators of Baldwin's words (fig. 3). Six of the most retweeted Twitter accounts were associated with men of color, many of whom were artists, activists, and writers: Zellie Imani (@zellieimani), Jose Antonio Vargas (@joseiswriting), Gbenga Akinnagbe (@GbengaAkinnagbe), Musa Okwonga (@Okwonga), Dante Boykin (@DanteB4u), and Chuck Modiano (@ChuckModi1). Three of the most retweeted accounts were associated with black women activists, who were arguably the most significant initiators and nodes in the network, the first and second most retweeted accounts overall and the most retweeted account on the night of Brown's death, respectively: Rahiel Tesfamariam (@RahielT), Courtney Thornton (@courteroy_), and Kim Moore (@SoulRevision). Thornton's was the only account that did not have more than 7,000 followers at the time of the published #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin tweet. Then a twenty-two-year-old, Rutgers University–Camden student, Thornton in fact had fewer than 200 followers when her tweet was recirculated by at least

Most Retweeted #BlackLivesMatter-Related Tweets That Mentioned "James Baldwin" (2014-2015)

Date	Retweet Count	Tweet Text	Tweet Author	User Name	Followers*	Quotation Source and Date
Apr-27-15	**768**	James Baldwin's prophetic, timeless words. True then. True now. #Baltimore #FreddieGray http://t.co/rKBaYCd34s [photo]	Rahiel Tesfamariam	@RahielT	8,466	"Fifth Avenue, Uptown" 1960 ✎
Nov-24-14	**650**	"To be black in America is to be in a constant state of rage." -James Baldwin #MikeBrown #FergusonTheRoot #Ferguson	Courtney Thornton	@courteroy_	158	"Black Panther" by Joan Didion 1968 ✎🗣
Aug-14-14	**487**	"To be Black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage." - James Baldwin #Ferguson	Zellie Imani	@zellieimani	13,955	"Black Panther" by Joan Didion 1968 ✎🗣
Nov-24-14	**375**	We live in "a civilization which has always glorified violence--unless the Negro had the gun."--James Baldwin circa 1963 #Ferguson	Jose Antonio Vargas	@joseiswriting	52,500	"The Negro and the American Promise" 1963 📺
Jan-01-15	**317**	Howard Zinn and James Baldwin in Selma. #blacklivesmatter http://t.co/54lFPfkSUv [photo]	Occupy Wall Street NYC	@OccupyWallStNYC	187,000	
Nov-24-14	**235**	"To be black and conscious in america is a constant state of rage" - James Baldwin #noblackjusticenoblackfriday #Ferguson	Gbenga Akinnagbe	@GbengaAkinnagbe	9,012	"Black Panther" by Joan Didion 1968 ✎🗣
Aug-09-14	**171**	#MikeBrown & #EricGarner's death speak to James Baldwin's quote; "to be black a conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage"	Kim Moore	@SoulRevision	11,593	"Black Panther" by Joan Didion 1968 ✎🗣
Nov-25-14	**165**	My article on #Ferguson and #MikeBrown, with an important quote from James Baldwin. If of interest, please share. http://t.co/S5DsNyJAmG	Musa Okwonga	@Okwonga	28,000	
Apr-23-15	**164**	"The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer." ~James Baldwin~ ǁ #StandUp for #FreddieGray	Dante Boykin	@DanteB4u	15,100	"A Report From Occupied Territory" 1966 ✎
Apr-12-15	**161**	Feeling #JamesBaldwin today. Feel him everyday. Wish he were here to weigh in on this mess. #EricHarris #WalterScott http://t.co/fMBlbeUVY5 [photo]	Chuck Modiano	@ChuckModi1	7,090	"A Talk to Teachers" 1963 🗣

Figure 3.
These are the top ten most retweeted tweets that were sent between June 2014 and May 2015 and that mentioned "James Baldwin" as well as "Black Lives Matter," "Ferguson," or the names of twenty other individuals who were killed by the police. The chart also depicts the date that the tweet was first published; the number of retweets (whether public or private) that the tweet received as of November 2017; the text of the tweet; the tweet author's name and user name; the approximate number of users who followed the tweet author around the time of the published tweet (*based on the closest existing date in the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine); and, if applicable, the original source, date, and medium of the James Baldwin quotation included in the tweet. The original medium is indicated by a symbol, where ✎ indicates an essay, 🗣 indicates a speech or spoken quotation, and 📺 indicates a television appearance. Though the retweet count includes both public and private retweets, the 7,326 tweets and retweets in the larger archive include only public retweets.

Most Frequently Appearing Text in #BlackLivesMatter-Related Tweets and Retweets That Mentioned "James Baldwin" (2014-2015)		
Number of Tweets	**Text Variation**	**Quotation Source and Date**
1,401	"to be black and conscious in america is to be in a constant state of rage"	"Black Panther" by Joan Didion 1968
879	"the white policeman… finds himself at the very center of the revolution now occurring in the world"	"Fifth Avenue, Uptown" 1960
714	"the law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer"	"A Report From Occupied Territory" 1966
502	"not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced"	"As Much Truth As One Can Bear" 1962
477	"to be a negro in the country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time"	"The Negro in American Culture" 1961
307	"a civilization which always glorified violence—unless the negro had the gun"	"The Negro and the American Promise" 1963

Figure 4.
These are the top six most frequently appearing text variations across all 7,326 tweets and retweets that were sent between June 2014 and May 2015 and that mentioned "James Baldwin" as well as "Black Lives Matter," "Ferguson," or the names of twenty other individuals who were killed by the police. The text variations include text that appeared either within the text of a tweet or within an embedded or linked image, and they were identified using a text clustering algorithm and manual tagging. The chart depicts the number of tweets in which the text variation appeared and the original source, date, and medium of the James Baldwin quotation included in the text variation. The original medium is indicated by a symbol, where indicates an essay, indicates a speech or spoken quotation, indicates a radio discussion, and indicates a television appearance. Though the number of tweets in which the text variation appeared includes retweets, this number only includes public retweets (like the larger archive). Thus, the number of tweets in which "a civilization which always glorified violence—unless the negro had the gun" appeared (307) is lower than its retweet count as shown in figure 3 (375) because it does not include private retweets.

650 different users. These findings emphasize the basic yet fundamental fact that Baldwin's words do not spring forth and circulate of their own accord. They were, in this case, heavily bolstered by social media–savvy artists and activists of color, but also aided at crucial times by crucial nonelites.

To get a sense of how Baldwin's words were recirculated beyond the most influential users and beyond the bounds of an individual tweet, I also tracked the most frequently repeated text across all 7,326 tweets and retweets, discovering that six Baldwin quotations made up more than 58 percent of the total #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin tweets during this time period (fig. 4).[19] These most frequently appearing quotations overlap with, and are no doubt influenced by, the most retweeted quotations, but they also suggest that these six quotations contained particular rhetorical structures, literary qualities, ideas, and representations of Baldwin's life and career that were particularly salient in 2014 and 2015. In the next sections, I follow these six quotations back to their origins and home in on specific moments of their #BlackLivesMatter employment to parse out the mechanics and meanings behind these reproductions.

Baldwin the Mass Media—New Media Witness

> "We live in 'a civilization which has always glorified violence—unless the Negro had the gun.' —James Baldwin circa 1963 #Ferguson"
>
> —Jose Antonio Vargas (@joseiswriting)

Though Baldwin grappled uneasily with public speaking, celebrity, and mass electronic media throughout his life and in his essays, interviews, and later novels, he nevertheless became one of the most famous and mass-mediated literary writers of the 1960s civil rights movement and later, though fadingly, of the late 1960s and 1970s Black Power movement.[20] Baldwin's mass-mediated statements, which appeared on television shows and radio programs and in major magazines and national newspapers, played a significant role in his recirculation within #BlackLivesMatter tweets largely because much of this material has been uploaded to networked digital platforms such as the *Nation*'s website or YouTube. Just after midnight on November 25, 2014, Jose Antonio Vargas (@joseiswriting), a journalist, filmmaker, and immigration rights activist, tweeted a quotation from such a YouTube video, a clip from the 1963 Boston public television series *The Negro and the American Promise*, which Vargas had tweeted a link to weeks earlier: "We live in 'a civilization which has always glorified violence—unless the Negro had the gun'—James

Baldwin circa 1963 #Ferguson.'"[21] Retweeted by at least 375 different users, this quotation reveals the circuitous ways in which Baldwin's civil rights–related media appearances were transformed into freely accessible and easily proliferated digital objects. These objects flowed across old and new media platforms in a process that Henry Jenkins calls "convergence" and that Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin alternatively call "remediation," becoming the material out of which Twitter users shaped their own quotation-sized social protest texts.[22]

The widely recirculated video that Vargas shared in August 2014—"essential" viewing for those following the unrest in Ferguson—also usefully reveals the appeal of the audiovisual Baldwin and represents a version of Baldwin that many #BlackLivesMatter tweeters gravitated toward: angry, animated, unequivocally political, situated between the philosophies of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and clearly speaking from the past.[23] Produced by Henry Morgenthau III for WGBH, *The Negro and the American Promise* featured conversations between the psychologist Kenneth Clark and three figures who were, as Clark described them in his introduction, "symbols and spokesmen for the Negro crying out for his full rights as an American citizen": Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin.[24] Despite Baldwin's confessed resistance to being dubbed a "symbol and spokesmen"—"I'm still trying to speak just for me, not for twenty million people," he insisted a month later[25]— he was by the summer of 1963 very much in the public eye and very near the heart of the national conversation about America's race relations. In the previous six months of 1963 alone, Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* had rocketed up best-seller lists, Baldwin had crossed and recrossed the country on public speaking tours for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and Baldwin's visage had appeared in the pages of *Life* and on the front cover of *Time* magazine. Even fresher to *The Negro and the American Promise*, in fact just hours before its recording, Baldwin, Clark, and a group of other black celebrities and activists, including Lorraine Hansberry, Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Clarence Jones, and David Baldwin, had discussed the nation's race problems with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who had personally tapped Baldwin to assemble the group. This promising meeting, however, devolved into a legendary failure of miscommunication and hostility, from which Baldwin and Clark headed straight to the WGBH shoot.[26]

Baldwin's still-smoldering frustration with Kennedy, his brother's administration, and the white American majority helped light the fire under one of his most intense, captivating, and quotable live performances, one that would be ripe for remediation and recirculation in 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter tweets. When Vargas shared the YouTube clip from this interview in August 2014,

he explicitly introduced it as "testimony in June 1963."[27] But with its black-and-white color grade, vintage camera whirring, and gray cigarette smoke unfurling in every shot (Baldwin and Clark puffed profusely throughout), its historical distance hardly needed an introduction. The clip cuts to Clark's reclarification of Baldwin's previous description of black youth and black America more broadly: "You said something—that you cannot expect them to remain constantly non-violent?" To which Baldwin insists, his voice hitting a note of exasperated hoarseness, "No, you can't! You can't."[28] This is Baldwin sympathizing with the increasingly Malcolm-inspired black nationalist movement—he goes on to describe the black Muslims as the only truly "grassroots" organization and more "effective" than its nonviolent peers[29]—and doing so with the vulnerability, spontaneity, and emotion of something close to a live musical performance, a claim that D. Quentin Miller has similarly made of Baldwin's public speaking.[30] This YouTube video thus delivered a historical precedence for racial unrest in the package of an engaging viral video—part intimate confessional, part searing monologue, part history lesson.

When Vargas later quoted from *The Negro and the American Promise* and inserted Baldwin's words into his own newly constructed sentence—"We live in 'a civilization which has always glorified violence—unless the Negro had the gun'"[31]—he transformed the 1963 television interview into a more targeted and directly radical defense of the unrest in Ferguson. Shared only hours after Wilson's nonindictment and in the midst of the protests, riots, lootings, and arsons that unfolded in Ferguson and around the country as a response to its announcement, this defense was further heightened by the criticisms of black violence then mounting against it. Many other 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter tweeters quoted from *The Negro and the American Promise*, as well as from Baldwin's other, now-YouTubed, radio and television appearances. Though I do not have the time or space to address them all here, many can be explored at *Tweets of a Native Son* (www.tweetsofanativeson.com), the digital companion to this essay. Suffice it to say, however, that this and other offshoots of Baldwin's digitized television and radio appearances have strongly contributed to the twenty-first-century recirculation of his words, ideas, and visage across the internet, and to his recirculation in the climate of #BlackLivesMatter in 2014–15.

Baldwin the Signifyin(g) Proverb-Prophet

> "'Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.' —James Baldwin #FERGUSON"
>
> —Sandrine Phaysouphanh (@drineee)

Black-and-white, midcentury public television was not the only form of mass media influencing Baldwin's recirculation by Twitter users, nor was his explicitly political speech the only sort drawn on to craft #BlackLivesMatter-related mantras. When the words "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced —James Baldwin" materialized in a fifteen-second PSA during the MTV Video Music Awards in August 2014, the once-musical cable television channel played a surprising part in helping make this 1962 aphorism from the *New York Times Review of Books* one of the most widely used Baldwin quotations in the 2014–15 tweets. Because the words in the quotation originally referred to the necessity of facing social, moral, and political problems within imaginative literature, the quotation ironically underlines the broader absence of Baldwin's specifically fictional work from these tweets. Yet this quotation also exemplifies a rhetorical habit of repetition and reversal that is central to both the black literary and oral traditions, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr., suggesting that #BlackLivesMatter tweeters were perhaps at their most literary in seizing on it as a generative site of meaning making, social critique, and community building.

Before the words "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" signified Michael Brown and #BlackLivesMatter, however, they signified William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In a two-page essay called "As Much Truth as One Can Bear," published in the *New York Times Book Review* in January 1962, Baldwin rejected the literary model of his forebears because of the "simplicity" of their social, moral, and political visions of the world.[32] The revelation of harsh truths was, Baldwin claimed, the literary writer's political duty in a future-oriented, nation-building project "to remake America into what we say we want it to be," a project that required language which could "somehow disrupt the comforting beat" and cut through the air that was "so heavy with rhetoric, so thick with soothing lies."[33] The essay's final paragraph concludes with the claim that America's problems must be addressed within literature in order to preserve any hope of meaningful social change, alluding at last to Hemingway's famous, two-part short story "The Big Two-Hearted River" (1925): "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can

be changed until it is faced. The principal fact that we must now face, that a handful of writers are trying to dramatize, is that the time has now come for us to turn our backs forever on the big two-hearted river."[34]

And yet it was this sticky maxim *about* literature—and not Baldwin's short stories, novels, plays, or poetry—that was most often wielded by Twitter users as a racial justice provocation, such as when the quotation first appeared in the data set on August 16, 2014, via @miheekimkort: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. James Baldwin #NMOS14 #Ferguson."[35] Repeating and reversing its opening clause, this quotation borrows the rhetorical trope of the chiasmus, which Gates claimed in his landmark *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) was "perhaps the most commonly used rhetorical figure in the slave narratives and throughout subsequent black literature."[36] What the chiasmus offers, like the practice of "signifyin(g)" more broadly, is "a measure of undecidability within the discourse, such that it must be interpreted or decoded by careful attention to its play of differences."[37] Recent work by Sarah Florini, Sanjay Sharma, Tara Conley, Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles has explored how hashtags act as sites of signifyin(g) within black communities on Twitter, facilitating online social critique, political advocacy, and community building.[38] Building on this research, I argue that the Twitter users of 2014–15 both signified a racial justice rallying cry and built an online political coalition by crafting a combination of Baldwin's chiasmus and hashtags. Juxtaposed hashtags such as "#Ferguson" and "#NMOS14"—an acronym that stood for "National Moment of Silence," a series of nationwide events started by Feminista Jones to honor Brown and other victims of police brutality—anchored Baldwin's social proverb signifier to the specific cause of Ferguson-inspired antiracist protest while leaving it open for other signifiers as well.

Individuals were not the only ones to wield Baldwin's chiasmus or to exploit its interpretive ambiguity. During MTV's Video Music Awards broadcast on August 24, 2014, a fifteen-second PSA sponsored by the channel's "Look Different" campaign appeared on television screens across the country, in which Baldwin's words gradually materialized over a graffitied Ferguson boundary sign while a call-and-response of the protest anthem "hands up don't shoot" played in the background.[39] With this audiovisual backdrop, Baldwin's mostly unspecific statement from 1962 soaks up a specifically antiracist message about responding to Brown's death in 2014. And yet the quotation's chiastic "undecidability" also offers it a kind of plausible deniability, allowing MTV to take an implicitly strong stance on racial justice without being pinned down by

potential critics. Moments after the PSA's debut, the same Baldwin quotation began recirculating throughout Twitter, along with a heated metacommentary about MTV's use of it, which was alternately praiseworthy and skeptical.[40] The synchronous recirculation of this quotation both on MTV and on Twitter again demonstrates the significance of remediation to the 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin story, as users once more ferried content from one medium and platform to another, this time from the old medium of cable television to the new medium of Twitter.

After the night of the VMAs, Baldwin's chiastic proverb continued to signify a steadily increasing constellation of #BlackLivesMatter concepts, events, and people. Dante Boykin (@DanteB4U) tweeted "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" twenty-two separate times throughout 2014 and 2015. And yet in different moments, juxtaposed next to different hashtags—"#StandUp," "#Justice," "#EricGarner," "#TamirRice," "#EndRacism," "#BlackLivesMatter"—Baldwin's words signified something slightly different each time.[41] Considered altogether, however, Baldwin's words served as a collective signifier that could hold these many hashtagged meanings at once—standing up for Eric Garner *and* for twelve-year-old Tamir Rice *and* for black lives more broadly.

Baldwin in the Streets, Baldwin at Length

> "James Baldwin's prophetic, timeless words. True then. True now. #Baltimore #FreddieGray http://t.co/rKBaYCd34s"
>
> —Rahiel Tesfamariam (@RahielT)

Baldwin quotations were also used by 2014–15 #BlackLivesMatter tweeters as protest literature in the bluntest sense, that is to say, as protest signs. Many images depicting protest signs bearing Baldwin's words were recirculated during these years, but one of the most common was cribbed from Baldwin's 1966 essay "A Report from Occupied Territory," also one of the most frequently referenced quotations: "The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer."[42] These Baldwin protest signs-turned-tweets exemplify the integral relationship shared between physical protest and social media networks, but also reveal the significance that images—specifically, images of text—served in the #BlackLivesMatter-related recirculation of Baldwin's words, which was also a finding of Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark within the larger data set.[43] The single most retweeted quotation in the data set was indeed an image of Baldwin's words from the 1960 *Esquire* essay "Fifth Avenue,

Uptown," an excerpt that would have exceeded the then-140-character limit four times over. #BlackLivesMatter tweeters thus exploited images not only to document Baldwin's protest presence in the streets but also to circumvent the platform's technical limitations and to usher Baldwin's often long-winded literary style into the Twitter conversation.

The words scrawled on many #BlackLivesMatter-related protest signs—"The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer"—had traveled from the pages of "A Report from Occupied Territory," an essay originally published in the *Nation.* There Baldwin had condemned police brutality against black bodies through the lens of the "Harlem Six," half a dozen black men who had been arrested and beaten in the spring of 1964, and about whom communal outrage spilled into race riots the following summer when a black teenager was shot and killed by a white police officer. The narrative that Baldwin relays about the atmospheric escalation leading to these Harlem riots neatly parallels the later trajectory of unrest in cities from Ferguson to Baltimore. Yet it was Baldwin's short, sharp pronouncement about what the anthropomorphized law was and was not meant to be, carved from this larger narrative, that made for more economical protest-sign material and more widely recirculated tweets, perhaps because the quotation's first-person perspective places the quoter into an exposed and embodied position that very much resembles protest. This quotation draws from a larger style of linguistic protest evidenced in "A Report from Occupied Territory," in which Baldwin bears witness to the racism and violence of midcentury Harlem through traditional journalistic reporting as well as through the testimony of his own body, striking autobiographical notes that echo those of his famous 1955 essay "Notes of a Native Son": "My report is also based on what I myself know, for I was born in Harlem and raised there."[44] In "A Report from Occupied Territory," Baldwin recounts violence perpetrated against his "own" flesh, face, eyes, hands, and knees, but also violence perpetrated against a communal body not owned by any one person—"the paralyzing shock of spittle in *the* face," "*one's* hands and knees."[45] The excerpted quotation—"The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer"—likewise accesses the communal through the personal, affirming in the same breath that the law is not meant to be "my" murderer, nor Baldwin's, nor Brown's.

Though decidedly not physical, the most widely recirculated tweet in the #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin tweets of 2014–15 similarly resembled a protest sign insofar as it was a white square image that contained text. On April 27, 2015, as unrest was unfolding in Baltimore after Freddie Gray's funeral, the activist Rahiel Tesfamariam (@RahielT) tweeted an image that she had first

shared on the night of Wilson's nonindictment, a block of text pieced together from Baldwin's "Fifth Avenue, Uptown":

> The white policeman . . . finds himself at the very center of the revolution now occurring in the world. He is not prepared for it—naturally, nobody is—and, what is possibly much more the point, he is exposed, as few white people are, to the anguish of the black people around him. . . . One day, to everyone's astonishment, someone drops a match in the powder keg and everything blows up. Before the dust has settled or the blood congealed, editorials, speeches, and civil-rights commissions are loud in the land, demanding to know what happened. What happened is that Negroes want to be treated like [humans].[46]

An image of text and not text itself, this Baldwin quotation was able to spill over Twitter's character limit and capture "the fundamental *un*-tweetability of [Baldwin's] prose at its most identifiable," as Maxwell has described it, his "long and gracefully overstuffed periodic sentences, immersed in the syntax of two royal Jameses, King and Henry."[47] The "lavish Baldwinian sentence," Maxwell continues, defiantly dares us to "Tweet *this*."[48] By sharing this remediation of Baldwin's words, Tesfamariam rose to the challenge posed by the seemingly untweetable Baldwinian sentence.

Yet even as this image allows us to hear more of on-the-page Baldwin at his most characteristic, Baldwin's words are still significantly manipulated and reshaped within it. The titular location and focus of "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" is erased. "The white policeman" is no longer "standing on a Harlem street corner" but standing on the edge of an ellipsis, standing on the curb of what could be any American street corner from Baltimore to Ferguson. The excerpt is similarly universalized in the alteration of its final word, in which the more expansive, inclusive "[humans]" replaces the narrow, gender-exclusive "men." In this manipulated form, Baldwin offers a narrative and diagnosis for police-related unrest in *any* city, which nevertheless leaves behind traces of its origins in civil rights history—"civil-rights commissions" and "Negroes"—as purposeful glints of the historical past.

Black Power Baldwin

> "'To be black in America is to be in a constant state of rage.'
> —James Baldwin #MikeBrown #FergusonTheRoot #Ferguson"
>
> —Courtney Thornton (@courteroy_)

The creative fingerprints of #BlackLivesMatter tweeters can also be seen in the many mutations of the Baldwin quotation "to be black a[nd] conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage," which appeared in 19 percent of

all #BlackLivesMatter–Baldwin tweets in 2014 and 2015. The quotation in question was already apocryphal, however, circulated between members of the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s and 1970s who had otherwise obscured Baldwin's literariness and condemned his homosexuality.[49] Baldwin's original statement appeared in "The Negro in American Culture," a group discussion between Baldwin, Hughes, Hansberry, and others, which aired on WBAI-FM, a public radio station in New York, in January 1961, and which largely revolved around the subject of African American literature. When Baldwin said that "to be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time," he was in fact answering a question about the tension between "being a Negro and a writer."[50] In the very next breath, Baldwin qualified his pronouncement—"the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you"—and discussed the threats that rage posed to literature, not least the temptation to write in an "old-fashioned protest way."[51]

Figure 5.
Two different artists' illustrations of the original and apocryphal Baldwin quotations—both tweeted by DeRay Mckesson (@deray) and retweeted widely in April and June 2015—seemed especially attuned to the subtle linguistic differences between these quotations and help to further clarify their distinct valences (fig. 5). Ronald Wimberly's illustration (right) of the original quotation is dominated by a cool, blue, comic-book aesthetic—complete with Ben-Day dots on the eyes that make it, like Roy Lichtenstein's work, pop arty—evoking a contemplative, quietly defiant Baldwin at midcentury. John Ira Jennings's illustration (left) of the apocryphal quotation, on the other hand, is dominated by an aggressive, red, street-art aesthetic, with a bouquet of militant, Black Power–style fists bursting from Baldwin's mind.

But members of the Black Panther Party would, much like #BlackLivesMatter tweeters after them, seize on this quotation as an articulation, expression, and explanation of the one word that remains the same in every evolution of these words from 1961 to 2014: rage. In Joan Didion's 1968 essay "Black Panther," which was originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* and later became part of her 1979 essay "The White Album," she describes a visit to Alameda County Jail outside Oakland, California. There she spoke with Newton, the Black Panthers' minister of defense, who was awaiting trial for the voluntary manslaughter of Oakland police officer John Frey, as well as with Cleaver, the Panthers' starkly homophobic, Baldwin-bashing minister of information, who was also visiting Newton that day. Didion recounts the frustrated interview efforts of two fellow journalists who struggle to push past Newton's "wall of rhetoric" and get him to divulge any kind of personal information. After being asked repeatedly to speak about "the influences that shaped" him, Newton finally turns to the apocryphal words of Baldwin: "It reminds me of a quote from James Baldwin: To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage."[52] According to Didion, Cleaver then immediately transcribes and remediates the quotation from spoken word to written text: "'To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage,' Eldridge Cleaver wrote in large letters on a pad of paper, and then he added: 'Huey P. Newton quoting James Baldwin.'"[53] Whether Newton consciously revised Baldwin's original words from "The Negro in American Culture"—intentionally substituting "black" for "Negro," or knowingly removing the qualifiers "relatively" and "almost all the time" for the more concise and confident "constant state of rage"—is not clear. But it is clear that in turning to these words to describe the influences that had shaped him, Newton believed that they articulated something fundamental about the experience of a radical black nationalist and member of the Black Panther Party. In this form, forged from this perspective, they also continued to resonate with others.

Didion was not entirely wrong when, in the next sentence, she imagined this Baldwin quotation as Black Panther propaganda, "emblazoned above the speakers' platform at a rally" and "imprinted on the letterhead of an ad hoc committee still unborn."[54] The quotation indeed became associated with the group both by those who described it from the outside and by actual Panthers who uttered it. In a 1969 informational pamphlet titled "Introduction to the Black Panthers," published by the Radical Education Project, a leftist education campaign founded by Students for a Democratic Society, the pamphlet offered three answers to the question "What is the status of the Black Man in America

today?" through the ventriloquized voices of Cleaver, Newton, and Baldwin, as if Baldwin were the obvious third in this Black Power trio. Here Baldwin answers "'To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.'"[55] In his 1970 memoir, former Black Panther Earl Anthony similarly turns to these words to describe his feelings about Newton's controversial 1967 arrest: "I remember a line from James Baldwin which best describes my feeling that day: 'To be black and conscious in America, is to be in a constant state of rage.' This rage is what makes whatever Huey Newton did that morning of October 28 acceptable to me, and whatever Frey and [Herbert] Heanes did unacceptable."[56] According to Anthony, Baldwin's quotation both successfully articulates his emotional state and retroactively justifies Newton's retributive violence against the state.

Through the recirculation of these same Baldwin-attributed words in 2014 and 2015, #BlackLivesMatter tweeters similarly clung to the articulation of a personal and collective rage, as well as the justification of that rage translated into the action of protests and riots. Many Twitter users also made this apocryphal quotation their own. For instance, the three most widely recirculated versions of this quotation were three slightly different variations of Baldwin's supposed words. Where Zellie Imani (@zellieimani) echoed the phrase that Newton had spoken—"To be Black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage"—Courtney Thornton (@courteroy_) dropped the word "conscious," suggesting that simply being black in America was enough to induce a state of rage: "To be black in America is to be in a constant state of rage." For his part, Gbenga Akinnagbe (@GbengaAkinnagbe) left out the second "to be"—"To be black and conscious in america is a constant state of rage"—suggesting that black rage was not a transient state that one could pass into or out of, but that to be black in America was *itself* a state of rage.[57] Many of these misquotations appear to be simple mistranscriptions. But even if they are mistakes, they are mistakes with meaning—indeed meaning*s*, plural. They perpetuate subtly splintered reimaginations of Baldwin, and they leave behind authorial fingerprints, evidence that these Twitter users were engaged in collaborative acts of textual production and that Baldwin's voice could not speak in these spaces without their conjuring.

But the longer history of this already splintered quotation alerts us to the potential costs of such selective quotation and misquotation, since members of the Black Panther Party similarly championed these words and Baldwin's dissenting anger, but elsewhere rejected Baldwin for his so-called love of the white man and his same-sex attraction to other men. In 1968, the same year

that Cleaver had recorded Newton quoting Baldwin, Cleaver also published *Soul on Ice*. This book included his now-infamous 1966 screed against Baldwin, “Notes on a Native Son,” in which, among other homophobic declarations, he announced that “Homosexuality is a sickness, just as much as baby-rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors.”[58] Baldwin’s relationship with Cleaver and Newton was complex and tumultuous, to say the least. Despite Cleaver’s attacks, Baldwin recalled in *No Name in the Street* (1972) that he was impressed by Newton and “very much impressed by Eldridge, too.”[59] Elsewhere, however, Baldwin made his distance from Panther ideology clear: “I was not, for example, a Black Muslim, in the same way, though for different reasons, that I never became a Black Panther, because I did not believe that all white people were devils, and I did not want young black people to believe that.”[60] In *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin in fact dismisses the very brand of political militancy that “tends to be a matter of indigestible fury and slogans and quotations.”[61]

By drawing out this freighted history, I do not mean to suggest that #BlackLivesMatter tweeters knowingly recirculated a Black Panther–coined misquotation or that these words inherently carry a homophobic connotation. But this history should, I think, prompt us to interrogate the gaps and obscurings within Baldwin’s #BlackLivesMatter recirculation, especially regarding Baldwin’s sexuality. Baldwin’s twenty-first-century resurgence is, after all, based in large part on the recovery work of queer theorists, critics, and historians over the last few decades, and his “intersectionality before that was a thing,” as Thomas Chatterton Williams has phrased it, has made Baldwin’s voice “an exemplar of the decidedly queer-inflected mood of the Black Lives Matter era now.”[62] And yet, despite this recuperation, it is not entirely clear where or to what extent Baldwin’s sexuality was drawn on, recognized, or discussed by those tweeting the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter or related hashtags in 2014–15. Explicit indicators, such as the words *queer* and *gay*, crop up only a few times. The national LGBT publication the *Advocate* published an article titled “5 James Baldwin Quotes That Foreshadowed Ferguson,” linked to by over a dozen Twitter users, which introduced Baldwin in its first paragraph as “a black and gay literary lion known for classics like *Giovanni’s Room* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.”[63] On August 30, 2014, two different Twitter users also relayed on-the-ground action from Ferguson, where, according to Dr. Treva Lindsey (@divafeminist), a “Brotha from Stl” was “breaking down the work & invoked James Baldwin to think about inclusive movement building,”[64] apparently claiming: “‘James Baldwin is a key figure in our mvmt! Gay, straight, that’s never been a problem in our community.’ #BlackLivesMatter.”[65]

But beyond these explicit references, Baldwin's sexuality is not prominent, or at least not detectable by the present methods, revealing yet again that social media data are only one way to understand Baldwin's twenty-first-century recirculation and that this social media data set, in particular, is only one perspective from the many possible. It also emphasizes that Baldwin's reception is not uniform across all spaces, communities, and contexts. Even during his lifetime, Baldwin understood that "all those strangers called Jimmy Baldwin" were produced by the refractions of his popular reception in addition to the complexities of his identity. During the final years of his life, Baldwin retrospectively claimed of his fans and followers: "They have *made* you, *produced* you."[66] There are, indeed, many more reproductions of Baldwin to be discovered beyond the scope of this essay and beyond the temporal boundary of this data set (May 31, 2015), after which the number of tweeted Baldwin invocations and quotations has almost certainly increased. This essay hopes to have suggested, however, that social media data and computational methods may be one way to discover and acquaint us with these refracted and reproduced strangers, the ones called Jimmy Baldwin and the ones that go by other names, attached to other authors, artists, and historical figures, as well.

Appendix A: #BlackLivesMatter-Related Keywords

"black lives matter"/#blacklivesmatter; "ferguson"/#ferguson; "michael brown"/"mike brown"/#michaelbrown/#mikebrown; "eric garner"/#ericgarner; "freddie gray"/#freddiegray; "walter scott"/#walterscott; "tamir rice"/#tamirrice; "john crawford"/#johncrawford; "tony robinson"/#tonyrobinson; "eric harris"/#ericharris; "ezell ford"/#ezellford; "akai gurley"/#akaigurley; "kajieme powell"/#kajiemepowell; "tanisha anderson"/#tanishaanderson; "victor white"/#victorwhite; "jordan baker"/#jordanbaker; "jerame reid"/#jeramereid; "yvette smith"/#yvettesmith; "philip white"/#philipwhite; "dante parker"/#danteparker; "mckenzie cochran"/#mckenziecochran; "tyree woodson"/#tyreewoodson

Appendix B: Computational Methods

To perform this analysis, I used the Python and command-line tool "twarc" to hydrate the shared tweet IDs from Twitter's API. I then used the JSON-reshaping command-line tool "jq" to search for mentions of Baldwin's name as well as the names of other authors. I used twarc utilities to identify top retweets, and I used a k-means clustering algorithm from the Python library Scikit-Learn, part of code modified from Amir Salihefendic, and selective manual tagging to identify the most frequently appearing text. Finally, I used the data visualization software Tableau to produce the visualizations.[67]

The tweet IDs for all 7,326 tweets used in this study can be found and hydrated from github.com/melaniewalsh/BLM-James-Baldwin-tweet-ids.

Appendix C: Author Comparison Numbers

Authors born after 1900 and listed in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (2014), whose full names (upper- or lowercase, with or without a space) appeared in at least fifty #BlackLivesMatter-related tweets between June 2014 and May 2015: Barack Obama (126,870); Martin Luther King (34,608); Malcolm X (29,093); **James Baldwin (7,326)**; Audre Lorde (1,634); Langston Hughes (1,401); Maya Angelou (1,236) Toni Morrison (843); Gil Scott-Heron (583); Claudia Rankine (556); Huey Newton (536); Eldridge Cleaver (373); Charles Johnson (224); Jean Grae (163); Amiri Baraka (148); Edwidge Danticat (136); Richard Wright (126); August Wilson (125); Ralph Ellison (116); Sonia Sanchez (75); Nikki Giovanni (71); Toni Cade Bambara (67); Kevin Young (57).

Appendix D: User Privacy and Intellectual Property

My citation practices in this essay attempt to strike a balance between acknowledging Twitter users' creative productions and protecting users from potentially unwanted publicity or harm. Thus, I contacted all cited Twitter users to inform them that I would be citing their tweet and username in this essay. If the users were verified or had more than ten thousand followers as of early 2018, I informed them that I would be citing their tweet, username, and name, and I offered them the option of removing identifying information. If the users were not verified or had fewer than ten thousand followers, I informed them that I would be using their tweet and username, as well as the option of including a "real"/preferred name or removing all identifying information.

My approach to working with social media users' data has been shaped by the work of Moya Bailey, Dorothy Kim, Eunsong Kim, and the *Documenting the Now* project.[68]

Notes

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1. For more on the "initiators" of the #Ferguson movement, see Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks," *Information, Communication & Society* 19.3 (2016): 397–418.
2. Kim Moore (@SoulRevision), "#MikeBrown & #EricGarner's death speak to James Baldwin's quote; 'to be black a conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage,'" Twitter, August 9, 2014, 9:42 p.m., twitter.com/SoulRevision/status/498298410299318273.
3. For the "Herstory" of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, movement, and organization, see blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/. According to Deen Freelon, Charlton McIlwain, and Meredith Clark, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was not widely used until November 24, 2014, when it "soared several orders of magnitude" and was tweeted 103,319 times (Deen Freelon, Charles D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark, *Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice* [2016], 34, cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/beyond_the_hashtags_2016.pdf).

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